

COMBAT ADVANTAGE

A Free Bi-Monthly Supplement for 4E

#17

Summer 2010

Special Preview: THE key OF THE fey

4e's Got Talent

Adventurer by day, secret agent by night.

Discover Endera

What is the Three Who Were One?

The Relic Guard

Never fight alone again...



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COMBAT ADVANTAGE

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Cover:

An ebony-skinned figure, possibly a keeper, watches over the fragile peace of Endera.

**EMERALD
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I could not feel more proud than right now.

If you haven't heard the news yet, then the Internet is not as powerful as CNN makes it out to be. Though it's rather presumptuous of me to assume that this particular piece of news is breaking the web apart and that everyone is talking about it at work, there are certain times when you get to reward yourself by acting as if everyone should know about it. Somewhere in Europe, George Clooney is sitting around in his credenza asking Matt Damon "Did you hear that Combat Advantage was just nominated for an ENnie award?" And Matt Damon will tell George to stop being such a geek.

It's true. (Except for everything with the celebrities.) Just last week, **CA15 was listed as one of the five nominees for Best Free Product.** As soon as I read it on my screen, I pounded my fist on the desk, yelled out something that I can't remember and woke my girlfriend up. But there is no way I can take all the credit. There are numerous people who have pitched in, especially those people whose names you see almost every issue: Vincent Harper, Shawn O'Leary, Tim Rose and Michael Evans. No matter what happens from this point on, we will always be able to look back on this nomination and know that we did it right.

But this also means we can't just sit on our laurels and bask in its glow - we have to get ready for next year's nominations and this issue gets the ball rolling. After an unexpected delay for numerous production hitches, CA is back with a new look. We have an extensive article on providing your PCs with traits and talents to put them to work outside of combat, a dominion clouded in secrets that threaten the balance of existence, a new specialist class for the summoner in all of us, a look at the PAX East 2010 expo, and the entire first chapter of our latest release, **The Key of the Fey**. So stop reading this introduction and get cracking! You've got a lot of reading to do.

Todd Crapper
Editor-in-Chief, Combat Advantage



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Traits & Talents

by **Carl Cramer**

Characters in 4e are very focused on adventuring. Players are free to role-play any skills or traits related to daily life outside the adventuring career. This article presents a system to learn and use noncombat abilities without affecting the rest of the game.

Traits

Traits are an optional set of rules that give characters more options out of combat. They are purchased separately from the skills, feats, and powers described in the 4E Player's Handbook. The talent rules can be added to the game without retrofitting existing characters, merely adding more depth on top of the normal rules.

Basics

Traits are non-combat versions of feats. They give special abilities that are used to define a character's background and are used to represent a character's livelihood outside of adventuring. This includes role-playing gimmicks and background options. They are also used to purchase talents (non-combat skills).

All characters start with three traits at level 1. After that, you gain traits at the same rate as you get new feats; at level 11, 21, and every even level. You can retrain one talent at each new level, in addition to normal retraining limits.

There are three types of traits. Like so much else about traits, these classifications are a general guide and not hard and fast rules. Personal traits are innate abilities, similar to feats. Almost all campaigns can use these. Perks are social advantages or privileges. Subplots are recurring events that comes up again and again in your character's life and are often a hindrance; the advantage with them is that you get more screen time.

Some DMs might ban some or all perks and subplots as too invasive, or just say that a particular plot or perk does not fit the situation in the game. You should ask each time you want to take one. This also serves to inform the DM that you have such a trait, allowing him to use it in the game.



How to Use Traits

Traits are a way to flesh out character without adding substantial benefits. They help define a role, background, and interests outside adventuring. Unlike feats, there are few prerequisites to fulfill and little need to plan ahead.

You generally don't choose traits in advance; instead you let circumstances in the campaign dictate how your character develops. Contacts, Romances, and Nemesis are good examples of this - traits you choose after encountering a situation or person in-game that is interesting enough to associate your character with in the long term.

Traits are used to learn Talents, non-combat skills that define your interests and give you an occupation outside your life as an adventurer.

Some traits naturally evolve into others and should be retained to reflect this. An Heir that comes into his inheritance might retrain as a Baron, an Influential Friend might become a Contact as you catch up to them socially. But these are exceptions; generally you are not expected to retrain old traits as you achieve new ones that are similar but more powerful, as explained in the introduction to Paragon Traits. Likewise, you have great freedom to assign traits as you please, but you should strive to pick ones that make sense; for certain rogues it might make sense to be the Sheriff, but if you want to play a freewheeling thief, another perk might be a more reasonable option.

Many campaigns have a theme, and include ways for characters to interact with this theme. For example, a police story might track contacts, ranks in the police, and your reputation on the street. Players choosing police work as their focus have opportunities to shine. Traits give the DM a way to handle such themes, and also provide an equal opportunity for characters to shine in other fields, outside the main scope of the story. In the police campaign mentioned above, one player character might be a cleric assigned to aid the police force. Besides being a cop, he is also an Ordained Priest and might advance to become a High Priest. The character's dealings with his church might never be the focus of the campaign or be played out in detail, yet the character has a career, builds his own clout, and develops socially just as those who focus their lives on the main theme. In fact, it is often easier to advance in a hierarchy that is not in the limelight; the DM might make the position of Lord Justice something the players have to work hard to earn but which also has a direct impact on the game. In comparison, the role of High Priest is easier to get because you do not have to achieve in-game goals to earn it, but it naturally has much less effect on the game.

Heroic Traits

These deal with personal abilities and subplots and relationships on the local level.

Adopted Race (Perk)

You have very good relations with a race other than your own, to the point that you are considered a member of this race for social purposes. You are considered to be as honorable as any other member of this race, accepted as one of their own. If you choose humans as your adopted race, this only applies to one human culture; humans are too diverse for any one nonhuman to become accepted amongst all of humanity. The same could apply to other widespread and diverse races in your campaign.

Agent (Perk)

Prerequisite: Level 4

You have an agent who will act on your behalf and represent you. While unwilling to risk his life, the agent will carry out instructions to the best of his ability, and look out for your interests when you are otherwise occupied. He will also travel to represent you in other places and can be sent on missions on his own. In return, the agent expects advice, patronage, and that you use your contacts on his behalf.

An agent is an NPC two levels lower than yours of a class and race agreed upon with the DM. If your agent is killed, you will want to retrain this talent.

Special: The agent is an NPC and is thus designed by the DM. You can take this talent several times, each time gaining a separate new agent.



Artiste (Personal)

You get a +3 feat bonus to Actor, Dancer, Lover, Musician, Orator, and Singer.

Authority (Personal)

You get a +3 feat bonus to Lawman, Merchant, Sailor, Soldier, and Valet.

Blue Blood (Perk)

Your family is old and recognized for its nobility, one of the most prestigious in the land. In a campaign where most everyone is a noble (a chivalry campaign, for example) you may even be of royal blood.

Those who care about such things will see you as a born leader, and your career often benefits. It is easy for you to be invited to parties and social functions, and you have relatives in high places. Your word is given due consideration, you are considered a valuable and reliable witness, and you will mostly be assumed to have a good reason to be where you are and doing what you're doing, even if it might seem fishy. Even those who don't respect nobility find it hard to ignore your manners and bearing; it is clear that you are a person not to be trifled with.

You're not automatically wealthy; some nobles are dirt poor. If you get caught with your hands dirty, Blue Blood may backfire; everyone loves a good scandal.

Cause (Perk)

You are a champion for a certain cause, and known by others dedicated to and against this cause. This gives you a set of friends and enemies depending on the exact cause you choose when taking this talent. Causes can be religious, political, or focused on some kind of activity, such as charities. They always have an element of idealism about them; a thieves' guild is not a cause.

Charming (Personal)

It is easy for you to get into social events, make acquaintances, and generally be very popular in a non-domineering sort of way. There is something about you that makes others care for you if you succeed on a Charisma roll against Will defense. People that would ordinarily be hostile might kidnap you instead of kill you.

Clan (Subplot)

You are a member of a clan or brotherhood, usually an extended family but sometimes a small tribe or very close-knit group of sworn friends. You do not live your everyday life with your clan (pick Family for that), but you keep in constant touch, sharing joys, sorrows, and information as well as intervening to help each other.

Contacts (Perk)

Contacts are persons you know and who are friendly to you and sympathetic to the same ideals as you, but not your direct servants or allies. They will gladly supply information, acting as your eyes and ears. They also willingly perform services for you at normal cost, which can be a boon if they deal in something that is outlawed, rare, or otherwise hard to come by. Over time, your network of contacts grows; you gain new ones while some of your old contacts become obsolete.

This talent gives you a number of contacts equal to half your level, with a minimum of one contact. You generally acquire a new contact once per level, replacing an old one at odd levels and gaining a new one at even levels. Sometimes, your contacts change slower or quicker than this, but can never have more contacts than your level indicates.

A contact should ideally be someone you met and befriended during play. In this way, you can gain influential contacts; kings, courtiers, important heroes, and other famous individuals. You can flesh out your stable of contacts with NPCs of your own invention, but these are generally not as important or influential as the ones you meet during play; typical examples are city guardsmen, traders, shopkeepers, local clergy, or minor mystics.



Deduction (Personal)

Once per day when you are speculating as to the intricacies of the plot, the best course of action, or about the motivations of a given character, you can have the GM tell you whether your speculation is correct or incorrect.

Disguise (Personal)

Prerequisite: Trained in Bluff.

With a few minutes of work you can disguise yourself as another person of your approximate size and same basic body shape. Imitating a specific individual is also possible, but takes a day of preparation and you need to find appropriate clothes, wigs, etc. which can be costly, especially if impersonating someone rich. Make a Bluff check opposed by passive Insight to pass inspection. Others inspecting you closely (a minor action) can make an Insight roll against 10 + your Bluff skill modifier to sense something is wrong.

Normal: Anyone with Bluff can don a disguise, but it takes longer to put on and needs more special materials.

Drifter (Subplot)

You spend a lot of time on the road, and have a tendency to just happen to be there when it happens. Any time another character is alone and needs help, you can show up if it's at all plausible. Even in non-dangerous scenes you have a tendency to just be there.

Eerie (Perk)

There is something odd and unusual about you that makes others leave you alone. This might be a mannerism, such as talking to yourself or staring vacantly into space, or an indefinable aura. The end result is that people expect odd things from you and around you, and will pay no heed to such occurrences unless they cause some kind of direct harm. They might think you a harmless eccentric or leave you alone out of fear. If there is a witch-hunt in the area, this can backfire; people too cowardly or reserved to do something themselves might still report on you.

Fame (Personal)

Prerequisite: Trained in the Celebrity talent.

You gain a +3 feat bonus to the Celebrity talent.

Family (Subplot)

You live with your family, usually either parents and siblings or spouse and children. Your family has a home appropriate to your station and gives you a base of security and respectability. The DM can involve some or all of your family in the plot.

Fans (Perk)

Prerequisite: Trained in the Celebrity talent.

You have a group of followers who look up to you, but who do not work for you. On many occasions, they will turn up and offer to help, fawn over you, or just hang around. This is often helpful, but sometimes annoying. Fans will not accompany you on adventures and never enter dungeons.

At any time, you have a number of fans equal to your Charisma score hanging around. All your followers are NPC minions no higher than two levels lower than you. All details are determined by the DM. Rarely, a powerful person or even a monster might turn out to be a fan, in which case he or she is likely to be extra pushy and demanding.



Fashion Sense (Perk)

You have good taste, knowledge of fashions, and an understanding of what to wear to provoke a reaction. This lets you dress well for every occasion, and gives you the savvy to dress oddly without causing a scandal.

Fixer (Perk)

You have market connections, and can sell or buy almost anything, even contraband, illegal items, loot that needs to be fenced, and other goods that are normally hard to trade in. You still pay market prices; this is mainly useful if you want to trade in proscribed goods or keep a very low profile.

Followers (Perk)

You have a group of followers who work for you. They serve in some capacity; for example as a garrison, police force, ship's crew, caravan drivers, or guild thieves. They report to you, and you can give them orders slightly outside the scope of their normal activity, but they will not accompany you on adventures and never enter dungeons.

You have a number of followers equal to your Charisma score, and if they take losses they return to this number as soon as plausible - either because you get new followers, or because defeated ones return to action.

All your followers are identical NPC minions two levels lower than you of a class and race agreed upon with the DM.

Special: You can take this talent several times, each time getting a separate group of followers.

Gold Digger (Personal)

You are good at ingratiating yourself to rich and powerful people. Having you around and spending money on you makes people feel rich and successful. This makes it easy for you to live off others and join parties and social occasions as a hanger-on. Actually gaining riches or influence will require more effort.

Guild Member (Perk)

You are a member of an established guild; a conservative organization that exists to further the professional interests of its members. Heroes tend to join artists', mages', mercenaries', and thieves' guilds, but there are many other guilds organizing all kinds of occupations. A guild provides little direct help, but has facilities you can use with skills, martial practices, and rituals, and can provide access to markets. Guilds are a great source of trainers, aides, and expertise. They also have medical resources, act as insurers and advocates, and have a pension fund, but such services are generally of little interest to adventurers.

Handyman (Personal)

You get a +3 feat bonus to Jeweler, Leatherworker, Mechanic, Smith, Stoneworker, and Tailor.

Heir (Perk)

It is well known that Something Marvelous is coming your way. Typically, you pick a paragon perk you are about to inherit (or an epic perk if you are of paragon level). People will know you are the heir apparent and fawn over you accordingly, though there are no direct benefits whatsoever.



Integrity (Subplot)

Prerequisite: Good or Lawful Good alignment

You have a great deal of integrity, and it shows. People find you to be a fair arbiter, an impartial witness, and a trustworthy leader; even if you never strive for positions of responsibility, people tend to put their trust in you and turn to you when they need someone to assume responsibility.

Influential Friend (Subplot)

You have a friend in a high position, corresponding to a perk talent one tier above your own. This can be a childhood friend, an accidental acquaintance, a lover, or otherwise someone in an official capacity who you know privately. For example, at the heroic tier, you might have an influential friend with an Army or who is a Minister, while at the paragon level your influential friend can even be a King. At the epic level, you can potentially have a divine being as your influential friend.

Inclined to act in your favor, an influential friend has many other obligations and this makes him unreliable. An influential friend likes you and wants to correspond with you or spend time with you, but is aware that showing you preferential treatment is somewhat irresponsible and thus does not provide the full support of a Mentor. Pressuring an influential friend can produce grand results in the short term, but may easily backfire.

Knight (Perk)

You are an acknowledged member of a warrior caste with a code to uphold. This is not nobility, but close to it. In many cultures, knighthood is a martial archetype, but it need not be; Chinese knights were martial artists and a fantasy world can easily have supernatural guardians with a similar creed. As a knight (or local equivalent) you are known to follow a code, which makes you trusted and respected. Your word is held in high regard. You can expect free room and board almost anywhere you go. People turn to you with their troubles and expect you to help.

Lackey (Perk)

Prerequisite: Level 4

You have a lackey who will provide for and serve you as long as it involves little personal risk. The lackey will travel with you, take care of your mounts or carriage, arrange for food and lodging, set up camp, stand guard, and do other domestic duties. A lackey avoids combat and only fights if sorely pressed. Sometimes, a lackey might provide more exiting services, such as opening a locked chest you bring back to camp, scouting, or acting as a foil, but never in competition with another player character. A lackey can have an interesting background or personal relationship with you.

The lackey is an NPC two levels lower than you, of a class and race agreed upon with the DM, and designed by the DM.

Special: You can take this talent several times, each time gaining a separate lackey. If your lackey is killed, you will want to retrain this talent.

Language (Personal)

Choose a language. You can now speak, read, and write this language fluently.

Special: You can take this talent more than once. Each time you select this talent, choose a new language to learn. Unlike the Linguist feat, this has no prerequisite.

Lip Reading (Personal)

Prerequisite: Training in Insight.

You have the ability to decipher what people are saying merely from looking at their lips moving, as long as you can get a reasonably good view of a speaker's lips and know the language. Certain parts may be obscure or missing or require an Insight roll to understand correctly. If they have reason to be careful, an Insight roll against their Bluff is required.



Medium (Subplot)

When you take this trait, select one type of spirit from the table below. You are aligned with that particular type of spirit, who sometimes gives you visions and advice. Each type of spirit is associated with a particular skill; you can use that skill to seek information. This is much the same as asking around using the Streetwise skill, only the answers are colored by the nature of the spirits with which you commune. No-one but you or another medium can sense or interact with these spirits in any way.

Type	Skill	Origin	Notes
Ghosts	Religion	Shadowworld	Individualistic. Wants to carry out unfulfilled desires from their lives.
Nature spirits	Nature	Natural world	Care about environmental issues, the daily life of animals, and primal rituals.
Elementals	Arcana	Elemental Chaos	Wild. Sometimes out to right a perceived wrong, many just want to vent their rage
Fey Spirits	Arcana	Feyrealm	Mischievous. Wants to bring magic into the world, for good or ill. Loves riddles and tricks.
Abberant Spirits	Dungeoneering	Far Realm	Incomprehensible. Give visions both hard to decipher and profoundly disquieting.
Virtues	Religion	Astral Sea	Idealistic; some are benign, others infernal. Visions have to do with morals and ideals.

Mentor (Perk)

You have mentor or employer that sees you as a trusted agent. The mentor is a constant source of information, employment opportunities, and often useless advice.

The DM is encouraged to use the mentor as an adventure hook and patron, and might tailor benefits and rewards to the mentor's outlook on you. You can also turn to the mentor for help and advice, but a mentor will not accept being used and will avoid becoming directly involved in the action. The mentor is a powerful figure, which might or might not mean that he is a high-level character. A rich merchant, influential queen, or behind-the-scenes monster can function as a mentor just as well as the classic warrior lord or wizard sage.

The exact details of your mentor are up to the DM and unknown to you. A mentor might have a secret agenda and use you as a pawn in it, but is rarely hostile to your ideals.

Mistaken Identity (Subplot)

Your identity is commonly mistaken, either for a specific person or for a role other than your own. You are known for traits and abilities you do not possess, based on misinterpretation, rumors, or just plain lies. A commoner fighter could be known as a magical prince, a holy man, or a demon summoner. People influenced by your Celebrity status will have heard of this false repute, and react accordingly; others gathering information about you will only find the mistaken identity information unless they pass the check with a margin of 10 or more.

Nemesis (Subplot)

Your fate and purpose is linked to a particular enemy. You and this enemy are bound to run across each other again and again, and you have a mysterious way of ending up in one-on-one encounters with this enemy. In addition, your nemesis advances in power as you do, and has an amazing ability to survive and return to fight another day. And should he die, there is always someone else on the sidelines, ready to step in.

The DM has to approve your choice of nemesis; it is generally best to pick a nemesis you've met during play and that proved particularly interesting, memorable, and loathsome.

Ordained Priest (Perk)

You are an ordained and recognized member of the official clergy of an important religious order. You can officiate at ceremonies and perform religious functions; this makes you a trusted individual and makes sure you are aware of the local gossip. People will naturally turn to you with spiritual and supernatural problems.



Note that not all divine characters need to have this talent. Many clerics have internal duties within their churches and almost never meet lay people, others are free wanderers with no official sanction or responsibilities. Some churches do not have the formal structure this feat implies at all.

Perfect Recall (Personal)

You have perfect recall; years afterward, you can call up the precise words of a conversation or recall details of a room seen only at a glance. This allows you to analyze a scene from memory as though you were actually present there. You can retroactively use the Perception skill to notice things you didn't look for when you were actually there, which in turn might give more information from knowledge skills.

Player (Perk)

You are never seen in social circles without a beautiful companion on your arm and you are known as a man or woman of the world. You are well known at night spots and get VIP treatment in most establishments. Depending on your style, your companions might be lovers, friends, artists you patronize, or just about anything else you can come up with. Your relationship with these people is congenial and warm, but never very serious; you neither expect nor give exclusive attention to any one of them.

Power Signature (Personal)

There is something special about the way you use powers. This is a purely visual effect and does not change what the powers actually do, but it makes your power-use distinctive and noticeable. Choose one visual effect for your powers; this can be something like flaming skulls, psychic shock waves, or celestial light. A martial character would usually have a more mundane power signature, such as carving your initials or leaving a signature item behind, though some actually leave traces of ephemeral energy when they perform their amazing moves.

A power signature generally makes it easier for others to recognize your handiwork. If you succeed at a Celebrity roll, people will recognize your power signature even from a distance and react accordingly. It can serve as an alibi (I could never have done that; everyone knows my magic is green) or as a lead for an investigator. It is possible to fake your power signature, so it is not enough to count as evidence against you.

Presence (Personal)

Prerequisite: Trained in Intimidation.

You are very good at projecting your image, be it scary or dazzling. This is great for becoming the center of attention. You can make an Intimidate roll as a free action when someone first spots you; on a success they take note of you. They do not become friendly or hostile; they merely focus some of their attention on you.

Professional Fame (Personal)

Prerequisite: Trained as a Celebrity.

Your fame is based on your professional abilities, not on your magnetism and presence. Select any one ability except Charisma; your modifier in the Celebrity is now based on that ability rather than on Charisma.

Romance (Subplot)

You have a complex and troubled romance that enhances your role in the campaign. This is not just any relationship, but one involving someone you cannot easily get together with; your king and sovereign or the daughter of an arch enemy, perhaps even a nemesis. There are usually other complications as well; unrequited love, duty, racial differences, and other hindrances. Alternatively your romance is trouble-prone, and needs constant help and attention.

Having a quiet relationship does not require this trait; this is for a romance that takes up some actual screen time. Still, you might want to pick it for a normal relationship, just to pin it down and make it a more definite part of the game world.



Romance-Prone (Subplot)

You constantly tend to get romantically entangled, but these romances rarely last.

Scholar (Personal)

You get a +3 feat bonus to Architect, Apothecary, Governor, Painter, Scribe, and Stargazer.

Scrounging (Personal)

You have a tendency to pick stuff up and keep it around for no clear reason, and an ability to find uses for all this junk. This lets you improvise and scrounge for food and gear in trash bins and ruins. Use your Dungeoneering, Nature, or Streetwise for this, depending on the environment. You can come up with improvised weapons like staves, clubs, and daggers, as well as makeshift tools that negate the penalty for lack of a toolkit. You do not need to exactly specify your equipment list. You can specify items that are in your pack, without specifying them ahead of time. Such an item must be reasonably common in the area, the DM can veto items he considers outrageous. It can neither weight more than 1 lb per point of Strength you have nor cost more than 5% of a magic item of your level. When you specify an item like this, you immediately pay its normal cost.

Secret Agent (Perk)

You are the member of a secret society, a fanatic group with a specific agenda. As long as you obey all orders with enthusiasm and devote yourself to the organization, you can expect their support. Fail them even a little and things can turn sour. In general, a player character secret agent will not be given suicidal orders, but if you don't live up to the expectations of the organization, you can expect very stern reprisals indeed. You can expect the full support of the organization; this can range from payment for special missions, information, fencing your loot, and other trivial services, to a suicide assault against your enemies by fanatic brothers in the cult. Typical secret societies are cults, spy rings, cabals, mystic orders, and the most close-knit of criminal gangs.

Secret Identity (Personal)

You know how to keep a low profile. Your personal life is your own, and people in general do not know who you are or what you can do. This might be because you have a secret identity or simply stand back and let your companions take the limelight. Streetwise rolls to find out things about your personal life suffer a +10 difficulty modifier.

If you are a Celebrity, you are a mysterious adventurer whose true identity no-one knows. Regardless of how famous you are, you won't generally be recognized unless in your heroic identity.

Sheriff (Perk)

You have law enforcement powers and can make arrests, repossess goods, hand out fines, and otherwise dispense justice. You can deputize others to act under your supervision. You have a limited area of jurisdiction, but even outside this area, a sheriff is accorded much more respect from other law-enforcement officials than a civilian. If you are ever caught with your hands dirty, you can expect the full force of the law to strike down on your errant behavior.

Signature Item (Perk)

You possess an item that has a great potential as a magic item. You know a special ritual to transfer the power of other magic items into your signature item.

Choose one specific type of magic item to be your signature item. This must be a weapon, implement, suit of armor, or neck slot item. Your signature item does not start out with this enchantment, but you know a special variant of the Create Magic Item ritual that only works on your signature item. You can only enchant your signature item with the one enchantment you choose when you selected the item, or with a generic plus only enchantment if your level is too low to create an item of your chosen type. You can use another magic item to power the ritual, using its full value to pay all or part of the enchantment cost.



If your signature item is lost or destroyed, you will want to retrain this talent.

Special: You can take this talent several times. Each time you do, it applies to a different item.

Signature Mount (Perk)

Prerequisites: Special Mount, Mounted Combat feat

Your Special Mount will advance in level as you do, using the normal rules for increasing monster levels.

Special Mount (Perk)

You have acquired the services of a special mount, often of a type not easily found. Choose a creature of your level or lower. The mounts from Adventurers Vault are generally available, and the DM might allow you to select a truly exotic creature if it makes sense in play. Elite, Leader, and Solo monsters are generally too strong to be special mounts. The mount will carry you in combat and allow you to use its Mount ability if you have Mounted Combat, but it will not otherwise partake in adventures or fight for you except to defend itself.

Note: Though not required, the feat Mounted Combat greatly increases the value of your special mount. To gain a new special mount, either to change or because the old one died, you must respecify this talent.

Talented (Personal)

You gain training in one talent.

Special: You can take this talent more than once. Each time you select this talent, choose a talent in which you are not trained.

True Identity (Subplot)

You have a secret but significant identity, and this identity is destined to become known and/or play a part in upcoming events. You can be such magnificent things as the long-lost child of the old king, the destined savior of all lizardfolk, or a dragon bound to human form and abilities by a curse. The DM has to approve your choice, and it's usually best to pick your true identity in play, once you know what the campaign is all about.

Victim (Subplot)

You have a tendency to end up as a victim; when someone is to be captured, mugged, or otherwise fall victim to a subplot, it tends to be you. Taking this trait means you'll accept that the DM hand-waves situations where you fall into peril and have to be rescued or work to escape, but DMs are of course encouraged to try and make this as fun and non-disruptive as possible.

Unusual Background (Personal)

You have an unusual or incredible background, such as having been teleported across half the world by a crazed wizard. While this does not allow you to take options the DM does not want in his game, it can serve as an excuse to play something odd or unusual. Obviously, you have to take this talent before you pick the odd option, usually at level 1. You can only respecify it if the campaign changes so that your background is no longer unusual.



Paragon Traits

These traits become available at level 11. At this level, character can assume social obligations and responsibilities, gaining power and influence thereby, but also assuming responsibilities. The practical benefits of such a position rarely apply to adventuring, but are rewards in themselves as they give you prestige, social status, and a role in the campaign. It is generally a good idea to have an Agent to run the practical side of such a position of responsibility, leaving you free to adventure.

In many cases, paragon traits build on heroic traits, but they generally do not replace them, nor have them as prerequisites. Instead, paragon traits build on and expand upon heroic traits. For example, it is possible to be a Baron without having Blue Blood, but if you have both you get the additional respect due a true blue-blooded scion of an ancient lineage. You can retrain Blue Blood to take Baron, but in this case this means you have advanced beyond your origin; your family is ancient but not originally baronial, and you are still seen as an upstart when you become a full baron. The effect of lacking relevant heroic traits has been explained in the description of some paragon traits. Even when it is not explicitly said, paragon traits expand upon, but do not supersede, similar heroic traits.

Peerage: Some paragon traits elevate you to the peerage; the ruling class. Not all peers are formal nobility, but as a peer you do have regional influence and wide-ranging respect. A peer has access to government and court, can arrange to be invited to almost any social event, and is generally considered to be a part of the ruling elite.

Paragon feats give you access to great prestige and recognition, and you should choose such a position sensibly. While it is certainly possible for a rogue to be a High Priest in a church that has gone political, such a position is generally more appropriate to a divine class character. The DM has final say on what traits you can pick. If your area of expertise is the focus of the campaign, you should expect to have to work for your advancement; becoming a baron might be the focus of a feudal campaign and something you have to do great deeds to accomplish. In other games, being a baron is just a backdrop, a wayside honor largely irrelevant to your adventuring activities. In this case it is usually easier to gain, but the impact on the campaign is much less.

Army (Perk)

You have a horde or army of low-level followers to call upon. When in active service, these followers take time and money to maintain, though a successful campaign generally pays its own expenses and you can have them employed to patrol or as a garrison to defray costs. The army has a comprehensive look-and-feel; an infantry force, engineering corps, barbarian horde, or cavalry squadron. You build it like an encounter, with an XP budget equal to the gp cost of a magic item of your level. No member of your army has a higher level than half your own level. An army can be used for military campaigns, as guards, and for other tasks that need a lot of people; they are not very useful on adventures.

Special: This feat can be taken several times, each time with a different army, often different in style.

Baron (Perk, Peer)

You are a regional landowner of considerable power, controlling a town or several villages. Benefits include a corps of guards similar to half an Army, and a castle, but these guards are needed in the area and cannot range far or take part in adventures. You are also a political figure of importance, and your voice will be heard on most matters.

Note: If you lack the Blue Blood talent, you are newly ennobled; while admired for your prowess, you do not gain the full respect due ancestral peers of the realm.

Courtier (Perk, Peer)

You are a well-known hanger-on at court. Though you have no official capacity, your wit, grace, and many friends assure that you are always welcome in high-class society, without any responsibilities.



Genius (Perk, Peer)

Prerequisites: Celebrity

You are recognized as especially gifted; your works are given the highest regard. This is usually applicable to artists, but activists, muckrakers, priests, scholars, and philosophers can also qualify. Whatever you say or do is news, and your opinion weighs heavily on public opinion. This gives you little direct power, but access to the highest circles. And if you are insulted or express your dislike of something, it can cause social chaos.

Guild Master (Perk, Peer)

You are a master of a guild, or in the case of very large and powerful guilds, a ranking official and regional leader. A guild is a professional organization as outlined under Guild Member above. You can call on your subordinates for support and professional services; this allows you to delegate work related to your organization. The guild also reports to you, which gives you a great deal of information.

Notes: Unless you are also a Guild Member, you do not gain access to guild resources like a guild member does; you are assumed to lead the guild from above, not be a working member.

Haunted (Personal, Peer)

You are a magnet for spirits and poltergeist events. Odd but minor things happen near you; milk goes sour, animals walk on their hind legs, apparitions appear, and ghostly voices bemoan their fate. This gives you a solid reputation as a spooky person whose interests are not to be crossed; ordinary people dare not oppose your interest, though they might petition lords and heroes to help them if you become an acute threat. Even persons of import show you a mix of fear and respect, but more guardedly. Overusing respect earned this way can backfire.

Notes: This makes you a part of the peerage but as a feared outsider; you are the wicked stepmother type who has to crash the party, but who no-one dares throw out once you get there.

High Priest (Perk, Peer)

You are a regional leader of a religious order, comparable to a bishop in rank. You can set the policy of the local church, and learn a lot of information about religious and magical events. You can declare holidays and feast days, and are expected to officiate at important ceremonies; if you do not it is seen as divine censure and can cause political and divine repercussions. Unless you are also an Ordained Priest, you do not have the grassroots contacts that position brings.

Lord Justice (Perk, Peer)

You are in a high judiciary position; depending on the locale, this can be a barbarian law-speaker, a chief of police, or a robed and bewigged judge. In either case, your voice is given high regard on matters judiciary, and you are expected to resolve conflicts and settle disputes. Though it is not mandatory to be a skilled Governor to take this position, it is generally very hard to be a respected judge without such expertise.

Magical Warden (Perk, Peer)

You are the guardian of a magical site; this can be a gateway to another world or a place of power. It is best to choose a place of power that has already appeared in the campaign, so that it has an already established magical effect. Typical effects of such sites are to aid certain rituals or allow travel to other planes. They also act as monster magnets; your presence influences what kinds of monsters appear, generally insuring they are amenable to your cause. A site with a responsible warden is an asset to its neighbors, and this position gives you social standing approximately equal to that of a baron or bishop.



Mastermind (Perk)

You are the regional master of an organization of Secret Agents. Your word is law to your lesser brothers. They are willing to do anything for you, but their fanaticism makes the society frail; it is easy to carelessly throw away the lives of your followers if you are not careful. This is best used for infiltration, surveillance, and to provide services and market contacts. None of your agents have a level higher than half your own level.

Minister (Perk, Peer)

You have made a political career and won access to important political venues; as a royal council, minister, or other position close to the seat of power. In this way you are a power behind the throne, with insight in, and influence over, policy.

Mole

Prerequisite: Trained in Bluff.

You are a master of disguise and infiltration. You often turn up to help your comrades at the most unexpected times, disguised as one of the bad guys. This can make an alternate entrance for you in a scenario, or it can be a way to turn up in a scene where you wouldn't ordinarily be, able to help another character in a split party situation.

Navy (Perk)

You have one or more ships at your command. The vessels are worth as much as a magic item of your level, and the crew is an Army with an XP budget of half that. You might not own these ships - it can be a merchant flotilla, part of a navy, or pirates - but you can use it on adventures and the crews are loyal to you; for all practical purposes it is yours. The crews stay with the ship and will never enter a dungeon.

Oracle (Perk, Peer)

You claim to have visions, and these are generally recognized as true and valid; people believe you speak with the voice of supernatural authority. They might not agree, but they certainly take note of what you say. A true oracle is also a Medium, and for a Medium-Oracle spiritual visitations are everyday events; your fame has spread both in the spirit world and the mundane world. If you are not a Medium, you are a fake (but still respected) oracle and can invent your own mystic revelations.

Paragon of Power (Personal, Peer)

Your association with an element or force is strong enough that the effect goes with you wherever you go. Decide on an effect related to the powers you have. Typical examples include elements, times of day, seasons, and so on. Wherever you go, the effect you are related to grows stronger. If you are related to winter, it is always cold where you are, if you are related to spring flowers bloom in your path, and so on. While this has no direct game effect, it establishes you as a personage of power and importance.

Patron of the Arts (Perk)

You have arranged to support artists in your name, either by spending money directly or (more commonly) through the channels you gain from other social paragon traits. As a result, you are seen in a good light in the artist community, which helps you create a good public image, portraying yourself in the best possible light. This serves to enhance any fame or titles you already have, letting you affect how others see you and talk about you. You gain a +2 bonus to the Celebrity talent.



Representative (Perk, Peer)

You are a political representative of the ruling body of your country. If your country has a parliament, you can be a member. You might also be an ambassador from a foreign country or people, a spokesman for a major noble family, free city, judicial council, or otherwise represent a powerful independent interest. This makes you something of an outsider, you don't have access to government (choose Minster for that), but you can make political appeals and have them respected and your opinion is given due weight. You can add power and prestige to whatever side you support. If you are mistreated or ignored, there might be unrest in the group you represent.

Paragon Adventurer (Perk, Peer)

You are recognized for your superior abilities as an adventurer and the power of your class. You might be known as a magus, master thief, or dragon-slaying warrior. Whatever your abilities, they have given you wide recognition. You can freely associate with nobility as an equal, and your advice is sought on matters great and small. If you are also a Celebrity, this extends to the general populace; otherwise you are mainly recognized among other peers.

Paragon Companion (Perk, Peer)

You are the recognized companion of persons of power. While your own powers are not recognized, no-one denies your right to mingle in the peerage. You gain respect not for your own position or abilities, but because of the status of those you associate with, most commonly because you are the known hanger-on to a Paragon Adventurer or closely associated with a personage of the peerage. You can be a heroic sidekick, the first lady, high priestess' consort, or the younger scion of a great noble.

This can be good way into the peerage if you have a Secret Identity or otherwise don't want to draw attention to yourself while still having access to the highest circles of society. You do not have the respect due a true peer or Paragon Adventurer, but neither do you have the notoriety; people tend to underestimate you and your abilities.

Paragon Talent (Personal)

Select one talent in which you are trained. You gain a +4 bonus with this talent. You can select this trait several times, each time selecting a different talent.

Sage (Perk, Peer)

Prerequisite: Trained in History.

You are an established academic authority, the recognized voice of truth, knowledge, and reason. You are called on to resolve disputes and pronounce the truth about history and law. While you have no direct power, your opinion carries great weight and only a fool would refuse you access to their inner council.

Trendsetter (Perk)

Prerequisites: Trained as a Celebrity.

You have the presence and fame to create fashion trends. If you also have Fashion Sense, the trends you create are in good taste and become successful. Otherwise, it is very hit-and-miss; people imitate your style, but often do not win acclaim for it, which tends to create cliques and subcultures. Either way, you are notorious in fashionable circles.

Being a trendsetter can apply to other areas as well. If you are either a great patron of something, or a skilled professional working in the field, you can create trends outside of fashion. Such fields include Architecture, Literature, Music, Fine Arts, Professional Dance, Sculpture, and Theatre.



Epic Traits

At this level you approach absolute power as an independent monarch or other great leader. Epic traits often give worldwide influence, but this influence is vague. If you want direct influence in a smaller area, it is generally wise to hold on to your paragon traits. If you retrain your old traits, you are assumed to have retired from such low-status jobs in order to enjoy the benefits of your new exalted position, leaving day-to-day activities (and the influence they bring) to someone new.

Archpriest (Perk)

You are the titular head of your religion, and can give orders to high priests. Your word is law in religious matters, though it takes tact and diplomacy to get the law implemented across the world.

Chancellor (Perk)

You are the prime minister or president of a major power, responsible for day-to-day policy decisions and in charge of the judicial, financial, and diplomatic corps.

Epic Adventurer (Perk)

You are recognized for your superior class abilities, known as an archmage, legendary thief, or master of dragons. Whatever your abilities, they have given you world-wide recognition. You can associate with royalty as an equal, and your personal influence is that of a small nation.

Epic Aura (Personal)

Somehow, your epic status is obvious to all you meet. This might be an actual physical aura, or it might be your bearing or some unidentifiable quality about you. Either way, you will always be treated with the respect due your legendary status. People will not recognize what epic hero you are unless you pass a Celebrity roll, but they will know you are epic. Their exact behavior depends on their own status and attitude, but they will accept and respect you as an epic presence.

Epic Ideal (Subplot)

You are an inspiration and rallying point for others who share your ideals. Heroes wander far and wide to meet you, nations build their national identity around your presence, and pilgrims visit your home and places where you have performed epic deeds. This makes you a topic of devotion and conversation even in your absence. When you are around, people who support your ideal flock to your banner, making it much easier to start a political movement, rebellion, or to gather a crusade.

Epic Talent (Personal)

Select one talent for which you have the Paragon Talent trait. You gain a +3 bonus with this talent. You can select this trait several times, each time selecting a different trait.

Icon of Art (Perk)

You are beyond famous; one of the icons of the world of culture. Though there is no way you can perform for all who want to see you, your works are carried on by others; imitators and those inspired by you or performing your works before new audiences. Whenever your presence becomes known in civilized areas, fans are likely to gather, in the faint hope of hearing you perform.



King (Perk)

You are the lord of a county. You might bear a different title and your powers might not be absolute, but you are the final executive authority of a nation, if not a major power.

Legend (Subplot)

You are a legend in your own time. The tales told of your exploits makes you seem larger-than-life, so fantastic that people barely believe you exist. They talk about you in hushed voices, and might not recognize you on sight - unless you project an awesome aura of power. Once they understand who you are, they will be awed by meeting a legend - but also become able to form their own opinion.

This trait gives you no recognition value; you have clout from the results of your actions and people respect you as a hidden force in the world, but your person remains unrecognized and your identity can remain secret.

Magical Locus (Perk)

The mark of a saint or archmage, you embody magical phenomena to such a degree that supernatural effects happen spontaneously up to a mile away from you. Choose one type of effect such as plants growing in barren soil, the dead reanimating, the sick getting cured, or supernatural creatures of a certain type manifesting. You have no direct control over this, but effects are generally benign to you and your interests. The level of such events is on the heroic scale and around 20 levels below your own.

Marshal (Perk)

You command the military forces of a major power; a large nation or military alliance. You can call a levy and demand armies from regional lords and allies.

Mogul (Perk)

You are a master of professional and commercial ventures, a merchant lord or guildmaster of worldwide repute. Wherever you go, members of your profession come out to greet you and seek your aid and advice. You do not hold direct authority, but your influence can drive nations bankrupt.

Shadow Lord (Perk)

You are a master of plots and secrets, aware of and in a position to manipulate several Masterminds, either because you are their shadow mentor, or because you have infiltrated their organizations. Your information network is vast, and you can cause all kinds of events all over the world, but you have little direct control over what your minions do; such control would jeopardize security.

Persona of Power (Perk)

You are an established presence in the highest circles of epic power. This includes the presence of such august personages as gods, archdevils, demon lords, primordials, elder dragons, fey archons, and elemental lords. You might not strictly be related to any of these groups, but you are accepted among them, if not as an equal, at least as someone worth respect and civility, someone to be talked to.

Prophet (Perk)

You receive direct guidance from a supernatural source - or at least people believe you do. Strangers treat you as the emissary of a god - or demon lord. If you are also a Medium, your visions are genuine, and the power level of the spirits guiding you has increased manifold; you now hear the voice of past kings, primordials, and demon princes, archfey, or gods. If you are also an Oracle your visions are frequent.

Notes: There is a danger in playing a genuine prophet; you are a tool of fate and lose some control over your character. In many cases, it is more interesting to play a false prophet or one at odds with his visions, who sees but does not fully believe. In other cases, the DM might simply let you decide what your visions are; it all depends on the needs of the campaign.



Talents List

- Actor
- Architect
- Alchemist
- Celebrity
- Dancer
- Governor
- Jeweler
- Lawman
- Leatherworker
- Lover
- Mechanic
- Merchant
- Musician
- Orator
- Painter
- Sailor
- Singer
- Scribe
- Soldier
- Smith
- Stargazer
- Stoneworker
- Tailor
- Valet
- Writer
- Woodworker



Visionary (Subplot)

Your ideas run like wildfire through the world. Whether the listener knows who spoke them or not, your views and ideas spread rapidly, possibly changing the life of millions. If you express dislike for something, it comes under immediate public scrutiny. If you express a preference for something, it is likely to garner followers and grow into a popular movement.

Talents

Talents are the non-combat equivalents of skills, and rules that apply to skills apply to talents as well. Talents are considered skills for abilities that affect the use of skills, such as the Jack of All Trades feat. Characters do not start with training in any talents; they must be mastered by taking the Talented trait.

Background and Profession

Talents are useful in defining and fleshing out character backgrounds. Talents are not a complete inventory of medieval occupations. Many vocations lack a corresponding talent. Some people who make their living that way are unskilled, using abilities directly, such as Strength for manual labor. Others use regular skills such as Nature for farming, hunting and fishing, or Dungeoneering for mining.

Gaining Training

A character uses the Talented trait to become trained in a talent. There are many talents, and they are much more specialized than skills. There are traits that give you a bonus to several talents at once, indicating an interest in a wide but related field. Unless you have decided on a particular talent to learn, these traits are often a good place to start. You can further improve a talent by training it, and specialize further at the paragon and epic levels, for a total bonus of +15 to any particular talent. This gives talents the same range of values skills have, allowing DMs to use the same range of difficulties. Keeping a talent at the maximum value requires the investment of 5 traits and is thus an expensive proposition; DMs should let players with high values in their talents shine.

Using Talents

Talents generally have no application in combat or action scenes. Using them takes time; from several minutes to several months. Their usefulness is in downtime and in skill challenges that take longer than rounds.

Each talent can be used in several ways to provide different benefits.

Income: You can use talent skills to make a living between adventures. For simplicity's sake, this income is generally equal to your living expenses. Having a good rating in an attractive profession means you can have a high standard of living and not pay for it.

Contacts: Being trained in a talent means you know others in your profession, and can be used to find fellow professionals within your chosen field. It works similarly to the Streetwise skill, but only in regards to the profession in question.

Knowledge: Being trained in a talent means you know many things pertaining to the field or profession. This works much like monster lore for your talents field of expertise. This allows craftsmen to know about the kinds of items they make, performers to know songs and sagas, and everyone to know of famous masters in their profession.

Craft: Some talents are crafts, and can be used to create mundane items. For a heroic character, crafts come easily, and you will often surpass ordinary craftsmen in proficiency and diversity. Thus, the craft fields given here are very broad. Most professional craftsmen are much more specialized than this.

A trained craftsman can make magic items appropriate to his craft. A smith makes swords, a leather worker leather armor, and so on. This works like the Enchant Magic Item or Brew Potion rituals, but only for items relevant to your craft. The item must be crafted as part of the enhancement ritual, which will usually require more time than the ritual itself.

Craft skills can also be used to create suitable presents meant for particular people; a well-crafted and suitable present can give a +2 bonus on social interaction rolls against the recipient for one scene. The DC of making a fitting present is the Will defense of the target.

Perform: Perform talents are used to impress and change the mood of others. Each performance takes from one minute up to an hour. In a game context it is more often used as a preliminary to social interaction, helping to set the mood. Used this way, the perform talent can be used to do the Aid Other action for any social interaction, and you can even help yourself this way by performing before you start to interact.

Another way to use a perform skill is as a way to attract attention and stand out in a crowd; make a roll against the passive Insight of the target to attract favorable attention without fawning.

Rituals: Many talents can be used by ritual casters using the Aid Other rules. Different talents have an affinity for different types of rituals. Where a talent is relevant for rituals, this is noted in the description of the talent.

Talent Descriptions

Actor (Cha)

You can bring stories to life and portray a wide array of emotions by use of voice or gesture.

Examples: comedy, drama, mime

Perform: Acting is a perform skill and can aid social interaction.

Rituals: Acting can aid deception rituals.

Architect (Int)

An architect understands geometry and design, making drawings used to build houses, gardens, bridges, fortifications, and other large-scale projects. It is generally impossible to make a large building (more than 30 ft. tall or 150 ft. long) without the help of an architect. An architect is also good at making maps. During a short break, an architect can make a rough draft of a map of an indoor area, and can find possible locations for hidden doors or chambers by the empty space they leave on the map.

Rituals: An architect can aid creation rituals.

Apothecary (Int)

You refine small quantities of precious substances, like medicines, potions, or the creation of ritual components. You can brew, recognize, and identify a great variety of substances and know how they react. You can make glassware such as retorts and tubes, as well as mirrors and lenses. You can brew magical potions. In some settings, you can make gunpowder.

Craft: You can make potions and poisons.

Rituals: An apothecary can aid all restoration rituals.

Celebrity (Cha)

A celebrity is well-known for whatever reason, and can expect recognition and to be fawned upon.

Make a Celebrity roll to see whether people have heard of you and what their impression is, to find fans and admirers, to gauge your popularity, and to check the loyalty of your followers.

Finding admirers has a DC of 20 if you made a dramatic entrance and let people know you are in the area, 30 if you reveal yourself after being incognito. On a success, people have a previous impression of you. You won't need to introduce yourself, and if their basic values mesh with yours they will start out friendly.



Situation	Modifier
Outside your regular area	-5 (or more)
Last adventure was a failure	-5
An adventure the past week was a resounding and public success	+5

Fame can also be used to check the morale and enthusiasm of followers. Make a Celebrity check with a DC of 15 + half the NPC follower's level to see if they will take risks or resist temptations for you.

Fame is not static. When you move about you lose contact with your fan base, and even a temporary setback can make you a has-been or at least make you temporarily out of fashion. Apply the following modifiers:

Fame has something of a drawback in that it makes it easier to hear rumors of your exploits. Such rumors tend to be exaggerated, almost urban legends, so while it is easy to get people to talk about you, it is no easier to actually find solid information on your whereabouts.

Dancer (Cha)

Dance is the art of bodily expression, to convey meaning through stance, posture, and movement. A dance performance is often supported by a musician, or the dancer can accompany himself using the shuffling of feet or with instruments such as tambourines and castanets. You do not need this talent in order to take part in public dancing, but stage dancing or leading a public dance requires a talent roll.

Perform: Dancing is a perform skill and can aid social interaction.

Rituals: Dancing can be used to aid all divination rituals.

Governor (Wis)

A governor understands the nuances of civilian administration and can balance a budget, keep a bureaucracy running, resolve conflicts, act as a judge, and serve as an administrator.

Rituals: A governor can aid binding rituals.

Jeweler (Dex)

You can work with precious stones and materials such as gold, ivory, and mother of pearl to create jewelry, sculptures, and other art objects.

Craft: You can craft rings, amulets, and some wondrous items.

Lawman (Int)

You are familiar with law enforcement methods and procedures. You know how to make an arrest, secure evidence, repossess goods, hand out fines, book prisoners, and otherwise run a smooth law enforcement operation. You could be an investigative judge, sheriff, bounty-hunter, city guardsman, or tax-collector; police as we think of them today rarely exist in fantasy worlds.

Rituals: A lawman can aid warding rituals.

Leatherworker (Wis)

You can work with leather and hide, making clothes, leather and hide armor, and slings. Leather is also used as raw material in many other crafts.

Craft: You can craft leather and hide armor, boots, gloves, and some wondrous items.



Lover (Cha)

Anyone who puts their mind to it can have a satisfying love-life with a familiar partner; this is the ability to sexually stimulate strangers. This is not only lovemaking, but flirtation, romantic conversation, and by being an attractive and complimentary companion as well.

Perform: Lover is a perform skill and can aid social interaction.

Rituals: A lover can aid scrying rituals.

Mechanic (Int)

You can build mechanical devices, such as crossbows, clocks, traps, and locks. Compared to other crafts, the mechanic is not self-sufficient, needing parts made by a smith, founder, and even jeweler to practice the craft.

Craft: You can craft mechanical devices, crossbows, and mechanical traps. In some settings, you can craft firearms.

Merchant (Int)

A merchant understands the laws of supply and demand and is able to move and market goods while maintaining a steady profit. You know how to load a ship or organize a caravan. Scrupulous traders insure goods come to the right buyers in a timely and efficient manner, to the benefit of everyone.

Contacts: You can find someone willing to sell almost anything, including magical items.

Rituals: A merchant can aid travel rituals.

Musician (Cha)

You can play instruments of all sorts, from flutes and drums, to harpsichords and organs.

Perform: Musician is a perform skill and can aid social interaction.

Rituals: A musician can aid any exploration ritual.

Orator (Cha)

A speaker is a performer using words, presenting a story or script in a clear, audible, and enjoyable way. It is used in public speaking, storytelling, and other verbal presentations. A speaker is not inherently skilled in social skills; the talent concerns the presentation of a script, not choosing the right words for an occasion. Still, this talent can be highly useful if you wish to use social skills against many people at once or in a noisy setting.

Perform: Oratory is a perform skill and can aid social interaction.

Rituals: Oratory can be used to aid binding rituals.

Painter (Int)

A painter makes pictures on a flat surface, paper, wooden board, canvas, or walls. This can be used to make works or art, but also simple sketches that serve as notes or to aid memorization. It is possible to make a fairly detailed sketch of a scene during a short rest.

Craft: Painting is a craft skill and can be used to create some wondrous items.

Rituals: Painting can be used to aid deception rituals.

Sailor (Wis)

You are comfortable on ships and boats and know how to operate ships and boats of any size. You can navigate coastal waters in reasonable safety as long as you only sail by day. You cannot navigate at sea using this talent; see Stargazer.



Scribe (Int)

Being literate is one thing; being a trained scribe is something else entirely. Scribes are craftsmen working with writings; copyists, librarians, illustrators, and bookbinders. A scribe is a master of calligraphy and bookbinding, able to make easily readable books and manuscripts. If the setting has printing presses or other means of easily reproducing text, scribes are proficient with them. A scribe is also familiar with various archivist systems, and is more able to find books in a library or archive than most people. This allows the Scribe talent to substitute for all knowledge rolls as long as the documents are available, but each roll takes an hour.

The scribe skill is not a substitute for the Writer or Painter talents; scribes are not concerned with the contents of the text or images reproduced, only with presentation. Nor can it replace the Bluff or Diplomacy skills; scribes are concerned with reproduction of writings and illustrations, not with original writing. However, an attractive presentation using calligraphy and proper paper has a better chance of ever being presented than something scribbled in haste.

Craft: Can be used to copy rituals, making ritual scrolls and books.

Rituals: A scribe can aid divination rituals.

Singer (Cha)

You can use your voice as an instrument. Your voice can enthrall an audience and be audible in a wide area. A professional singer has a wide repertoire and can vary volume and timbre, and can also act as a chanter, leading other less skilled singers.

Perform: Singer is a perform skill and can aid social interaction.

Rituals: Singing can aid exploration rituals.

Soldier (Wis)

You know how to work as part of a disciplined military unit. A soldier knows how to forage, maintain equipment, understand orders, make camp, organize guards and patrols, march without losing coherency, fight in formation, and other military tasks. This is the sign of a veteran and usually means you are at least a sergeant.

Rituals: A soldier can aid warding rituals.

Smith (Str)

You can shape all kinds of metal and make armor and weapons, tools, and other useful objects such as horseshoes and nails.

Craft: You can craft metal items such as weapons and armor, shields, helmets, bracers, greaves, and some wondrous items.

Stargazer (Int)

You know the position of celestial bodies in the sky, and can use them to tell the time and to orient yourself. The main use is for navigation without landmarks, such as at sea, on rolling plains, or in the deep desert. It can also be used to mark time and for astrological and astronomical observations.

Rituals: This talent can be used to aid scrying and travel rituals.

Stoneworker (Str)

You can work stone, adobe, clay, and the like, to build smaller buildings or to realize the plans of an architect. A trained stoneworker can also do sculpting and decorative work in stone, plaster, and clay.

Craft: You can craft items from stone.

Rituals: Can aid all creation rituals.



Tailor (Dev)

You can make clothes and cloth armor, along with tents and tarpaulins. You understand weaving and other fabric-making techniques, such as felt making and carpet knitting. A good tailor can make and repair these things quickly and efficiently; an excellent tailor can make them beautiful and attractive, often using expensive imported materials. Tailored objects make excellent gifts.

Craft: You can craft cloth armor, capes, shoes, gloves, and some magic wondrous items.

Valet (Wir)

You are good at caring for the creature comforts of others. This includes maintaining clothes, cooking, providing basics such as light, food, and warmth, hygiene and grooming, handling personal expenses efficiently, and knowing when you are needed or not. A novice valet is a servant or maid; as you progress in skill you might move on to become an innkeeper, major-domo, or master of a large household.

Contacts: Important people often have their own valets, who can be surprisingly free with gossip when with others of their profession.

Rituals: A valet can aid restoration rituals.

Writer (Wir)

A writer uses the written word, presenting a story or discourse in a clear, intelligible, and enjoyable way. It is used to record things for perpetuity and give them a wider spread than simple stories. A writer is not inherently skilled in social skills; the talent concerns putting words into writing in a legible and understandable way, not the contents of the message. Knowledge skills are needed to fill the words with content; social skills such as Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidation are needed to influence a reader. Still, this talent can be highly useful if you wish to use social skills against many people at once to spread ideas over a large area, limited by the reproduction techniques of the setting and the speed of news.

Craft: Can be used to make magic books and scrolls.

Rituals: Writing can be used to aid binding rituals.

Woodworker (Wir)

You can work wood, building smaller buildings, furniture, and interiors or to realize the plans of an architect. You can make carts, wagons, tools, shafts, arrows, bows, and wooden weapons such as staves and clubs.

Craft: You can craft items from wood.

Rituals: Can aid creation rituals.

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COMBAT ADVANTAGE

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The pair of furred humanoid pushed through the deep bowels of snow, their hoods pulled tight over their faces as the scratching wind tore past them. The slightest step caused them to lose balance and fall back from the force of the elements, and tying a rope around each other would only jeopardize them both, leaving them to abandon their frozen comrades miles back. They all knew the risks of coming here, just as much as they knew the importance of finding it.

Finally reaching the overlook of a valley far below, the first humanoid held up a thickly gloved hand and they both hunched forward, holding their hands over their faces to block out the streaks of snow blowing around them. It was there, just as they had heard; a large crater of melted snow, revealing the warm stone waiting underneath all this winter. Even from such a distant vantage point, they could make out the body lying in the middle of the hole.

It took them until the end of the day to reach the base of the valley safely and they risked pushing on past their limits with their target so close. The snowfall had calmed down and they felt warm as they approached their destination. By the time they fell from the edge of the snow and land on their knees against the rocks, it was too warm to remain dressed in these furs. Pulling back their hoods, the keepers exposed their skin to air for the first time in weeks and looked down at their find.

Burnt remains of the creature that had carried this item so far were laid out in the sword's shadow, a long arm reaching up to keep an eternal grip on the handle. When the keeper laid his fingers over the gemmed handle, the blackened arm turned to ash and tipped into the keeper's grasp.

After a good night's rest, they would head back in the morning. Back through the snow and down the mountainside, hopefully with better odds than it took to get here...

Three Who Were One...

The Wandering Dominion of Endera

by Shawn O'Leary



Endera (*In-deer-ab*) is as vibrant and diverse as any other natural world of the multiverse, with similar geography, weather, and races, combined with the sheer brilliance only found on the dominions of the gods. Unlike other realms, it harbors several secrets. First, and perhaps foremost, Endera is flat, or rather a disk with three distinct layers. It is bordered on all edges by treacherous and life threatening landscapes. Secondly, Endera is adrift on the Astral Sea, never staying in one area for too long before it is swept away in an arcane tide. Lastly, and known to less than a handful of mortals, Endera holds the two remaining essences of the Three Who Were One, ancient and powerful beings who are said to have crafted all of existence.

The Secrets Defined

Endera is finite in shape and size. It is hundreds upon thousands of miles wide, but at its edge lies the Astral Sea. The realm is oval shaped with its boundaries marked by the Foreboding Mountains to the East, the Frost Glacier Spine to the North, the Darnat Falls to the West, and the Blistering Sands to the south. Each is a path to the Astral Sea and beyond if the proper key is known. Few dare tread these inhospitable lands, however, as they are quick and horrible ways to die.

Endera is also the name of an ancient and powerful deity, all that remains of the Three Who Were One. Ancient script, lain in stone by the first invokers, relate a tale of the spontaneous conception and birth of a single entity who then, in its loneliness, created the multiverse. First were the primordials, ancient titans of sheer elemental power, followed by the dragons, majestic, winged reptiles of grace and beauty. And eventually all other beings followed.

A second tale tells of the Disparity, the internal conflict of ethics. It was a disagreement of morality, freedom, desire, and of personal choice initiated by the children of the Three Who Were One. The tale tells of three basic ideals upheld by the children, dividing them into three camps. Those that espoused benevolence and charity, those that believed in personal choice and strength over weakness, and the third camp who felt a collusion of beliefs would provide the best in everything for everyone. This eternal conflict raged for untold millennia until the Three Who Were One could no longer handle the strain and thus split itself into three entities to better tackle the problem. What became of all three afterward is unknown. Only Endera, often referred to as the Goddess of Harmony, remains.

Grand Secret of the Multiverse

Endera holds the greatest secret of the multiverse: the remnants of the Three Who Were One. Two crystal shards are all that remain of Endera's siblings. The shards were the other two divinities' hearts that crystallized after their untimely demise. One crystal is a dark blood red color and the size of a giant's heart. It pulsates with an eerie beat and radiates a hard purple light blinding to any but those of evil alignment. The other shard is bright gold in color and the size of a human heart. It pulsates in a timely rhythmic beat and radiates a soft silvery light that blinds anyone of evil alignment.

The crystals are kept separate and completely hidden in a pocket domain accessible only through Endera's domain. No one in the multiverse knows of their exact whereabouts. However, during the Eclipse of a Million Worlds, where every world in the multiverse is parallel to one another, it is said that a direct path runs toward these crystals. This is a remaining effect Endera's siblings had on reality that she has no control over.

Separate from each other, the shards are powerful artifacts of their respective alignments. Each is an item of power that could actually tip the scales in the ongoing war between good and evil. Of course if each side had one of the shards each it would just even the playing field out again but thousands of worlds would suffer and or die as a result.

Ashalon is a giant reminiscent in appearance to a white hart with bright blue human-seeming eyes. Ashalon is lawful good, one of the very few primordials in existence of such alignment if not the only, and he is guardian of the blood red crystal shard of evil. He takes his duty seriously and understands that the preservation of the multiverse needs to be maintained. He would rather not kill good aligned artifact hunters if he can help it but will do so if necessary. Ashalon hates evil as much as the next person, and maybe more so than most immortals, so it galls him to have to preserve the evil artifact understanding his duty to the multiverse comes first. If, however, he was presented with a way to destroy it without affecting the multiverse he would readily accept its removal from his presence. If the would be destroyers of the artifact left Endera he would follow to ensure its destruction and intervene if needed. If Ashalon was played for a fool, even those of good alignment would suffer if their intent had been to deceive the Primordial of Summer. Ashalon, however, is ultimately good and would not cause any permanent harm to them. He would just teach them a lesson that could take several hundred years to learn. During this time they do not suffer unduly, do not age, nor have need of food or sustenance. They become a permanent fixture of Ashalon's home

until they are released. Once freed, any individual forgets how to get to the artifact that he guards and, regardless of how much magic is used to make him or her remember it, the path cannot be recalled. They do not however forget Ashalon and the lesson he imparted regarding defying a primordial and trying to manipulate/destroy the multiverse.

Telgharz is reminiscent of a colossal diseased boar with a sickly green skin that radiates a purulent odor. He is a primordial of disease and famine. He is smarter or more enlightened than most of his fellow primordials and so agreed to enter service to Endera to preserve the multiverse. This agreement however wasn't for free; *Telgharz* exacted a high price to gain his service. Anyone who dies on Endera and isn't a native, has his soul fed to the Boar of Disease. No one knows of this arrangement except for Endera and *Telgharz*. If Ashalon ever found out he would be quite angry and even possibly leave Endera's service, citing that the price of maintaining the multiverse is too high and that another way should be found. Therefore Endera and the Boar of Disease do their utmost to keep the Primordial of Summer in the dark. *Telgharz* is a loyal servant of Endera so long as the letter of the agreement is maintained, which he is not allowed to divulge as per the agreement. Since the dawn of time, *Telgharz* hasn't found a loophole in the agreement and is not all that worried about doing so. After all, for the most part the Diseased Boar just has to lay next to a crystal shard, albeit a powerful good aligned artifact, and just feed off the souls that are delivered to him. As far as he is concerned, *Telgharz* has the best deal in the multiverse. Any intruders that cannot convince him of the "wisdom" of destroying the shard he guards benefits him more than anything else, and he will destroy any newcomers first and then, time permitting and he's up to it, question them. He can speak to the dead providing he hasn't devoured their souls.

Each shard is a powerful artifact that could have a profound influence on the outcome of the multiverse up to and including its destruction, something both Endera and the primordials in her service hope to maintain. If either artifact or both are destroyed it is believed that existence will slowly unravel. Some believe this to be enough while others contend that Endera must be destroyed as well in order to commence complete annihilation of all existence. It is also believed that anyone possessing or in close proximity to the artifacts when they are destroyed, will be saved from non-existence, and can manipulate the dying artifact to gain several wishes reflected in the new resulting reality.

Celestial Warfare

The war between good and evil isn't isolated to the mortal world, or even the realms of gods and demons, but spans the entire multiverse. Nowhere is it more apparent than the plane of Endera.

Endera is much like the mortal world with mountains, rivers, streams, and ordinary everyday folk, but the stakes of existence are much higher. Devils and demons, good and evil angels, and their mortal agents all seek out this mysterious realm so that the war between good and evil can be settled once and for all.

Endera holds a secret that predates the Dawn War, a secret so dark and ominous that its unraveling could rewrite existence. A relic of existence lies within the realm and holds the key to ending the war against good and evil. This is of grave concern to heroes and villains alike: heroes who dread the end of all things and villains who dread the end of what they call a profitable business.

Most mortals are unaware of the war behind the war between good and evil that wages across existence. This is a war not of just differing points of view but a settlement to an ages old argument between two ancient beings whose disagreement caused their death and the subsequent birth of reality. The few that become aware soon wish they hadn't, as the horror and beauty experienced is too great for most mortals to handle.

The Three Layers (Regions)

There are three overall layers to Endera known only to the Keepers and a handful of the domain's rulers and scholars.

Elra: This is the first layer and surface of Endera. This layer is reflective of the surface of other natural worlds open to the sky. It includes the Foreboding Mountains, Frost Glacier Spine, Darnat Falls, Blistering Sands, rivers, seas, forests, and mortals of the realm.

Elradeep: The second layer of Endera is the underdark and home to most unaligned mortals and fey that can be found across the multiverse. Pockets of evil do thrive and exist as a malignant tumor in Endera's bowels and are slowly being excised by those few brave hearts that are in the know about such things. Halfway down deep within Elradeep, a traveler's sense of going down is replaced with a sense of moving up and should the traveler continue on would reach the third layer of Endera.

Knowledge Checks - Endera

Characters from the mortal world know the following with a successful Arcana check:

DC35: You know that ancient legends tell of a place called Endera adrift on the astral sea that is the key to all existence and nearly impossible to reach.

DC40: You know that powerful immortals of both good and evil seek out the realm to effect the war against one another and are unable to set foot physically on the realm except under special circumstances.

DC55: You know that two ancient powers of unimaginable power destroyed themselves fighting over an argument that can only be guessed at but resulted in the birth of reality.

Characters from the mortal world know the following with a successful Religion check:

DC35: You know that that a realm sought after by all divine beings is hidden somewhere in existence, and if found by good or evil would not bode well for existence.

DC40: You know that there is a popular belief among sages and theologians alike that one god created existence so that it wouldn't be alone and the primordials and the gods were his children. You also know that this belief also postulates that due to warring emotions over what was his most favorite children caused him to split in to three distinct beings known only as the Three Who Were One.

DC50: You know that the Three Who Were One was the perfect embodiment of good, evil, and neutrality and chose gods and primordials alike that represented these ideals.

DC55: You know that the children of Three Who Were One argued over which was the better point of view and the Three Who Were One fought amongst themselves creating a major catastrophe that nearly destroyed existence.

Characters native to Endera make the same skill checks at half the listed DC values for PCs not of the realm.

Upperdown: The very few scholars knowledgeable of this third layer and the Keepers refer to this layer as Upperdown but its inhabitants refer to it as Elrana. This realm is reported to be an exotic and strange place filled with beings and monsters both beautiful and dangerous, and with a topography similar to Elra.

Exploring the Three Layers

Finite as it may be, there is much in Endera to discover and many places where its secrets remain.

Foreboding Mountains: The Foreboding Mountains are a dark and gloomy region on Endera's most eastern edge. This chain of black mist-shrouded mountains runs the entire length of the eastern edge from north to south. It is a perpetually darkened region where light cannot escape and nightmares roam free to terrorize anyone foolish enough to enter. It is strongly believed that these mountains either harbor an active portal to realms of shadow or meet contiguously on some metaphysical level. Whatever the reason, those few brave enough to enter almost never return and the rare few that do are never the same. No one of the common races are said to thrive within its borders yet there is a humanoid race in service to the Death Goddess who may have outposts in the region – The Shadowmen).

Frost Glacier Spine: The Frost Glacier Spine is a chain of mountains and cliffs that borders the northern most edge of Endera and runs the entire length of the realm from east to west. The mountains are continuously blasted by biting winds killing the unwary in seconds.. Active portals to Air, Water, and Ice are said to lie somewhere within its depths allowing the denizens of these planes through constantly. It is believed a race of humanoids, once human and now known only as the frostmen, roam the region searching for warm blood to feed upon.

Darnat Falls: The Darnat Falls is a region of rocky cliffs and overhangs in the west that dot the entire edge of the realm north to south . These cliffs are said to range from just a few hundred feet to thousands or more, and the water that flows down them an aspect of the astral sea pouring through the realm and washing away in the west. The falls are said to hold the secrets of underwater travel as well as traversing the astral sea. In addition, as with the other realms, this one is rumored to harbor a portal to several planes, one of which is the plane of water. Each of the falls is believed to hold aquatic monstrosities out of nightmare to harry and devour even the bravest of adventurers.

Blistering Sands: The Blistering Sands is a fifteen mile stretch of desolate sand and sun stretching from the most western edge of Endera to the most easterly edge in the south. The coolest temperature of the region is believed to cook the mind of even the most prepared of adventurers, while the hottest region will melt flesh and bone within minutes. All that is viewed when traveling south is a shimmering wave of heat and it is believed that if that wave is passed, a paradise oasis will be reached that restores youth and vigor to the old and life to the deceased, and beyond that the Astral Sea.

Immortals

Creatures with the immortal keyword of any alignment cannot enter the realm except by permission from the goddess, and to date this permission has never been granted. The predictable desires of good and evil gods, and the uncertainty of the unaligned, threatens the goddesses' sense of security and stability not only for her realm but for that of the multiverse.

Travel

Each treacherous region is a path to the Astral Sea and beyond if the proper key is known, but few dare tread to these inhospitable and dangerous places. Mortals may come and go as they may if they know the way, but the ways are fraught with perils rarely seen. Endera respects free will and has no qualms about letting her "children" depart Endera for other planes. She believes that anyone desiring to experience the multiverse and all it has to offer should, but there is a catch. Anyone who departs has her memory on how to return suppressed, a malady only restored under highly unusual circumstances. Special agents directly serving the goddess retain their memories when leaving Endera.

Immortals, such as devils, demons, angels, and their ilk are another story altogether. Their travel to Endera is completely cut off, regardless of the power of the ritual used, portal, power, or the skill of the spell caster. If such an attempt is made by these beings they are shunted to the astral sea instead. The goddess does not tolerate their presence as it disrupts the delicate balance and peace of the realm and threatens the stability of preserving the multiverse. Agents of these beings and their descendants on the other hand do travel to and from Endera, but suffer the same memory loss as others.

Night and Day

Endera is unique among planes. Instead of being round like most mortal realms that rotate around solar and lunar bodies, Endera "flips" every 24 hours, exposing itself to the sun Solra and its single moon, Nunera, and thus reflecting day and night. The flip is slow and steady and appears to mortals that Endera rotates around the sun. Nunera slowly rotates around Endera in a direction opposite of her "flip" and thus can be seen on both Elra and Upperdown as luminescent silver at night. Nunera's cycle is a 30 day rotation.

The scholars and wizards, who know the truth hypothesize that this "flip" or "turning" of day into night is facilitated by the Darnat Falls. It is believed that the force and weight of the falls spilling into the astral sea slowly dips the plane on its axis so that day and night continue on and on.

The Enderans

Mortals everywhere fight and bicker, and sometimes kill. Endera is no different but there has never been a known war. Skirmishes between different races have occurred, but the differences are usually ironed out to everyone's satisfaction. And although theft and larceny are common place, there truly are no poor. Everyone is able to work

and provide for themselves and live comfortably if they so desire. Endera's rulers, with the aid of the Keepers, have maintained the peace since the realm's inception. Thus most folks have a serene and congenial attitude toward friends and strangers alike. Only the stresses of daily living weigh on these folks, but not very heavily for they trust in their goddess to aid them in troubled times. There is rarely anyone of evil alignment and those that arise are quickly vanquished by the good folk of the realm. Most creatures and beings are unaligned or good.

The most common races of Endera are human, elf, dwarf, and halfling, but others do roam the countryside or have small communities set up away from civilization. All races from all sources are allowed in Endera with the DM's permission.

Each race has one known primary stronghold or kingdom in Endera while the rest of the realm is a pocket of cities, independent communities, and wilderness.

New Race: Keepers (Elda)

The Keepers are the ancient mortal "children" of Endera created at the beginning of time and now indigenous to Endera. The term Keeper is more a descriptive title than a racial name but it is what most of Endera's inhabitants know them as. They are known as the Elda amongst themselves, which translates to child of peace from ancient eladrin script. They directly serve Endera in preserving the secrets hidden on the plane. They are overseers, protectors, and advisors to the domain's inhabitants. They rarely leave the plane except on the most desperate of missions. These ancient beings police the length and breadth of the plane searching for both the forces of good and darkness to turn them away from the plane's secrets. They will fight to the death to preserve the existence of the multiverse and their beloved home.

They are tall elegant humanoids, lithe and graceful. Those who have had the opportunity to see these beings unmasked will note an unearthly beauty and serenity. Most will note similarities between humans and eladrin but they are not half-elves in any sense of the word. They are taller than humans on average and slender, with gray skin and silver hair. Their eyes are almond shaped but lack pupils, much like many celestial beings. The elda are the closest Endera comes to having immortals on Endera.

Keeper Racial Traits

Average Height: 6' –7'

Average Weight: 150–250 lb.

Ability Scores: +2 Wisdom, +2 Charisma

Size: Medium

Speed: 6 squares

Vision: Low-light

Languages: Common, Eldan,* and one other of player's choice

Skill Bonuses: +2 Religion, +2 Diplomacy

Endera's Oath: When reduced to 0 hit points, you immediately make a death saving throw with a +2 bonus.

Enduring Will: You receive a +1 racial bonus to all defenses against powers with the psychic and charm keywords.

Immortal Heritage: You are considered immortal.

Morality Defense: You are immune to Endera's morality shift and receive a +1 bonus to saving throws when suffering a condition caused by an elemental or outsider.

Aligned Resistance: You gain the *aligned resistance* racial encounter power.

Aligned Resistance Keeper Racial Power

Your oath and dedication to Endera grant you resistance to those diametrically opposed to her.

Encounter

Immediate Reaction Personal

Trigger: You received a critical hit from a good- or evil-aligned creature.

Effect: You gain temporary hit points equal to one-half your level.

The Elda have deep religious and magical traditions that serve as a basis for their upbringing and shapes their morals and ethics toward each other and the multiverse. The Elda are a contemplative people favoring philosophy, theology, and magical study over fighting and physical arts. They have keen minds, and eyes able to pierce the secrets of the multiverse and the deepest secrets of others. The Elda perceive the common races as ignorant younger siblings who have not yet learned to walk. This is not to say that they are haughty or mistreat them, only that the Elda feel that they are incapable of understanding anything greater than their personal lives. Even those enlightened ones, whether mage or sorcerer, or seasoned planer walker, can understand that which the Elda know.

The Elda are tall and of healthy medium build with long delicate fingers and toes. Their ears are close to a humans coming to only a slight point. They can, and do, grow facial hair which has on occasion allowed them to mingle amongst other races undetected. Their hair is gray, black, or white and their eyes always gray or blue.

New Languages

Eldan is the language of the Elda and spoken by all who serve the goddess directly. It has a similar structure and syntax to common, with strong influences from both dwarven and elven languages. It is believed that the goddess, rather than grant them a language of their own, had the Elda appear in the mortal realm to learn their own, believing that by doing so their drive for knowledge and enlightenment would be greater than others. It stands to reason then that if that legend is true the Eldan's first neighbors were dwarves and eladrin.

Theian is an ancient language spoken by priests when performing rituals and prayers dedicated to Endera. It was taught to the first Invokers by the goddess herself in an effort to communicate better with her servants. Originally it was learned only by the invokers, but with the passage of centuries and the need for lay priests and clerics, knowledge of the language has passed on to them as well. Travelers attempting to leave Endera must also be extremely fluent with Theian, otherwise knowing where a portal is and the activation key is just useless information. Theian is both a complex and simple languages with more consonants than vowels, and spoken more often in short sentences. It has no known basis in any other language.

Religion

Endera is the only surviving aspect of a divine entity known as the Three Who Were One and perhaps the most caring and sincere despite her neutral outlook. Only the most ancient and most fragile of relics scattered throughout the multiverse details her and her “siblings”; very little true knowledge exists. However, the people of Endera know her as a stern and loving mother who looks after all that they do. She is revered by most and recognized as the chief deity amongst Enderans. She either appears as a dove-headed female garbed in white and skyblue robes or a member of any race she chooses to emulate.

Endera (In-deer-ah)

Goddess of Serenity, Peace, and Balance

Alignment: Unaligned

Worshippers: Anyone who seeks normalcy, balance, and peace in their lives. Common worshippers include farmers, craftsmen, and artisans. Lastly, those who have lived a tragic and turmoil-filled life seek her love and affection so that they too can find eternal peace.

Symbol: A dove whose head is dipped toward the earth as if bowing, wings spread wide.

Colors: Gray, white, and sky blue

Weapon of Choice: Longsword

Allies: Most lawful deities

Enemies: Any being or entity that threatens the stability of the multiverse or favors the disruption of peace. Chief among her enemies are the gods of destruction and hate.

Clergy/Servants

Avengers: The avengers have only appeared recently in few numbers, and seem to be a splinter faith of the goddess that dedicates themselves to achieving peace through violence. This isn't to say that the avengers aren't peaceful and kind people, only that they believe the best way to achieve peace without open warfare is to eliminate those that would threaten it. Avengers almost universally wear gray so as to better blend in with common folk, but do wear Endera's other colors. The choice is typically up to the avenger, except for those belonging

to the Tranquil Brothers who must all wear gray. All avengers are secretive and typically loners. If they travel it is either alone or with a small group of trusted companions of no more than eight.

Invokers: These ancient servants of the goddess are required to wear sky blue as the predominant color of their garb while adventuring or exploring. When performing ceremonies or religious rituals they must be wearing all skyblue and paint their faces blue. During grand and important ceremonies they must also dye their hair white. Invokers perhaps know the most about the Three Who Were One due to a strong oral tradition among them, and they were the first mortals to see this divine being as one. The invokers are also perhaps the most knowledgeable of Endera's secrets.

Clerics: The organized clergies of Endera are widespread and prevalent in the dominion but only a few of the churches' servants remain, as the invokers may be seen on other worlds promoting the goddess's faith. Unlike their more passionate brethren, clerics of Endera feel a calmer, more withdrawn approach is necessary to protecting Endera from dangerous outsiders.

The colors a cleric wears for ceremonies and rituals is dependent on their ranking in the clergy. Initiates and acolytes are garbed in gray and required to wear a gray robe or cloak at all times. Ordained priests wear equal parts gray and white and must wear them during all ceremonies and rituals. Archpriests (i.e. bishop, cardinal) wear all blue and must wear that color during ceremonies and rituals. The Great Cleric of Elra (Upperdown) is the only priest allowed to wear all white. He must also dye his hair white (to reflect wisdom) if it isn't already white due to age. However, if the Great Cleric does have mostly gray hair, which is acceptable, as gray hair amongst the clergy is considered a sign of wisdom.

Note: On Upperdown, interestingly enough, the structure and requirements of Endera are quite the same with the essential requirements of the three professions remaining the same. Customs and cultural similarities exist moreso in the clergy of Elra and Upperdown than anywhere else on the domain.



RELIC GUARD

Defender of Endera

There comes a time in every creature's life when all must be risked for the greater good. A danger lies on the horizon with no standing in its way. You can ignore the threat, pray for someone else to take that stand against all odds, but what if those prayers called on you to be that lone savior? Would you answer that call? Or would you take on the challenge before those prayers were ever needed?

Endera, with all its beauty, conceals some of the multiverse's most powerful artifacts and maintains order in an existence of war and chaos. Relic guards take up the quest, working with the protective energies of the plane to secure the safety and solitude of these wicked devices. Relic guards not only call upon their gods for their powers but Endera itself through relics, incredible statues of power bursting through the earth to aid the relic guard in its mission.

You have accepted your role as the guardian of such an artifact and learned the divine art of summoning relics. Your powers are tailored to hold back creatures eager to obtain your artifact and aid your comrades with blocking defenses and surges of radiant healing... or unleash a wave of deadly necrotic energy on your enemies.

Prerequisites:

Must worship a deity; trained in Arcana or Religion



Specialist Traits

Relic guards utilize their relics to create an additional opponent on the battlefield for enemies and a crucial companion for your allies. Their power comes in the form of relics and most of the powers provided in this class are dailies, requiring only a minor action to unleash the power of a relic.

Additional Role: Defender/Controller. Depending on your chosen destiny and the relics you summon, you are able to manipulate the environment around you to create blocking terrain, boost your defenses, and even provide flanking for ranged attacks.

Power Source: Divine. Your relic guard powers are blessings from your god and Endera combined, each working towards the security of your warded artifact.

What Is A Specialist Class?

While each class provided in the D&D game provides a generic role and purpose for any party, there are moments and campaigns where a specific touch of flavor is required or desired. Specialist classes are an option for augmenting your existing character in new directions without drastically altering the core design of the class.

When you choose a specialist class, you can select from any of the optional class features and powers to substitute those already provided in your original class selection. For example, you can choose from one of the relic guard's at-will powers in addition to your ranger at-will powers. So long as you meet the prerequisites of the specialist class and choose at least one specialist class feature to replace an existing feature from your original class, you are now a specialist. From this point on, you can select any powers, feats, and other resources designed for the specialist class. This includes multiclass and hybrid characters.

You can select a specialist class at any time in the campaign provided your GM has approved this option. Once you substitute at least one class feature with a specialist class feature, you are now considered a specialist. You do not gain an additional number of powers, feats, or other statistical accounts through specializing. You are also restricted to one specialty at one time. Should you choose to change your specialty, you must replace all of your specialist class features with your new specialist class.

Combining Power Sources: Many specialists use a specific power source (such as the divine power source for the relic guard) but this does not place a restriction on your character's power selection. You can gain the benefits of a divine specialist class feature with another power source from any other class.

Using the Multiclass Option: Specialists may not be a viable option for all campaigns and some GMs may find them overpowering as initially designed. For that reason, multiclass feats are presented as an option in the Feats section at the end of this article. You can replace the requirements for specialist selection with the given feats functioning as multiclass feats.

Relic Guard Class Features

Choose at least one of the following class features. Each class feature you choose must replace an existing feature from your primary class (e.g. cleric or wizard) and cannot be used within any class features given under the Restrictions listings below. See the Relic Summoning sidebar for details on using relics.

Bound Artifact

Choose an artifact connected to your deity (created by you and the GM) to protect above and beyond all others. The artifact need not be magical or intelligent. Through a long and arduous series of rituals, you become bound to that artifact. As long as you live, the artifact cannot be destroyed. If you fail your third death saving throw, you can make an additional saving throw as an immediate reaction.

Special: All relic guards gain this class feature automatically. If you exchange an additional class feature from your primary class, you also gain the Bound Artifact encounter power provided below.

Bound Artifact

Class Feature

Drawing on your divine connection to your linked relic, you gain raw heavenly power to destroy your enemies.

Encounter • Divine, Implement

Minor Action **Close blast 3**

Target: Every creature in blast

Attack: Wisdom +2 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1d6 + Wisdom modifier radiant, fire, thunder, necrotic, poison, or force damage and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn.

Increase damage to 3d6+Wis modifier at 11th level and increase damage to 4d6 + Wis modifier damage at 21st level.

Special: Choose radiant, fire, thunder, necrotic, poison, or force and that is the type of damage that your Bound Relic Power does. Once chosen it cannot change. If you possess the artifact affinity feat and the bound relic meets all the requirements of this feat you gain hit points equal to your healing surge if you are bloodied.



Relic of Fortitude

You can summon relics and use any of the daily attack powers listed for this class. When you summon a relic, you gain a +1 power bonus to all defenses while standing adjacent to your relic. This bonus increases to +2 at 11th level and +3 at 21st level. Once per day, if you have a clear line of sight to the relic, you gain this bonus up to 5 squares away from your relic.

Choose one damage type. When you roll a critical hit, you can convert your damage to your chosen damage type. If your attack already inflicts this damage, the target is instead vulnerable 5 to your chosen damage type until the end of your next turn.

Relic of Grace

You can summon relics and use any of the daily attack powers listed for this class. When you summon a relic, you gain a +1 bonus to speed. This bonus increases to +2 at 11th level and +3 at 21st level. Once per day, you can shift one-half your speed as a move action.

Choose one damage type. When you roll a critical hit, you can convert your damage to your chosen damage type. If your attack already inflicts this damage, the target is instead vulnerable 5 to your chosen damage type until the end of your next turn.

Relic of Opportunity

You can summon relics and use any of the daily attack powers listed for this class. When you summon a relic, you can make a separate initiative roll, using your modifiers, for the relic to act individually from you. Once per day, while your relic is summoned, you can re-roll your initiative in the middle of the encounter. You must use the new result no matter if your new result is lower.

Choose one damage type. When you roll a critical hit, you can convert your damage to your chosen damage type. If your attack already inflicts this damage, the target is instead vulnerable 5 to your chosen damage type until the end of your next turn.

Relic of War

You can summon relics and use any of the daily attack powers listed for this class. When you summon a relic, it provides flanking for you. Once per day as a minor action, your relic can provide flanking for all allies until the end of your next turn.

Choose one damage type. When you roll a critical hit, you can convert your damage to your chosen damage type. If your attack already inflicts this damage, the target is instead vulnerable 5 to your chosen damage type until the end of your next turn.

Relic Guard Powers

Just as with your primary divine powers, using relics and other boons of your training are prayers, calling upon the divine retribution of Endera.

Level 1 Relic Guard Prayer

Relic of the Snake

Relic Guard Attack 1

A long, circular pillar comprised of swirling coils of scales cuts through the ground and whips its fury at those who would disrupt peace.

Daily • Divine, Poison, Relic, Summoning, Zone
Minor Action Area 1 within 10 squares

Effect: You summon the Relic of the Snake in the chosen square. When an enemy moves or starts its turn within 5 squares of the relic, it takes poison damage equal to one-half your level + 1 per adjacent ally. If an enemy makes an opportunity attack against you while in this zone, the triggering target is knocked prone.

Once per encounter, the Relic of the Snake can use the following attack:

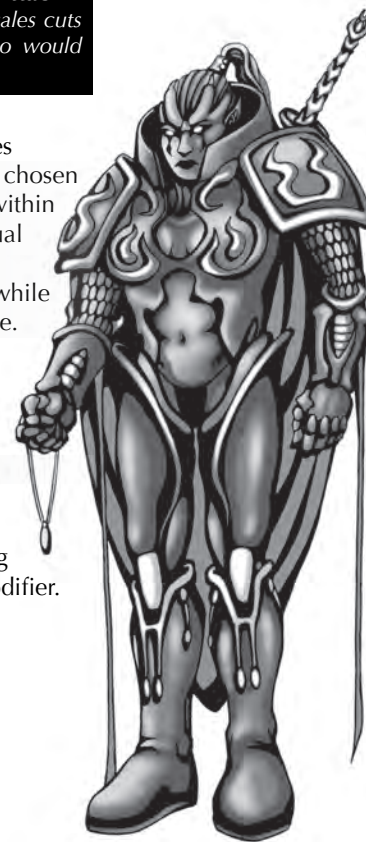
Standard Action Melee relic 1

Target: One creature

Attack: Primary ability +2 vs AC

Hit: 2d10 + primary modifier poison damage.

The target is restrained and slides 5 squares. Any secondary target on the path of the sliding target takes damage equal to your primary modifier.





Relic Summoning

When you use a power with the relic keyword, you are summoning the physical embodiment of Endera's commitment to guarding your artifact. Use the following rules for using a relic power.

Relics

When you summon a relic, you must use these rules.

Point of Origin: Choose a single square within the area listed with the relic power. The relic rises out of the floor at this square and occupies that square. It cannot rise on a square that is already occupied unless your relic power states otherwise.

Moving a Relic: If your relic power allows you to move the relic, it cannot pass through a square occupied by an enemy unless the relic power states otherwise. If it does move through enemy squares, the enemy is pushed 1 square.

Cover: A relic provides total cover to an adjacent creature and blocks line of sight. A relic guard cannot be flanked while standing adjacent to a relic.

Defense and Hit Points: A relic uses your defenses when it is attacked by an enemy and has hit points equal to one-half your total. Any defense bonuses applied to you also applies to the relic so long as the relic remains standing. When the relic is reduced to 0 hp, it crumbles into dust and no longer occupies the square but the square is now considered difficult terrain.

Healing the Relic: You can spend a healing surge to heal your relic but your relic does not have any healing surges of its own. Whenever you are able to spend a healing surge (e.g. second wind, healing power), you can choose to pass those benefits to the relic instead, regardless of the distance or line of sight on the relic. If an ally casts a healing spell that targets the relic but does not target you, the relic cannot receive the benefits of a healing surge. If you choose to spend a healing surge on your relic, you cannot gain its benefits. If you spend a healing surge on yourself, your relic does not gain its benefits. If you are subject to a power granting additional benefits with the healing surge, such as additional hit points, the relic can still gain those additional benefits.

Attacks: If your relic power allows your relic to make an attack, it uses your attack modifier and the damage listed with the power. When a relic power uses your "primary ability" or "primary modifier", this responds to your primary ability modifier from your primary class.

Multiple Relics: You can only have one relic active at a time for every relic guard class feature selected. You can only summon one relic per turn. When you spend a healing surge, you must select one relic to gain its benefits.

Level 5 Relic Guard Prayer

Relic of the Shield

Relic Guard Attack 5

As wide as a tower shield and taller than a goliath, this massive hulk of rock and earth protects you from harm and reflects energy attacks back at their creators.

Daily • Divine, Relic, Summoning, Zone

Minor Action Area 1 within 10 squares

Effect: You summon the Relic of the Shield in the chosen square. When you or one ally stands adjacent to the relic, you gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses. As a minor action, the relic gains resist 10 + 2 per adjacent ally to one of the following damage types: fire, cold, thunder, lightning, radiant, or necrotic. If you or your allies stand adjacent to the relic, you gain the relic's resistance. This can be sustained as a minor action.

Once per encounter, the Relic of the Snake can use the following attack:

Immediate Reaction Ranged relic 5

Target: One creature

Attack: Primary ability +2 vs AC

Hit: 3d10 + primary modifier damage. If the relic has been hit by an energy type it was resistant to earlier in the encounter, you can alter the damage type of this attack to match.

Level 15 Relic Guard Prayer

Relic of Eternal Breath Relic Guard Attack 15

Rather than crashing through the ground, this relic appears as a soft mist quickly taking solid form, creating a curved wall of silver and sky blue glass.

Daily • Divine, Force, Relic, Summoning

Minor Action Area 1 within 10 squares

Effect: You summon the Relic of Eternal Breath in the chosen square. When you use a move action to move, you can move the relic an equal number of squares. Standing within 2 squares of the relic grants cover, concealment, and a +2 bonus to defenses against ranged attacks for yourself and all allies.

Once per encounter, the Relic of the Snake can use the following attack:

Standard Action Melee relic 1

Target: One creature

Attack: Primary ability +2 vs Reflex

Hit: 4d10 + primary modifier force damage and target is restrained (save ends). Until the target makes its saving throw, it takes damage from any missed attack passing through or adjacent to the target's square. Aftereffect: The target slides 5 squares. Any secondary targets hit by the primary target are prone.



Level 25 Relic Guard Prayer

Relic of Billowing Flame Relic Guard Attack 25
Erupting like a mushroom cloud of smoke and ash, the flaming pillar burns all it touches and singses the soul of those who would defy it.

Daily • Divine, Fire, Relic, Summoning, Zone
Minor Action Area 1 within 10 squares
Effect: You summon the Relic of Billowing Flame in the chosen square. The relic creates a zone within 2 squares of its position and inflicts fire damage equal to one-half your level against any enemies within this zone. Once a target has suffered fire damage from the relic, it gains vulnerable 10 fire (save ends). If you or any allies include the relic in an area, blast, burst, or ranged attack, the attack also deals fire damage.

Once per encounter, the Relic of Billowing Flame can use the following attack:

Standard Action Melee relic 1
Effect: The relic moves a number of squares equal to your speed + 4 and attacks all enemies it passes.
Target: One creature
Attack: Primary ability +2 vs Fortitude
Hit: 2d10 + primary modifier fire damage plus 10 ongoing fire damage (save ends). If the relic bloodies a target, it continues to move an additional 2 squares.

Level 19 Relic Guard Prayer

Relic of Winter Relic Guard Attack 19
Rising up like a tidal wave, this rolling tower of water looms over your enemy's heads before it comes crashing down on them.

Daily • Cold, Divine, Force, Relic, Summoning
Minor Action Area 1 within 10 squares
Effect: You summon the Relic of Winter in the chosen square. When you use a move action to move, you can move the relic a number of squares equal to your speed + 2. The relic creates a zone of ice up to 2 squares which counts as difficult terrain. Any enemy that ends its movement on this zone must make a saving throw or slide an additional 2 squares. Any allies starting their turn within the zone gain temporary hit points equal to one-half your level and gain +2d6 hit points when they spend a healing surge.

Once per encounter, the Relic of Winter can use the following attack:

Standard Action Melee relic 1
Target: One creature
Attack: Primary ability +4 vs AC
Hit: 4d10 + primary modifier cold damage and target is immobilized. The relic makes a secondary attack as a close blast 3.
Secondary Target: All enemies in the blast
Secondary Attack: Primary ability vs Reflex
Hit: 1d6 cold damage and target is pushed a number of squares equal to one-half the damage

WANTED: Fresh Blood

Everyone has an idea on how their favorite game should be played. There are more powers, feats, monsters, traps, hazards, terrains, and encounters out there than you can shake a kobold at ...and we want to see them.

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Level 29 Relic Guard Prayer

Relic of All Endera

Relic Guard Attack 29

There is little detail to make, for this relic appears as a pillar of pure white light, bright as the day the universe was created.

Daily • Divine, Radiant, Relic, Summoning, Zone
Minor Action Area 1 within 10 squares

Effect: You summon the Relic of All Endera to the chosen square. When you stand adjacent to the relic, you gain blindsight up to 10 squares and ignore cover, concealment and superior concealment. You and your allies are granted superior concealment when you stand within 2 squares of the relic. All enemies within 5 squares of the relic suffer radiant damage equal to one-half your level + 1 per adjacent ally when they start their turn in this zone.

Once per encounter, the Relic of All Endera can use the following attack:

Minor Action Personal (special)

Target: You and the relic

Effect: You and the relic can spend a healing surge and gain temporary hit points equal to one-half your level. Until the end of the encounter, you gain a +1 bonus to one defense of your choice when an enemy misses you with a melee or ranged attack. Once per turn, you inflict a -1 penalty to all enemy's defenses when you hit it with an at-will attack power.



FEATS

In time, the relic guard pushes his connection to his mission beyond expectations and learns to fight alongside his relic as a trusted comrade-in-arms. You can select any of the following feats to increase your abilities as this specialist class.

Distant Flanker

Prerequisite: Relic guard

Benefit: If a target stands on a square within a straight line between you and your relic, the relic provides flanking with a ranged attack power.

Explosive Zone

Prerequisite: Relic guard, 11th level

Benefit: Once per day, you can use a minor action to expand the zone of your relic by 1 square until the end of your next turn.

In Harm's Way

Prerequisite: Relic guard, 11th level

Benefit: When an enemy is pushed into your relic, the enemy suffers the relic's zone damage, even if it has already suffered the relic's zone damage that round.

Relic Shift

Prerequisite: Relic guard

Benefit: If you hit with an opportunity attack, you can shift your relic 1 square, even if your relic does not move.

Relic's Touch

Prerequisite: Relic guard

Benefit: When you spend a healing surge on yourself, any allies standing adjacent to your relic gain temporary hit points equal to one-half your level.

Share The Wound

Prerequisite: Relic guard, 21st level

Benefit: Once per encounter while standing adjacent to your relic, you can share damage with the relic, causing half damage to both you and the relic.



Through Pain Comes Health

Prerequisite: Relic guard, 21st level

Benefit: Whenever an enemy suffers damage with your chosen damage type from your relic guard class feature, you gain temporary hit points equal to one-half your level.

Specialist Feats: An Optional System for Multiclassing

For some, specialist classes as presented are overpowered and break the mold set down by multiclassing feats given in the *4E Player's Handbook*. The feats given below are an optional means of incorporating specialist classes in your campaign as a series of multiclass feats.

Adept Training

Prerequisite: Specialization

Benefit: You can replace the listed ability score modifier on a specialist power with another ability score modifier of your choice.

Special: You can select this feat multiple times and substitute the ability score modifier on another specialist power.

Master Specialist

Prerequisite: Specialization

Benefit: You can exchange one power from your primary class to a similar power from your specialist class. This substituted power must be the same level, frequency (at-will, encounter, or daily), and type (attack or utility).

Special: You can select this feat multiple times and substitute another power from your specialist class.

Past Lesson

Prerequisite: Specialization

Benefit: You can substitute one of your primary class features for a specialist class feature. You can only use a primary class feature chosen for elimination when you become a specialist. Once you have used your substituted primary class feature, you cannot use your specialist class feature until after an extended rest.

For example, if you substituted your Ritual Caster class feature as a cleric for the Bound Artifact relic guard class feature, you can use this feat to regain the use of Ritual Caster until your next extended rest.

During this time, you do not have Bound Artifact.

Specialization

Prerequisites: You must meet the conditions of your chosen specialist class.

Benefit: Choose a specialist class and replace one of your primary class features with one from your chosen specialist class.



Review:

PAX East 2010:

A Retrospective & Survival Guide

I had the great fortune this spring to attend my first ever Penny Arcade Expo, or PAX, for short. There are two expos each year, one in Seattle and one in Boston, and they are sponsored by the artists of the Penny Arcade webcomic. And like the webcomic that spawned them, these expos are events celebrating all things GEEK and GAMING.

by Michael Evans

The expos cover everything from console games and computer games, to board games, tabletop games, and role-playing games. Gamers of all kinds flock to PAX and PAX East to check out what's new in games, hardware for gaming, and upcoming releases of game-related products of every conceivable type. But it also celebrates old games too, and gamers are encouraged to bring their old portable game systems, board games, and role-playing games to spend time in what can only be called a "festival of geekery".

Retrospective #1: Know the difference between a convention and an expo.

Now the first thing I came to realize about this event is that it is an EXPO and not a CONVENTION, and the distinction between the two is a fairly important one. At a gaming convention, you're inundated by gaming events, sponsored by both "official" sources, like Wizards of the Coast, Chaosium, or White Wolf, for instance, and by Dungeon Masters and Games Masters who volunteer to run gaming events. At an expo, various gaming companies and manufacturers will sponsor a few events to showcase their products, and hopefully to make a sale.

That means the amount of gaming activities you find at PAX is considerably less than what you'd find at a gaming convention, even a small local one. In fact, WotC was scrambling to find DMs to help meet the enormous, and apparently unexpected, demand by gamers to take part in the various D&D 4E events.

That doesn't mean you're going to be bored at a PAX if you're a gamer. Far from it, in fact. I managed to get in nearly 24 hours of solid D&D 4E play while at PAX East over a two day period, plus a couple turns at demo stations for computer games. There were plenty of "indie" game companies running non-stop demos of their latest board game or card game to try your hand at. And I could have had even more gaming had I wandered into the open gaming areas and joined a pick-up game of D&D (any version), as well as numerous board games such as Settlers of Catan or Axis & Allies, or card games like Magic: The Gathering. And that brings up a good point for my first bit of advice.



Survival Tip #1: Get in line - early, Early, EARLY!!!

Unlike a gaming convention, at PAX East, most of the panel events and gaming activities are “first come, first served”, or in a few unruly cases, “first shove, first served”. Gamers on the whole are a pretty polite bunch and there is a definite bonhomie when it comes to the Brotherhood of Geeks, but you have to be pretty fast if you want to grab your turn trying out a new game at the expo.

Lines queued up for panel events up to an hour before the start time, and there was no guarantee that standing in line for an hour was going to get you a seat. Although there was great esprit de corps between my fellow gamers over the course of the weekend, there were still quite a bit of chagrin when it came to being able to attend panel events. Seats filled up pretty fast, particularly on Saturday when the greatest bulk of conventioners showed up, but I got hedged out of the two Friday events I wanted to attend because I did not get in line early enough.

Thankfully, the organizers of the D&D 4E and other WotC events were on the ball and had sign-up sheets for all the games they were running, which was NOT standard-operating-procedure for most of the events in the expo. And as Dungeon Masters showed up to volunteer, they kept expanding the sign-up and waiting lists. I know there were some folks that got turned away, however, so I can only recommend that you get in line early for your best chance at having a good expo and gaming experience.

Oh, and even if you do sign-up for a game, be sure to be a little early. If they start seating players with Dungeon Masters, you want to be there when your name is called, or someone from the waiting list might end up with your spot at the table!

Retrospective #2: Wizards of the Coast knows how to show gamers a good time!

It's not too shocking that Wizard of the Coast knows how to make the most of a chance to show off their products and make sure that gamers have a great time – GenCon and Origins have given them plenty of experience in that department! WotC sponsored twelve Magic: The Gathering Tournaments and six different Magic: The Gathering Online events at PAX East this year. In addition, they sponsored six unique D&D 4E Events, covering 27 different sessions over the three day weekend, with multiple DM's running groups of

6 Players in each session. And on top of all that, they threw in a Three-Dragon-Ante Tournament and ran a panel discussion on Sunday entitled “Save My Game! LIVE”. Now that's a lot of gaming!

The D&D 4E Events at PAX East this year included:

- Brand-New to D&D
- D&D Encounters Undermountain Session 1
- D&D Encounters Undermountain Session 2
- D&D Convention Delve: “Ruins of Spectral Glade”
- D&D Dark Sun Preview: “Death in the Arena”
- D&D DM Challenge: “Horrors of the Underdark”

I was fortunate enough to partake in four of the six D&D 4E Events at PAX East this year, only opting out of Brand-New to D&D and D&D Convention Delve: “Ruins of Spectral Glade”.

The Convention Delve looked like a lot of fun, taking place on a gigantic square grid in the Wizards of the Coast booth in the Exhibition Hall. Players would take their place on the grid-map, portraying their own “mini” while battling monsters cut from foam-board.

The Brand-New to D&D players got to experience a couple of 1st Level Encounters, and it was a good way to get an idea of what D&D 4E is all about. I spoke with several players who said they really enjoyed learning D&D 4E, which included some 3.5 Edition Players who had D&D experience, but not with 4E. It was self-evident that they must have liked 4E, because after partaking in the “beginner” sessions, several of them went on to play in the Dark Sun and DM's Challenge adventures. Playing in the Brand-New to D&D was also a great way to earn some swag, as Trevor Kidd, the WotC Community Event Coordinator, passed out copies of the Player's Handbook, Adventurer's Vault, and Dungeon Master's





Guide to a few lucky participants! It was great to see Trevor on-hand soliciting feedback and promoting 4E, which has received a lot of exposure from the Penny Arcade webcomic over the past year.

As for the other events, D&D Encounters: Undermountain is a new promotion for D&D 4E, and is played every Wednesday at game stores and shops nationwide. Each week, a different encounter of the Undermountain adventure, Halaster's Lost Apprentice, are played at local gaming stores, and give Players a chance to earn Renown in the DCI/RPGA Network.

At PAX East, I got the opportunity to not only play in the first two D&D Encounters, and they are definitely worth trotting down to your local gaming store to participate in. The combats are well designed, and full-color maps are provided to DM's to enhance the experience. I used the chance to sit on the other side of the DM screen, and play a new Class from the Player's Handbook 3: a Half-Elf Monk named Malen. As far as Classes go, the monk is a lot of fun to play and he acquitted himself well in the two Encounters. It took a little over 90-minutes to run each of the Encounters, and we played them nearly back-to-back Friday night, which made for a great night of gaming.

On Saturday, I was able to get seated for the other two big D&D 4E events at PAX East 2010: the Dark Sun Preview and the DM's Challenge. The Dark Sun Preview was scheduled for four hours and the DM's Challenge for up to six hours, so I had about 10+ hours of D&D 4E play ahead of me.

The Dark Sun Preview was a great opportunity to see how the new psionic rules introduced in the Player's Handbook 3 will be used in the desert world of Athas. It also showcased the fact that D&D 4E is just as adaptable to different campaign settings as its predecessors. Much of the flavor of Dark Sun, particularly its brutality and savagery, have been captured with new 4E rules. For example, most weapons are made of stone and bone, with wood and metal being scarce materials. And it is possible for all Characters to re-roll a "1" in order to turn a complete miss into a hit, but at the cost of destroying their stone weapon. Even if you happen to have a metal weapon, it will still break 25% of the time on a re-rolled miss.

Characters will also be very different in Dark Sun than in previous campaign settings. In addition to the changes made to the Player-Character Race list, there will also be new powers and feats in Dark Sun, using new mechanics to bring the Athas setting to life under D&D 4E rules. Racially speaking, the Half-Giant is

pretty much a Goliath, but the Mul (Half-Dwarf) and the Thri-Kreen are definitely something new, and have some unique powers which set them apart from other races. Sadly, fans of Halflings will probably be disappointed to learn that they are savage and feral cannibals, and probably won't be Player-Characters in Dark Sun.



There is also a new Character mechanic called Themes. Characters will be able to select Themes during generation, such as Gladiator, Elemental Priest, Templar, Wilder, and Veiled Alliance, which will give them special encounter powers to match their theme. Many of these powers were revealed during the "Death in the Arena" adventure, and were useful in completing the adventure.

For instance, in the adventure, one of the Characters was a Thri-Kreen Shaman with an Elemental Priest Theme, which granted the Elemental Spirit Encounter Power. The elemental spirit is essentially like a second companion, which can attack enemies and protect allies. And the Elven Battlemind in the adventure had a Wilder Theme, granting him a Wild Surge Encounter power, which allowed the defender to blast off a surge of psychic energy in order to damage a foe and make it more easily crit-able.

And of course, there are many new monsters which are native to the harsh deserts of Athas, so expect them to be tough and very, very nasty. Not to mention, frequently psionic!

But the really big event of D&D 4E at PAX East 2010 was the DM's Challenge: "Horrors of the Underdark"! This event gave Dungeon Masters the chance to create a 6th Level Underdark adventure, using the following criteria:

DMs must create an adventure suitable for five 6th-level characters (actual group size may vary from 4-6 players) that spotlights areas of the Underdark, using the material in the Underdark book (released just this past January) as a guide.

The adventure should play in about 5 hours. You should write approximately 4 combat encounters for your adventure; you must write at least 3 combat encounters, but no more than 5. Levels for the encounters should not be lower than 4 or higher than 9; you should endeavor to write a total of about 26 levels' worth of combat encounters (that would parse out into two 6th-level fights





and two 7th-level fights). You can, of course, add skill challenges and roleplaying encounters to your adventure to give it a cool story.

The DM's Challenge drew a number of experienced Dungeon Masters, including Phillip (The Chatty DM), Dave (The Game at Critical-Hits) and Sarah Darkmagic. I participated as a player, and thoroughly enjoyed the adventure of cthulhu-esque horrors in the Underdark of our DM named Guy. The DMs were judged by their Players on Presentation and Preparedness, Story and Plot, Combats, and the all important Fun Factor.

The adventuring party were pre-generated by WotC, and drawn from Races and Classes mainly from the Player's Handbook 3. I was given a 6th Level Half-Elf Ardent to play, and was amazed at what a solid healer and combatant it was, and how much fun it was to play. Other Characters included a Githzerai Monk, Elven Seeker, Minotaur Runepriest, Wilden Battlemind, and Shardmind Psion. Our group came together very quickly into a cohesive unit, and we successfully quested our way to the end of Guy's Underdark adventure.

Guy created many terrible new monsters and cultists that had been tainted by the influence of the Far Realms, and he did a great job of creating a very creepy atmosphere to play in. The final encounter against a horrible elder being from the Far Realms made a great climax to his adventure, and he used plenty of props and hand-drawn maps to tell a great story. Thankfully, we were able to finish the adventure by midnight, as several of the Players at our table had to catch the last train back to their hotels.

By the way, in case you have not heard, congratulations are in order for the winner of the DM's Challenge: Dave Chalker of Critical-Hits.com. I understand that Dave won an impressive pile of WotC books as his prize, but everyone won something that night, even the Players: every Player and DM got an awesome folder with important tables inside to use during any 4E game.

Survival Tip #2: Get accommodations close to the convention center.

As I mentioned, some of our Players had to flee the convention hall in order to get the last train to their hotels. Now Boston is a great town, with lots of reasonably priced public transportation including a subway, buses, and cabs. But depending on public transportation means you have to quit the convention center before you might be ready to leave, which can be problematic.

Driving is not a great solution, because parking can be expensive in the city, and the more times you move your car, the more you have to pay. And PAX East was open for play each night until 2am, well after the last of the trains and buses are available.

I felt fortunate enough to get a hotel within a fifteen minute walk of the convention center, which meant I could leave anytime I wanted without worrying about getting a cab. And the area around the convention center is a tourists' dream, situated between Boston Commons and Wrigley Field, and every morning was a walk past famous sites like the Old South Church, the Boston Public Library, and Trinity Church.

It also made dining easier, as the convention center was right next to the Prudential Building, which has a huge mall at its base with a food court of some forty eateries. So getting a hotel near the convention hall just made a lot of sense, and it made getting to and from the expo a lot less of a hassle.

And that brings me to the next tip:

Survival Tip #3: You're going to walk a lot, so wear comfortable shoes.

Expect to be on your feet a whole lot at an expo like PAX East. Walking to and from the expo every day, walking back and forth through the turnstiles of the dreaded Queue Room, and walking around the Hynes Convention Center is going to take a big toll over the course of a few days, unless you're used to it. And if you are standing in line for panels which can be for up to an hour at a stretch, as mentioned previously, that's even more time on your feet, so I recommend wearing some really comfy shoes while you are there. Heck even the Exhibition Hall takes a couple hours of wandering just to try and see everything.





Thankfully, the folks at PAX East provide these really nice gigantic pillows, strewn all around the concourses in case you need to take your ease, and play some games or just take a nap. Although I never tried them myself, I have it on good authority from several fellow gamers that a few minutes on one of those pillows can be a great way to relax between panels and gaming sessions.

Retrospective #3: The Exhibition Hall was sooo huge, you'll need several sessions to make an attempt to see everything!

The Exhibition Hall at PAX East is huge – I mean really, really HUGE, and it takes a long time to check out everything there is to see in there! I went through the Exhibition Hall on Friday for about an hour and a half, then went back on Saturday for another two hours, and I still think I missed some stuff!

Video games make up the bulk of the booths in the Exhibition Hall, so whether you play on a hand-held unit, on a console, or on your desktop PC or laptop, there is almost certainly some game in there that will catch your eye. Even colleges brought their brightest video game designers out to show off their computer science programs.

And it pays off to stop by and play, because every exhibitor is running a contest or has freebies to hand out, ranging from bumper stickers and temporary tattoos, to awarding copies of games. One of the guys I traveled with to the expo actually won a brand new iPod Touch!

And the must-have Hardware you need to play video games is also a big part of the expo, and companies like Alienware, NVidia, Apple, Axion, and INTEL are all on hand to show off their latest electronic toys.

But table-top gamers and role-players are not forgotten at PAX East, and Wizards of the Coast is on hand, along with other game companies, to promote upcoming releases and hand out free stuff. I ended up getting a bunch of very cool D&D 4E bookmarkers and a box of Magic: The

Gathering Planeswalker cards. I was hoping to score a copy of Three-
Dragon-Ante, but sadly they had none for sale at the WotC booth.

There was one accessory for tabletop gamers I saw that I have absolutely added to my personal gamer-geek wish list: a new gaming table! But not just any gaming table – I want a Geek Chic custom built gaming table! These tables look like regular coffee tables and dining room tables, but they are definitely more than meets the eye.

By removing the top panels of the table, a customer built gaming table is revealed inside, complete with whatever surface you want.

So whether you want squares or hex maps, or special slots for Magic: The Gathering or the Settlers of Catan, they can build you the gaming table of your dreams. Sadly, the price for a custom table is pretty much the same as it would be for buying any fine furnishings, but for gamers with the extra cash on hand, these tables are absolutely amazing.

Of course, no expo or convention anywhere would be complete without running into fellow geeks dressed in all manner of costumes! While wandering around the Exhibition Hall, there were plenty of costumed gamers of all kinds on hand, showing off their renditions of their favorite characters from video games and role-playing games. Some of the costumes were really excellent, and it definitely adds a bit of fun seeing a vampire, fairy princess, or steam-punker go wandering by you in the crowd.

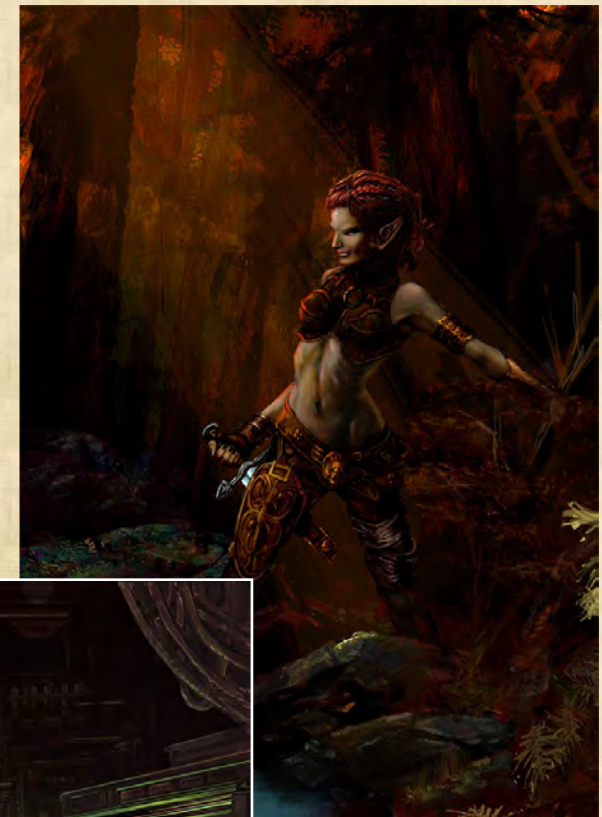
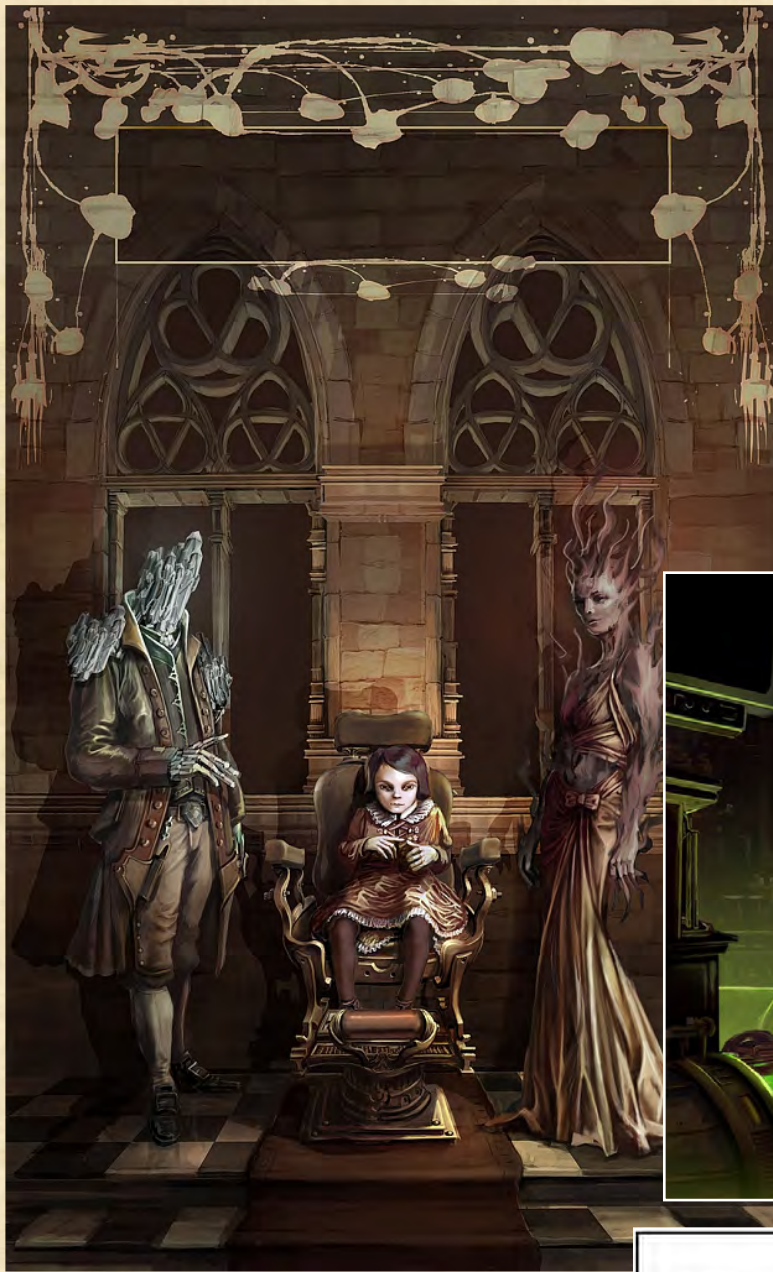
So overall, PAX East has a lot to offer gamers of all kinds, including table-top gamers and role-players. It's definitely worth a trip to Boston for the experience alone, and I will absolutely go back next year, if finances allow. But if your taste runs more toward gaming conventions, you're probably better off packing for a trip to Origins or GenCon, where gaming is the central focus. But PAX East is worth trying out at least once, for there is almost nowhere else in the world that Geek-dom is more welcome and celebrated!



Michael Evans is the head of Neuroglyph Games and runs one of the most comprehensive 4e review sites around. In addition, he is the author of The Perilous Secrets of Wilford Manor, the first installment of the Doombringer Saga.



OLIVER SPECHT



Oliver Specht

Biographie:

Born 24. Feb. 1972 in Nürtingen (Germany).

1991 Abitur (university-entrance diploma) at the Max-Planck-Gymnasium in English, German, History and Mathematics.

1992 Civil Service.

1993-1994 Practical courses at 2 german newspapers.

1995-1996 Studies at the school of free arts in Stuttgart.

1996-1999 Studies at „ecole d'art Emile Cohl“ school for Illustration, Comics and Animation in Lyon (France).

1999-2001 Work as freelance Illustrator, later 2D-Artist and 3D Character Designer for IP-Studios/Innonics in Hannover on games The Reef and Napoleon.

2001-2002 Work as Animator and Character Designer on Napoleon (released Nov. 2002) for Collision-Studios in Hannover.

2003 Work as 3D Designer and Concept Artist for Collision-Studios on Augustus (released 2003)

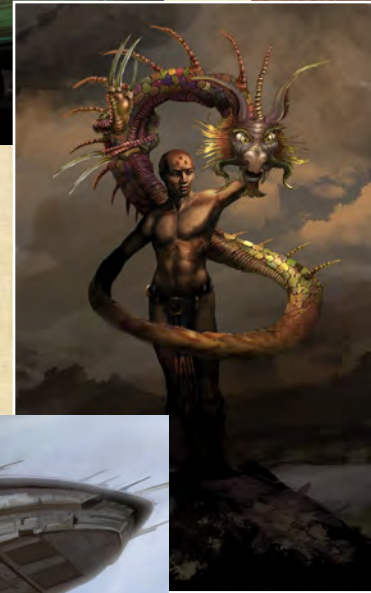
2003-2004 Lead Artist for planned game “DC” and Gamedesigner/Concept Artist for a gamesystem based on NOKIA's second generation N-Gage.

2004-2005 Freelance illustrator for Fantasy Flight Games trading card game “Call of Cthulhu”, Z-man games Conan and Shadowfist CCG. Freelance Concept Artist for Sunflowers/related designs video-game “Anno 1701”.

2006-2007 Art Director Silver Style entertainment for the PC games Simon the sorcerer 4(released 2007) and Everlight (released 2008)

2007-2008 Art Director 4head/Cranberry Production for the PC games Mata Hari and Black Mirror 2

2009 Freelance Concept Artist and Illustrator for AEGs Legend of the 5 rings CCG and Twilight Creations Deadlands boardgame. As well as Fantasy Flights Warhammer 40k RPGs and Cthulhu CCG.



EXCLUSIVE
PREVIEW

DARK
EMERALD

THE key OF THE fey



A Mercenary Adventure for Levels 1-3

Todd Crapper

There's no such thing as easy money. In our line of work, nothing's as simple as it sounds. A simple snatch'n'grab can turn sour with just one wrong move, one twig under your foot, one soldier who drops his sword into your skull and it all comes crashing down around you. In our line of work, anything's possible.

Still interested? Good, 'cause we're looking for new blood. Everyone's out there trying to be a hero and do right by the world when the world doesn't do right by us. Life is harsh and brutal... and so are we. We're mercenaries but we like to be called meres. Straight and to the point. Most of the time, there is no trial run, no training period but you're caught me in a good mood today. This here is a little sample of the first job I've got lined up for ya - the entire first chapter. Have a read, try it out at no charge. But be warned: if you do choose to take that plunge and give the merc's life a shot, I expect nothing but professional dedication. We might be scum in their eyes but we've got our own code and it says that your word in your bond. Fail me and finding another job will be the least of your problems...



THE key OF THE fey

**EMERALD
PRESS** 

**DARK
EMERALD** 

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS 4th Edition PLAYER’S HANDBOOK, written by Rob Heinsoo, Andy Collins, and James Wyatt; DUNGEON MASTER’S GUIDE, written by James Wyatt; and MONSTER MANUAL, written by Mike Mearls, Stephen Schubert and James Wyatt; PLAYER’S HANDBOOK 2, written by Jeremy Crawford, Mike Mearls, and James Wyatt; MONSTER MANUAL 2, written by Rob Heinsoo, and Chris Sims; Adventurer’s Vault, written by Logan Bonner, Eytan Bernstein, and Chris Sims. © 2008, 2009 Wizards of the Coast. All rights reserved.



All things must have a beginning and all mercs need that first job. Your name means nothin' without it and you can talk all you want, but it's a body count you need to make your mark. Fresh blood has to start somewhere and you can't be picky about the work, but if you're lucky, you get to have a sweet one for your first time out.

You'll find your way to Bloomten, an old village that's been taken over by a tribe of orcs. Fair 'nuff that it's been run to the ground and nowhere near what it used to be, but there's a bloke named Stump who's set up shop there and he's looking for some hoods to wink a portal key. Get out in the open and introduce yourself to the crowd, because you're going to meet some interesting faces and there's nothing like a brawl or two to get the blood pumpin'.

STARTING POINT...

At the beginning of the adventure, **hand each player one of the six Player Introduction cards provided in the Appendix.** Each card provides the player with a brief list of events on how they came to learn about Bloomten, their reason for going there, how they arrive, and any other connections which may (or may not) come into play later on. These cards are optional and GMs are encouraged to roleplay any events listed on the cards or to make up their own backstory for PCs starting this adventure.

"THEY CALL HIM... HATCHET!"

Read the following passage to the players as the adventure begins:

As the wagon slowly winds its way across this overgrown trail running through Harrington Woods, you understand now why the fare was so cheap: the ride is bumpy, there are no decent seats, and there are too many people crammed back here. And from what you can smell, the driver appears drunk. He interchanges from whistling a tune to singing a drinking song with words mixed together from various jingles, broken up by the occasional hocking wad of phlegm spat out the side.

There is little of interest to see and hear in the forest. Few birds chirp and a faint mist in the distance prevents you from seeing much past the overgrowth. There is a dank smell in the air, moldy and foul. It's not until you pass by a small clearing that you can see why – an overturned cart rests in a ditch, barely concealing the rotting bodies of its previous owners. Arrows stick out their backs and heads, leaving no mistake as to what happened here weeks ago.

Use this time for the PCs to meet each other and establish connections in the party before they reach the first encounter.

Shortly after passing the overturned cart above, the PCs see a group of six orcs surrounding a single human male with a recently deceased human lying on the ground. His battle-ready posture reveals he is more than equipped to deal with this threat, but the orcs seem oblivious to this. He has a thick brown cloak draped over his shoulders and a **DC 15 Perception check** can reveal the shadowed chainmail armour and sword scabbard tucked underneath it, none of which has yet been spotted by the orcs. One distinguishing mark is the man's right hand: it has been replaced by an axe attached at the wrist. A **DC 18 History check** reveals this is a merc known as Hatchet (see the Hatchet NPC stats in Appendix I for his infamy).

Once a fight breaks out, the orcs will be quick to use deadly force. The PCs are free to step in and offer a hand at any point, but it is likely not needed or expected.

Once the orcs have been dispatched, Hatchet expresses his thanks to the PCs for whatever help was provided and offers to buy them a drink in town and introduce them around. As they travel, they converse. When asked about any jobs he may know about or be working on, Hatchet says *"Yeah, I've got one at the moment, but the pay's just enough to cover me, if you know what I mean."* He says nothing more about it and deflects the conversation away to other topics.

Chapter 1: FIRST JOB

Setting the Stage

THE KEY OF THE FEY takes place in late summer: trees are at their thickest, the sun is at its highest peak at midday, and the forests of the world and the Feyrealm overflow with life. Many descriptions and details will need to be modified should you choose to run this adventure during any other season, so be sure to watch out for them.

Much of the terrain is bright and pleasant but muted by the violence of the past few years. There have been many fires here with seedlings barely able to grow before they are burnt to cinders like their kind before them. An air of tragedy lingers here, mostly in the deepest corners of the woods.

ENCOUNTER A: HATCHET

Encounter Level 1 (500 XP)

Sure, you could sit back and watch this pro make quick work of those orcs, but then your blade would be dry, wouldn't it?

SETUP

The PCs makes their way to Bloomten and discover an upcoming fight between the infamous merc Hatchet and six rookie orcs. The orcs are aware of the PCs arrival (unless they makes a **passive DC 15 Perception check** prior to walking onto the scene and remain hidden for its initial rounds) and care little for them but will gladly take them down with as much effort as they would with Hatchet.

This encounter occurs within the quarter-mile zone around Bloomten using the map provided below.

This encounter includes the following creatures;

Hatchet (H)

5 Bloomten orc patrollers (O)

1 Bloomten orc archer (A)

Read or paraphrase the following to the PCs at the start of the encounter:

It is hard to make out who these six orcs are standing around, but their posture tells you that they don't intend to give him much of a fighting chance. Standing on the other side of a fallen log, foaming at the mouth and eager for bloodshed, five of them have encircled a cloaked human and taunt him with their wretched speech while a sixth one stands ready with his longbow cocked and ready next to a pile of large rocks.

Place the PCs' miniatures anywhere on the map. If they makes a **DC 15 Perception check** prior to starting this encounter, they can hear the conversation between Hatchet and the orcs. Otherwise, they stumble onto the scene and the orcs spot them immediately.

FEATURES

Illumination: Dim light, unless the PCs are traveling by night (then no light).

Road: The road is made of dirt, crushed rock, and tiny tree roots sticking out of the ground. Nothing on the road hinders movement or affects visibility.

Forest: The forest provides cover and becomes very thick as soon as anyone steps off the road. Anything off the road is considered difficult terrain.

Fallen Log: This was placed here by the orcs to force any wagons to stop and be searched by them. Providing total cover to anyone standing adjacent to it, the log can be jumped or climbed over with a **DC 10 Athletics check**. All Medium or larger characters have line of sight over the log. The log can be moved with a **DC 35 Strength check**.

Rocks: A pile of large rocks rest next to the Bloomten orc archer (A). They are not tall enough to provide cover or concealment, but they can be picked up and thrown as a ranged attack with 1d6 plus Strength modifier damage.

Dead Body: This human male was Hatchet's guide, struck down by an arrow from the Bloomten orc archer (A). He is dead and was only considered a minion. Hatchet is upset that his guide was killed, but it also means he doesn't have to be paid any more. On the body is a quarterstaff, leather armor, a short sword, and a backpack containing standard supplies, a map of Harrington Woods, and a teddy bear (see The Importance of the Bear below).

Orc Booty: If they are victorious, the PCs will only find the weapons carried by the orcs, some morsels of bread, and 2d6 chits (see the Halfling's Coin sidebar in Chapter One).

TACTICS

Hatchet will attempt to downplay any combat skills until the first round of combat, using his higher Initiative modifier to act first and strike fast. Once the orcs realize the human can fight, they will attempt to swarm over him and beat him down to the ground – they will attempt to gain combat advantage over Hatchet and knock him prone.

Hatchet will drop one orc at a time rather than attack each of them in turn and make as much space around himself as possible. He will use his Fury of Swings power when surrounded then return to his singular focus on his current foe. If any orc tries to escape, Hatchet uses his Sliced Escape power to slow them down.



Hatchet

Level 4 Solo Skirmisher

Medium natural humanoid (human)

XP 875

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +9

HP 224; **Bloodied** 112

AC 22, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18

Saving Throws +5

Speed 5

Action Points 1

⊕ **Double Strike** (standard; at-will) • **Weapon**

+10 vs AC; 1d8+5 damage

Secondary Attack: +10 vs AC; 1d6+5 damage

⊕ **Return the Favor** (immediate interrupt, when a flanking opponent misses) • **Weapon**

+8 vs AC; 1d4+4 damage

Secondary Attack: +7 vs Reflex; 2d4+4 damage

↶ **Fury of Swings** (standard; encounter) • **Thunder, Weapon**

Close burst 1; +10 vs AC; 2d8+7 damage plus 2 thunder damage

↶ **Wink** (minor; encounter) • **Gaze**

Close blast 3; +10 vs Will; target is marked

Violent Thrash (immediate reaction, when bloodied; encounter)

Can use either Double Strike or Fury of Swings.

Sliced Escape

Hatchet reduces the target's speed by 2 with opportunity attacks.

Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven, Giant

Skills Athletics +9, Acrobatics +10, Nature +8, Intimidate +7

Str 16 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+3)

Con 14 (+4) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 11 (+2)

Equipment chainmail, longsword (w/scabbard), handaxe (attached), adventurer's pack, brown cloak

Bloomten Orc Patroller

Level 1 Brute

Medium natural humanoid (orc)

XP 100

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +5; low-light vision

HP 30; **Bloodied** 15

AC 17, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12

Speed 6

⊕ **Spear** (standard; at-will) • **Weapon**

+6 vs AC; 1d8+2 damage

↶ **Longbow** (standard; at-will) • **Weapon**

Range 20/40; +5 vs AC; 1d10 damage

Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Giant

Str 17 (+4) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 15 (+3)

Con 17 (+4) **Int** 12 (+2) **Cha** 13 (+2)

Equipment hide armor, spear, longbow, 20 arrows

Bloomten Orc Archer

Level 1 Artillery

Medium natural humanoid (orc)

XP 100

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +5; low-light vision

HP 32; **Bloodied** 16

AC 17, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 12

Speed 6

⊕ **Longbow** (standard; at-will) • **Weapon**

Range 20/40; +7 vs AC; 1d10 damage

Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Giant

Str 17 (+4) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 15 (+3)

Con 17 (+4) **Int** 12 (+2) **Cha** 13 (+2)

Equipment hide armor, spear, longbow, 20 arrows

FIGHT! FIGHT!

ENCOUNTER A:

HATCHET provides the first combat encounter for the adventure and can be found on page 10.

NO HELP, NO XP: If the PCs simply watch the fight, they cannot collect any XP for the orcs. Also, Hatchet will feel no sense of gratitude toward the PCs and will head into Bloomten without them, chiding them as he leaves.

ELADRIN GENEROSITY: If there are any eladrins in the soon-to-form band, they could stand to benefit the most from this encounter. Having someone like Hatchet at your side can easily cause the Harad'adak to forgive such intrusions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BEAR: A DC 12 **Perception check** reveals the teddy bear is heavier than it looks and it feels like something else is inside. There is a slit in the back of the toy, allowing it to be easily opened and closed without tearing it apart. There is an **amulet of protection +2** stuffed inside. Stitched on the back of the toy are the scriptive words *"For a special boy."*

Metagamers can see a possible link between the key engraved on the bear and the title of this adventure and take the bear based on that fact alone. Allow this to happen and play up on the stitched emblem as much as possible – they will be on the right track but will not be close either.

If the PCs do not take the bear, there is no loss. The teddy bear is a hint, but it is not crucial enough for them to discover the truth.

THE VILLAGE OF BLOOMTEN

Read or paraphrase the following to the players as they arrive in Bloomten:

You can smell thick smoke through the trees and everything around you seems musty and dank. There is a foul odor lingering, like a severed foot in a wet boot left out for days. Following the path, you see a pair of orcs standing on a trail leading into a village. While one of them pisses in a bush, the other simply nods and waves you through.

You've heard the stories of villages, farmhouses, and wagon lines sacked by vicious creatures, left to burn under the noon sun... but the thought of such sieges never prepared you for the fate of this once prosperous village. Every building is scorched with burns. Windows are shattered, and doors are bashed in and crudely replaced with hunks of wood and debris. Smoke lingers in the air, as if this place had only been raided days ago. Hooting and hollering is all that can be heard, the same sounds you could make out in the distance during your approach to Bloomten, as orcs, goblinoids, and humanoid of all kinds revel with drink and smoke in hand.



Lining the cartways of the village are executed villagers, long since rotted, with birds pecking at the meager remaining flesh. The area is still well guarded by patrols, but you are allowed to pass without question, sized up and down by all.

A lone church sits in the midst of it all, surrounded by tattered tents and crude huts that has become a massive complex of orcs, all wearing the red and gold hues of their tribe. The bulk of commotion seems to center around a barn. Reasonably intact, it has been modified into a tavern where music and even louder shouting can be heard coming from inside.

The barn does indeed function as a tavern for Bloomten. Called the Hungry Orc, it acts as the central watering hole for every orc in the tribe. Any PC can make a **Streetwise check** to remember any facts or rumours regarding the Hungry Orc, as given below.

The Invasion of Bloomten - Streetwise check

DC 12: The Hungry Orc was built after the fall of Bloomten to feed and water the orc tribe, known as the Harad'adak (or Bloody Heart Tribe in Common). Conceived and cared for by a self-proclaimed orc merchant called Stump, this place is considered a neutral meeting ground for many savage races.

DC 17: Stump is not linked to the Harad'adak, but struck a deal with them after they sacked Bloomten. Stump is rumored to have several other hidden locations and munitions dumps throughout the savage lands with similar deals amongst other tribes.

DC 20: Aside from being an orc, there have been rumours as to how Stump came into the fortune to make such deals with various orc tribes, leading many to believe that he is funded by a powerful crime lord within one of the major cities of the land. If this is true, then Stump is nothing more than an errand boy for a much bigger fish.

Give the PCs some time to explore Bloomten on their own as they enter the village. Use this time to give them the lay of the land before they settle into the Hungry Orc and onto the next scene.

EXPLORING BLOOMTEN

Consult the map of Bloomten for the following locations:

1. THE HUNGRY ORC

The bulk of the PCs' visit to this village will center on the Hungry Orc, the main watering hole and place of business in Bloomten. Filthy and disgusting, this is where they must go to find a job.

The Hungry Orc is situated in a typical barn. Orcs with any money left can pay to sleep on the hay while the rest are kicked onto the street to sleep in tents (see Area 2). There are various rooms in the cellar that are currently being used as prisons and food storage.

2. ORC TENTS AND THE CHURCH

Sleeping in a burned out farmhouse may be fine for some, but there aren't enough proper living conditions for everyone to sleep in... including orcs. These tents were brought by the orcs when they invaded and are used by any number at any given time. Each tent is nothing more than a cloth supported by poles, leaving them open and exposed with mats and worn blankets to sleep on. If nothing else, the tents protect the orcs from rain and bitter wind.

The church resting at the center of the village has been gutted out and converted into a giant apartment/restroom for the Harad'adak – all religious symbols inside have been defecated on, urine soaks the carpets, and windows have been smashed out in drunken rage. In some cases, it is enough to cause sickness and disease to those without the constitution to handle it.

ADAPTING THE CHURCH TO YOUR CAMPAIGN

While there is very little evidence indicating to whom the church was once dedicated, feel free to embellish and decorate its remains to suit any commonly worshipped deity in your campaign. Bloomten, as it once was, could have existed as a logging town or a waypoint for merchants on the road to a larger town or city, making the church a general stop for many passersby. If there is a follower of a good or neutral deity in the party, you may choose to select their god as the former host of this church and roleplay their arrival inside the church for a unique scene.



No single orc owns a tent, room, or house in Bloomten – it's every orc for himself. Many fights break out in the early hours of the morning as the nocturnal warriors seek to find a better bed than the previous day. Many of these fights spill onto the street and in the open, where a massive melee will break out among any nearby orcs. Any orc caught trying to take the same bed twice is found dead in the woods by the second night.

3. STUMP'S MANOR

Still singed from the invasion, this three-storey manor remains intact enough for Stump to call home. Many other orcs frequent here and act as his bodyguards, but there is little quality of life to be found here save for the master bedroom, where fine paintings, florals, and clean silk sheets on a four-poster bed can be found. Stump spends the majority of his time in the Hungry Orc and only comes here to sleep during the day.

4. THE HARAD'ADAK HOTEL

Cleverly named, this wasted inn barely holds twenty orcs simultaneously, but they are the elite commanders of the tribe. They keep themselves separated from Stump's affairs and care not for the type of clientele he attracts, but he does keep the liquor flowing in Bloomten and that gives the orc commanders plenty of time to come up with a new village to sack, keeping the tribe from getting bored and restless.

THE HUNGRY ORC

Read or paraphrase the following text to the players as they enter the Hungry Orc:

The entrance is nothing more than barn doors with the right one left open. Hay spills out of the doorway and as you look inside, it covers the entire floor too. Torches lining the walls of each stall barely illuminate the tables scattered about; only a few of them are available for seating. A crude looking bar has been erected ahead of you and stairs to the right lead to a loft above.

There is a disgusting and pervasive aroma of urine, and there is no question that the buckets and barrel beside the door are filled with vomit – the unquestionable mixture of orcs and ale. There is music playing, but it is soft compared to the shouts, grunts, and hollers from inside. The hay on the floor is damp, sopped with beer, and covered in crumbs. Many orcs are passed out in all directions: on the floor, on tables, and under chairs. Arm wrestling, mug smashing, and other benign tests of strength carry on here, but all gazes shift to you as you enter. You are unwanted, but luckily you are tolerated.

Surrounded by bloodthirsty orcs and other savage races, the PCs are best to tread carefully or they will find it easy to break into a fight. There is no weapon check at the door and it is understood that everyone has a weapon of some kind on them, displayed or concealed. Drinks are frequent and cheap with very little edible food to be found.

FINDING A JOB: A simple **DC 10 Streetwise check** can point them towards Stump (or anyone noticing the only table in the tavern with a rug, plush chairs, and several empty plates).

HATCHET'S APPRECIATION: The PCs who aided Hatchet in the forest can enter with the famed mercenary and have a few drinks with him, engaging in conversation and exchanging stories of their most recent jobs (though the PCs will likely have to make Bluff checks to fake Hatchet out).

If the PCs mention finding a job, Hatchet will take them to see Stump personally and introduce them, thereby ensuring the PC's involvement in the adventure. For the rest of this scene, the PCs gain a +2 bonus to any Charisma-based skill checks through their association with Hatchet.

After a while, Hatchet goes to leave and wishes the PCs all the best.

MEETING WITH STUMP

When the PCs are able to meet up with Stump, read, or paraphrase the following text to the players:

There is no mistaking which table you're looking for, when you stop and think about it. It is the largest table placed atop a finely woven rug. Hopefully, those stains are just mud. Many torches and candles illuminate the table and a board game of scattered pieces centers it all.

Seated between two orc females, the one known as Stump pays no heed to your approach, but the two hobgoblins do. Massive hammers cradled in their arms, the hobgoblins stand in front of you and block your path towards the merchant. Leering down at you and snarling their lips to reveal sharp, jagged teeth, one of the hobgoblins speaks with a guttural voice.

"He's busy. Come back later."

Considering the affection Stump is receiving from the orc females, it should be obvious to the PCs that he will be busy for some time. If they want to get his attention, they'll have to find a way past his goons.

TAKE THEM DOWN: If the PCs decide to take out the hobgoblin bodyguards by force, this will incite a brawl to break out. Any number of orc minions equal to the total level of the PCs involved will join in the ruckus.

TALK IT THROUGH: The PCs can also try negotiating their way through (which includes bribery, as do all types of negotiations). A simple skill challenge can be used or the hobgoblins will move aside for no less than 10 gp.

GET THE MESSAGE DIRECT: Stump has already partaken of several drinks and has no problem drinking some more. If the PCs order a drink for him, Stump will immediately allow them past the hobgoblins and speak with them.

SNEAK PAST THEM: This is the most difficult option as Stump is seated in a very open area of the Hungry Orc, but it is still possible. If another PC distracts the hobgoblins, use the aid another rule to grant the sneaking PC a bonus to his Stealth check.

Once seated with Stump, the PCs learn of a job he is recruiting for:

The squat little orc leans forward and drops his voice slightly. It is loud enough for you to hear but not enough for the crowd to pick up on.

"I've got a little snatch-and-grab I need done. There's a pot of believers just northeast of here they say has a portal to the Feyrealm. Something about a connection to some ancient god who dwells with the elves or some such spat, but it's a portal no one's got working before. My ears tell me they have a key to open it, so that's where you lads come in if your price is right. I want that key.

"Thing is, these believers have a bit of sway in the civilized world. Human by the call of Jarod runs things in their world and he's related to a Marshall just five days from here. Gossip is that Jarod and the Marshalls ain't exactly on speaking terms on account of his beliefs, but the Marshall'll raise all nine Hells if something happens to his brother. So I needs this key gone quietly.

"Here's the offer: you get the key and bring it back here, to my hands, and I'll throw 500 gold amongst the lot of you to split. But I like to provide incentives, so I'm adding a little extra if you can do it without anyone knowing you did it. Pile an extra 100 on there for that. Keep its owner attached and I'll double it."

This is something Stump is known for: making multiple offers with sweeter prizes. In his twisted mind, Stump is looking to see just how far these mercs are willing to go for some gold and perhaps serve a purpose in the future. No matter which option they choose, he wins and can find more use for the party later on (should he feel the need for it). If they don't kill the entire community, he still has the key. If they do, he has the key and more enemies are out of his mind...and he has decoys to draw the Marshall's attention should the need arise.

FIGHT! FIGHT!
Use **ENCOUNTER B: MEETING WITH STUMP** on page 16 if the PCs choose to get into a scrap with Stump's bodyguards... and other companions.

ENCOUNTER B: MEETING WITH STUMP

Encounter Level 2 (500 XP)

If you wanna talk to that orc behind the table, then you're have to get past his bodyguards. Would be a shame to spill your drink, though...

SETUP

The PCs wish to talk to Stump, the local underboss, about a job, but the hobgoblin bodyguards surrounding his table are not inclined to let anyone pass without an invitation. Choosing to use violence to get the orc's attention, they will fight with the hobgoblins and break their way through.

The Peaceful Approach: There are always options in any encounter (some of which are provided above) and so there are always multiple ways to collect XP. If the band can meet with Stump without resorting to violence, they can gain 100 XP each instead of the encounter award given at the top of the page.

This encounter takes place in a corner of the Hungry Orc tavern in Bloomten.

This encounter uses the following creatures:

Stump (S)

2 hobgoblins bodyguards (H)

2 orc prostitutes (F)

Any number of orc minions (O)

FEATURES

Illumination: Dim light with various pockets of darkness, particularly under the stairs on the first floor.

Furniture: There are various pieces of tavern furnishings, each of them practical in a fight, that can be used as an improvised melee weapon (see the Weapons Tables in the 4E Player's Handbook).

If anyone stands adjacent to a piece of furniture while in combat, they must make a save throw at the end of combat to avoid tripping and falling prone at the beginning of the next round.

Assorted Cutlery: There is any number of cutlery pieces within reach of a table or the bar and they can be used as improvised ranged weapons (see the Weapons Table in the 4E Player's Handbook).



TACTICS

The hobgoblin bodyguards have no problem going for the killing blow with the PCs and will use their massive hammers to prove the point. Staying within two squares of Stump to gain their guardian pose bonus, they will swing and try to use their knee break power early on.

They are not alone however. After gauging the PCs' abilities for the first round, the orc prostitutes pull out their knives and jump in, using their leg wrap to bind them and allowing the hobgoblin bodyguards to crack their skulls open. The prostitutes are only as good as they are paid and they will flee when bloodied.

Hobgoblin Bodyguard (2) Level 3 Soldier Medium natural humanoid (orc) XP 150

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +3; low-light vision
HP 44; **Bloodied** 22

AC 20, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 16

Speed 5

⊕ **Heavy Hammer** (standard; at-will) • **Weapon**
+8 vs AC; 1d10+4 damage, the target is marked

⊕ **Knee Break** (standard; encounter) • **Weapon**
+7 vs Reflex; 1d10+7 damage plus target is slowed

Sturdy Stance (immediate interrupt, when an opponent attempts to shift him)

Can resist being shifted up to 3 times in an encounter.

Guardian Pose

The hobgoblin bodyguard gains a +2 bonus to AC while standing at least two squares from Stump.

Evil **Languages** Common, Giant

Skills Athletics +10, History +8

Str 19 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 14 (+3)

Con 15 (+3) **Int** 11 (+1) **Cha** 10 (+1)

Equipment scale armour, heavy hammer

Orc Prostitutes (2) Level 1 Skirmisher Medium natural humanoid (orc) XP 100

Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +2; low-light vision
HP 21; **Bloodied** 10

AC 17, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15

Speed 6

⊕ **Curved Knives** (standard; at-will) • **Weapon**
+5 vs AC; 1d4 damage

✂ **Knife Toss** (standard; encounter) • **Weapon**
+7 vs AC; 1d4 damage and the orc prostitute loses the use of one curved knife

✂ **Leg Wrap** (standard; encounter)
+6 vs Reflex; target is wrapped up in the orc prostitute's legs and is restrained (save ends)

Secondary Attack: +4 vs Fortitude; 2d6+1 damage

Evil **Languages** Giant

Skills Athletics +5, Acrobatics +5

Str 11 (+0) **Dex** 14 (+2) **Wis** 12 (+1)

Con 13 (+1) **Int** 8 (-1) **Cha** 15 (+2)

Equipment curved knife (2)

Orc minions are scattered throughout the bar to liven up the scene as needed. If the PCs make quick work of the former opponents, the minions may choose otherwise. Stump will remain still, drinking his ale, confident of the PCs' intent behind this scuffle. Just in case, however, he has his wand of magic missiles at the ready under the table and will fire off a wand blast to cause the table to explode at the PCs.

Stump Level 7 Controller Medium natural humanoid (orc) XP 300

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +5; low-light vision
HP 79; **Bloodied** 39

AC 20, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 20

Speed 4

✂ **Wand of Magic Missiles** (standard; at-will)

• **Arcane, Force, Implement**

Range 10; +12 vs Reflex; 2d4 force damage

⊕ **Short Sword** (standard; at-will) • **Poison, Weapon**
+10 vs AC; 1d6 damage and 1 ongoing poison (save ends)

✂ **Wand Blast** (standard; encounter) • **Arcane, Force, Implement**

Close blast 5; +12 vs Reflex; 2d6 damage

Secondary Attack: +8 vs Fortitude; target is dazed (save ends)

Evil **Languages** Common, Giant

Skills Bluff +10, Diplomacy +10, Intimidate +5, Thievery +5

Str 10 (+3) **Dex** 8 (+2) **Wis** 15 (+5)

Con 12 (+4) **Int** 17 (+6) **Cha** 16 (+6)

Equipment padded armour, wand of magic missiles, short sword

Bloomten Orc Minion Level 1 Minion Medium natural humanoid (orc) XP 25

Initiative +0 **Senses** Perception +2; low-light vision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion

AC 16, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 10

Speed 6

⊕ **Bash** (standard; at-will) • **Weapon**
+4 vs AC; 1d6+2 damage

Evil **Languages** Giant

Str 15 (+2) **Dex** 10 (+0) **Wis** 10 (+0)

Con 14 (+2) **Int** 8 (-1) **Cha** 9 (-1)

Equipment assorted weapons (clubs, short swords, spears)

Criminals Don't Trust Nice Guys...

While this line of work tends to draw seedier characters than your typical heroes, it still features a wide variety of people calling themselves mercs. If Stump is approached by good-aligned or clearly naïve and inexperienced mercs, he will want a test performed to prove their willingness to get the job done.

“You think ye can work for me? Fine, prove it. See those two orcs at the table with their backs turned to us? Kill ‘em. Now.”

Stump carries no grudge against these particular orcs (in fact, you can even select the table at random or use orcs who may have been particularly harassing to the PCs) and needs to make sure he can find help that won't get bogged down with morals and ethics. Now the characters have a choice and a chance to make an impression strong enough to overshadow their inexperience.

With all of this going through his mind, reading his expressions will be much harder. Any opposed Insight check against Stump's Bluff skill will normally meet with failure and the orc has done an excellent job of covering up any botched jobs or betrayals to protect his reputation. While the PCs may be wary of trusting this orc, they need the work and the money is a very tempting offer for characters of their level.

Stump will give them some time to think about his offer and even buys them a few rounds of drinks while they discuss business amongst themselves. When they accept, he provides them with a sealed scroll case holding a map to the community.

DESCRIBING THE KEY: Truth be told, Stump doesn't know for a fact what the key looks like, but they did capture a Faithful some weeks back and the most they got out of him was *“The Master keeps it close to him at all times.”* That leaves Stump to believe it's the holy symbol worn around Jarod's neck. Jarod is the paladin leader of the Faithful, a very reverent human with a charismatic following of 25 humans, halflings, and half-elves. Stump will tell the PCs that is the key they must steal.

HALFLING'S COIN

One way for the PCs to interact and bond is a good game of halfling's coin (which is often confused for “beggar's change” for those who refuse to follow anything to do with halflings). Word has it that the game was conceived impromptu by a halfling to cover up his outright theft of money at the table during a game of cards, but the game has caught on in seedier circles regardless of its origin.

Halfling's coin is a betting game where the best player wins solely by bluffing, deceiving, and especially cheating. There are no cards, dice, or other playing aids other than the hand carved coins piled on the table. Each player plays with up to fifty coins inside a sack, which is generally the size of an average coin purse. The exact amount of coins at the start of the game is generally agreed upon by all players at the table, meaning a high priced table can have each player with a large sack of coins at the start. Each bag of halfling coins are collected from various sources, so it is rare for any significant number of coins to look the same and easily allows any other players to sneak in their own coins to their piles to increase their value.

After the piles are made, each player takes turns negotiating with other players to exchange piles of coins. Offers and counteroffers are made between players, each one trying to bluff their way to collecting a higher value of coins from another player and passing off their worthless pile as equal or greater (although passing it off as greater is a sure way to scream out your bluff). At the end of each round, players are allowed to rearrange their piles and continue bluffing until a winner has been declared.

Winning a game of halfling's coin is fairly simple, but sometimes arduous to get there. Any player without any dark coin at the end of a turn wins. Some tables preset a number of rounds before a winner can be determined – if no single player is without the dark coin by the end of these specified number of rounds, then the game continues until only one player is without the dreaded coins.

PLAYING THE GAME

The whole of the game is the coin. Any numbers of different coins exist in the underworld, backwoods taverns, and side alleys where the game is played, but they all have these characteristics in common in order to be considered “fair use.” They have one of five colours on its edge: red, blue, yellow, green, and black. Each coin has a number written on it, ranging from 1 to 25, but some have been greedy enough to make coins going as high as 100. These values are added up when the winner is declared and that amount is divided amongst the losers and awarded in gold to the winner. Therefore, the best aim in a game of halfling's coin is to have a high value of coins.

Five of these coins are dark coins. Their edge can be any of the five standard colours for coins in the game, but their face is a carving of a skull rather than a number. If a player has any dark coins in his pile, he cannot win the game. Each player must confirm they are playing five dark coins at the start of each game, meaning they can be freshly carved for a specific game or the same ones an old player has been stuck with for months. Since coins can be of any mixed collection, the dark coins are generally able to stand out amongst others or can be made to look very similar to others in the pile. The goal of each player is to get rid of his or her dark coins and avoid keeping any dark coins from other players. As soon as a player gets rid of the last dark coin currently in their pile, they announce this and spread out their remaining coins to collect that amount from the remaining players.

Before the game begins, the players determine any number of rounds that must be played before a winner can be declared or choose to play until the winner ditches his last dark coin. Players must reveal the face edge of their dark coins to a third party who is impartial to the game (generally a server, barmaid, or bartender, as these games generally occur in taverns and pubs) before the game can begin. Each player reaches into their bag and blindly pulls out a coin: the player with the highest number goes first with the player to his right going next and so forth. From this point on, all coins are kept face down and their value kept hidden from other players until a coin is in the possession of another player. Players can look at their own coins any time they choose, but they cannot noticeably switch them around in any way until after a round has passed. At the end of a full round, players can switch their coins around however they choose.

Each player must trade any number of coins with another player on his turn. Players can pile their coins in any fashion they choose, but the general method is to sort the coins into smaller piles. A player makes an offer to any player on his turn, suggesting any number of coins in his pile to a certain number of coins from the other players. At this point, the two players negotiate until a deal is reached. Once a player makes an offer, it cannot be ignored. Any means of negotiation can be used to sweeten the deal, including offers outside of the table or even threats. At no point and time can a player make physical contact with another player, meaning a player cannot attack another player and take his coins away by force. Physical contact results in forfeit and the player must leave with all the coins currently in his possession. Some bad players have refused to follow this rule and have been killed for their ignorance and rudeness to the game.

As soon as a player has removed the last dark coin in his pile after the designated number of played rounds, he announces his victory and counts his total in the pile. The remaining players must pay the winner this amount, to be divided however the losing players see fit.

ROLEPLAYING THE GAME

While it may be rewarding and worthwhile for a GM to actually set up a game of halfling's coin for his players, this is not always feasible. Provided below are guidelines for playing halfling's coin with just dice and character stats.

After each player is informed of the rules of halfling's coin (in character and at the table), they each have five dark points in their pool. These dark points replace the dark coins used in halfling's coin and the first player to get rid of his last dark point wins.

Each player starts the game by rolling 1d20 and the highest roller goes first with the next player seated to his right going next and so forth. The player chooses another player and rolls his Bluff or Negotiation skill against the opposing player's Intuition skill. Whoever rolls the higher number wins the round and collects the difference in gold coin (to be paid in full after the game). If the winning player beats the losing player's skill check by five or more, the winning player loses a dark coin and collects the difference in gold coins – the dark coin is passed on to the losing player.

Players are encouraged to invent or utilize other aspects of the rules to gain favor on their turn. So long as their character abide by the few rules of the game (e.g. no physical contact), the GM may allow any number of tools for a player to collect more coins from the other players.

THE FINE ART OF CHEATING

Cheating is encouraged and expected in this game, for it is what gives halfling's coin its charm – that is why this game is played by thieves, scoundrels, and mercenaries. The goal of the game is to screw over as many players as possible to come out on top and collect money. To meet that goal, players cheat.

There are any number of means by which a player can cheat, so long as he is not caught and he does not make physical contact with another player. For example, a player can pocket a dark coin and remove it from his piles. When he gets rid of his last coin, he announces his victory while one of the dark coins sits secretly in his pocket. So long as the player isn't caught, it's all good. If he's found out after the game, there is no harm done. If it turns out that the player snuck the dark coin into another player's pocket, that counts as physical contact and the fouling player is dealt with... accordingly.

Pocketing coins is a tried-and-true method of cheating in halfling's coin and is commonly done with a **Theivery skill check against opposing Perception checks with the thieving player gaining a +4 bonus to the roll** with the table blocking the view of his hands. Switching coins on the table in play, however, is reserved for master thieves at work. The player must make a **Theivery check with a -5 penalty** as all players will be expecting sleight of hand. Players can attempt to distract other players with an **opposed Bluff check**, but any action taken in direct view of other players generally results in a -4 penalty because cheating is widely expected in a game.

Players can attempt to intimidate another player and make him nervous when he attempts to cheat. **An Intimidate check against another player's Will defense** can inflict a -2 penalty to the affected player's Bluff, Thievery, and Negotiation skills (save ends). Targeted players can use any utility power which can boost their Will defense during a game of halfling's coin to increase their defense against these intimidation tactics, but only so long as the power can be activated appropriately at the table (GM's discretion). For example, activating a power that requires shifting does not make sense during a game where the player is seated in a chair.

Hidden pockets, particularly in the sleeve of a shirt, are popular means of cheating in halfling's coin and grant a **+2 bonus to any Thievery check** made during the game.

When it comes down to it, lying is the best form of cheating in this game. A player's Bluff and Negotiation skills are the most valuable skills to a player and using them successfully can make all the difference between owing money and collecting it. At the start of a round, each player makes a **Bluff check** and uses that result for the entire round. Using their **passive Insight check** at the beginning of the round, a player can sense if another player is lying during their negotiations and gain a **+2 bonus to any rolls** when they do succeed until the next player's turn. In an attempt to turn the coin in their favor, a player who originated the offer can make a Bluff or Negotiation check and convert the new result as a minor action into the difficulty for a passive Intuition checks made against them. This new roll replaces any previous rolls used for the round, but this can only be done once per round at the table.

Finally, **players can use their action points to re-roll any skill check** related to the game. (Since players will not be adventuring in this time, this means they can only use their action point once throughout the entire game for this effect.) Regardless of the result of their re-roll, the player must stick with the result of the new dice roll and suffer the consequences if need be.

EXPERIENCE POINTS IN HALFLING'S COIN

Players who use their wits and imagination to pull off an upset in halfling's coin could even win some XP for their efforts, if the GM allows this. A player can win half his gold value winnings as experience points. As time goes on, the player's skill at the game increases his infamy and can lead to a little more infamy than most. A good game of halfling's coin can also count as an encounter towards collecting milestones.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This section details events far out of range for the players and is provided for the GM's sake to reveal upcoming plot points, character motivations, and other story-based considerations so the GM can cover unusual events or spontaneous plot killers. Potential player impact is provided in each detail below.

WATCHFUL EYE: Hatchet has been hired on by the Faithful to protect them from potential attacks, suspecting that if anyone were to make a strike against the Faithful, it would be with mercs. Scoping out the "competition" and getting a gauge for anyone looking to steal the key (though Stump was already high on his list), Hatchet actually remains in the Hungry Orc to learn about the PCs' new job. Allow PCs to spot Hatchet within the Hungry Orc from time to time, but make these fleeting appearances. Once the PCs have been hired on, Hatchet makes for the Faithful camp.

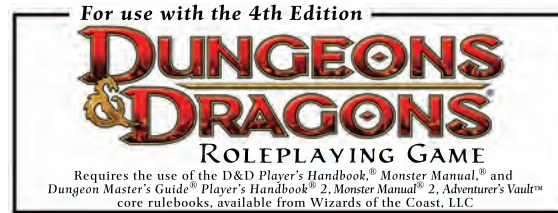
THE BODY HAS A NAME...: The dead body found in "They Call Him... Hatchet" is not just a guide. His name is Hagard, a member of the Faithful charged with meeting Hatchet in town and leading him safely back to the Faithful camp. Unfortunately, things did not proceed as planned.



TWO HEADS, ONE COIN: Stump is planning to betray the PCs and that's the reason why he's hiring outside help rather than calling on any number of mercs, orcs, or other lowlifes to do the job for him. The Marshall is not a believer or member of the Faithful, but his loyalty to his "mad brother" is firm. He will rain his full wrath on the region if the key goes missing and something should happen to Jarod. Having that kind of heat on Stump is not good for business and the occupation of Bloomten is only mildly tolerated (the fat orc has bribed a magistrate into filing false reports on orc numbers and activities) but the offer from Stump's other employer is just too good to pass up. When the key is in his hands, Stump will need some decoys to take the fall.

In all honesty, there is no reason to believe Stump will not betray the PCs and the players should be more than aware of that possibility... but that is the risk of their particular line of work. Taking jobs from seedy characters is the price you pay for high payoff jobs doing bad things. Feel free to make this point to the players, but their characters may not be able to pick up any strong clues – Stump's Bluff skill is rather high for 1st-level character to counter with their Insight skill.





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