

# Asgaard

D20 SYSTEM MAGAZINE

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AN INTERVIEW WITH  
JOHN WICK

**LEY LINE MAGUS**  
A PRESTIGE CLASS DRAWING ON  
THE POWER OF THE LAND

**THE ADVENTURING SCHOLAR**  
A PREVIEW OF PRIVATEER'S MONSTERNOMICON

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ISSUE 3  
OCTOBER 2001

# Morrus Dancing

Here we are at Issue 3 of Asgard Magazine!

In my opinion, this magazine is getting better and better all the time. I am very pleased to see more and more publishers contributing to the magazine - in this issue you'll find materials from four separate publishers! Add to this a couple of extra artists, an editor, and, of course, the excellent layout work of Jake Badger, and I'm sure you'll agree that this publication is becoming more professional each month.

The readership of Asgard seems to be increasing too! People are still downloading Issue 2 - the initial number of downloads last month was about 5,000 people, but nearly that number again have downloaded it during the month - this puts it on a par with many print magazines. As the magazine gets better and better, and as it gets more and more popular, you may well find it expanding in size. One good thing about an e-zine is that it's not limited by space - and you can store the magazine on your computer and just print out the bits that you need.

I have had a lot of people ask me why I'm not releasing this magazine in print format. Unfortunately, at present, Asgard does not have the resources to do such a thing - and to do so would mean that the magazine would no longer be free. However, I am thinking about releasing a print 'annual' with help from the d20 publisher industry, which has been very supportive of the idea. Later in the year, I will hold large poll to find out what you would like to see in such an annual.

One of the main reasons that I started Asgard was to give members of our community the chance to shine - to get their work published and distributed. There are so many very talented people who present their work on the forums or on their own websites who are just waiting for the chance to prove what they can do, and hopefully, this magazine will provide a vehicle that will help them to do that.

Of course, members of our community are finding their own routes into the industry. The Creature Catalog guys have recently been published in Mongoose Publishing's *Necromancy: Beyond the Grave*. Claudio Pozas, as you probably know, was brought on board the Fiery Dragon Productions team some time ago (shortly after becoming hosted by Eric Noah) and Kevin Kulp (known to many of you as 'Piratecat') has work lined up with Fiery Dragon and Chaosium. It's great to see them all doing so well, and I wish every success to them all!

Thanks for listening to my inane ramblings....

Russell 'Morrus' Morrissey

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# Product Reviews

By Alan Kohler & Russell Morrissey

## RETURN TO THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL

By Monte Cook  
Wizards of the Coast  
<http://www.wizards.com>



Monte Cook is perhaps best known by modern fans of the D&D game as the author of the D&D 3e *Dungeon Master's Guide*. However, he is no stranger to adventure writing. In his dawning days working on the *Dungeons & Dragons* product lines, he was responsible for much of the material for the Planescape campaign setting. Indeed, two of the best adventures for the Planescape setting were super-sized campaign style adventures, *Dead Gods* and *Tales of the Infinite Staircase*.

In my estimation, those two adventures were the best published adventures for D&D. I had often wondered how Monte would do if he tried his hand at an adventure for the D&D 3e game.

At last I have a chance to find out. *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* is such a module, aimed at taking characters from 4th level to 14th level.

The adventure is conceived in the same vein as a variety of other "Return to" adventures that WotC / TSR released prior to the publication of D&D 3e. *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* holds more promise, however, in that it gives us a fresh take on a classic adventure using the totally revamped D&D 3e system.

### A First Look

*Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* (RttToEE) is a 192 page perfect-bound soft-cover book. The cover bears a color illustration by Brom. The interior is black & white, with ink artwork by David Roach depicting

locations and possible situations from the adventure. The margins are of average size and the text density is high.

The cartography is in a separate 16 page color booklet that is glued into the back of the main book. The cartography appeared attractive, though the printing on my copy was somewhat blurry.

### A Deeper Look

(Warning: The following section contains some spoilers for secrets revealed in the adventure.)

The original *Temple of Elemental Evil* was, according to the history in RttToEE, is a result of cultists of Tharizdun convincing the demoness Zuggtmoy that she could gain power through creating a temple dedicated to elemental evil. Iuz became involved thinking he could use the temple to strike at his enemies. The truth as told by RttToEE is that the princes of elemental evil are servants of Tharizdun, the destructive ancient deity described in various Greyhawk-based adventures. Tharizdun is also secretly the Elder Elemental God that the renegade drow follow in the *Against the Giants and Drow* trilogies.

In RttToEE, the players must foil the plan of the cultists to uncover the *Temple of Elemental Evil* and open the gates to each of four elemental nodes. If this can be done, Tharizdun's servants, the princes of elemental evil, can emerge and use an artifact to release Tharizdun from his prison.

Needless to say, Tharizdun is a really bad Lovecraftian-type world eating entity and the players really do not want him wandering about.

The adventure itself is sorted into 3 sections and 8 chapters.

The first section deals with the characters escapades in and around the town of Hommlet (it has grown a bit from the days of the original ToEE, where it was merely a village.) The characters are really given little direction while in Hommlet, but poking around Hommlet will lead them to rumors of strange things going on at the moathouse near the town. There are some cultists of Tharizdun in town, but chances are that the party will not discover them until they have investigated the moathouse.

There are some cultists trapped in the moathouse by a significant creature. Said creature could easily be the end of the

party if they are not careful. Once the major encounter is dealt with, the party can explore the moathouse and find clues among the belongings of the cultists there that there are cultists operating in the town of Hommlet. If the party deals with the cultists in town, they may find the clue that they need to lead them to the second part of the adventure.

A final chapter in the first section details the ruined village of Nulb and the *Temple of Elemental Evil* itself. It is inhabited by some hobgoblins and some other creatures that the players can take out if they please, but at this stage, the temple and Nulb do not figure prominently into the adventure.

The second section details what is currently the stronghold of the cult of Tharizdun, the *Temple of All Consumption*. This is probably the meatiest part of the adventure. The *Temple of All Consumption* is built in an old volcano crater. The central part of the temple cannot be entered directly. After a brief bit of exploration in a local hamlet, the characters will have to head into a series of old mines that exist in the crater rim. The mines are inhabited by cultists and their various denizens, and there are four separate elemental temples situated about the mines.

The mines are situated such that as the characters penetrate deeper in the mines in either direction, the encounters become more challenging. Though that seems like it will channel the players quite a bit, there are still a variety of possibilities as to how this will play out. The four elemental temples compete with one another, and are constantly at each others throats. This will limit the possibilities for players sneaking into the mines, but once the players learn of the politics in the mines they can use it to their advantage.

Once the players have discovered the secret to getting to the central section of the temple they may proceed there. By this time they should be able to handle the challenges there. The central section of the *Temple of All Consumption* is filled with some of the most powerful priests of Tharizdun, the doomdreamers, as well as a number of other daunting obstacles. In the end, they may run into a priest who had a change of heart and other clues that will point them back to the temple of elemental evil, where the excavations and rituals that will eventually bring Tharizdun to the world are beginning.

The third part of the temple details the excavated *Temple of Elemental Evil*. To

stop the plans to bring Tharizdun back, the players must confront some of the most powerful followers of Tharizdun, destroy the artifact that allows his return, and/or close the way to the fire node which has been opened.

In addition to the adventure itself, the adventure has four appendices. The first is a listing of new magic items and monsters introduced (or reintroduced) in the adventure, including the grell, a favorite monster from the old days of AD&D, and new favorites like a half-elemental template.

The second appendix gives the details of worshipers of Tharizdun, including special rules for insanity, two new clerical domains (madness and force), and a new prestige class, the doomdreamer. The doomdreamer are highly placed clerics of Tharizdun with powers stemming from their maddening communion with their dark deity.

The third appendix gives all of the statistics for NPCs and special monsters encountered in the adventure.

The last appendix are two player handouts. The handouts are clues that the players find along the way, memoirs that reveal important details about the plans of the cult.

## Summary

The adventure is stuffed with a huge variety of encounters that should keep the players busy for months. The adventure purports to run the characters through a major portion of their careers, from 4th to 14th level. That it should easily do.

Further, the material is well written and consistent with the D&D rules. That should not be a surprise given the author is one of the lead designers of the 3e system.

However, I do not consider this to be Monte Cook's best adventure by a long shot. His two campaign style adventures for the Planescape setting, *Dead Gods* and *Tales of the Infinite Staircase*, are just as epic in scope but have a far greater variety and creativity in the types of challenges that the adventurers face. For the most part, *RttToEE* is mostly a series of interconnected dungeon crawls.

As I read the crater-rim mines, I was reminded of the second book of another campaign style adventure, *The Night Below*. *The Night Below* was similar to *RttToEE* in that it had the players facing an evolving plot that the players must grapple with. But the second book had many combat encounters that the players must plow through to get to their objective. In the end, it started to prove very tedious. I worry that the crater-rim mines could turn out

the same way.

Another problem I noted is that in the initial section, the players motivations are weak and the trail of clues is quite tenuous. The adventure could have used some suggestions for firmer motivations for the PCs and there should have been more to clue the players into what was going on in the town. If the players miss the diaries of the priest in the moathouse the whole adventure could pass them by.

Still, the adventure isn't bad for all this – it is still an immense adventure with tons of usable material with a sort of brooding *Masks of Nyarlothotep* feel to it. It just isn't up to what I have come to expect from Monte Cook's mega-adventures.

## Ratings

The adventure had outstanding ready to use gaming content. It features new creatures, new magic items, spells, domains, and prestige classes. The adventure has full color glossy maps with good keys. It also includes a large variety of solid and creative NPCs and other encounters.

I consider the idea content to be about average. Though there are a few gems, overall I felt that the dungeon crawl feel was a little overbearing and the players were funneled in places, and the crater rim mines could easily become a tedious stream of encounters.

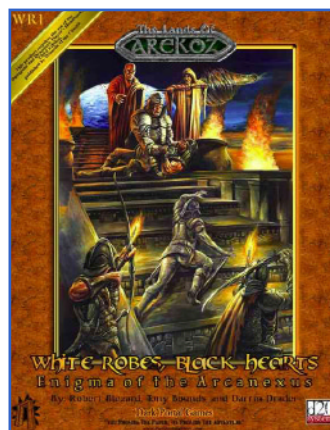
*RttToEE* had good value for the money. Though it comes at a pretty penny, this thing is stuffed.

4/5

## WHITE ROBES, BLACK HEARTS: ENIGMA OF THE ARCANEXUS

By Robert Belzard, Touny Bound and Darrin Drader  
Dark Portal Games

<http://www.darkportalgames.com>



The D20 System provided an unusual opportunity for would be game publishers -- the capability to publish products for the most popular RPG game system in the world. As you might imagine, competition is fierce, but a few publishers have pinned their hopes on an unusual publication model: electronic publications.

It certainly stands to be a hard sell. Many people are used to buying a product that they can touch, hold in their hands, and flip through. However, this segment of the market should not be ignored. With all the competition, some creative talents can get stifled. However, they are out there and the electronic publishing make it possible for a lot of fresh talents to make it to the market with minimal entry costs.

Dark Portal Games is one of these companies. Dark Portal announced their entry as a D20/OGL publisher with their free *Dead Fire* adventure. Their first breadwinners are to be a line of adventures entitled *White Robes, Black Hearts*. Each adventure will carry a different subtitle. The first of these is *White Robes, Black Hearts: Enigma of the Arcanexus*. (EoA)

It may seem as if the queue is already full for D20 System adventures. Dark Portal's approach to adventures is slightly different. Small stand-alone adventures seem to be all the rage. *EoA* is in cast in a slightly different mold. It is a somewhat larger (100+ page) PDF adventure, essentially 5 smaller adventures linked into a long running campaign adventure. In essence, *EoA* is a full quest.

## A First Look

*EoA* comes packaged as a zip file, with many component PDF files. Two PDF files are provided with the adventure text. One is plain text version of the adventure. The other is a fully formatted version. Oddly, the plain text version is printed in a larger font so it takes up more pages. If their intention were to put out a version you could format yourself, they would have done much better to simply include a text file or RTF file.

The PDF file is attractively formatted, with a total of 104 pages. A nice dungeon motif margin flourish is used, and the cover and interior art is well done. Only the first and last pages (cover) are color. The remaining pages are black-and-white, which should be a good thing for those who hope to print it out. The back of the booklet contains a number of handouts that are attractive and should add to the gaming experience.

The PDF file does not take advantage of the bookmark feature, which would have been a very nice way to leverage the fea-

tures of the format.

The maps are also all in PDF format. The maps appear to have been created in Campaign Cartographer 2, as many of the symbols used are familiar. Overall the maps appear usable and attractive, but there are some problems. Only one of the maps bothers with a key. Many of the maps have grids without any indication of the scale. Some maps have the opposite problem -- they indicate the size of the grid, but no grid is included.

In addition to these obvious problems with the maps, another way that they would have better leveraged the format would be to include the CC2 format maps.

## A Deeper Look

(Warning: This section contains spoilers to events in the adventure)

*EoA* is set against a specific political backdrop. A society of cleric/sorcerers called the "White Robes" control the central empire of the setting, Mhul. In recent years, the empire has oppressed one of their neighbors, a nation called Calrendia. A group of rebels from Calrendia appeal to the party to find an artifact called the Arcanexus. The rebels believe that if they can obtain the Arcanexus, they can travel to the otherworldly place that holds the source of the White Robes' power and smash it. Though this sounds like a very specific background, the adventure provides you with some pretty good guidelines on how you can adapt this adventure to your own game and not invalidate the adventure.

On a basic level, the adventure is divided into 5 chapters. The first chapter is the introduction and the beginning of the adventure. In this chapter, the characters are recruited and they travel to the city where they will meet some of the NPCs that will be important throughout the adventure. In talking to these NPCs, the players may discover more about the quest ahead of them, but ultimately will find little information until they investigate the resting place of Rowhan Lyrgan, one of the monks who once guarded the Arcanexus.

In addition to the setup, chapter 1 describes the information and actions of some NPCs throughout the adventure.

Chapter 2 chiefly concerns the cemetery to find the remains of one of the last known guardians of the Arcanexus. A number of constables and hostile creatures may have to be dealt with in exploring the cemetery, and they may decide to explore a dangerous (and of course, undead infested) set of catacombs. Ultimately, the players must explore the mausoleum of Rowhan Lyrgan. Among the more unusual encounters, the

party may find themselves allied with a ghoul out to exact revenge on the creature that brought about his state.

The mausoleum features some Indiana Jones-style puzzles and traps that the players will have to work through in order to obtain the information that they need to move on with the adventure.

Chapter 3 concerns the monastery that once housed the Arcanexus. The resistance movement knows that the Arcanexus is no longer there, but once the party gets the necessary clues from Rowhan's mausoleum, they have enough information to determine that the monastery is worth looking at. Of course, the monastery is overrun by unfriendlies (in this case, ettercaps and undead). By using an item they found in the mausoleum, they can uncover what the Mhul soldiers could not: a maps to the caves featured in the next part.

Chapter 4 concerns a group of caves where the monks fled from the forces of Mhul. The cave networks are pretty extensive, and feature troglodytes and sandipedes, a new creature introduced in *EoA*. The possible activities of this section could grow beyond the central premise of finding the Arcanexus, but a codex that they find in the caves will enable them to effectively eliminate any remaining threats in the cavern and move on to a ziggurat described in chapter 5.

Chapter 5 describes the Ziggurat called Ippaeth's Disgrace. The ziggurat was originally to be built as a place where people could speak to the gods. However, the treachery of one powerful mage resulted in his magical hijacking of the ziggurat. He set it up as a hidden lair on another plane. He eventually died and his secrets were discovered by the priests. They used the ziggurat as a hiding place for the Arcanexus.

The ziggurat can only be accessed by means described in the codex. Challenges within the ziggurat include a new creature that the mage had created, a trap, and a chess puzzle, and a demon. The demon is a considerable challenge for characters of the level the party is likely to be, but it is instructed to allow the characters access to one item -- and only one -- and to allow them to leave unmolested.

That would be the end of the adventure, but if the players have not noticed the NPCs following them, the day of reckoning has come. As the party is attacked by NPCs in the employ of Mhul that wish to take the Arcanexus for themselves.

## Summary and Conclusions

This looks like it would be a fun adventure to me. The whole adventure has a nice

quest-like feel that I think has been absent from many D20 System adventures. If you can run your game out of a computer or have access to cheap printing, this adventure is a steal and should keep your players entertained for several sessions.

There is a rich historical backdrop to the adventure. This can be both a good thing and a bad thing. If you are like most DMs, you already have a setting picked out. Fortunately, DPG has provided several alternatives to assist you in fitting the adventure into the game, and several interesting historical bits are small enough in scope that you can use them whole cloth even if you discard DPG's Arekoz setting.

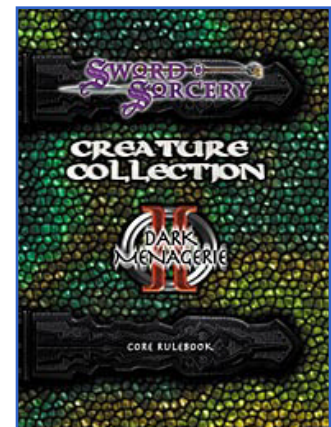
I see few shortcomings in the adventure itself. My primary point of concern is the maps and the files. It seems as if these could have been done to provide more value for the DM. Having an already established bookmark section in the PDF file would have been of great value. The maps need some work and providing the adventure text and the CC2 maps in formats other than the PDF files would have been a nice feature.

4/5

## CREATURE COLLECTION II: DARK MENAGERIE

Sword & Sorcery Studios

<http://www.sword-sorcery.com>



Sword & Sorcery Studios is well known for having one of the first major D20 System products. It is also known for having one of the best D20 System products.

Note that when I say that, I am speaking of two different books.

S&SS gained a good degree of notoriety for releasing the Creature Collection (CC I) book before the D&D 3e Monster Manual came out. The book made did make quite a splash for its early appearance, and it provided many 3e DMs with some fresh takes on creature for their games. Still, the book's rush to market was telling. It is still derided

for some of its truly poor artwork. More importantly, due to its early release date and the designers' attendant lack of mastery of the system, many of the book's creatures had errors in their treatment under the D20 System.

S&SS is also well known for the Relics & Rituals (R&R) book. R&R is a magic sourcebook for both general use by D&D 3e players and for the Scarred Lands setting that S&SS is producing. A large portion of R&R was based on fan submissions. Despite this, R&R was of outstanding qualities. The book showed that the authors had learned a little since CC 1, and had the editorial and D20 System expertise to synthesize a doubtlessly varied batch of fan submissions into a high quality D20 System sourcebook.

Given this, S&SS's second creature book was awaited with much anticipation. Many who appreciated their earlier efforts were anxious to see if S&SS could effectively apply their newfound expertise to a creature book. Hopes are high. But are they too high?

## A First Look

Creature Collection II: Dark Menagerie (CC II) is a 244 page hardbound book. Like WotC and many of its imitators, the book has a cover image made to resemble some ancient tome; in this case the book is made to appear as if made from the skin of some green scaly creature.

The interior is black and white and thoroughly illustrated with at least one image per creature. On the whole, the quality of the art is good, but seemed more illustrative than evocative. Few pictures had the effect of bringing a concept to life that (as an example from a recent work by WotC) Wayne Reynolds' artwork in Tome & Blood did.

The use of space is slightly above average. The margins are average in size, and illustrated with the same "cracked" pattern that adorns all Scarred Lands products. The white space is moderate. Most entries show little white space, but there is some on the trailing end of entries that don't end on a page break.

The font size used varied from entry to entry. It seems as if ensuring that the entries used exactly 1 or 2 pages was a primary consideration. This probably wastes some space, but gives it a layout that is more comfortable to read and use than WotC's 3e Monster Manual.

As with prior Scarred Lands D20 System / OGL products, each entry is split into description and combat sections which mark the dividing line between the copyrighted material and the open game con-

tent. Probably more importantly if you are not running a game in the Scarred Lands and you are not looking to make your own OGL products, this clearly divides the Scarred Lands specific material from the game mechanical content.

## A Deeper Look: Breaking it down.

As befits the subject matter, the bulk of CC II consists of creatures for the D20 System. My quick count shows a total of 169 creatures and templates.

It's hard to quickly sum up the creatures in a book like this, but alas I shall try. A quick breakdown of creature types is as follows.

### Outsiders

There are many entries for outsiders in the book. A majority of these creatures are servants of the various deities of the scarred lands, and most of the ones depicted are evil (which are the ones you were most likely to use anyways, right?)

The same general alignment oriented demon / devil dichotomy that is used by the 3e MM (demons are chaotic evil and devils are lawful evil) is used here. However, as these creatures are primarily servants of the three major evil deities of the scarred lands, and there is one such deity for each evil alignment, the book resorts to using the archaic 1st edition title of "daemon" for neutral evil outsiders. The Planescape-inspired titles that are now part of the standard D&D conventions are not used here.

There are a number of outsiders that for one reason or another don't fit into the standard "three D's" convention. Some are just plan combatants or other servants of the various deities. Others fit a specific theme, such as three "dream creatures" that are servants of the demigod of dreams. There are oddities like the Slarecian Gatekeeper, a creature summoned specifically for its ability to provide instantaneous transportation. And alas, there are some creatures in this book that actually aren't evil. My picks from this category:

*Daemon, Grisly Minstrel:* The most fiendish seeming of the evil outsiders, the grisly minstrel is the upper body of a woman and the lower body of a giant cricket. It has a good background concept, set of abilities, and a creepy feel.

*Daemon, Plague Angel:* Probably the best of a batch of plague-themed creatures in the book.

*Demon, Blood Horror:* At the core of this creature's concept is an interesting (to DMs) / frightening (to players) ability. Wounds from blood horrors resist being

totally healed by any means short of a heal spell, and they continue to bleed each day. This ability is somewhat like the wounding magic weapon ability, but even more insidious.

*Darkling Sentinel:* A straightforward but interesting concept, the darkling sentinel is a crystalline creature. It is interesting in that when it can struck, it can voluntarily shatter and reform to avoid most of the damage from the blow.

*Shackleddeath:* This skeleton-like creature has a number of shackles attached to it. It can attack with the shackles. The shackleddeath can use spell-like abilities on creatures trapped by the shackles – the more shackles attached to the creature, the worse the ability it can use.

### Constructs

There are many constructs in the book, most of them cast as instruments of terror during the titanswar. Many are truly odd but somehow fail to invite themselves into my game. Some make the cut though. My picks from the constructs are:

*Golem, Serpent:* There are a few golems in the book patterned after the fearsome magic-resistant golems from the 3e MM. This one is both odd enough to notice and good enough to use. The serpent golem is a mass of writhing snakes that acts as a single creature. The golem is only affected by certain spells that affect snakes and can be healed by summoning snakes and ordering them to join the mass.

*Ioun Beholder:* Another rather odd construct. I don't know if I would use it in a game, but it sounds like an interesting concept but probably only a one-shot sort of thing. The ioun beholder masquerades as crystal ball but is actually more like a cursed crystal hypnosis ball. If it can get its owner to collect a number of ioun stones, it animates and takes control of the ioun stones, and can use them to project rays like a beholder.

### Undead

As CC II is focused at dark and creepy creatures, this is one of the biggest categories along with outsiders and aberrations. Some of the undead ideas we have seen before elsewhere, such as burned ones (a flaming skeleton variant, which has been done in 3e in both the Diablo II books and in Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil). Some are fresh, interesting, and campaign portable. Here are my picks from the undead:

*Skull king:* The skull king is a skeletal figure with 2-4 skulls floating above the remainder of its body. It is depicted as sort of a behind the scenes puppeteer and can cast multiple spells each round. It casts spells as a sorcerer, but I think to make the

“puppeteer” image complete I would allow it levels of the mindbender prestige class from Tome & Blood.

*Shadowlord*: Actually, I didn't care for it but I know many people will like it and find it useful. The shadowlord is sort of a super-shadow with spell like abilities largely related to shadows.

### Abberations

In many ways, this is the catch all category, and you would think that it would get used a fair bit amidst all of the titan-spawn that we were promised and odd creatures we expect in this book. There are a few, and they have all the bizarreness and unkind nature you might expect, from the blade handed blood reaper to the gory bloodman. (Did I mention that a blood theme gets a lot of use in this book?)

*Arcane Symbiote*: A creature that can attach itself to a spellcaster and allow the character to use its abilities... for a price. Also comes in a parasitic variant for less kind DMs.

*Sundered Mage*: Strange concept with a strange picture. The sundered mage were a titan-spawn race that another one of the titans experimented with. Basically, the creature has two faces, and can even split into two less powerful creatures.

### Humanoids, Monstrous Humanoids, and Giants

There are a variety of these, mostly new races that crawl the face of the Scarred lands, plus new variants of races you saw the last time around – hags and ratmen. Many of the races are creations of the titans or the gods who struggled against them. Some of my picks – and one pan:

*Piscean*: A new aquatic race with a variety of subraces. You may already have enough sea-dwelling creatures if you use sahaugin, merfolk, etc. But the pisceans would fill the role of larger ogre-type humanoids.

*Skin Weaver*: A very cool concept for an NPC race with an interesting ability, skin weavers are a race with the ability to make items from other creatures. These items grant them a random ability of the creature to the skinweaver.

*Face Stealer*: This one's pretty hideous. And it does just what it says – removes a creatures face, leaving it with no face other than nostrils. Victims are blind, deaf, and soon die from starvation unless the condition is cured. (Did anyone else have flash-backs to the ST:TOS issue Charlie X?)

*Carnival Krewe*: Though I'm not a big fan of the Carnival Krewe creatures, I understand that many people like the ones appearing in CC I. Three new Carnival Krewe members appear in CC II. Of these, my favorite is the Dark Harlequin.

*Haglings*: The concept is good enough – some hags retain maternal instincts and decide to steal children and subject them to the same transformation they went through. However, the artwork makes them seem to cutesy and really killed the concept for me. They looked like trick-or-treaters!

### Fey

There are a few fey in here, and they are used well to display the corrupted nature of the land in the Scarred Lands setting. The best example and my pick from this section is:

*Sundered Woman*: This is sort of a creepy creature. It is a dryad like entity whose forest home was corrupted or destroyed during the titanswar. Not only are they driven to madness, their condition gives them a hideous appearance of continually opening and resealing wounds on their body, which they seem oblivious too. This one would be bound to elicit some sort of response from the players.

### Beasts, Magical Beasts, and Vermin

There are a variety of these, and these are possibly the most campaign portable creatures.

*Blade Beast*: This unusual magical beast can actually absorb bladed weapons into its body when struck, and then reuse them as its own body parts / attacks.

*Fleshstrippers*: These unsettling rodents have a bite that anesthetizes the victim. Their victim may not even notice that they are being eaten alive.

*Shadowcat*: A naturally invisible great cat, the shadowcat is cloaked in invisibility that cannot be purged or dispelled. The only indication is that in bright light, it casts a shadow.

### Plants and Hazards

Surprisingly, there are some of these. There are a few of the “carnivorous tree / vine” variety, but some fresh takes as well:

*Spectral Plant*: These are undead plants that existed in regions plagued by demons or fallen afoul of necromantic rites. They are normally incorporeal and normally invisible, but if anyone walk through them, the flicker briefly and have the effect of an energy drain on the unfortunate person walking through.

### Shapechangers

There are a few in the book. My favorite is a category of creatures called vermin hosts. They are mostly former worshippers of Vangal who have been infested by vermin. Now they can change form be become a swarm of vermin. As interesting (and creepy) as the concept sounds, I think it would have worked better as a template so you could make any creature like this.

## Templates

CC II has a good selection of templates. Here are a few of my favorites:

*Belsameth Spiders*: An odd (okay, hideous) version of undead, Belsameth spiders appear as a head mounted on spidery legs. They can spread their horrific condition by killing creatures with their poisonous bite.

*Conundrum Creature*: Creatures cursed by the powerful unique sphinx Athentia, creatures with the conundrum creature template become constructs, living puzzles. They can speak no words except for the one riddle that can return them to their original state. Their curse can be lifted if all of the pieces are assembled and their riddle is correctly answered. The template is a bizarre but compelling concept, and the possibilities of how these creatures are used and abuses are well explored in the text.

## Appendices

Finally, the book has some appendices. First is a list of all creatures in the MM, CC I, and CC II by CR. Second, and more welcome, are revised monster summoning tables that include new creatures presented in the book as options for use with summoning spells.

## Conclusions

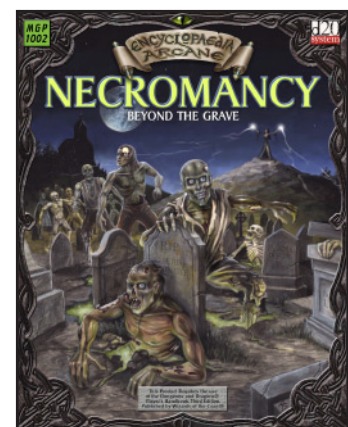
Overall, I found this to be a fairly good book. My expectations were perhaps a little higher than the mark, but I still find the art quality up to snuff this time and didn't notice the same type of inexperienced rules gaffs that cropped up with such great frequency as CC I. The creatures are largely campaign portable, and you should be able to fish out some odd new denizens for your campaign here.

4/5

## NECROMANCY: BEYOND THE GRAVE

Mongoose Publishing

<http://www.mongoosepublishing.com>



*Necromancy: Beyond the Grave* is the second book in Mongoose Publishing's *Encyclopaedia Arcane* series. Unlike the *Slayer's Guides*, this particular line is considerably more 'meaty' when it comes to rules content, something that many felt that Mongoose's previous work lacked.

I'll start with a quick look at the presentation of the book. It's a 64 page book with a full colour cover and back and white interior art. I find the cover a tad cartoony myself, not the same style as the covers of the *Slayer's Guides* (although drawn by the same artist), but certainly of high quality. The interior art is not as good - with the exception of one or two pieces, I was not overly impressed. That said, artwork is far from the be-all and end-all of an RPG supplement.

And so on to the important stuff.

Like *Demonology: The Dark Road* before it, this book maintains that Necromancy, in itself, is not inherently evil. However, it is a dark and dangerous path to follow and few people can follow the path for long without succumbing to corruption and/or insanity.

The book begins with an **Overview**, which introduces us to Necromancy, its practitioners, the concepts of Negative Energy and a look at the 'creatures of undeath'. It's interesting reading, if a bit discursive, but it serves to set the scene well.

The bit that most people are looking for, of course, is the rules. N:BTG gives us three new **knowledge skills** (Anatomy, Necrology and Spirit Lore). I imagine that many people already have a Knowledge: Undead skill in their games already, so it is nice to see it presented in print. Unfortunately, I don't feel that these skills go into quite enough detail - a slightly more comprehensive list of DCs for each would have been more useful than the three levels of difficulty presented.

The **prestige classes** come next, and we are presented with *The Spectral Loremaster* (a spellcaster who gains knowledge via communion with spirits), *The Deathseeker* (a necromancer who taps into the rush of negative energy that floods into a dying body) and *The Necrophage* (an obsessive anatomist who grafts the limbs and organs of the dead to his own nightmarish creations). Other than the first of these, I can't see them being used by PCs (at least not in my game!), but they would be great villains if played correctly. *The Necrophage*, of course, instantly brings to mind images of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (and I have no doubt that that was the intent here).

We then move on to the **spells** section. Always the poorer cousin of the Evoker, the

Necromancer's spell list has been boosted with 34 new spells. They are spread throughout all nine levels, from the 0-level *Identify Undead* to the 9th-level *Raise City* - the latter allowing the caster to bring an entire civilisation back as skeletons! Many of the spells fill in the expected gaps - necromantic divinations, a greater range of animation spells, some much needed offensive and defensive spells, along with some interesting new ideas. This section, above all others, is likely to be the most useful in the average game.

A large section on **Necromantic Feats** presents 8 new feats and a preceding section on 'Negative Energy Side Effects'. Each time a necromantic feat is used, the practitioner is required to make a Negative Energy check, failure causing a randomly determined side-effect to be inflicted on the character. There are 20 such side-effects, varying in strength from *Aura of Unease*, though *Holy Aversion*, *Glowing Eyes* and *Disfigurement* to the somewhat unpleasant *Undeath* (presented as a non-specific 'Undead' template as opposed to a particular type of undead). This is vaguely reminiscent of the 'Dark powers' checks from Ravenloft 2E, although I feel that Mongoose have come up with a more elegant system.

The feats themselves immediately follow this section. This is one problem that I have with this book - it's not a major issue, but the feats follow on immediately from the side-effects with no break distinguishing the two sections. So we go straight from the side effect *Undeath* to the feat *Animation by Touch* with no introduction. I found it a trifle confusing.

Then comes a section on **lichdom** - three pages describing how how becomes a lich, detailing the lich's phylactery and so on. Although this is something that would never be used in my game (players as liches - no chance!) I can see how it might be attractive to some and may help provide background for NPC villains. I would have liked to see the Death Knight (detailed as a monster later in the book) given the same treatment as I have always regarded that particular undead beastie to be the 'warrior' version of the lich.

A section on **Magical Items** presents several new items. These are fairly imaginative, although there aren't many there. It does include one very powerful artifact, however.

**Minions of Undeath** is the title for the obligatory monster section. There are 8 monsters here, written by Scott Greene and Erica Balsley of the Creature Catalog hosted here at EN World. These monsters are all fairly unpleasant, especially the *Skull Child* which is downright creepy! Very useful overall, especially when it comes to those

long-time players who know the Monster Manual inside and out. Interestingly, and somewhat controversially, the Death Knight has lost his 20 HD fireball.

At the back of the book is a **Rules and Spell Summary** appendix, which lists all necromantic spells from the PHB, *Relics & Rituals* and, of course, *Necromancy: Beyond the Grave*. It also lists the necromantic feats and prerequisites. I'm not sure if this is the first example of OGC content being used by another publisher (although I am certainly aware of plans for various publishers to use each others' materials), but it is good to see the Open Gaming License being used to its fullest extent. Compatibility between the products from various publishers is a legitimate concern for the fans, and this use of *Sword & Sorcery's* certainly goes some way towards easing some of those fears.

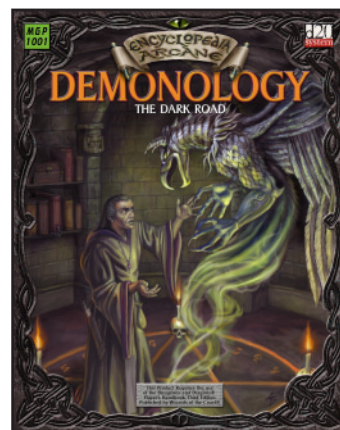
## In Summary

A solid book, with plenty of useful material. Mongoose are getting better with each product and seem to be listening to the fans (the meat/fluff ration here is certainly better than their previous outings), and I find myself looking forward to future materials. This one gets a solid 4/5 from me.

4/5

## DEMONOLOGY: THE DARK ROAD

Mongoose Publishing  
<http://www.mongoosepublishing.com>



Mongoose's first set of d20 books were the *Slayer's Guides*, adding details to some classical D&D creatures like Hobgoblins and Gnolls. *Demonology: The Dark Road* is the first in a new series of books from Mongoose entitled the *Encyclopedia Arcane*. The books in the Encyclopedia Arcane series will focus on different methods of arcane magic for use with the d20 system. In addition to *Demonology*, follow-up books will

Asgard October 2001



detail Necromancy and “Wild Spellcraft.”

*Demonology: The Dark Road* details (as you might guess) game mechanics for players wishing to pursue the binding of creatures from the planes of evil to do the bidding of their arcane spellcasting characters. Departing with the convention of the D&D / d20 game, *Demonology: The Dark Road* refers to all evil outsiders generically as demons, not just the chaotic ones.

## A First Look

*Demonology: The Dark Road* is a 64-page softcover book. The cover depicts a man calling forth some sort of beaked demonic creature (probably a Vrock Tanar&#8217;ri) against a backdrop of a lab with a pentagram.

The interior of the book is black and white. Decent artwork -- primarily of demons -- decorates the book. A variety of artists contributed to the book, yet the most eye-pleasing to me is the work of Eric Lofgren, whose artwork you may recognize from FF's *Traps & Treachery*.

As with the *Slayer's Guides*, I feel that the use of space is not good. The space between paragraphs and white space is not as glaring, but there is the same large line spacing and font size. Additionally, the price per page is a little high in my estimation. Compare it to other recent books of similar printing format. *Demonology: The Dark Road* is 64 pages at a price of \$13.99. Necromancer Games' *Rappan Athuk 2* is 64 pages at the price of \$11.95, and has a higher text density.

## A Deeper Look

*Demonology: The Dark Road* is divided into a large number of small sections instead of a few chapters. More generally, the book is divided into broad sections including introductory material, the prestige classes, game mechanics for the summoning and binding of evil outsiders, supplemental mechanics (such as feats and magic items), and some afterthoughts including advice for GMs, details on how some races use demonology, and specifics on what materials are required to summon the standard evil outsiders described in the MM and SRD.

The basis of the book is the prestige classes. Three prestige classes in the book can use the its methods for demon summoning. The demonologist is pretty much the most basic practitioner of demonology. Beyond access to the use of the demonology rules, the demonologist gains abilities allowing it to exercise greater control

over the creatures called and to call more of them.

There are two more specialized demonology prestige classes. They too can use the demonology rules, but they receive other abilities instead of improvements in calling demons. The binder receives the ability to bind fiends into objects and create a special class of magic items. The possessed voluntarily allows a fiend to co-occupy his or her body and in the process gain some of the fiend's abilities.

The classes may prove a little powerful for many campaigns. Though using the demonology abilities entails some risk, the prestige classes still receive a considerable array of abilities in addition to more skills than a wizard or sorcerer and full spellcasting advancement.

Unlike in AEG's *Evil*, the demonology rules in *Demonology: The Dark Road* do not simply ignore the already existing means of dealing with outsiders. The demonology rules are presented, however, as an alternative to the existing rules, a “more risky” method with potentially greater rewards. Demonologists are not assumed to automatically be collaborating with fiends, but instead are merely engaging in a risky form of magic. This perspective perhaps makes the book more accessible for non-evil (but foolhardy) PCs.

The book presents a straightforward mechanic for dealing with fiends. There are basically two steps: summoning the fiend and controlling the fiend. Both of these tasks require a roll. A standard d20 roll is used, with modifiers according to the character's demonology class level and a number of other factors.

The difficulty of these checks depends on the CR of the summoned fiend. Summoning requires a roll with a DC of 10 + the fiend's CR. Controlling the fiend is a bit more difficult, requiring 10 plus double the fiend's CR. As you might imagine, the fiend who is summoned but not controlled tends to be a significant problem for the demonologist.

The author intentionally places control in the GM's hands by requiring that a demonologist character acquire texts detailing the demons and rituals before attempting to summon a given type of outsider. While fundamentally wise, the possibility still exists that a campaign could get out of hand if the GM makes a bad call.

There are two sections on magic items. One is general magic items that are of interest to demonologists; the other gives details for items created by the binder prestige class binding fiends to objects. Some misunderstandings of the rules shine through

here. For example, with regard to demonic wands and staves, the author states that they can be recharged as normal magical wands and staves. The D&D 3e / d20 System, however, provides no standard method for recharging items.

The demonology feats are primarily targeted at members of the book's prestige classes. They allow characters to do things such as speed up the summoning rituals, issue more complex commands, and bring fiends under their permanent control.

The remainder of the book is more details, rhetoric, and ideas. Though some of the additional material is interesting, much of it seems like material from which only a few GMs will get much value. For example, the section on other races is likely to be overridden by the specifics of a GM's campaign, if any of the creatures are even used at all.

Throughout the book are a number of fiction sidebars detailing the exploits of some demonologists. They are generally better written and more interesting than the similar sidebars that appeared in the *Slayer's Guides*.

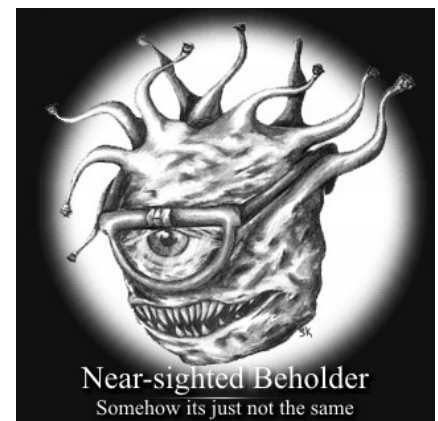
## Summary

The book provides an interesting and mechanically solid alternative method to the standard d20 summoning rules. A GM who adopts these rules should find that they create a lot of interesting possibilities, but they are bound to add a measure of randomness and chaos to a campaign in the hands of PCs.

The book sacrifices breadth for depth. As such, it will be most useful in a campaign chiefly concerned with demonology. It may be a little narrow to justify the purpose of buying it in a campaign with a broader focus, especially considering the text density and cost of the book.

3/5

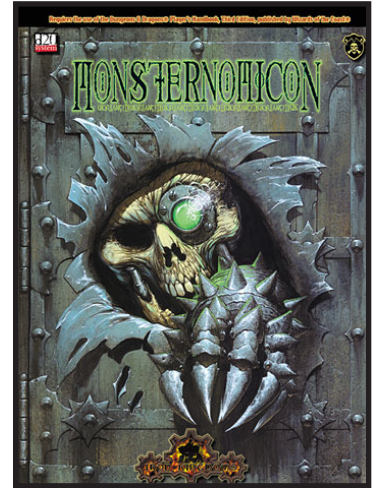
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Contributors: Rob Baxter, Matt Staroscik, Jon Thompson, Matt Wilson

# Lessons of the Learned

*Monsternomicon Preview from  
Privateer Press*



In November, Privateer Press will be releasing the Monsternomicon Vol. 1. This 200-page tome will shatter the tired trends in monster references. For starters, each monster entry will be at least two pages long. Many of the more important creatures will have four or even six pages dedicated to them—a wealth of useful information for the DM. Along with the basics of combat, there will be a detailed treasure section, adventure hooks, and legends and lore relating to the creature. Naturally, the book will be crammed full of the incomparable artwork of Brian Snoddy and Matt Wilson—winners of the 2001 “ENnie” awards for their work on Privateer Press’ D20 scenario *The Longest Night*.

Besides being useful, the Monsternomicon will be fun to read. Each entry will be narrated by one of the Iron Kingdoms’ most fascinating characters—Prof. Viktor Pendrake, High Chancellor of the Department of Extraordinary Zoology at the University of Cygnar. From his University office in the city of Corvis, the Professor plans an endless series of expeditions to bring the most bizarre and dangerous creatures to light. Read on to learn more about Professor Pendrake, including a new prestige class and a preview of some new skills and feats from the Monsternomicon!



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## INTRODUCING PROFESSOR VIKTOR PENDRAKE

From the Memoirs of Lynus Wesselbaum, Senior Assistant to Professor Viktor Pendrake, University of Cygnar, Department of Extraordinary Zoology

Legends tell of a hero of men—a man so possessed with his thirst for knowledge that he would, bare handed, scale a hundred feet of cliff on the broken coast simply to

recover a perfect feather from the nest of a carnivorous pterra-roc. The same man, it has been told, has wrestled a young gorax, ridden bareback on a dracodile, and plucked the quills off a sleeping spine-ripper. Nothing could be further from the truth, and I was there to see it all. The cliffs were much higher. The gorax was a frenzied mother protecting her young—and the spine-ripper wasn't asleep at all. I won't even go into the dracodile—I had my eyes closed the whole time!

To say that Professor Pendrake is a man possessed of a thirst for knowledge is to say that a bloodstalker has only a slight taste for human flesh. By any normal standards, Viktor Pendrake is utterly mad. Did I not know him myself, I would think that he must be two different men, indeed.

The man the students know, the Professor of renown who has brought the Corvis University such esteem, is a pensive, engaging character who speaks on the subjects of extraordinary beasts with infallible expertise, and in a tone so carefully metered that one is nearly lured into a trance-like state by his cavernous voice. The Viktor Pendrake I know, however, the one who pursues the most fearsome inhabitants of this land out of simple curiosity, bears no resemblance to that wizened scholar, buried beneath an avalanche of dusty scientific tomes in his dimly lit study.

Pendrake began his life the son of a junker, roaming the borders between Khador and Cygnar, scavenging orphaned machine parts and scrap metal. His interests lay elsewhere, however, and he possessed none of the mechanical acumen of his brothers or father. Often, he was known to wander off from a scavenging party, investigating strange tracks that he had not yet sketched within his journal.

At the still naïve age of fifteen, Pendrake's wanderlust led him right into the middle of a violent confrontation between skirmishing Khador mercenaries and a crippled detachment of Cygnaran outriders pinned down in an almost impassable thicket. Ever quick on his feet, Pendrake led the Cygnaran soldiers to safety, easily traversing trails only known to someone who had haunted the region as thoroughly as young Viktor himself.

His obvious resourcefulness and natural wilderness expertise immediately garnered Pendrake employment in the Cygnaran army as a junior scout. Happy to leave behind the life of a junker, Pendrake joined the scouts and quickly rose through the ranks. He was given command of an entire company of Cygnaran rangers just before his twentieth

summer. Sadly, the company would meet a miserable demise, but this event would mark the beginning of a legend.

Pendrake's scout company was deep in the heart of Khador, working a patrol circuit that monitored the deployment of this violent kingdom's most elite units. The scouting company had just completed its assignment and Pendrake prepared to move his men back to Cygnar, carrying with them vital intelligence desperately needed by the war council back home. A traitor in their ranks, however, sold the company out for a handful of coins. The scouts were ambushed by a full battalion of Khador regulars, and in the end, all were slain save Pendrake.

With only two parchment tubes containing the critical intelligence grasped in each hand, Pendrake ran for the hills, the crackle of Khadoran rifle-fire chasing him. Eventually finding the lowlands, Pendrake wound up caught between a small horde of pygmy trolls and the bloodthirsty battalion. With only his instincts to save him, Pendrake stripped his body bare of his tattered clothes and covered himself in thick mud and leaves. Mimicking the stunted trolls, he waded into their pack and lost himself among their numbers. The Khadorians, seeing little to gain in engaging the scores of creatures, withdrew from the area to continue their search for the elusive scout. For three weeks, Pendrake lived among the pygmy trolls, eating, breathing, and sleeping as one of their kind, until the battalion of regulars gave him up for dead and abandoned their search of the area.

Weeks later, Pendrake dragged his weary form to the gates of a border fortress and handed over the crucial documents. The look of disbelief on the faces of the gate-wardens is something I myself have grown accustomed to in my eight years as Pendrake's assistant.

For his valor, Pendrake was offered any reward the king could provide. Without hesitation, the brave scout asked only for a sponsorship to Corvis University. The sponsorship was granted immediately, and at the age of twenty-one, Viktor Pendrake became the first junker ever admitted to the Corvis University, Department of Extraordinary Zoology.

The good Professor Fulgar Wynham accepted Pendrake under his wing, perhaps seeing something in him that he missed from his own youth. Pendrake quickly became the Professor's most prized student, and was given increasingly more prestigious assignments to catalog this or recover that—challenges which Pendrake always rose to,

seemingly without effort.

Within a few more summers, Pendrake earned his residency at the University, and took his place amongst the most elite academicians within the realm. In time, Professor Wynham passed on, and his title was bestowed upon the eager Viktor—Professor Pendrake, High Chancellor of the Department of Extraordinary Zoology.

Today, Pendrake divides his time between lecturing the up-and-coming minds of Corvis University and the pursuit of insanely inspired quests to catalog every wild creature that stalks the hills and forests of Caen. His latest and grandest work, the first volume of the *Monsternomicon* is almost complete, and I daresay that nearly half of those entries came within a farrow's whisker of ending not only the good Professor's life, but my own as well.

For now, my path remains tied to Viktor Pendrake, and by Morrow, I hope it is a long path indeed! Though I've never thought of myself as the "field research" type, no scholar worth his salt would walk away from a chance to adventure side by side with the legendary Professor Pendrake. I have seen exotic places that no other man may ever see again, and I have witnessed with my own eyes fearsome monsters engaged in behavior that would turn most men white with terror. But just between myself and the pages of this journal, of all of the fantastic beasts that I have seen, Professor Viktor Pendrake may be the most extraordinary creature of them all.

## Combat

In combat, Professor Pendrake is a terror to behold—not for his blazing weapons, nor the bloodlust in his eyes, but rather for his determination and absolute lack of fear. Pendrake usually charges into combat headlong, most often opening up with a volley of arrows, which are followed by close melee combat if possible. Although he is audacious, the professor is quite crafty, and he wins his fights quite often through trickery or manipulation.

His preferred weapons are his composite long bow (his lucky long bow, the first he was commissioned as a junior scout) and his short sword (an ancient relic found on a subterranean quest); both of them are traditional weapons of a Cygnaran ranger. He has also become a master at the elusive aldar's chain—an exotic weapon native to the sailors of Ord. The professor also frequently carries a pistol or rifle with him when in the field, though he admits he has little skill with firearms.

When sheer bravado and melee won't overcome a situation, Pendrake turns to his allies and his resources, both of which are quite extensive. He is also not afraid to admit defeat and retreat when the situation warrants it.

## Allies and Enemies

☛ **Lynus Wesselbaum (Rgr 6/Adv scholar 1):** The professor's senior assistant, Lynus helps Pendrake in most everything he does. Although he possesses the courage of a typical bookwormish student, he can never refuse an adventure at Pendrake's side, and he truly hopes to one day fill the professor's shoes.

☛ **Edrea Lloryr (Rog 4/Brd 4):** Pendrake's other close assistant, Edrea is quite the opposite of Lynus. Overcome with wanderlust, she left the Elven homeland to explore the world. Pendrake came upon her in the clutches of a dire troll, and after saving her life he found that he just couldn't get rid of her. Edrea turned out to be as smart as she is adventurous, and the professor has made good use of her help, despite her not being student. Although open with the professor, Edrea is outwardly shy, aloof, and mysterious (as is typical of an elf) to most she meets. Like Lynus, she is almost always present when the professor is out in the field.

☛ **Saxon Orrik (Rgr 16):** Once an ally and mentor, Orrik is now one of Pendrake's greatest enemies. The professor studied under him when first inducted into the Cygnaran military, and Orrik taught Pendrake much of what he knows of being a ranger. Their relationship went well until Pendrake blew the whistle on Orrik for committing a number of atrocities in the course of his duties. Orrik is a power-hungry warrior who, despite being ejected from the military (circumstantial evidence prevented full conviction), still serves as one of Vinter Raelthorne's most loyal troops (currently serving him alongside the Skorne). He thinks Pendrake a fool for devoting his work to posterity and would gladly teach the "boy" a lesson, should he have the chance.

☛ **Thain Raleah (Wiz 12):** Thain is a distinguished member of the Corvis branch of the Fraternal Order of Wizardry. His exploits as a wizard are quite well known, and he has made himself a welcome adventuring partner to Pendrake many times (the two get along famously). He has also been helpful in procuring access for Pendrake to the Order's extensive library. Those who have played *The Longest Night* will remember Thain as one of the three wizards romping



through the streets, fighting off the hordes of thralls during the Longest Night massacre (TLN 51).

☛ **Natalia Casale (Aristocrat 6):** Natalia is the wife of one of the largest and most powerful merchant families in Corvis (and all of Cygnar for that matter), and she secretly runs its operation through her spineless, puppet husband. Although a ruthless woman, she has proved quite a resource to Pendrake, who has in turn pulled various favors for her company. She also draws quite a bit of water in the circles of Corvis' wealthy elite.

☛ **Gusten "Chilly" Vilchmanker (Rog 7):** While he's not the type one would find at a high society gathering, Chilly is still a well-connected man in Corvis and beyond. His knowledge of Corvis's underworld and—

most importantly—the traffic coming in and out of the city is extensive, and Pendrake relies on him for many tips. He can typically be found loafing around the docks.

☛ **Mitchel Filkins (Ftr 8):** One of Corvis' finest, Mitchel is a proud member of the Corvis Watch. In many ways he's a beat guardsman like his colleagues, but Mitchel has been around long enough to see everything the city has to offer. He knows every nook and cranny of the ancient city (above and below ground) as well as the faces and rap sheets of most of the town's crooks. Filkins assists Pendrake frequently on his Corvis-based romps, and provides other services as he is able.

The following NPC stats are Open Game Content, with the exception of material specific to the Iron Kingdoms such as proper

names of languages, people and places, which remain the Product Identity of Privateer Press.

**Professor Viktor Pendrake, male human Rgr 5/Adv Sch 9:** CR 14; Size M (5 ft., 11 in. tall); HD 5d10+9d6+42; hp 123; Spd 30 ft.; AC 24 (+7 armor, +2 Dex, +5 Cha); Atk short sword +15/+10/+5 (+11 base, +3 enhancement, +1 Str), knife +14/+9/+4 (+11 base, +2 enhancement, +1 Str), aldar's chain +14/+9/+4 (+11 base, +2 Dex, +1 Point Blank Shot), composite long bow +14/+9/+4 (+11 base, +2 Dex, +1 Point Blank Shot); Damage 1d6+4 short sword, 1d4+3 dagger, 1d6+1 aldar's chain, 1d8+1 longbow; SV Fort +13 (+7 base, +3 Con, +3 luck), Ref +12 (+7 base, +2 Dex, +3 luck), Will +11 (+7 base, +1 Wis, +3 luck); AL CG; Str 12 (+1), Dex 15 (+2), Con 16 (+3), Int 18 (+4), Wis 13 (+1), Cha 20 (+5).

**Languages Spoken:** Cygnaran (the common tongue of the realm, spread through trade), Caspian (a dead language commonly used by scholars and historians), Khadoran (the state language of Khador, learned by Pendrake when he was a Cygnaran military scout), Molgur (a crude language spoken by some humanoids such as ogres and trolls), Ordic (picked up on an extended research trip into the Kingdom of Ord; the same trip where Pendrake learned to wield the aldar's chain), Quor (an obscure dead language from the area now known as Llael, learned in order to translate some ancient texts), Shyr (the language of the Elves, learned from Edrea; basic spoken proficiency such as this requires two language slots for outsiders, and written proficiency requires three.).

**Skills and Feats:** Animal Empathy +15 (+10 ranks, +5 Cha), Balance +6 (+4 ranks, +2 Dex), Climb +5 (+4 ranks, +1 Str), Concentration +7 (+4 ranks, +3 Con), Craft (Small arms) +5 (+1 ranks, +4 Int), Creature Lore +22 (+14 ranks, +4 Int, +4 Field of Study), Decipher Script +11 (+7 ranks, +4 Int), Diplomacy +8 (+3 ranks, +5 Cha), Gather Information +12 (+7 ranks, +5 Cha), Handle Animal +14 (+9 ranks, +5 Cha), Heal +4 (+3 ranks, +1 Wis), Hide +8 (+6 ranks, +2 Dex), Intimidate +8 (+3 ranks, +5 Cha), Intuit Direction +6 (+5 ranks, +1 Wis), Jump +3 (+2 ranks, +1 Str), Knowledge (Nature) +18 (+10 ranks, +4 Int, +4 Field of Study), Knowledge (Geography) +14 (+9 ranks, +1 Wis, +4 Field of Study), Listen +7 (+6 ranks, +1 Wis), Move Silently +8 (+6 ranks, +2 Dex), Profession (Professor) +12 (+7 ranks, +1 Wis, +4 Field of Study), Ride +3 (+1 ranks, +2 Dex), Search +9 (+5 ranks, +4 Int), Spot +7 (+6 ranks, +1 Wis), Swim +5 (+4 ranks, +1 Str), Use Rope +6 (+4

ranks, +2 Dex), Wilderness Lore +16 (+11 ranks, +1 Wis, +4 Field of Study); Track, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Aldar's chain), Skill Focus (Creature Lore), Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, Endurance, Unearthed Arcana (Aberrations), Unearthed Arcana (Dragons), Unearthed Arcana (Beasts and Magical Beasts), Sagas and Stories (Humanoids and Monstrous Humanoids), Sagas and Stories (Undead).

**Clerical Spells:** Due to his focus on scholastic studies, Professor Pendrake receives no spell levels as are normally allotted a ranger; instead, he receives extra feats as a fighter (thus he has three extra feats as a 5th level ranger).

**Special Abilities:**

**Favored Enemy:** Gobbers, Trolls. (Note that this represents more of a deep knowledge and understanding of these creatures garnered through experience, rather than a burning desire to hunt them.)

**Field of Study:** Field Scholar of zoology

**Base of operations:** Cygnaran Royal University's Corvis branch; Title: High Chancellor of the Department of Extraordinary Zoology

**Scholarly reputation score:** +13 (+4 professional, +9.5 tomes); Works written: The Gobbers of Caen, a twelve-part series (currently seven volumes complete, each +1 tome of gobbler-specific lore); Genera and Species of the Southern Trolls (+2 tome of troll-specific lore); On the Habits of the Dragon's Tongue and Black Rivers Humanoids (+1 tome of monstrous humanoid lore); Training Techniques for the Two-Headed Argus (+2 tome of argus lore); Scattered Notes on the Nature of the Shadow Reaver (unpublished, +1 tome outsider lore).

**Equipment:** +4 Enchanted dragodile hide armor (+7 total AC; +3 base AC, +4 magical enhancement; no armor check penalty) (beast was killed by professor himself, and enchantment was laid by a farrow shaman ally); +3 Ancient Orgoth lieutenant's blade (short sword, +3 enhancement bonus); +2 Fog drake fang dagger (+1 craftsmanship enhancement bonus, +1 material quality enhancement bonus); Aldar's chain (Ord sailors' chain weapon with weight at one end and harpoon-like hook/spear at other end; may use all special abilities of spiked chain PHB 100; though considered ranged weapon); Cygnaran scout's bow, the professor's lucky bow (composite longbow, +3 luck enhancement).

## THE ADVENTURING SCHOLAR

### An Iron Kingdoms Prestige Class for Use with Dungeons & Dragons® Third Edition

Callous fingers ran through gray hair, pausing to scratch an aged scalp. The man sighed, then looked back up at the lock he'd been studying for three minutes. It was set in a massive bronzed metal door, covered with overgrowth, and bearing religious symbols lost to most.

"Well, can we get in?" A young man asked in a not-so-enthused voice. He was wearing a large backpack and fidgeting heavily as he stood behind the old man. "Professor Fincher...?"

The old man stood up, wiping the sweat from his eyes with the backs of his sleeves before putting his glasses back on. Although his faded, straggly hair and wrinkled skin spoke of many years, his steady gate and firm posture told of a confidence that knew no frailty. "Kootler, give me the hammer," he barked, his bearded face showing no patience.

The young man dropped his backpack and began rooting clumsily through it. "This hammer?" He asked a moment later, handing it to him.

"Well, how many did you bring, boy?"

The youth looked confused. "Just that one, sir."

The professor stared at him, arms crossed, for a long pause. The boy squirmed. "Well, are ya going to give me the spike, boy?!"

"Spike? Spike . . ." He rooted frantically through the pack. "You didn't say—"

"By Morrow, boy. Do you know how many course credits you're getting for being my assistant?" The boy kept rooting through the pack. "Stop that and give me your dagger." The professor grabbed the boy and stood him up, taking the dagger from his belt himself.

With dagger and hammer, the professor stepped up to the door and began pounding on what appeared to be a locking mechanism. He struck several times, each time harder than the last, but the great steal door didn't budge. "Blasted, infernal temple!" The professor cursed. "Couldn't leave a key in a place that wouldn't sink under a swamp, so now you got to make me do it the hard way, eh!" He brought the hammer down with a vengeance, this time snapping the blade right in two. With an angered howl and one swift motion the

professor tossed the hammer aside, pulled out a stout pistol, and blasted the door.

Despite the rolling echo of gunfire, the click of the trap switch going off could still be heard. A volley of arrows blasted from a dozen holes in the door, peppering the air with darts. The assistant shrieked and fell backwards against a tree. He lay there motionless, his sweat gelling on his skin, and several moments later was picked up by a set of hands and manhandled to the ground.

“Get up, boy. Damn it, we haven’t got all day,” the professor demanded. There were several darts sticking out of the professor’s clothes, but he seemed completely unharmed. The boy looked up and saw the professor’s hat nailed to the tree above him by two darts. The boy glared at his professor as if he was a mental patient. He was stuffing items back into the boy’s pack, seemingly unaware of the near fatality that’d just occurred.

Before he could speak or argue, Kootler was being shoved into the now open doorway. “Come on, son. No time to dally. Remember, we’re doing this for science,” the professor said before stepping into the temple himself and shutting the door behind them. As the boy plunged into the cobwebbed darkness ahead, he mused all too late that this was definitely not what he had imagined when signing up for a “semester of intrigue and adventure” as a professor’s assistant.

“If you think that was fun, boy, just wait till we wake the bane thralls up,” the professor commented almost enthusiastically as he patted the boy on the back, shoving him further into the darkness.

The Adventuring Scholar prestige class is Open Game Content, with the exception of material specific to the Iron Kingdoms such as proper names of people and places,

which remain the Product Identity of Private Press.

All of us thirst for knowledge to some degree, yet for those whom we call scholars, that thirst develops into a passion that shapes and encompasses their lives. For most scholars, this means years of intense study, keeping locked up in a bedroom, study, or library surrounded by tomes, charts, and other curiosities. For the adventuring scholar, this just isn’t enough. They need to experience their passion for knowledge firsthand, and their hunger for that knowledge often takes them to places undreamed of by most. After all, somebody has to visit all those strange places they write about in those many books.

Adventuring scholars are a special breed. They have spent years in study, and they most often hold some sort of mundane position at a university or museum, but they are by no means bookworms. They are hearty adventurers that can run with the best of them. Only instead of exploring the mysteries of the world in search of treasure or power, they do it for knowledge. The primary tools of the adventuring scholar are wit, determination, knowledge, and a touch of both brawn and luck. With these they delve the mysteries of the world, unlocking secrets that few would dare to fathom.

Hit Die: d6

## Requirements

To qualify to become an adventuring scholar, a character must fulfill all of the following criteria.

Skills: Knowledge or Lore (any) 5 ranks, Gather Information 4 ranks, Profession (teacher, curator, etc.) 5 ranks

Feat: Skill Focus (any Lore or Knowledge skill)

## Class Skills

Class Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+0	+0	+2	+2	Field of study (field specialist +2/+1), base of operations, against all odds
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+3	Exotic weapon feat
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+3	Bonus language
4th	+3	+1	+4	+4	Adventurer’s zeal
5th	+3	+1	+4	+4	Easy allies, field scholar (+4/+2; may take 10)
6th	+4	+2	+5	+5	Bonus language
7th	+5	+2	+5	+5	Pen scholarly work
8th	+6	+2	+6	+6	Easy allies (improved)
9th	+6	+3	+6	+6	Bonus language
10th	+7	+3	+7	+7	Field master (+6/+3; take 20)

Alchemy (Int), Balance (Dex), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (any; Int), Listen (Wis), Lore (any; ex: Wilderness Lore), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (Wis), Search (Int), Speak Language (Int), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str).

Skill points at each level: 6 + Int modifier

## Class Features

**Field of Study:** Every adventuring scholar as a specific scholastic field that he or she specializes in (“general knowledge” may not be selected). This field of study is always something that the scholar is very passionate about, and his research in the field is both personal and very rewarding. Usually, they will also have some sort of special focus within that field that is just kind of a pet subject (no additional bonuses for it, however).

**Field Specialist:** At 1st level the adventuring scholar is considered a specialist and gains a +2 competence bonus to all Knowledge and Lore skill checks related to his or her field of specialization. They also receive a +1 synergy bonus to rolls of other skills when they are directly involved in some way with the field of study. Furthermore, the scholar may attempt an untrained skill check on any Knowledge or Lore skill roll related to his or her field of study, even if they would not normally be allowed (i.e. if it were a trained-only roll).

**Field Scholar:** At 5th level the adventuring scholar is considered as a true scholar in his or her field. The competence and synergy bonuses for this ability rise to +4/+2 respectively. The scholar may also now take 10 on any Knowledge or Lore skill roll related to their field of study, even if circumstances would normally prohibit them from doing so.

**Field Master:** At 10th level the scholar is a master of his or her field. Their bonuses rise to +6/+3 respectively, and they may now take 20 on any Knowledge or Lore skill roll related to their field of study, regardless of circumstances.

**Base of Operations:** The adventuring scholar also starts off with some form of base of operations. This place is almost invariably tied to the scholar’s profession and is usually a university, museum, or similar institution of culture or knowledge. The scholar may draw upon this place for resources (within reason), but he must also pay it the respects he would any other place of employment. Adventuring scholars who

abuse their role may have it revoked (at the DM's discretion). This starting point is usually the beneficiary of most of the scholar's studies and trophies from the field. Although scholars may be sponsored by a wealthy benefactor, they may not sponsor themselves, even though they may bear the wealth to do so.

Along with this base of operations also comes a Scholarly Reputation score. This score is measured in ranks, just as a skill, and may be added as a circumstance bonus to Charisma based rolls (such as Diplomacy skill rolls or attempts to influence NPC attitudes [Table 1-2 below]; it does not influence extraordinary, supernatural, or spell-like abilities) to influence fellow scholars, students, aristocrats, and other educated individuals who would be aware of the scholar's work and importance to the scholarly community. The base modifier for this ability is equal to the adventuring scholar's competence bonus as a specialist, scholar, or master of his field (+2, +4, or +6 respectively), though it may be raised by penning scholarly tomes (see below).

**Against All Odds (Ex):** Adventuring scholars are known for many things, but their luck is legendary. An adventuring scholar gains a luck bonus that applies to all saving throws (see chart on Table 1-1). It grows as the adventuring scholar increases in level, though the bonuses are not cumulative (at 3rd level it is +1, at 7th level it is +3, etc.).

**Exotic Weapon:** In their travels, adventuring scholars are known to pick up all sorts of unusual knowledge and abilities. At 2nd level they gain a free exotic weapon feat. Choice of weapons varies greatly, although versatile and clever weapons are the most favored.

**Bonus Languages:** In their immense amount of study, adventuring scholars pick up many languages. They gain a bonus language at levels 3, 6, and 9.

**Adventurer's Zeal (Ex):** At 3rd level the adventuring scholar gains the adventurer's zeal, a thirst for adventure that pushes him beyond his normal limits through sheer bravery. He may now add his Charisma bonus to his armor class. This bonus represents a preternatural level of courage and

	Currently	Neutral	Friend	Confidant	Ally
Antagonist		30	40	50	60
Neutral		20	30	40	50
Friend		-	-	30	40
Confidant		-	-	-	30

occasional wanton abandon. This bonus applies even when wearing armor, as well as when flat-footed. It does not apply if the scholar is immobilized.

**Easy Allies (Ex):** Adventuring scholars are also well known for their ability to find old or make new allies just about anywhere. In any populated location, the scholar may make a Gather Information roll to see if he can locate an existing ally or create a new one. Use the Easy Allies table (1-2) below to determine the DC of the roll; first find where the NPC (either the individual being affected or the general level of the local populace) falls in the "Currently" column, then roll. The scholar may add his Gather Information ranks, as well as a +5 competence bonus, to the roll (in addition to the CHA bonus). Look across the line to find the highest DC beaten by the roll. The most positive attitude level achieved with the roll is the type of ally found, but at this level the "Ally" column is ignored (a Confidant is the highest that may be achieved). This relationship usually only lasts the duration of a particular scene or act of an adventure, although if roleplayed properly it may last longer. DMs are encouraged to mind the limits to which NPCs will be willing to go to help people; a Friend, for example, wouldn't be willing to take a fall for a PC, while an Ally most definitely would.

This roll may only be made once per location, per visit, and it may not be used more than once on the same NPC (and may only be used on a particular NPC at the DM's discretion; against many it won't be applicable). The scholar may not take 10 or 20 on this roll. It is up to the DM whether the ally found is an existing acquaintance who happened to be in the same area, or if it is a new ally altogether.

At 8th level the adventuring scholar's ability to find allies increases. Use the same chart as before (Table 1-2), but this time successes in the "Ally" column are not ignored. Success in this column indicates

that the scholar has made a lasting ally that will continue to help the character well beyond the current adventure. Furthermore, the scholar may increase the competence bonus to +10. The same restrictions apply.

**Pen Scholarly Work:** At 7th level the adventuring scholar may attempt to increase his Scholarly Reputation ranks (see Base of Operations above) by writing scholarly texts. To write a text the scholar must invest a great deal of time into research, study, writing, and revising. The length of time depends on the complexity and depth intended to be covered by the text; this also determines the DC to create the text.

Consult the following chart and make a Knowledge roll. The scholar absolutely must have the specific Knowledge skill relating to the subject of the intended text. If this text is within his field of study, then his field competence bonus applies to the roll as well. No synergy bonuses apply, and 10 or 20 may not be taken. The roll is made at the end of the period of work, and failure indicates a waste of time (the work is incomplete, inconsistent, or just plain wrong in some way), although the scholar may attempt the work again with a +5 competence bonus due to the previous research (no shorter time, though). Additional adventuring and work may be done during this work period, but only very briefly; the scholarly work must be the main focus during this time.

Level of Tome indicates the level of the knowledge put into the work.

Tome Bonus indicates the bonus that the tome will bear once the work is finished.

DC indicates the difficulty class of the die roll, and Length of Time indicates how much time must be spent in the creation attempt.

Reputation Bonus indicates the bonus to the adventuring scholar's Scholarly Reputation once the work is completed, and Maximum indicates the maximum number of times this bonus may be applied to the scholar's score. A scholar may create tomes beyond this maximum, but he no longer gains any bonus to his Scholarly Reputation score.

Level of Tomb	Tomb Bonus	DC	Length of Time	Reputation Bonus	Maximum
Basic	+1	20	2 months	+1/2	12 works
Advanced	+2	26	6 months	+1	8 works
Master	+3	31	1 year	+3	5 works
Grand Master	+4	37	3 years	+5	3 works
Legendary	+5	42	10 years	+10	1 work

## NEW SKILLS AND FEATS

This Open Game Content is a short preview of the new material in the forthcoming *Monsternomicon* from Privateer Press. The final product will have more feats, detailed rules for creature research, and a guide to creating mystic tomes of creature lore.

### Creature Lore

(INT; TRAINED ONLY)

**Check:** With the use of Creature Lore you can research the tales surrounding creatures. In doing so you can try to discern the truths evident in the legends and lore surrounding specific beasts. Using this skill you can perform monster research, attempting to uncover obscure facts. The DC of research depends on how uncommon the information is:

- Common (10-14)
- Uncommon (15-19)
- Rare (20-29)
- Obscure (30+)

The more unique a creature is, the harder it is to find out specific lore about that creature. If information about a specific creature is unusually rare the DM may modify the difficulty of the legends and lore check. A good guideline is to take the CR of a creature and add it to the DC of the check.

The more obscure the lore, the longer it takes to uncover. Rare and obscure lore—true names and the like—can even take months of research before the roll can be made. If tomes of monster lore are employed in the research, each +1 of tome bonus applied requires one additional week of study. (If two tomes overlap, only the tome with the highest bonus can be used.) The researcher can “take 10” if they wish; they can even “take 20” though in this case the research time is twenty times the base amount.

**Special:** There is a synergy between Creature Lore and some Knowledge skills. A PC with Creature Lore of +4 or more will receive a +2 bonus to a Knowledge check that relates to monster lore. Likewise, a PC that is conducting research with the Creature Lore skill may receive a +2 synergy bonus if they have a relevant Knowledge skill of +4 or greater. Only one synergy bonus may be applied to any skill check.

**Note:** This is a class skill for Wizards and Bards. All other classes may learn this as a cross class skill.

You have managed to discover the secrets of myth and legend and have deciphered them into concrete knowledge. For every 4 points of the Creature Lore skill you may gain common, uncommon, and rare legends and lore on two specific creatures from a specific creature category (i.e. Giants, Fey, Undead, Outsiders, etc.). As your skill increases so does your knowledge, every time your Creature Lore skill increases by 4 points you gain insight on two more creatures of that type.

This feat is based on specific creature type. For instance *Unearthed Arcana* (Undead) gives you knowledge of creatures of the undead type. If you want to learn about gooey Aberrations you would need to take the feat a second time, as *Unearthed Arcana* (Aberrations). There are two exceptions to this: Humanoids and Monstrous Humanoids are “bundled” together, as are Beasts and Magical Beasts.

**Special:** You may not learn the legends and lore of a creature with a CR that

exceeds your base Creature Lore skill.

### Sagas and Stories [General]

Prerequisites: None

You’ve done a lot of reading and study on the myths about a specific creature type—so much so that you automatically gain common knowledge on any creature of that type when it is described to you. When researching a monster of that specific type your legends and lore check takes half of the regular time.

**Special:** This feat may only be taken once for every creature type as they are described in core rulebook III. For instance you may only take *Sagas and Stories* (Undead) once. If you purchase *Sagas and Stories* again you must take it for a different creature type, for instance *Sagas and Stories* (Aberrations). There are two exceptions to this: Humanoids and Monstrous Humanoids are “bundled” together, as are Beasts and Magical Beasts.



## The Short Straw

(c) Adrian Czajkowski 2001



### Unearthed Arcana [General]

Prerequisites: Creature Lore +4





# Ley Line Magus

By Ryan Nock

Illustration By J.L. Jones

*Ley:* Variant of *Lea*, “grassland or meadow.”

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Just below the surface of the world run rivers of magic, veins of power that a skilled and knowledgeable spellcaster can tap to empower his spells. Such rivers, called ley lines because they most often rise to the surface on fields or meadows, continually move in erratic fashions, and so are useless and unreachable in normal situations.

Some magic-users, however, learn the difficult talent of binding and tapping ley lines, utilizing the world’s natural powers for their magic, rather than trying to develop their own. A Ley Line Magus can bind a given ley line to the surface, creating a ley font that channels magical energy through his feet and into his magic. Once bound, however, the Ley Line Magus cannot move from that spot without freeing the ley font from its bondage. Ley Line Magi thus have great power, but at the expense of mobility.

**Hit Die:** d4.

## Requirements

**Skills:** Knowledge (Arcana) 8 ranks, Scr: 8 ranks.

**Feats:** Skill Focus (Knowledge (arcana)), or one of the following metamagic feats—Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Heighten Spell, Maximize Spell.

**Spellcasting:** Ability to cast spells of 3rd level or higher, plus the ability to cast detect magic.

**Other:** Must spend at least one month researching ley lines, either through scholarship or in the field.

## Class Skills

The Ley Line Magus’s class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Profession (Wis), Scry (Int, exclusive skill), and Spellcraft (Int). See Chapter 4: Skills in the Player’s Handbook for skill descriptions.

## Class Features

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** A Ley Line Magus gains no additional proficiency in any weapon or armor.

**Spells Per Day:** For the purposes of determining spells per day, caster level, and (for spontaneous spellcasters) spells known, whenever a level as Ley Line Magus grants the ability “+1 level of existing class,” the character adds 1 effective level to one of his previous spellcasting classes.

**Tap the Ley Font (Su):** The primary ability of the Ley Line Magus allows him to locate ley line fonts and tap into their flow of magical energies. Because ley lines flow most easily in areas of relatively clear terrain, and flow most strongly in areas lush with life, a Ley Line Magus can quickly find a font in a grassland or field, but other types of terrain take longer.

Ley line fonts are powerful, yet subtle enough that those without proper training cannot easily detect them. To locate a ley line font, the Ley Line Magus casts detect magic, then concentrates slightly, moving slowly to find the exact spot of the font. While concentrating, the Magus moves 5 feet per round, testing the strength of the connection in various places on the earth. He may even backtrack, discovering that a previous location was better for his connection, but he must spend several rounds becoming attuned to the local web of ley lines.

Depending on the terrain and vegetation, the process of attuning can take shorter or longer. While becoming attuned, the Ley Line Magus can take no action other than concentrating and moving 5 feet per round. If he cannot move (such as if he’s bound, or if he chooses not to move through dangerous local terrain) he cannot attune. Additionally, he must be in contact with the ground, and thus cannot attune if flying or swimming.

Attunement takes 2 rounds in relatively flat, verdant areas like fields of grasslands. In areas of lush vegetation but heavy brush to block ley energy, like forests, swamps, or coral reefs, locating the spot of attunement takes 4 rounds. In areas of flat terrain that has scarce life, like deserts or tundra, attunement takes 6 rounds, and in areas both lifeless and uneven, like mountains or caverns, attunement takes 8 rounds.

Once the Ley Line Magus has attuned himself to the local energies, he must remain in the same spot, not moving outside his own 5-foot square. If he does so, he ruins his connection and must start over. Otherwise, maintaining the connection requires no conscious effort, allowing the Ley Line Magus to take whatever actions he wishes, as long as they don’t involve him moving from the same general spot on the ground.

If at any time during attunement or while connected to the ley font, if the Ley Line Magus takes damage, he must succeed a Concentration check (DC 10 + damage dealt) or lose the connection and have to start over again. The process of attunement temporarily binds the ley line so it will not move, but once the connection is broken the font disappears, forcing the spellcaster to locate a new font.

**Draw upon Ley Magic (Su):** While attuned to a ley font, the character gains several advantages.

Primarily, the Ley Line Magus’s caster level is increased by 2 for every level of this class, instead how much each level normally increases it. For example, a Wizard 5/Ley Line Magus 2 casts as a 6th level wizard in most instances, but casts his spells with a caster level of 9 while attuned to a ley font. Notice that even though a 2nd level of Magus adds 1 to his caster level normally, it adds a total of 2 to his caster level while attuned for that level, not 3.

Additionally, the Ley Line Magus can draw energy from the ley font to empower his spells, instead of using his own. If he concentrates constantly, he can draw one level of magic per minute and use this

magical energy to power his own spells. He can draw no more than two levels of magic per level of this class, and must use any drawn levels on the next spell he casts. He cannot store drawn levels for longer than the casting of one spell, but he can hold onto the drawn energies and wait to cast his first spell.

The Ley Line Magus can use these drawn levels to adjust his spells with metamagic feats, without actually having to raise the spells' levels. He must have the appropriate feats to adjust his spells.

For example, Gregory (a Wizard 5/Ley Line Magus 1) casts all his spells as though a 7th level wizard while connected to a ley font. If he spends two minutes concentrating, he can draw two extra levels of spell power. Then, on the next spell he casts, he could adjust it with the Empower Spell feat (which normally increases the spell level by 2) without having to use a higher level spell slot. He could choose to draw the ley energy, then wait as long as needed until a target came into range. He could not, however, cast other spells while holding the extra spell energy in reserve. He could cast an empowered fireball, even though he doesn't have the 5th level spell slots he'd normally need.

If using the Heighten Spell metamagic feat, no spell's level can be increased beyond 9th. Otherwise, the Magus can still use metamagic feats on any spell, even if doing so would normally increase it beyond 9th level.

**Ley Line Scrying (Sp):** At 2nd level, the Ley Line Magus gains the ability to cast scrying a number of times per day equal to his class level, but only while attuned to a ley font.

Additionally, while attuned to a ley font, the Ley Line Magus can search for other nearby ley lines and fonts. Doing so takes one full round on concentration and uses up one of the usages of the scrying spell (as noted above). The Magus then chooses any 5-foot square within 100 feet per class level. Thereafter, he maintains a partial bond to the ley line for one minute per class level. If he moves to the chosen 5-foot square, he can bond to the ley line as a free action, rather than the normal amount of time.

For example, Gregory (a Wizard 5/Ley Line Magus 2) is using his attack spells against an enemy army on a rugged, sandy

plain. Since he is surrounded by opponents, he decides he wants to get to a safer location but still continue the fight. He concentrates for one full round (using up one of his two castings of scrying for the day), and chooses a spot that is currently guarded by allied warriors. He then casts fly and flies to the chosen location, from which he can safely continue to fight his opponents without having to spend the time to manually locate a new ley font.

**Channel Forces (Su):** At 3rd level, the Ley Line Magus gains the ability to channel magic he gains through the Tap the Ley Font ability into other nearby spellcasters. While concentrating to draw spell energy from a ley font, the Magus can designate any other spellcaster within 5 feet to be the recipient of the energy he is drawing. The other spellcaster must stay within 5 feet of the Ley Line Magus, or else he loses any extra spell energy. The Ley Line Magus can still draw no more than twice his class level in extra levels of spell energy at any one time, but he can allow another spellcaster to utilize the magic he draws.

If the adjacent spellcaster is also a Ley Line Magus, he can then channel the energy he receives into another spellcaster within 5 feet of him. Thus a chain could potentially be made to let a distant spellcaster empower his spells. Additionally, the total limit of extra spell levels that can be drawn is the sum of the limits of all Ley Line Magi united at one ley font.

For example, Gregory (a Wizard 5/Ley Line Magus 3) attunes to a ley font. His master (a Wizard 15) stands beside Gregory and lets the Ley Line Magus channel ley energy into him. Gregory spends 6 minutes and channels his maximum of 6 spell levels into his master. Either he or his master can then cast any spell with up to 6 levels of metamagic for free. Gregory cannot channel any more spell energy until either he or his master uses up the current energy.

If four spellcasters (all Wizard 5/Ley Line Magus 3) were united at one ley font, they could, over the course of 24 minutes, draw 24 effective spell levels to utilize in empowering a spell. These extra spell levels could only be used in the casting of one spell, however, and thus would likely go to waste.

**Bind Ley Point (Su):** One of the greatest drawbacks of ley line magic is the difficulty of finding a ley font quickly. Powerful

Ley Line Magi often prepare their homes or sanctums with permanently bonded ley fonts, so they can instantly access the ley energy.

Ley Line Magi of 4th level or higher gains the ability to create a permanent ley font, which allows any spellcaster to attune to the font as a full round action as detailed above in Ley Line Fonts and Currents. Doing so involves a 28-day-long ritual and requires various expensive incenses, oils, and other materials costing 14,000 gold pieces and 1120 XP. After the ritual is performed, one designated 5-foot square becomes a permanent ley font.

**The Fountain of the Self (Su):** Master Ley Line Magi learn how to adapt ley energy into new spells, rather than simply empowering existing spells. A 5th level Ley Line Magus can use drawn spell energy to cast any spell he knows. After drawing energy, the magus uses spell levels at a two for one ratio to cast any spell he knows. Doing so does not use up any prepare spells or spell slots. Additionally, any metamagic alteration to the spell must also be paid for in a two for one ratio because the magus is not simply altering one of his own spells, but rather casting it directly from the ley.

For example, Gregory (a Wizard 5/Ley Line Magus 5) can draw up to 10 levels of spell energy, allowing him to use ley energy to cast any spell he knows up to 5th level using pure ley energy. Doing so, however, would take 10 minutes plus the spell's normal casting time. If Gregory formed a link with several other Ley Line Magi (using the Channel Forces ability) and managed to draw 30 levels of spell energy with their help, he could cast a 5th level spell with up to 10 levels of metamagic affecting it. He could only cast spells he knew, and only use metamagic effects he knew.

If, rather, a powerful Wizard 15/Ley Line Magus 5 were working with other Ley Line Magi and managed to draw 30 levels of spell energy, he could cast a 9th level spell with up to 6 levels of metamagic, but doing so would take at least half an hour and require at least two more Magi.

A group of Ley Line Magi can be incredibly powerful if given enough time. Of course, rarely would the opponents of powerful magi give them the time to become a threat.



Class Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1st	+0	+0	+0	+2	Tap the Ley Font, Draw upon Ley Magic	
2nd	+1	+0	+0	+3	Ley Line Scrying	+1 level of existing class
3rd	+1	+1	+1	+3	Channel Forces	
4th	+2	+1	+1	+4	Bind Ley Font	+1 level of existing class
5th	+2	+1	+1	+4	The Fountain of the Self	



# The Quasimancer

By Michael A. Semanko

Illustration By J Ryan Machan

The path to becoming a lich is a painful and dangerous one. A powerful and corrosive poison must be drank during the transformation. Those who survive the process are freed from the confines of life in order to continue their magical research for all eternity. Those whose powers are too weak to complete the full transformation to a lich are consumed by the poison they must drink. These haunted souls become quasimancers. While a lich is free to learn new magic and grow ever more powerful, a quasimancer finds himself unable to advance along the path of magic at all. The ability to learn higher levels of magic is forever lost to them. This eternal curse enrages a quasimancer more than anything.

Quasimancers are composed of the deepest shadows, and for this reason they are often known to work with shadows to complete their goals. Their bodies can flow through material objects with ease. Unlike a lich, quasimancers do not possess a phylactery, and if their incorporeal spirit is killed, they are forever destroyed.

Quasimancers speak Common plus any other languages they knew in life.

## Creating a Quasimancer

“Quasimancer” is a template that can be added to any humanoid creature (referred

to hereafter as the character). The character’s type changes to “undead.” It uses all of the characters statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

**Hit Dice:** Increase to d12

**Speed:** Same base creature

**AC:** The quasimancer has a deflection bonus equal to its Charisma modifier or +1 whichever is higher.

**Damage:** A quasimancer has an incorporeal touch attack that uses negative energy to deal 1d6+3 damage on a successful strike; a Will save with DC 10+1/2 quasimancer’s HD + quasimancers Charisma modifier reduces the damage by half.

**Special Attacks:** A quasimancer retains all of the character’s special attacks that do not require a touch attack. The quasimancer also gains a aura of coldness, described below.

**Cold Aura (Su):** The area around a quasimancer is exceptionally cold. Those within a 30-foot radius take 1 point of subdual damage from the cold per round unless they are magically protected.

**Spells:** A quasimancer can cast any spells it could cast while alive.

**Special Qualities:** A quasimancer retains all the characters special qualities and those listed below, and also gains the undead type.

**Turn Resistance (Ex):** A quasimancer has +2 turn resistance.

**Incorporeal (Su):** See page 77 of the Monster Manual.

**Immunities (Ex):** Quasimancers are immune to cold, electricity, polymorph, and mind-influencing attacks.

**Saves:** Same base creature.

**Abilities:** A quasimancer gains +2 to Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma, but being undead has no Constitution score.

**Skills:** Quasimancers receive a +8 racial bonus to Hide, Listen, and Move Silently checks.

**Feats:** Same as base creature.

**Climate/Terrain:** Any land and underground.

**Organization:** Solitary or troupe (1 quasimancer, plus 2-4 shadows)

**Challenge Rating:** Same as base creature+1

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Any evil

**Advancement:** By character class (no arcane spell caster class allowed)

## Quasimancer Characters

A quasimancer can never advance as an arcane spellcaster, thus they often become fighters, rogues, or more likely clerics. The quasimancer retains all of the class abilities it had in life except those which require touch.

## Sample Quasimancer

This sample quasimancer was a 5th level wizard in life.

### Quasimancer

**Medium-Size Undead**

**Hit Dice:** 5d12+3 (35 hp)

**Initiative:** +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Init.)

**Speed:** 30ft.

**AC:** 11

**Attacks:** Touch +2 melee

**Damage:** Touch 1d6+3

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Cold aura, spells

**Special Qualities:** Undead, +2 turn resistance, immunities

**Saves:** Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6

**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 14, Con --, Int 18,

Wis 14, Cha 10.

**Skills:** Alchemy +12, Concentration +11,

Spellcraft +12, Knowledge(arcana) +12,

Hide +10, Listen +10, Move Silently +10.

**Feats:** Scribe Scroll, Toughness, Combat

Casting, Brew Potion, Improved Initiative.

**Climate/Terrain:** Any land and underground

**Organization:** Solitary

**Challenge Rating:** 6

**Treasure:** None.

**Alignment:** Neutral evil

**Advancement:** By character class (no arcane spell caster class allowed)





# The Yeoman

By Jagged Edge Games

*Kell looked over her shoulder. Everything was quiet and calm, just as she liked it. She scanned over the small village looking for her target. The Sheriff gave her a description, but to be honest, she had always felt like every Daermin looked alike as far as she was concerned.*

*Then she saw him. He was tall, dark, and solid. He had silver-gray hair tied back in a ponytail. His fine longsword dangling at his side. He had that look like he was definitely one that could kill in cold blood. And this one killed the wrong person.*

*She took a deep breath and locked her eyes on the man. Her breathing slowed as she notched her arrow. In her mind, she talked with herself, trying to get everything in rhythm. As she concentrated, she felt the details of his features coming into focus. Even at this range -- nearly 200 feet -- she could see the lines under his violet-colored eyes. She could see the maniacal look in his smile. Time seemed to stop.*

*Then, after what seemed like forever, she let her arrow loose; without loosing her eye-lock on her target, she reached behind her back, grabbed a new arrow, notched and let it fly; then another; then another. About the time she let the third one fly, the first one was hitting Farihk Thron's left shoulder. The second one hit him in the chest. The third caught him in the stomach. The fourth arrow slapped him squarely between his eyes -- Kell's calling card shot. Everyone in the village was so busy running about trying to get cover that Kell was able to slip easily away without being noticed or trailed.*

*Farihk Thron was dead. Granted, he was not going to killing another son of a Crown Prince, but Kell knew that his elder brother Gomas was not the forgiving type. It didn't matter that Sheriff Aoyinis gave the order. It was Kell's arrow. She would need to lay low for a while.*

## Description

The Yeoman is a dedicated Master Archer that has managed to take her craft to the point of being an art form. Unlike the Arcane Archers, these masters of archery are not relying on magic to do what they do. They rely on patience and skill. Also, these masters are often taken from the ranks of Rangers and used as woodsman snipers.

The Yeoman trains to use the bow as an extension of the self. There is a spiritual side to the class, but it is a spiritualism of self-awareness. In other words, they follow a path of ideology and self-control rather than a path of theology and dogma. They tend to be rather passive people, and will not kill out of anger -- as this interferes with the effectiveness of their craft.

### Hit Die Type: d6

Note: The Yeoman is a martial profession, but their skills do not tend to be honed in direct face-to-face conflict. Thus, they do gain some respectable Hit Points, but not excessive amounts of them. At heart, they are warriors, but warriors of the spirit and mind instead of the body.

## Requirements

**Proficiencies:** One or more of the standard bows (Long bow, Short Bow, Composite Long bow or Composite Short Bow)

**Base Attack Bonus:** +8

**Feats:** Point Blank Shot, Far Shot, Precise Shot, and Rapid Shot.

**Skill Ranks:** Concentration (6), Craft (Boyer and/or Fletcher, 6)

## Class Skills

Their class skills (and the associated abilities) are: Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Listen (Wis), Search (Int), Spot (Wis)

The Yeoman receives 2+INT bonus skill points each level.

## Class Features

**Armor:** A Yeoman cannot wear armor heavier than medium and still use the Yeoman abilities Focused Shot or Pinpoint Shot. No additional weapons or armor proficiencies are granted.

**Breath Control:** The Yeoman, early in her career, learns that much of the mastery of the bow deals with the control of one's breathing and heartbeat; timing such things so that the control of the arrow is at its best. At first level, the Yeoman gains the ability to control her breathing. By taking a full round action, the yeoman may attempt a DC 25 Concentration check. If successful, the Yeoman may add her Wis bonus to all to-hit and damage rolls with her bow for the next 10 combat rounds (one minute). Failure will cause no ill effects, but it will take a full minute for the Yeoman to clear her mind before she may attempt this ability again.

**Focused Shot:** Sometimes timing is everything. At second level and higher, the Yeoman can focus on a target to improve her aim. By taking a full round action to aim on her target, the Yeoman receives a Focused Shot bonus equal to her level on the To-Hit roll for the first shot fired at that target in the following round.

**Eagle Eye:** At third level, the Yeoman has studied the bow to the point of knowing how to get the most out of the weapon. The range increment is increased by 25% (round up to the nearest 5 ft.) and the point blank range is increased by 10 ft. This bonus gets larger at fifth, seventh and ninth levels. The effective ranges for the standard bows (including the prerequisite Far Shot feat for the class) thus becomes:

Class Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+2	+0	Breath Control
2	+1	+0	+3	+0	Focused Shot
3	+2	+1	+3	+1	Eagle Eye I
4	+3	+1	+4	+1	Inner Harmony, Pinpoint Shot I
5	+3	+1	+4	+1	Eagle Eye II
6	+4	+2	+5	+2	Pinpoint Shot II
7	+5	+2	+5	+2	Eagle Eye III, Inner Peace
8	+6	+2	+6	+2	Pinpoint Shot III
9	+6	+3	+6	+3	Eagle Eye IV
10	+7	+3	+7	+3	Total Peace. Pinpoint Shot IV

Pinpoint Shot	Point Blank	1 x Range	2 x Range	Over 2 x Range
None	-	-	-	-
I	+1d6	-	-	-
II	+2d6	+1d6	-	-
III	+3d6	+2d6	+1d6	-
IV	+4d6	+3d6	+2d6	+1d6

\* +FS: All Yeoman must have the Far Shot feat -- thus, we include that information on this chart.

**Inner Harmony:** At fourth level, the Yeoman has gained extreme control over their breathing and heart rates. This results in a +2 bonus to the skill Concentration. Additionally, the Yeoman receives a +2 bonus to all saves against gasses and can hold her breath +50% longer than normal. Breath Control and Focused Shots no longer require a full round actions, but instead become normal (standard) actions.

**Pinpoint Shot:** At fourth level, the Yeoman has gained a much greater level of control over the arrows that she lets fly. This results in the effects of the focused shot bonus now applying to all arrows let loose in the round following the focus (as opposed to only the first arrow) as well as the ability to deal additional damage with the placement of the arrow. Focused shots fired by the Yeoman add the Pinpoint

Shot bonus to the damage rolled. The exact amount of bonus damage from the pinpoint shot depends on two things: the level of the Yeoman (Pinpoint Shot improves at sixth, eighth and tenth levels) and the range to the target. The Chart below gives the exact amounts of bonus damage that is to be added.

**Inner Peace:** At seventh level, the yeoman has begun the road to true mastery. Breath control and Focused Shot no longer require standard actions, but become move equivalent actions. The Yeoman receives another +2 bonus to concentration and to all saves against gasses (total bonus +4). The Yeoman can also hold her breath another 50% longer

(total bonus +100%).

**Total Peace:** At tenth level, the Yeoman has achieved a level of peace, harmony and body control that far surpasses that of the earlier levels. Control over breathing and heart rates is almost completely voluntary. The Yeoman receives an additional +2 bonus on the skill Concentration and to all saves against gasses (for a total bonus of +6); additionally, she may add her WIS bonus to all saves. The effects of Breath Control are considered 'always on' and Focused Shot becomes a Free Action.



Eagle Eye	Point Blank	Short Bow	Range Increments		
			Comp. Short Bow	Long Bow	Comp. Long Bow
None	30	60	70	100	110
+FS *	30	90	105	150	165
I	40	105	125	175	195
II	50	120	140	200	220
III	60	135	160	225	250
IV	70	150	175	250	275

# The Sceptic

An Interview with  
John Wick

John Wick is an award-winning author and game designer. Best known for his work on *Legend of the Five Rings* and *7th Sea* for AEG, John has also written for *Shadis* magazine and other publications, both print and online. Wicked Press is John's (relatively new) d20 publishing company, and can be reached at <http://www.wickedpress.com>.

**How do you reconcile your publicized distaste for the d20 system with your desire to write for it?**

"Distaste" is a really strong word. I think "mystified" might be better. D20 is no different than any other generic task resolution systems out there, nor is it worse. It just "is." Some people like it, some people hate it, some people have no opinion at all. My rant on *Gaming Outpost* had more to do with people's reactions to D20 than the system itself.

I thought the rant was rather funny, myself. I thought shouting in all caps "YOU BOUGHT AN 800 PAGE RULEBOOK YOU SUCKERS!!!" would be taken as it was meant to be taken: as a passionate reaction about the not-so-incredible reception of D&D3. I knew it was going to sell hundreds of thousands of copies. I knew people would flock to the OGL. I knew all of that was going to happen. It didn't stop the emotions from bubbling deep inside. There are some really great games out there. Really powerful games that most people never see because all they play is D&D.

For example, there's a great fantasy game coming out from Hogshead Publishing called *Bloodlust*. The premise is simple: You play *Stormbringer*. Not *Elric*, but *Stormbringer*. An eternal, magical weapon who goes through wielders like *Hit Points*. If you aren't familiar with *Elric* and *Stormbringer*, imagine playing *Lord of the Rings* as the *One Ring*. Not *Frodo* or *Bilbo*, but the *One Ring*. Intelligent, resourceful and powerful, you control the fates of mortals. Damn, that's hip. That falls right into the "I wish I thought of that" category. You build grudges and vendettas against other weapons and play in centuries-long campaigns. It's brilliant! But there's a whole category of gamers who will never even look at that game because it isn't D20 compatible.

And that fact burns me up inside. People turn their noses at any other game because it isn't their favorite game. It really chaffs my hide.

Also, most of the people who reacted so negatively to that article had never read anything else I wrote in the *Game Designer's Journal*. I spent a year making an analogy between games and religions. Every gaming group has their favorite system, a game that works best for them. Some people belong to the Cult of D&D, others to the Cult of Vampire. Some, like myself, are omnithiests (we can never have too many messiahs) and play a whole wide spectrum of games. D&D players, I said, shouldn't go trashing Vampire, just as Vampire players shouldn't go trashing D&D players. They're all having fun, and that's what counts. If you're getting along with your set of *Champions* rules, who am I to come in and say, "That game is crap!" I'm rude, that's what I am. People play games to have fun. Yelling at each other about which game is better than the other isn't fun, it's rude.

People who read the column regularly knew that. They knew the "SUUCKERS!" exclamation was a cry of frustration, not criticism. I have never – and I mean NEVER – told anyone not to play a game because it was crap. The most criticism I've ever given a game has been "That's not for me," and that's it.

Unfortunately, a lot of people got linked to that column without ever reading anything else I've ever written. In fact, most of them never even heard of me before. "Who is this John Wick guy and who the hell does he think he is?"

All I am is a gamer. I like some games, I don't like others. Some are my favorites. D&D is not one of my favorite games, but that doesn't mean I hate it. I think it does exactly what it's supposed to do, which is more than what some games can claim.

However...

I have to stand behind one claim I made. There is nothing unique, different or special about D&D3. Every "innovation" was made by another game. Every neat dice trick has already been done. D&D3 would have been an amazing, breathtaking and revolutionary game... in 1985.

That doesn't mean it's a bad game. It doesn't make it a great game, either. In the end, it's just a game. Just like Vampire, Cthulhu, GURPS, BESM, *7th Sea*, L5R or any other game. It makes some gamers happy, makes some gamers mad and makes other gamers shrug. And that's how it ought to be.

(Whew! Now, what was that second part? Oh, yeah. Why is Wicked Press publishing D20 stuff. Right...)

The reason Wicked Press is publishing D20 adventures is very simple. Hopefully, people will like WHAT'S THAT SMELL? and WHO KILLED LORD DAVENPORT? and

they'll take a look at the company name or the guy who wrote it and ask: "Gee. This was pretty good. I wonder what else he's published?"

**Does you feel like you have burned any bridges with the d20 fan base?**

What I said about D20 was honest. Some people admired it, some people hated it, some people shrugged (we've got a theme going on here). If you don't want to buy a Wicked Press product because of me, that's your right. If you were offended by what I said, that's your choice. If someone chose not to buy my products because of what I said, I really can't hold it against them or take it personally. That'd be pretty small. I actually respect people for being picky about what they purchase, even if it is my products. At least that shows me they're looking at the credits instead of shelling out cash because it has the D20 logo on it. I guess what I'm saying is I'd much rather be honest with my emotions and opinions than be "polite."

Although, as a quick aside, I think it's rather funny that I get chided for being honest about an 800 page rulebook while other people get praised for writing scathing reviews of games like L5R and Vampire because they're 800 page books about setting. I read that review of *Synnibar* and many people's reactions to it at Eric Noah's site. They throw spit balls at me because I bad mouthed D&D but get on their feet and cheer someone else for doing the same thing with someone else's product.

Interesting...

3) What genres, if any, are you excited to adapt to a d20 rules set?

I'm really not interested in adapting any settings. I mean, isn't the whole point of D20 adapting your own setting to the rules? Isn't that what everybody's screaming about on all the boards, that they don't want settings, but rules?

I guess that's why all those setting books fly off the shelves, right?

(Sorry. I just needed to say that. I'll be good now, I promise.)

The *Wastelands* is the only setting I'm interested in doing for D20 because it was written specifically for D20. I don't see any point in "converting" a setting to a system. That seems a little bass-akwards to me. As far as I'm concerned system should be converted to fit the setting, not the other way around.

**To what extent do you feel that rules are intrinsic to a games character and "soul"? Are rules more important than setting, less important, or equal?**

I think rules and setting are equally important. But more important than that, I think they should be complimentary. They should fit together like a puzzle box. If a specific rule doesn't fit a setting (or the other way around), ditch it.

**If setting is more important than rules, what internal debate would you have to go through before deciding to convert (say) 7th Sea to a d20 rules set?**

D20 is not the God-Emperor of game systems, it's more like a really good chair. You can sit in it, rock in it and fall asleep in it, but you can't really bake a cake with it. As far as I can tell, D20 is good for one thing: Dungeons & Dragons.

That statement has a lot to do with the way publishers are allowed to use D20, mind you. If I publish stuff for D20, I pretty much have to use the game as it's given to me. I can't drop alignments, classes or hit points. That's pretty limiting when you think about it. It's fine for a D&D style product, but try doing a modern game with D20. You need a whole new brand of character classes (which you can't create) and the alignments really don't work.

(Of course, I have a fundamental problem with the alignment system. I studied philosophy in college, with a focus on ethics, and the whole system really starts breaking down once you take a good look at it.)

7th Sea wouldn't work as a D20 game for those reasons. The limits placed on how publishers can use the D20 system makes it next to impossible to "translate" characters without losing much of what the 7th Sea system gives them. For example, let's try translating a Fate Witch from 7th Sea into the D20 system.

To begin with, the sorcery Fate Witches use doesn't really translate at all to the D20 System; you'd have to create an entirely different magic system in order for them to pull off what they do. For those of you not familiar with Fate Witches of 7th Sea, I'll give a brief explanation.

In 7th Sea, Fate Witches are a lot like sorcerers; they don't "learn" magic, they're born with it. The land of Vodacce (where Fate Witches come from) is incredibly misogynistic, forcing women who are born with Sorte (Fate Magic) into a kind of slavery. No witch is ever allowed to learn how to read and write. They're only told what they need to know to use their magic – at their husband's demand, of course.

Witches see "fate strands" between every living creature, and they fall into four categories: Passion, Conflict, Commerce and Authority. These strands create elaborate webs between people. Looking at one person shows a multitude of strands of all

different colors going out and coming in. At first, a witch learns to see the strands and identify the kind of strand, its strength and other properties. This allows a witch to look at a married couple and see the two share a very strong Commerce strand, a freying Passion strand and a powerful Authority strand. However, she also sees a blossoming Passion strand between the wife and the husband's bodyguard. No secret is safe from a fate witch.

Next, fate witches learn to "twist" strands, which allows her to make strands stronger or weaker. This means she can twist the Passion strand between that wife and her husband's bodyguard, thus making their affair more potent. She can also twist the Authority strand between the husband, weakening his hold over her.

Finally, fate witches can create and destroy strands. She can create a Commerce strand between the wife and her lover or destroy the Passion strand between the husband and the wife completely.

The trick with using fate magic is the witch isn't ever certain what her meddling will do. She knows how to twist the strands, but fate is such a powerful force, she can't directly influence what her actions accomplish. She can make new strands and break existing ones, but there's no telling what that will do. And, because she's gotten involved with the married couple, whether she likes it or not, she's just created a Conflict strand between herself and them.

Finally, fate witches can give curses. Imagine a dark room, lit by a single candle. A man sits alone in the room, crying into a cup of wine. The door bursts open and three burly men walk in, all bearing pistols. The lone man screams as he's thrown against the wall, the three bruisers holding his arms and legs. Then, very slowly, a fate witch walks into the room. She wears a black veil over her face (so no man can look directly into her eyes). She steps very close to the crying man and lifts the veil, her hidden beauty revealed just to him.

She cups his face in her hands and looks into his eyes. Her lips part and speak his name three times. Her soft voice is almost drowned out by the man's screams. When she's done, those lips close and she presses them against his own. His screams are muffled for a moment as he falls to the floor. There's no need to hold him anymore. The fate witch pulls her veil back over her face and leaves the room, followed by the three bruisers. The weeping man sits very still for a long time, then returns to the table where one of the bruisers left behind a pistol. The crying man grabs the pistol with trembling fingers and holds it against his head...

A curse from a fate witch (speaking a man's name three times while looking into

his eyes, then delivering the kiss) essentially damns its recipient. In game terms (remember, 7th Sea is all about rolling lots of 10-sided dice against a Target Number – usually 15), it means you get a whole bunch of "Curse Dice." Essentially, whenever you roll a Curse Die (and you have to roll it until it rolls a 10) subtracts from your total, rather than adding to it.

Fate witches are powerful characters, but their magic is far from the flash-bang kind of magic in the D20 system. Their magic is subtle and uncertain. The player never knows what the outcome will be when she pulls, twists or breaks a strand. It's completely unlike any other magic in the entire D20 system. That means, as a publisher, I'd have to make a new class – Fate Witch – and a new kind of magic for her to use.

Under the rules of the OGL, I can't do that.

Sure, I could make her a "prestige class," but that violates the spirit of the character. Fate witches don't learn any other kind of magic. They don't throw fireballs or see spirits or identify magic items or anything else. They spend their entire lives learning how to use the sorcery they were born with.

So, yes, you could "convert" 7th Sea to D20, but you'd lose a lot of what makes 7th Sea cool. That's because the game system was built to work with the setting. You change how the system works, you change the setting. The reverse is also true.

**What are the chances of 7th Sea being converted to d20?**

I don't know; I'm not on the 7th Sea design team.

**Given the large number of adventures currently available for the d20 system, have you any plans to publish non-adventure material?**

I've got plans, but I'll keep them to myself for right now.

**Where do you draw inspiration from: books; movies; music; RPGs?**

I was walking through a bookstore with Tom Denmark, trying to explain why I really don't enjoy "genre fiction." We walked through the Sci-Fi/Fantasy section, picked up random books and read the first line out loud. Most times, we put the book back down and walked away.

You pick up a copy of Fight Club and read the first line (paraphrased): "Tyler gets me a job as a waiter and the next thing I know, he sticks a gun down my throat and tells me we have to die in order to live forever."

One of Tanith Lee's books starts with the line (paraphrased): "How fast do you have

to run when the Devil's behind you?"

Most genre fiction is about presenting a really cool idea with very little thought put toward the language. The people just don't know how to write. Sure, they have a great idea, but everybody has at least one great idea. Just because you can spell don't make you a writer.

As for music, right now in my CD case I have Rob Zombie, Indigo Girls, Johnny Cash, Rage Against the Machine, Harry Chapin, Chris Isaak, The Darkest of the Hillside Thickets, Jimmy Buffett, Jim Steinman's Bad for Good, Bruce Springsteen, Alanis Morissette, Poe, The Streets of Fire Soundtrack, Meg Davis' Captain Jack & The Mermaid, Janet Jackson and Drain S.T.H.

I think I've really put my money where my mouth is in terms of the RPGs I enjoy. Next year, Wicked Press is publishing at least two games by designers other than myself: Jared Sorensen's Tooth & Claw (Adventure Roleplaying in the Age of Dinosaurs) and Scott Knipe's Wyrd (Adventure Roleplaying in the Age of Vikings). There's a whole new pool of incredibly talented designers out there who are making games that don't just think outside the box, but throw the box out the window.

**Who do you respect most in the industry?**

The consumer who buys products based on who wrote them rather than the brand name.

**Where do you see yourself in five or ten years time? Do you have aspirations beyond RPG design/writing?**

Right now I'm working in the video game industry, which is ten times more wacky than the paper game industry ever was. (And get it straight: video games are a sub-genre of paper games, not the other way around.) I'm working on a novel and a screenplay. Writing for a living (games, movies, books, whatever) is my long term goal. And being a good dad.

**What did you think of the Dungeons & Dragons movie?**

I haven't seen it. Although a friend of mine (Chris Hepler) wrote something along the lines of:

"It amazes me that the director, producer, screenwriter, actors, cameramen, lighting guys, grips, best boys and even caterers never once – not once – cleared their throat and said: "You know, it might not be a good idea to have our chief villain say 'Give me the Rod!'"

**Did you ever watch the Dungeons & Dragons cartoon and if so who was your favourite character, and why?**

The Dungeon Master. That little guy had something up his sleeve. "Oh yes. I can get you home. But first, you must do all these things for me..."

**I loved the "Wasteland" chapters – will you publish the rest of the story or create any RPG stuff for this setting?**

The Wastelands is currently available at my website (<http://www.wickedpress.com/stories>). I'd like to publish a sourcebook, but that's not what fans want, now is it? They don't really want settings, they want rules. You don't really want the maps or the names of places, you just want the rules to play the Last Paladin, right?

(Sorry. I promise I won't do it again.)

I've got plans for The Wastelands. I'm not exactly sure what I'll do with it yet, at least not until it's done. I'm up to chapter five right now (The Girl Who Murdered Death). We'll see where it goes from there.

**What can we expect from the upcoming "Elfworld" book?**

I'm not sure what to expect from Elfworld just yet. I'm pretty monogamous when it comes to game design. I start one thing and all I can think about is that one thing until it's finished. Right now, I'm finishing up Cat: A Storytelling Game of Fancy and Wonder. As soon as that's done, I'm killing Lord Davenport.

I do know what I want Elfworld to do. I want a book that sits on your shelf next to your other books and makes them squirm. I want a book that people have to wear rubber gloves to read. Elfworld is my homage to EVIL. When I'm done writing it, I'll need a bath in Listerine.

**Will there be a "Dwarfworld" book?**

I don't know yet. I have an idea for Dwarfworld, but it really hasn't gelled. The dwarves are my wife's favorite, so she'll probably pester me 'till I do it. But don't hold your breath; I've got tons of things I need to do first.

**Is there a (non-fantasy) genre (or setting) you would really like to explore in an RPG book (sf, horror, crime, pulp, post-apocalyptic, etc.)?**

Writing other people's games is kind of like writing fan fiction. Writing the Amber RPG would be tough for me, because it's not mine. That's why I ended up leaving AEG: nothing felt like mine anymore. Ree (Soesbee) did a great job taking over as "Story Czar" for Legend of the Five Rings and really made it her own. 7th Sea started off belonging to Jennifer and me, but when it was done, it just didn't feel like mine anymore. I spent five years of my life developing ideas that didn't belong to me,

and I wanted something that was mine. I couldn't really do that at AEG, so I left.

In terms of "genre," I've never been a big fan. L5R and 7th Sea really aren't "genre" games. When you play L5R, you can play drama, horror, romance, suspense, or anything else. The samurai are just costumes. I have ideas for other kinds of games, but none of them really fit a "genre." In fact, if you really want to get down to it (here he goes), the whole genre thing is really crap.

Look at Pulp Fiction. What genre is it? Action? How about comedy? Suspense? Romance? Horror? It's got all those elements (I was absolutely terrified during those basement scenes – ice cold water rushed up my spine the first time Sam Jackson delivered the Bible passage). It doesn't fit into any of those categories, so the press created a genre for it: Tarrantino-esque. It's bullshit. Just like the "Drama" section at Blockbuster Video. Everything is drama. Drama isn't a genre, it's a literary term. If something doesn't have drama... well, it's The Crow comic book. Yes, it's a very pretty, very compelling book, but the main character can't be hurt, wounded, slowed down or stopped. There is no doubt he's gonna kill every single last one of those guys.

If there's no conflict ("Will he succeed? Will he fail?"), there's no drama.

Granted, that's not always the point – The Crow comic is a good example of that – but without drama, you don't have a story.

Drama, horror, romance and suspense are not "genres." They are literary terms. But, because we have small-minded people running bookstores, we have to settle for putting books on shelves according to genre rather than... oh, say something that makes sense. Like sorting them by author.

Stephen King's book Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption does not belong in horror. Neither does The Body (otherwise known as Stand By Me) or The Green Mile. Much of Neil Gaiman's fiction has no place in "Fantasy." It's not fantasy. It's fantastic, but it ain't fantasy. Why in the world do we shove Ray Bradbury – America's most gifted author – in the ghetto known as "Science Fiction?" Because he wrote The Martian Chronicles? Crap. Utter crap.

Genre is just another box. Don't think outside the box, throw the damn thing out the window. Don't write a science fiction story or a fantasy story or a horror story. Just write a good story. Let the small-minded people worry about what genre it is.



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# Rogues Of The Bloody Sash

By Darrin Drader

Illustrations by Jay Fletcher

This article contains supplemental material for Gateway: City of Living Waters, which is made available for free from Dark Portal Games, LLC At their web site <http://www.darkportalgames.com>. While this is fully compatible with Gateway and the Lands of Arekoz, this can easily be modified to fit into any fantasy campaign setting.

Within Gateway, few groups are as feared and loathed to the same degree as the Scarlet Sashes. They are a ruthless band of thieves, cut throats, and extortionists who operate almost exclusively from within the district of Scrapper's Row. Their numerous members are constantly out in force, and unlike most established thieves guilds, they have no code of conduct that requires them to behave in a civilized manner or spare innocent lives. They patrol entire neighborhoods, their assaults are often public, and they consider the city guard to be nothing more than an inconvenience. Ultimately; however, the focus of this organization is the desire for wealth to finance long desired revenge.

Although the guild's history dates back 150 years, they only became a force to fear 15 years ago, after the assassin Soros Gristwilven poisoned the previous guild leader Grick Swifthand. Since usurping the position as the leader, Soros has pushed the limits of their activities much farther than many assumed possible in Gateway. The fear of retribution from the city is minimal due to the fact that they normally contain their actions to Scrapper's Row, and because Soros has a great deal of influence over a handful of the powerful nobles.

The Scarlet Sashes have their hands in nearly every illegal pie imaginable. They

rake in the gold through repressing competition in areas they control; distribution of illicit substances; numerous thieves working the streets, and a number of well-trained assassins. The elf Soros Gristwilven presides over the entire operation, and he personally takes 15% of all the profits generated.

The one facet of thievery that the Crimson Sashes do not partake in is begging. They consider themselves to be a brotherhood that is far above the dredges of the petty street beggars. They will often times harass any beggars they encounter on the street corners, driving them from areas they have claimed.

Other thieves' guilds are rarely tolerated once the Sashes have claimed a piece of territory. If the thieves from rival guilds show promise, they will often go out of their way to recruit them. Those who openly oppose them risk open retribution. The assassins of the organization will make examples out of rivals if they become too much of a problem.

Only two groups exist that the Scarlet Sashes generally ignore: the Green Dragons, and the Order of the Demi-Lich. Because of the size and power of these rival organizations, an arrangement has been reached, keeping the streets of the city from erupting into all-out war.

Two illicit drugs can be found in large quantities in Gateway, as through all of Arekoz: Opium and Lotus. The Scarlet Sashes are notorious traders of both banned substances. Opium is imported in large quantities from the dream merchants of Mhul, while the extract of Lotus is a powerful hallucinogen that is gathered from numerous traders from Calrendia and Vehmon. Demand is high for these substances, and since the supply barely matches the demands, the Scarlet Sashes manage to quickly accumulate huge profits from their sales. This is a risky business, as the city guard is heavy handed when they dispense justice against drug traffickers. Because of this, the drug trade is conducted as quietly as possible. Rivals are often tolerated, provided that none of them cut too deeply into the Sashes' profits. Those who exist outside of the Scarlet Sashes who manage to cultivate a large trade in Lotus or Opium within their territory are typically dealt with quietly and lethally.

Thievery is the bread and butter for the Scarlet Sashes. Their cutpurses constantly work the streets, taverns and inns, directly acquiring gold by relieving the burden of it from those whom they encounter. The vast majority of these operations are conducted stealthily, their victims usually not even realizing that they've been robbed

until well after the fact. Late at night, in the back alleys, muggings are more common, but frequently lead to injuries.

Intimidation also plays a large part in the activities of the Scarlet Sashes. Hundreds of legitimate merchants eke out a meager existence in Scrapper's Row. The Scarlet Sashes are known to most of them due to the "professional relationships" they are forced to endure. The sashes frequent many merchants to collect "Safety fees," which protects them from being robbed. The unspoken part of the arrangement is that if the merchant in question does not agree to pay the fees, the same people who would otherwise protect them will conduct the robberies. Fees will vary, but they are usually between 7 and 15 gold pieces per month. Merchants who turn away the protection of the Sashes are usually either suicidal, or able to hire the best-trained fighters to protect them.

Assassination is the final way that the Scarlet Sashes earn their money. As with any other place in Arekoz, there is no shortage of people who want their rivals killed. The sashes provide this service for a premium fee of no less than 1,000 gp per contract. Contract fees have been known to soar as high as 25,000 gp if the targeted individual is either well known or physically powerful. Only the upper echelons of the organization are involved with assassinations, and Soros Gristwilven will take on several contracts himself. Clients of this service will range from the common people of Gateway to the very nobility. The motivations for clients of this service include infidelity from cheating spouses, business rivalry, revenge for past deeds, and general individual dislikes. It is rare; however, for a noble to take out a contract against a member of another noble's family, and even the Scarlet Sashes will often steer away from such contracts, as they could potentially compromise the overall amount of leverage they maintain over certain noble houses.

## Organizational Structure

The lowest level of the Scarlet Sashes is made up of the petty thieves and the drug dealers. There are rumored to be close to two hundred people involved in these activities alone, and they are the most numerous sect of the Scarlet Sashes. Most people who join the sashes are expected to work at this level for a time, regardless of the amount of skill that they might otherwise bring to the organization.

Those who fancy themselves administrators hold the second level of power in the

Scarlet Sashes. These people tend to dress well and act well mannered, and yet they are the ones who visit the merchants to work out their “safety arrangements.” Most of these people are known in polite circles and dwell within the better-off district of Crafter’s Hold. Their other responsibilities include checking in on the guild houses within Scrapper’s Row, and supervising normal street activities. There are usually only about thirty of these individuals in the organization at any given time.

Assassins and other highly trained professionals who perform specific duties within the organization hold the third level of power. These individuals generally maintain identities within the cities that are distanced from the thugs who work the streets. They will often be successful merchants, craftsmen, or even courtiers who answer only to Soros and his lieutenants. Other than the assassins, the Crimson Sashes employs fighters who act as guards, and wizards who protect them from magical threats.

Once a job has been assigned to the assassins, they will typically turn over their day-to-day responsibilities to their hired hands while they research their targets’ daily routines before they make the kill. A minimum of three days are typically spent in the preparation of fulfilling each contract. There are usually a total of 15 of these individuals within the organization at any given time, although Soros is slowly trying to raise their overall numbers.

Soros Gristwilven and his lieutenants Faradas Lauer, Agara Vidahan, and Unara Talanor hold the top level of power within the Scarlet Sashes. These three have supported Soros and worked with him for many years. Naturally, he barely trusts them, and he knows that he will one day be forced to strike them down before they decide to do the same to him and take his place at the top.

## ➤ Soros Gristwilven, Male

**Elf Rog9/Asn6:** CR 15, Medium-size Humanoid (elf); HD 15d6+30; hp 87; Init +5 (Dex); Spd 30ft.; AC 18; Atk +12/+7/+7 melee (two weapon fighting) (1d8+4 longsword +2 crit 19-20 (x2) slashing)/ 1d4+2 dagger crit 19-20 (x2) piercing), +15/+10 ranged (1d4, crossbow crit 19-20 (x2)); SA Death Attack, Sneak Attack +8d6; SQ Evasion, Poison Use +3 save vs. poison, Uncanny Dodge (Dex bonus to AC), Uncanny Dodge (can’t be flanked), Uncanny Dodge (+2 against traps), (elven traits) Immunity to sleep, save +2 vs enchantment spells, Automatic Search check if within 5’ of secret/concealed door; AL



NE; SV Fort +7, Ref +16, Will +6; Str 15, Dex 21, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 17. Height 5 ft.1 in, weight 125 lb

**Skills and Feats:** Balance (15) Climb(19) Disable Device(18) Disguise(10) Escape Artist(10) Hide(19) Intimidate(15) Jump(1) Listen(14) Move Silently(13) Open Lock(17) Pick Pocket(17) Search(23) Sense Motive(10) Spot(18) Use Magic Device(10); Alertness, Ambidexterity, Blind-Fight, Deflect Arrows, Improved Unarmed Strike, Martial Weapon Proficiency, Two-Weapon Fighting.

**Possessions:** Sword (Long) +2, Dagger, Studded Leather Thieves’ Tools (Master-work)

**Spells Prepared (1/1/1):** 1 – 1 level: spell spider climb, 1 – 2nd level spell: darkness, 1 – 3rd level Spell: nondetection.

In order to understand the Scarlet Sashes, understanding the motivations of Soros Gristwilven becomes necessary. Soros has never spoken of his past to his allies, his few loves, or his even fewer friends. Always surrounding Soros is a veil of secrecy that cannot be penetrated, lest he bare his soul, which would leave him vulnerable; a possibility he cannot afford.

Soros is a Silver Elf, or a snow elf as they are sometimes called due to that race’s pale complexion, white hair, and fondness for colder climates. As a youth Soros had been smitten with a wanderlust that his elders could not dissuade him from. He grew up on the fringes of elven society, and he joined a group of adventurers called the Company of the Talon when he became old enough to leave his small village. This group dedicated itself to unearthing ancient treasures, fighting evil, and undertaking quests to improve the world. They were originally based out the village of Jungh in southern Mhul, far away from the base of power of the White Robes.

Soros fit in well with this group, and over the period of a year he was firmly entrenched within their ranks. After a couple of years with them, the group stumbled upon a trail of Lotus leading south, originating from the heartland of Mhul. This was an unusual development since Opium is the drug of choice in most circles, and is freely distributed by the Dream Merchants. The Company of the Talon resolved to follow the trail of Lotus to the source, which after two years, finally led them far away from the heartland of Mhul to a scheming White Robe named Kellos Arybar in the capitol city of Malthaga. The company first tried to expose the corrupt White Robe, but found that their complaints were met with hostility from the bureaucracy.

At last, the group hatched a plan to

break into Kellos’s estate and find proof of their allegations against the White Robe. Kellos, who was well aware that this group had been monitoring his operations, hired a capable group of mercenaries to guard his house until the Company of the Talon either moved against him or left the city. Upon invading the grounds of Kellos’s estate, the group quickly found themselves outmatched and outnumbered. They were forced to beat a hasty retreat, but in order to keep the mercenaries from following them into the city, one of the adventurers had to stay behind to keep the portcullis closed behind them. Soros took on this responsibility, fully expecting to die in his attempt to save his friends. Instead of being killed outright, Soros was taken alive to Kellos, who had him imprisoned in isolation for a year.

Following his year of isolation Soros was informed that his former companions had been tracked down and killed. Various personal items and mummified body parts were presented to him so that he would make no mistake about the authenticity of the news. Soros then endured years of beatings and torture at the hands of interrogators. During this time he was unable to find any avenues in which to escape. On many occasions he would be so badly wounded during his torture sessions that he would have died had there not been a healer on hand to cure his wounds before it was too late.

After five years of this treatment Soros broke, at which time Kellos forced the elf to proclaim his loyalty to him. Soros gladly did this and was rewarded by being trained as an assassin. During the training his life was in constant peril. If he said or did anything to upset his master, he would be savagely beaten. The threat of death hung constantly over him. Eventually, he was sent on his first assassination mission. As Kellos had expected, the elf was well motivated by fear, and he performed the job flawlessly.

In a city of constant infighting, political maneuvering, alliances, and intrigue, Soros’s skills were put to the test time and time again. At first, Kellos scried him during his outings, and there would be magical safeguards in place to kill him instantly if he betrayed his master. Later he developed a flair for his new profession, actually managing to morbidly enjoy it. The safeguards were slowly relaxed, and Soros began to feel almost free... almost.

Despite his new success as an assassin, Soros’s time in isolation and the brutal torture sessions he had endured instilled a hatred within him that reached the very core of his being. One night he returned from a job to find Kellos alone and intoxicated, without the protection of his guards. With-

out thinking twice, the elf poisoned Kellos, and then escorted him to a cell in his own dungeon. The elf waited in the estate for the three days that it took his master to die an agonizing, messy death. When it was over he submerged his former master's remains in acid to ensure that Kellos could not be raised from the dead.

Following the death of Kellos, Soros left Malthaga so that he could try to find his way in the world again. Unfortunately, due to the torture he had endured, he found himself incapable of trusting anyone, including his own kind. A trip he made back to the village of his birth resulted in the death of an elf who had derided him for the time he'd spent away from his people. Elven justice would have had him killed, but Soros escaped before they could deal with him.

In his travels Soros found that the work he had once enjoyed as a thief was now unfulfilling, but there was never a shortage of people in need of a good assassin. From city to city he took on one job after another, slowly cultivating a reputation as one of the best in the business. Anyone who heard that Soros Gristwilven had a contract out on them would quake in terror before disappearing or meeting their demise.

When he arrived at Gateway, Soros hatched a plan to take revenge on the White Robes. He held their general level of corruption responsible for his treatment at the hands of Kellos. Although the specific White Robe who had wronged him was long dead, his hatred carried over to their entire lineage. Noticing the lack of an assassin's guild in Gateway, he looked for a powerful thieves guild that had a weak leadership structure. After considering several possibilities, he eventually decided to join the Scarlet Sashes. Their leader Grick Swifthand had become old and complacent, and many of the members showed the potential to be cold-blooded killers. After spending five years working his way up the ranks of the guild, Soros poisoned Grick, making his death appear to be a heart attack. Due to his reputation as a ruthless assassin, few challenges were made when Soros vied for the leadership of the organization.

Under Soros, the Scarlet Sashes have slowly evolved from a band of petty thieves to a major moneymaking power in the city, with connections so deep within certain noble houses that most of their members are all but untouchable. Soros has trained his best, most loyal thieves to be assassins, and he has provided them with a great deal of work to do. His goal is to train close to a hundred assassins. When he has built up his organization to that point, he intends to embark upon a major campaign of silent

death against the White Robes of Mhul in an effort to wipe their kind from the face of Areakoz.

Soros Gristwilven has a large house in the Crafter's Hold district. The house was purchased under his butler's name in order to keep his identity out of city records. Because he has no problem maintaining his stealthy comings and goings, even those living next to him don't suspect that he lives next to them. Soros often time carries out assassinations for select nobles and wealthy families himself. Though he is well paid, these favors give him leverage, which allows him to bail out his followers when they become entangled in the Gateway legal system. Despite his history, Soros is well dressed, quite cultured, and very charming, all of which lead to numerous invitations to various social functions. The nobles and upper crust have become accustomed to seeing him in attendance, and have largely stopped wondering why he isn't apprehended when he makes an appearance.

➤ **Farradas Lauer, Male Human Rog4/Ftr2/Asn3:**

CR 9; Medium-size Humanoid; hp 40; Init +4; Spd 20'ft.; AC 17; Atk +7/+2 melee (1d8+3 longsword crit 19-20, x2, slashing), +7/+2 ranged; SA: Evasion, Death Attack, Poison Use, +1 save vs. poison, Sneak Attack +4d6, Uncanny Dodge (Dex bonus to AC), Uncanny Dodge (can't be flanked); AL: NE; SV Fort +5, Ref +9, +2; Str 16, Dex 18, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 15. Height 6 ft. 4 in., weight 174 pounds.



*Skills and Feats:* Decipher Script +6, Disable Device +9, Disguise +6, Escape Artist +2, Gather Information +9, Hide +7, Intimidate +9, Jump +0, Move Silently +10, Open Lock +8, Pick Pocket +6, Ride +1, Search +11, Sense Motive +9, Spot +10, Tumble +2, Alertness, Blind-Fight, Improved Unarmed Strike, Leadership, Lightning Reflexes, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack.

*Possessions:* Chainmail, longsword, Dagger, Longbow 50 arrows.

Tall and muscular, Farradas is one of the most unlikely assassins working within the Scarlet Sashes. Despite his strength and physical bulk, he is light on his feet, and quite capable at the art of assassination. He stands 6 feet, 4 inches tall with short cut black hair. He usually wears a well-trimmed mustache and goatee.

Farradas was one of the first thieves to be rewarded by being trained as an assassin. Recently, he has taken the position as the right hand man to Soros Gristwilven. Like most good assassins, he plots to one day kill

his master and take his place at the head of the organization. This is something Soros is well aware of, and he fully expects such ambition from his subordinates, so he keeps a close eye on the assassin. At this time Farradas doesn't have the same amount of influence over the noble houses that Soros does, and so he waits until he accumulates more favors and more power. Farradas doesn't know that Soros has designs on the White Robes, and would not be likely to support any move against them.

➤ **Unara Talanor, Female Human Ftr6/Rog1/BG 3:**

CR 10; Medium-size Humanoid; hp 65; Init +2; Spd 20'ft.; AC 21; Atk +11/+6 melee (1d8+7/1d8+7 crit 19-20 (x2) slashing), +9/+4 ranged; SA: Sneak Attack +1d6, Detect Good, Poison Use, Dark Blessing, Smite Good, Command Undead, Aura of Despair; AL: CE; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, +3; Str 17, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 11, Cha 11. Height 6' 0 inches, weight 145 pounds.



*Skills and Feats:* Diplomacy +5, Heal +5, Hide +1, Intimidate +7, Jump +6, Knowledge (Religion) +3, Ride +5, Spot +4, Swim +8, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Exotic Weapon Proficiency, Great Cleave, Power Attack, Sunder, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (Sword (Two-Bladed)), Weapon Specialization (Sword (Two-Bladed))

*Possessions:* 50 Crossbow Bolts, Crossbow (Heavy), sword (2-bladed +2), Full Plate Mail +2

*Spells Castable/Known:* Blackguard 1st-cause fear, cure light wounds, doom, inflict light wounds, magic weapon, summon monster 1.

The first mistake most people make when encountering Unara is that they forget that she is evil to the very core of her being. Gorgeous by almost anyone's definition, Unara stands 6 ft. tall and muscular, with wavy auburn shoulder length hair. Her complexion is fair, and her eyes are a deep shade of green.

Unara was a soldier in Vehrmon's army up until four years ago when she had a disagreement with her commanding officer that left him dead and her in flight from her former comrades. Over the next two years she fell in with several groups of highwaymen, eventually, preying upon caravans coming and going from Gateway.

Two years ago she made peaceful contact with a devil, and at that time made her transformation into a black guard. Shortly after that time she approached Soros Gristwilven about a job within his organiza-

tion. At first, he nearly dismissed her, but his interest was piqued when she cut down his chief bodyguard and three of his men in front of him.

Unara has taken the position as Soros's chief bodyguard as well as the head of the small group warriors who work within the organization. Unara can be sweet, even personable on the surface, though she has proven time and time again that she would just as soon spare herself an outward display of anger by cutting down those who displease her. Most people who serve within the ranks of the Scarlet Sashes fear Unara for her brutality, which makes her the perfect person to fill her niche within the organization.

## ➤ Agara Vidahan, Female

**Human Wiz9: CR 9;** Medium-size Humanoid; hp 51; Init -1; Spd 30'ft.; AC 17; Atk +4 melee (1d6/1d6 quarterstaff, crit x2 bludgeoning), +4 ranged; SA: Summon Familiar; AL:LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, +6; Str 10, Dex 8, Con 16, Int 17, Wis 11, Cha 12. Height 6' 0 inches, weight 185 pounds



**Skills and Feats:** Alchemy +15, Concentration +15, Knowledge (Arcana) +15, Listen +6, Scry +15, Spellcraft +15, Spot +6, Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Craft Rod, Craft Wondrous Item, Maximize Spell, Scribe Scroll.

**Possessions:** Blowgun, Padded armor +2, quarterstaff, Ring of Protection +5, Ring of Telekinesis, Rod of enemy detection, staff of power.

**Spells Castable/Known Wizard:** (0:4/0 1:5/0 2:5/0 3:4/0 4:2/0 5:1/0 6:0/0 7:0/0 8:0/0 9:0/0)

**Spellbook:** Wizard: 0- arcane mark, dancing lights, daze, detect magic, detect poison, disrupt undead, flare, ghost sound, light, mage hand, mending, open/close, prestidigitation, ray of frost, read magic, resistance; 1st-color spray, feather fall, hold portal, magic missile, protection from good; 2nd-invisibility, locate object, see invisibility, Tasha's hideous laughter, web; 3rd-dispel magic, fireball, fly, nondetection; (4):scrying, wall of fire; (5):permanency.

Agara is a woman with pale skin and blue eyes, with long black hair that is usually styled and worn up. Rather than dress herself in the robes typically worn by wizards, she usually garbs herself in elegant clothing more befitting of a noble. Most people who encounter her don't recognize her as a spellcaster, which is exactly how she likes it.

For years Agara has followed the singular pursuit of increasing her magical power

without worrying about how her ambition affects others. She was born in Gateway to wealthy merchants who have since moved to Vehrmon in order to capitalize on their superior business sense. Agara has always learned that every set of rules, including magic, has loopholes that can be exploited for one's own personal gain.

Soros brought Agara into the fold eight years ago when he saw that she was an ambitious spellcaster who could be easily motivated to fulfill his needs. In return for her services Soros funds Agara's magical research, and pays her handsomely. Her role within the Scarlet Sashes is to protect the organization from magical threats, and organize the other ten wizards under her into a cohesive unit. She has no designs to take over the organization, and she is considering leaving at some point in the near future to study magic in other lands.

## Campaign Hooks

The Scarlet Sashes can be integrated into any ongoing city based campaign. Characters can be drawn into a conflict with every level of the organization. Because the operations of the Sashes are so varied, characters can actually be drawn into several different storylines that all tie together, and lead back to the organization. Characters who will quickly find that the organization will not quickly forget or forgive, which means that a long lasting conflict may be in their future, or at least a quick death. Listed below are some possible campaign hooks to help integrate the organization into your campaign.

- The characters catch a thief trying to pick one of their pockets, and the thief will attempt to escape. If the party allows the thief to go free, there will be no further immediate complications. If they apprehend the cutpurse or try to interrogate him, the thief will mention this treatment to his superiors. This may result in further pick-pocket attempts, or they may be confronted by a band of street thugs who wish to pay them back.

- The characters are asked by the city guard or one of the nobles to follow a trail of opium or lotus to its source. The party picks up the trail, which leads to a group of dealers. If the party merely apprehends the dealers, they will soon find themselves the target of general harassment or attempted assassinations. If the party looks into the fate of the dealers, they will learn that the criminals somehow managed to escape from the dungeons and are now once more loose. In this scenario the Scarlet Sashes will not rest until the party has either paid for their

interference with their lives, or they have fled the city.

- One of the noble families has learned that their tough stance on crime has made them a target for assassination. The party will be asked to try to protect the nobles as they push through a new law that will increase the penalties for thievery or the trade of illicit substances. If the party manages to thwart an assassination attempt, an operative of the organization will contact them and try to warn them away from protecting the noble. If the party refuses to abide by their wishes, the sashes will increase the number of assassins who make the next attempt on the noble's life, and the party members will find themselves among the intended targets. This can quickly escalate into a long-term conflict with the sashes, which could result in a confrontation with Soros or his top henchmen.

- The characters have done something to offend an evil person or organization of the city. That person responds by contracting the Scarlet Sashes to kill one or more characters in the group. The party will have to deal with one or more assassination attempts, and they may have to investigate to find out who put the contract out on them in the first place. This can lead to a situation with multiple and varying enemies, which could easily become the basis for an ongoing campaign.

- One of the many white robes will be traveling south to oversee an aspect of the annexation of Calrendia. Along the way he will spend a night at one of the inns in Gateway. Soros has learned of the White Robe's plans, and he has decided to assassinate the traveler himself. The party may see Soros stealthily enter the inn, possibly stopping the assassination at that time, or the assassination may go as planned, but the party will witness the murder, making them future targets. In either case, they will have attracted the attention and the ire of Soros, which will put them at the top of the list of enemies of the organization.

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# Objectionable Oozes

by Scott Greene & Erica Balsley

## BLOOD PUDDING

**Small Ooze**

**Hit Dice:** 1d10+2 (7 hp)

**Initiative:** -5 (Dex)

**Speed:** 15 ft

**AC:** 6 (+1 size, -5 Dex)

**Attacks:** Attach +3 melee

**Damage:** Ability score drain 1d4

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft by 5 ft/5 ft

**Special Attacks:** Attach

**Special Qualities:** Blindsight, cold immunity, ooze

**Saves:** Fort +2, Ref -3, Will -5

**Abilities:** Str 15, Dex 1, Con 15, Int -, Wis 1, Cha 1

**Climate/Terrain:** Any marsh and underground

**Organization:** Solitary

**Challenge Rating:** 1

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always neutral

**Advancement:** 2HD (Small), 3HD (Medium-size)

A blood pudding is a roughly spheroid blob of protoplasm about 3 feet high; they are rounded at the top, but flatten out somewhat at the bottom as their own weight spreads out their form. They are a sickly blood red in color, and constantly seep a foul smelling slime. In bright enough light, blood puddings are translucent.

These oozes roll through dark corridors looking for sustenance, and can consume the vital fluids of any creature that it can attach to or which will fit inside its form. Its size usually limits its prey to rats and other small dungeon denizens, but it does attack larger prey when the opportunity arises.

## Combat

A blood pudding attacks by rolling over or onto its prey and attaching itself with powerful organic adhesives.

**Attach (Ex):** A blood pudding attacks by attaching itself to Small or larger opponents. With a successful melee attack, a blood pudding wraps itself around the opponent's leg, arm, torso, or other body part. Strong adhesives are then secreted from the protoplasm of the blood pudding, which requires a Strength check (DC 12) to remove the blood pudding, inflicting 1 point of damage to the victim. Attached blood puddings can also be removed by

pouring vinegar over them. The organic acids in the vinegar irritate the blood pudding and cause it to drop away. The blood pudding will stick to any organic material it comes in contact with.

**Ability Score Drain (Su):** An attached blood pudding consumes the blood and bodily fluids of its victim, causing a drain of 1d4 points of temporary Constitution damage per round it remains attached. A successful Fortitude save (DC 12) negates this damage. If the prey is reduced to 0 Constitution by a blood pudding it dies, fully drained of all its vital fluids. The blood pudding then detaches itself and moves off to find other prey.

**Blindsight (Ex):** A blood pudding's entire body is a sensory organ that can ascertain prey by scent and vibration within 60 feet.

**Cold Immunity (Ex):** Blood puddings are unaffected by all cold-based effects.

**Ooze:** Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and polymorphing. Not subject to critical hits.

## MERCURY OOZE

**Large Ooze**

**Hit Dice:** 5d10+25 (52 hp)

**Initiative:** -5 (Dex)

**Speed:** 30 ft, climb 20 ft

**AC:** 4 (-1 size, -5 Dex)

**Attacks:** Slam +4 melee

**Damage:** Slam 1d8+3 and poison

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft by 10 ft/10 ft

**Special Attacks:** Improved grab, constrict, poison

**Special Qualities:** Blindsight, ooze

**Saves:** Fort +3, Ref -4, Will -4

**Abilities:** Str 14, Dex 1, Con 14, Int -, Wis 1, Cha 1

**Climate/Terrain:** Any underground

**Organization:** Solitary

**Challenge Rating:** 4

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always neutral

**Advancement:** 6-8 HD (Large); 9-15 HD (Huge)

Alchemy is both a blessing and a curse. The pseudo-arcanic science of alchemy has found ways to light the darkness, heal the sick, and expand the scope and breadth of knowledge. And at other times, alchemy has created hideous monstrosities and vile

creatures best left to never see existence. The mercury ooze is one such an example.

A mercury ooze is a puddle of mercury 8 feet long and 6 inches thick. It can compress its body to a thickness of 1 inch to slip into cracks and crevices.

## Combat

Mercury oozes attack by grabbing and squeezing their prey.

**Improved Grab (Ex):** To use this ability, the mercury ooze must hit with its slam attack. If it gets a hold, it can constrict.

**Poison (Ex):** The touch of a mercury ooze deals 1 point each of permanent Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma damage (Fortitude save DC 14 negates) with a touch. One week after suffering the ability score damage, the opponent must make a Will save (DC 14) or become a babbling maniac and act as though affected by an insanity spell cast by a 5th-level sorcerer.

**Constrict (Ex):** A mercury ooze deals automatic slam and poison damage with a successful grapple check.

**Blindsight (Ex):** A mercury ooze's entire body is a primitive sensory organ that can ascertain all foes by scent and vibration within 60 feet.

**Ooze:** Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and polymorphing. Not subject to critical hits.

## MUDBOG

**Large Ooze**

**Hit Dice:** 3d10+6 (37 hp)

**Initiative:** -5 (Dex)

**Speed:** 5 ft.

**AC:** 4 (-1 size, -5 Dex)

**Attacks:** None

**Damage:** See below

**Face/Reach:** 10f t. by 10 ft./0 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Consume, hungry ooze

**Special Qualities:** Mud

**Saves:** Fort +3, Ref -4, Will -4

**Abilities:** Str 20, Dex 1, Con 15, Int -, Wis 1, Cha 1

**Climate/Terrain:** Any land and underground

**Organization:** Solitary

**Challenge Rating:** 2

**Treasure:** Standard (special, see below)

**Alignment:** Always neutral

**Advancement:** 4-9HD (Large)

Mudbogs are strange pudding-like creatures that dwell in swamps, fens, and wetlands. They are brownish in color, resembling nothing more than brackish

# Crunchy Bits

*A Magic Item and a Monster from Thunderhead Games*  
By Hal Greenberg, Matt Mosher & Brian Keller

mud and water. Mudbogs use their coloration to their best advantage. These puddings use their acidic bodies to dig a hole for themselves, usually several feet deep, in which to lie in wait for a meal. The average mudbog is roughly 10 feet across and 3 feet deep.

Situated comfortably in its hole along well-traveled paths, a mudbog is likely to be mistaken for a patch of muddy water or a wet spot in the road. Creatures attempting to simply walk over or through the "mud puddle" find themselves stuck fast and, worse yet, being consumed by the hungry ooze.

## Combat

Mudbogs don't really attack their opponents; their method of getting a meal is strictly passive. However, once a meal has stumbled into its protoplasm, a mudbog is determined to not let it escape.

**Consume (Ex):** Any creature unfortunate enough to stumble into a mudbog takes 2d6 points of acid damage per round. The mudbog's digestive enzymes inflict 20 points of acid damage per round to any organic item within it, including wood, cloth, and leather. A mudbog cannot digest metal or stone, and such materials eventually sink to the bottom of the hole in which the creature resides.

**Mud (Ex):** The consistency and coloration of a mudbog makes it nearly impossible to discern from a normal patch of mud. Any creature within 10 feet of a mudbog is allowed to make a Spot check (DC 20) to determine the actual nature of the creature.

**Hungry Ooze (Ex):** Mudbogs are constantly hungry, and can consume any kind of organic material. As a result they are inclined to hang on to anything that falls into them, including things they can't digest. Any item or creature stuck in a mudbog must make three consecutive opposed Strength checks in order to escape its sucking protoplasm.

## Mudbog Treasure

As an ooze, a mudbog lacks the intelligence to collect treasure. However, the possessions of its victims can always be found in a heap at the bottom of the hole it has chosen as its home. Actually getting to the treasure involves somehow removing the mudbog from its hole. The simplest way to do this is to dig a deeper hole next to the mudbog and letting it flow into that. A dig spell accomplishes this easily.



## MOON STEED

**Large Outsider (Good)**

**Hit Dice :** 6d8 + 15 (42 hp)

**Initiative:** +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

**Speed:** 40 ft., fly 90 ft. (good)

**AC:** 25 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +13 Natural)

**Attacks:** 2 hooves +8 melee Damage Hoof 1d8 +3

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft by 10 ft/6ft

**Special Attacks:** Force Strike, Smite evil

**Specials Qualities:** See ethereal, blur effect

**Saves:** Fort +7, Ref +8, Will +6

**Abilities:** Str 17, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 15, Wis 13, Cha 12

**Skills:** Intuit Direction +10, Listen +12, Move Silently +12, Search +10, Sense Motive +10, Spot +13

**Feats:** Alertness, Improved Initiative

**Climate/Terrain:** Any land or water

**Organization:** solitary

**Challenge Rating:** 5

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Any good

**Advancement:** 7-10 HD(large); 11-18 HD(Huge)

Where there is evil, there is always a good to maintain the balance. As dark and evil as the Nightmare is, the Moon Steed is good.

During the daylight hours, the steed appears as a normal horse, albeit a beautiful specimen. At night, the true majesty of the moon steed makes itself known. It appears as powerful warhorse with silverish white coat and a light blue mane.

Moon steeds are calm and thoughtful creatures. They wander the lands and seas hunting evil in all its shapes. The moon steed can fly like the wind that blows over the seas. They sometimes ally themselves with beings as virtuous as themselves. They also will allow noble beings to ride them.

## Combat:

Moons steeds do battle by kicking with their strong legs. A moon steed can also fight while mounted. The rider cannot attack at the same time unless he or she makes a successful ride check.

**Force Strike:** This ability allows the moon steed to strike an ethereal opponent with its hooves. This is a supernatural ability that the steed can use 3 times a day.

**Smite Evil:** This ability allows the moon steed to attempt to smite an evil opponent

once per day. It adds its charisma bonuses to hit. The moon steed then adds its hit dice to the damage. This stacks with any other bonuses that the steed may have for damage. If the steed attempts to smite a non evil opponent, the smite has no effect. The smite is still used up for the day. This is a supernatural ability.

**See Ethereal:** This supernatural ability may be used up to the hit die of the moon steed per day. It allows the steed to see ethereal opponents.

**Blur Effect:** Night has a strange effect on the sight of most beings. It offers some concealment. This effect has a one-half concealment bonus to the moon steed (20% chance of missing). This ability is supernatural and offers no saving throw unlike the spell of the same name. Those opponents that do not see (ie blind sight) are not affected by this ability.

## FLUID ARMOR

When found Fluid armor looks like little more than a large but ornately decorated flask of what looks like holy water that has been permanently sealed with a wick of glass that must be broken to activate the armor. When broken a spray of fine mist pours from the top and shrouds the holder of the flask. This mist provides them for the round concealment as if they had 50% cover. The mist coalesces into a roughly transparent suit of full plate, breastplate or banded mail style armor. Fluid Armor provides the wearer a +5 Armor Bonus, no restriction to dex and no armor check penalty. The armor weighs nothing and the wearer is not even considered to be wearing armor. However the person may not be wearing any armor to begin with to use Fluid Armor. In addition to the + Armor Bonus Fluid armor also grants the wearer damage reduction 5/- for the first 10 Minutes they wear they armor and then the damage reduction becomes 5/+5 for the next 10 minutes, /+4 for the 10 minutes after that, 5/+3 for the next 10, 5/+2 next 10 and lastly 5/+1 for 10 more minutes after which the armor dissipates into misty nothingness.

**Caster Level:** 9th **Prerequisites:** Craft Magical Armors and Armor, Craft Wondrous Item, *Stone Skin* & *Gaseous Form*. **Market Price:** 6,600gp **Cost to Create:** 3,300gp + 275 xp



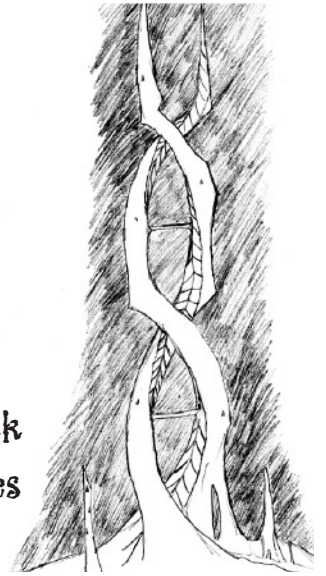
# Keep Going

## -Chapter Three-

# Mausoleum Halls

By Ryan Nock

Illustration by J.L. Jones



The Mausoleum Halls of the Pale Lord were as colorless as the pall on a corpse. Sant Kerrel followed the spirit courier numbly, too unnerved to look to either side. Beyond the alabaster doors of the Pale Lord's twin towers, each wall was lined with a row of motionless, unblinking wraithguards. The walls, mortared from the bones of fiends, sapped the warmth from Sant Kerrel's body, and a chill mountain wind moaned through the double-helix spiral of the twin towers.

Though she walked close behind him, Kendra's nervous voice sounded faint. "This place is incredible. Kerrel . . . isn't it amazing? We're one of the few people to be let in here."

The courier, an elfblood spirit paused at the foot of a staircase that spiraled gently upward. His glowing face turned to them, his eyes falling upon Kendra. "One of the few living, perhaps. Your speech disturbs the guards. Follow silently."

The spirit courier turned back to the stairs, but stopped at the voice of Bountiful Shades-of-Gray. "Just because they're dead doesn't mean they have to stop having fun."

The elderly Bountiful turned with a flourish to face the twin rows of spectral guards. Raising her voice, she shouted, "All of you, start having fun. Talk or something. I doubt it's every day that an airship crashes into your city."

Sant Kerrel cringed as Bountiful's voice echoed dully, wanting to hide his face at the embarrassment. He consciously avoided meeting the courier's eyes as their guide replied to Bountiful.

"As much as the Pale Lord respects your lord and you as a messenger for him, your enthusiasm is misplaced, Miss Shades-of-Gray. An airship has crashed into Skaukator twelve times in the seven hundred and fifty-eight years I have served here."

Beside Sant Kerrel, Kendra reached out and laid a hand on Bountiful's shoulder to calm her down. Kendra leaned close to the gray-haired Helper of Bugaboo and lowered her voice. "Ma'am, the Pale Lord has requested our presence, and though you might not be beholden to his desires, it would reflect poorly on Kerrel and me if we were late."

Bountiful curled her nose. "Bother. Fine, if the airship is so uninteresting, and if they don't care about the fact that one of the people aboard the ship was almost finished in his research of how to open the gates of dawn—"

Sant Kerrel turned to her in surprise. "What did you say?"

Kendra laughed softly to herself and nodded to Sant Kerrel. "Look around, Kerrel."

Sant Kerrel shifted nervously, but he lay his golden eyes over the room with a quick glance. Many of the previously motionless wraithguards had turned their heads to look at Bountiful, and a few were even talking with each other quietly.

The courier haughtily raised himself a foot above the ground and

stared down at Bountiful. The spirit's voice carried through the large hall, rasping past Sant Kerrel's ears. "The Helper of Bugaboo is simply being inflammatory, as we should suspect. I assure you, her comments are false."

Bountiful scoffed. "Are not. I know this for a fact. I was on that ship before I transferred to Kerrel's here, at the Chapel. I talked to scholar, and he said he just needed to confer with some other big-heads in the library here. I suppose that option's out."

Kendra shook her head slightly and squinted her eyes. "But... Miss Bountiful, you were never on that ship."

"Was too," Bountiful assured her. She patted Kendra on the head, smiling. "And so were you, wink wink."

Sant Kerrel groaned. "Miss, please stop this. You're disturbing them."

Bountiful smiled at him and cocked her head, listening to the soft rasping murmur of spirits. The sound faded quickly, however, and Bountiful's face fell in chagrin.

"Well I never," she huffed. "You dead people have no sense of fun. I swear here and now that when I'm dead, I'll haunt you until you have fun."

The courier stared at her for a beat, then turned and started up the staircase. Sant Kerrel quickly followed, keeping his left hand to the wall to steady himself on the narrow ascent. He heard Kendra's armor clanking behind him as she followed, but after only a few steps the Bugaboo woman's voice raised again, addressing the guards.

"Here, I'll give you something to talk about. I bet this hasn't happened before."

Beyond the point of becoming more embarrassed, Sant Kerrel turned with morbid interest to see Bountiful draw a gray strap from one of her sleeves. She twirled it twice with a quick flourish, then spun it in the direction of the guards. A small stone flew from the sling and pierced through the intangible chest of one of the guards. With a flash, the pale white of the spirit's glow turned an iridescent orange. The struck guard shuddered in confusion, but quickly composed himself, apparently realizing he had not been harmed. A few guards near the one who had been struck looked in brief curiosity, then shrugged and returned to their stoic stance.

Without stopping his ascent, the courier spirit called down to Bountiful. "Actually, Miss Shades-of-Gray, that has happened twice in the last year. Though this is the first time you've used orange."

Sant Kerrel almost sagged against the wall in shock at the behavior of Bountiful, but he forced himself to continue to follow their guide, hoping that Bountiful would decide to leave now. Instead, as they ascended the narrow, skeletal alabaster stairs, passing over a dozen levels of incorporeal dignitaries, lectures, and artisans, Bounti-



ful pranced after them, playing a giddy funeral dirge on her flute.

The ascent took several minutes for the armored and encumbered living, with the draining chill and lamenting howling of wind drawing Sant Kerrel's thoughts to the last time he had been present with a spirit, that of his mother. She had made him walk with her from their home in Tunak to the Furnace, where she had let her spirit be utterly destroyed. For a month they had traveled the Twilight March, walking endlessly, only stopping when Sant Kerrel grew too tired to keep going.

The climb to the Pale Lord's throne room was endless, and in the conversations of the spirits he heard echoes of the weeping of his dead mother. When Kendra spoke to him, he jerked in startlement.

"Kerrel, I'm sorry, alright? That thing about your mother? I was wrong."

Sant Kerrel glanced at her briefly, shivering off the sudden shock of her voice. With a quiet growl, he shook his head. "Be quiet, please. I said we'd talk later."

Kendra fell back a few steps, and Sant Kerrel relaxed with the extra distance. His muscles burned from the climb when they finally reached the last step of the stairs. The ascent ended in a small room with a tapering ceiling. The spirit courier led the path from the top step through the only exit, a single ivory door. As the spirit passed through the door, it swung open for the living that followed him. A burst of frigid mountain wind swirled through the opening, and Sant Kerrel paused in shock as he saw the 'throne room' of the Pale Lord.

"Step up, sonny," Bountiful wheezed, poking him in the back of the neck with her flute. "I'm about to pass out from this climb, and you're in my way from any chairs. Get moving."

Sant Kerrel frowned but walked through the door, following the courier nervously onto a twenty foot wide bridge that spanned between the spires of the double-helix tower. Three-foot-tall walls formed token guard-rails on either side of the bridge, but the bridge was open to the air, and Sant Kerrel hesitated with each step, reminding himself that it was no different from being on the deck of a windship. The bridge spanned fifty feet, and it swayed stiffly in the harsh breeze. At first he thought he heard the bridge cracking, but then he recognized the cracking as the sound of the Pale Lord's banners snapping in the intense wind.

Behind him, Kendra gasped, loud enough to be heard over the wind. The moaning of the air chilled them both to near immobilization, tugging their gaze down to the city of spirits, a home to eternal wanderers. Sant Kerrel wished he could look down and find his mother in the glowing crowd far below, and a lump filled his throat.

"Come forward, please."

Sant Kerrel and Kendra turned simultaneously at the pleasant voice, the voice of a father that could pierce the lonely howl of the breeze and soothe them. In the center of the bridge, his throne at the edge, the regal figure of the Pale Lord twisted his head to see them. In that voice, Sant Kerrel heard an endless melancholy, and he stepped forward without hesitation or thought, the tug of sympathy urging him to seek the voice again. As he approached the Pale Lord and his host, Sant Kerrel realized that even Bountiful had stopped talking or fluting.

The Pale Lord turned his gaze away from Sant Kerrel, Kendra, and Bountiful as they approached, instead casting his sight over the Necropolis of Skaukator. Beside him stood only two motionless wraithguards, with a trio of seated spectral scribes holding ghostly pens to capture their lord's words. The courier walked to within ten feet directly in front of the Pale Lord, then stopped, turned to his master, and bowed. With a gesture of his left hand, the patron dismissed his servant, and the spectre stood and continued across to the other side of the bridge.

"Come before me," the undead patron said again, a lonely smile flickering across his face for an instant. His voice did not ask or request, but simply stated with the knowledge of millennia. Sant

Kerrel and Kendra both approached and kneeled respectfully, feeling relaxed. The pain in their limbs from the climb seemed faint, as though their souls were not wholly part of their bodies.

"You are the two Soul Guards," the Pale Lord stated. "Kendra Bleuth and Sant Kerrel Pound. I regret the circumstances that brought you both to serve me, but respect your families' desire for oblivion. And Miss Heatherbrook--"

Bountiful stammered out, "A-actually I go by B-bountiful now. Bountiful Shades-of-Gray."

The Pale Lord nodded once in understanding. "I understand. I assure you your daughter endures peacefully. Your master has shown his kindness and wisdom in accepting you."

Sant Kerrel furrowed his brow in surprise at the Pale Lord's words, then sheepishly raised his gaze to look upon the spectral patron. He sat with a casual permanency upon his throne, moving with only slight but powerful gestures. Sant Kerrel hesitated for a moment in wonderment, because up close the Pale Lord looked more tangible and alive than wraithlike, yet still possessed of a restrained melancholy. A pureblood human, with a slender face but regal bearing, the nameless Pale Lord looked almost like a forgotten friend or a father. His spectral clothes were but an elegant robe, stained red in the center of his chest, the sword wound with which he had ended his own life centuries before.

"You can stand," the Pale Lord said with a friendly chuckle. "Your life is too short to waste it on pleasantries and ceremony."

Kendra stood, then nudged Sant Kerrel with her knee. Uneasily he rose to his feet, put off by the calm demeanor of his master. Rather than meeting the spectre's eyes, he examined the austere throne and surroundings. Only as the Pale Lord spoke again did Sant Kerrel realize that it sounded like a real voice, not the sibilant rustle that is the voice of most spirits. Sucking in a breath of awe, Sant Kerrel could not deny that if anyone had defied the lassitude of death, he stood before him now.

"It is an honor to meet you, my lord," Sant Kerrel said.

"Yes," Bountiful added, her tone distant, "an honor. Maybe I should leave. I wouldn't want to disturb you."

The Pale Lord shook his head very softly, once. "I leave that choice to you. I must discuss with these two the events they witnessed, but your presence will not endanger anything."

"My lord," Kendra spoke up, and Sant Kerrel could tell she was trying to sound relaxed, "if I may begin, we tried to tell some of your guards to be on watch because the fiendblood who took the Pale Hand could use illusion to disguise himself."

"Good," the Pale Lord stated. "My thanks for keeping me from digressing too long. But there is no need to worry about my guards, since the true ends of the commands I give them need not concern you. No, tell me of your experiences with the theft of the ship."

"Well," Kendra continued, apparently growing more comfortable now that she could speak actively, "our ship, the Vigil, took aboard a captive fiendblooded human near the Furnace, and we delivered him without incident to the Chapel, where we transferred him to the Pale Hand. We were still moored at the Chapel docks when a griffon rider from the Pale Hand flew back to us and told us how that dam- . . . how the fiendblood had killed most of the crew, charmed the rest, and hijacked the ship. Since we were the fastest ship at the Chapel, our captain commanded us to follow. I . . . I regret that I don't have the magical training to send an arcane message, so we could not send word ahead."

Kendra paused, nervous again, and did not speak for several beats. Sant Kerrel was familiar with Kendra's spurts of self-guilt; it had taken him weeks of working beside her to realize how genuinely depressed she would become if no one tried to remind her that she wasn't worthless. His nerves already strained, Sant Kerrel had to suppress a groan that she had become so closed-mouthed at this moment.

The Pale Lord waited, and the silence became uncomfortable. Sant Kerrel was about to speak up when the Pale Lord quietly said, "There is no fault, Miss Bleuth. It is the poor judgment of my generals that did not prepare you better. I have already been informed that you survived an actual confrontation with the fiendblood, and for that I know the souls of this city should respect you."

Kendra relaxed visibly, releasing her held breath. She nodded slowly in thanks, shrugging sheepishly as her way of apology. "Thank you, my lord."

Rather than give Kendra another chance to further embarrass them or prolong this meeting longer, Sant Kerrel spoke up then. "My liege, though we confronted the fiendblood, we did not defeat him. We had to flee the ship just before it contacted Skaukator's barrier."

The Pale Lord turned his colorless eyes upon Sant Kerrel. "And what became of the fiendblood who caused this trouble?"

Sant Kerrel swallowed nervously, feeling his stomach ulcer begin to burn. "Chance, the fiendblood, had wings, and managed to fly away. Actually he . . . kept us from dying. I'm not sure why, but Kendra and I were falling from the Pale Hand and a spell from the fiendblood caught us against the wall of Skaukator. I think he wanted us to deliver a message to you."

The Pale Lord's silence urged Sant Kerrel to continue.

"He said. . . ," Sant Kerrel started, then paused to remember Chance's exact words. He briefly met Kendra's eyes, but looked away angrily. "I'm sorry that I can't remember exactly. It was . . . 'Tell the Pale Lord that knowledge that's not used is like it's destroyed, and that if you keep on destroying it, you'll lose the battle.'"

The Pale Lord looked away, his gaze distant and unfocused for a long moment. He stirred briefly, putting his left hand to the wound on his chest, then looked back to them.

"I admire your willingness to risk your most valuable possession, your lives, to face the fiendblood and recover this message, but I regret that it is probably more than a threat for which you have so labored. I may need you later to follow through on the investigation of this incident, but for now return to your ship and await your orders. If the fiendblood is truly a threat worth paying attention to, which I doubt, it is unlikely he will be found soon. He is probably still within the city, hiding, and thus will be easy prey. On the very slight chance. . . . Your ship will return to its normal patrol after one day's rest."

Kendra looked to Sant Kerrel nervously, then back to the Pale Lord. "But sir, shouldn't we be scouting the Twilight March in case the demon has escaped the city?"

Shaking his head slowly, the Pale Lord leaned back in his throne. Motionless except for his mouth, he replied, "Bravery does not equate competence, and so you of the Soul Guard have been assigned a position where bravery is required. Do not think you are incompetent, but understand the reality that you are several hundred years too inexperienced to be useful in this matter. My Wraithguard will serve me as loyally as you, in the realm which best demands their talents.

"I request that you leave now. May your return to me be long in coming."

Sant Kerrel's stomach suddenly turned cold in confusion and disappointment. He forced himself to bow to his master, then turned and walked. A moment later he was back within the far spire of the twin towers, where he stopped to shake off the chill of the Pale Lord's words.

Bountiful followed only a few steps behind him, and had regained her normal frustrating personality once free from the Pale Lord's presence. "Did he just imply that he doesn't like us? He said he doesn't want to see us for a long time."

Sant Kerrel glared at the floor, preferring that to looking at the Bugaboo woman. "He meant that he doesn't want us to die."

Kendra came into the room last, pulling the door shut behind her. Her face was drawn, her eyes watering with tears. Forcing a smile, she laughed weakly. "It was so windy out there. Are your eyes watering too?"

Sighing, Sant Kerrel looked away and turned to descend the stairs. "Worthless. This whole thing was worthless."

They traveled in uncomfortable silence out of the tower and to the docks where the Vigil awaited. The docks were thankfully clear of spirits, and the only one who met them at their arrival was the mixedblood dwarf-gnome griffon rider who had escaped the Pale Hand. He stood near the gangplank, glancing occasionally at his griffon, which paced the aftcastle of the Vigil, and was not wearing any shoes. Sant Kerrel bent down to clasp the man's hand when they reached him.

"How did it go?" the griffon rider asked, his bearded face expectant.

"Very well," Sant Kerrel stated, ignoring Kendra's periodic sniffing behind him. "We actually spoke to the Pale Lord, but he thinks that the fiendblood isn't that much of a threat."

The mixedblood laughed. "Odd damned perspective he has, thinking that an airship stuck in his library isn't a threat, but I suppose he's allowed it."

Bountiful, now showing no signs worse for wear from the meeting with the Pale Lord, tiptoed up to the griffon rider and knelt next to him as though she were talking to child. "And why are you here, son? It's sweet that you're waiting for us."

The man huffed a laugh. "I was getting some air and taking a few steps on solid rock for a change. This is the last time I'll be on real stone for a while, I imagine, since I've been assigned to join your ship right away, until they can build another Pale Hand."

Sant Kerrel nodded in congratulations, then moved to pass the dwarf-gnome when Bountiful enveloped the man in a hug.

"I'm so proud of you," Bountiful said with a smile as she smothered the griffon rider. "You looked like an interesting young man when I first saw you, and now we get to spend a lot of time together."

Chuckling softly, the man extricated himself from her grip. "I guess you're the Bugaboo woman the rest of the crew was talking about, then. Well, ma'am, I'm sorry, but I grew up a long time ago, so you'll have to go elsewhere. I doubt the cap'n wants you on his ship."

Bountiful stepped away and cocked her head, staring sidelong at the man. "I'll find a way, sonny-boy. Don't you worry."

Sant Kerrel gritted his teeth and glanced at Bountiful. His frustration lightened somewhat when he saw that Bountiful had walked off slightly to talk quietly with Kendra.

"So," the dwarf-blood said curiously, "what's wrong with your woman friend in the armor?"

Sant Kerrel shook his head and walked past the griffon rider, up the gang plank. "I don't know, but she can deal with it herself. When do we set off?"

The mixedblood grimaced slightly, and Sant Kerrel realized he shouldn't have brushed past him, but he didn't care. With a tinge of hidden frustration, the griffon rider said, "We'll be setting off tomorrow morning. Orders came that there's a transport ship we need to escort back here. There've been some pirate hits recently. I guess that means I'll have to be out flying scout again."

Sant Kerrel nodded. "Yeah, I guess so. I dunno."

He returned to his quarters and took off his armor, waiting awake to leave the city of the dead. Having met the Pale Lord, he could imagine why Chance would've wanted to crash a ship into the man's city.



# THE DAEMONFORGE CHRONICLES

BY PHIL DYER

ILLUSTRATION BY J. RYAN MACHAN

## INTERLUDE

*The Dreamer swept from its bedchamber, a vast cloak woven from the fibers of living shadow trailing behind. It strode through the polished black marble halls of its demesne, idly fingering the cold-wrought iron hilt of the massive blade that hung at its side. The Dreamer's heavy footfalls echoed through the corridors, punctuated by the frequent cracking of dried bones as it trod on the desiccated remains of long-forgotten victims.*

*Dark creatures, little more than shadows themselves, scurried from the Dreamer's path, fearful of attracting its attention. If it noticed their scurrying, it gave no hint, for its hooded gaze remained fixed and it glanced neither right or left. The dark creatures shivered uncontrollably from the unnatural chill left in the wake of the Dreamer's passage.*

*A pair of huge doors, cut from ebony wood and bound with iron, loomed before the Dreamer. They opened noiselessly as it approached, revealing a vast, vaulted chamber constructed of gray granite and black basalt. Guards, courtiers and functionaries froze in place then bowed low as the Dreamer passed, moving towards a raised dais in the center of the chamber. Atop the dais crouched a throne, cunningly wrought from a massive single block of basalt.*

*An onyx, twice as large as a man's head, adorned the top of the throne. Intricate carvings of leering skulls, tangled lovers and nightmare creatures cascaded down the back of the throne and onto the arms. Each arm ended in a grinning horned head, tongue extended between dagger-like fangs. The Dreamer mounted the dais and claimed the throne with a grace that belied its bulk and its gaze swept the chamber.*

*An unspoken command emptied the throne room, sending minions scurrying in every direction. In the space of a few heartbeats, the Dreamer was alone, save for the fading echoes of retreating footfalls. It grasped the grinning skulls with gnarled, clawed hands and leaned back in the throne until its head touched the onyx. Closing its eyes, the Dreamer gathered its will and called out wordlessly.*

*"Master."*

## CHAPTER THREE

Marcus looked from the dwarf-breed to the orc-breed to Gabriella in rapid succession. The dwarf-breed, apparently Demetri, seemed frozen. He was staring down, right hand gripping the handle of his flagon and left resting on the edge of the table. The orc-breed stood a few steps behind him, knees slightly flexed, swords held low, face set in an expression somewhere between a grin and a grimace. Gabriella sat impassively, face blank except for a slight narrowing of her eyes. She had stopped stroking Lös and Marcus noticed the cat's coat glowed faintly with a silvery sheen. The tableaux held for a moment, then Marcus began to slowly slide a hand towards his sword hilt.

Without taking his eyes from Demetri's back, the orc-breed evenly, "This is none of your affair, boy. Turn around, finish your dinner and live to see tomorrow."

Marcus paused for a moment, as common sense warred with the precepts of fairness. 'The orc-breed is right,' he thought. 'This was not his affair. Still, four against one just doesn't seem right.' His indecision was cut short when Demetri made a sudden move.

Apparently hoping that Marcus had distracted the orc-breed, Demetri heaved away from away from the table, hurling himself backwards and to the right while he flung the half-full flagon of ale at his antagonist's head. The orc-breed contemptuously batted the flagon from the air with his left-hand blade, scattering the contents in a spray of foam while lunging forward with the right-hand blade, seeking to skewer the dwarf-breed as he tumbled away.

The thrown tankard was just a feint, however, for Demetri scissored his legs as he dropped to the floor, catching the orc-breed's lead leg with enough force to send the thrust wide by a handbreadth. The orc-breed stumbled awkwardly and attempted to recover while Demetri rolled to one knee and drew a heavy fighting dirk. "Kill him!" the orc-breed growled as he came on guard again.

The common room dissolved into chaos. Tables and benches clattered to the floor as patrons attempted to flee from the conflict. The orc-breed's companions threw back their cloaks and advanced. The two on the flanks raised small crossbows and the third hefted a brace of fighting knives that matched the one Demetri held. Gabriella yelled something unintelligible and Marcus yanked his blade from the scabbard. Out of the corner of his eye, Marcus saw Lös dash past him towards the crossbowman on the left, fur still glimmering faintly.

The man noted Marcus' movement and shifted his aim from Demetri to the closer threat. Caught half-standing, legs straddling the bench, Marcus had no where to go. Focusing on the diamond-shaped cross-section of the bolt head, Marcus knew there was no way the crossbowman could miss from that range. 'I'm dead,' he thought with almost clinical detachment. The man's face split in a grin as his finger tightened on the trigger.

The crossbowman's smile turned into a grimace of agony as Lös pounced and latched onto his left leg. The aura surrounding the tomcat discharged into crackling strands of electrical energy which raced up the man's torso, down his other limbs and engulfed his head in a shower of sparks. The nose of the crossbow jerked up as the man fired the weapon spasmodically and the bolt passed just over Marcus' head, buzzing like a nest of angry hornets, before burying itself in a ceiling beam.

The silvery tendrils dissipated almost instantly and the man collapsed to the floor. His eyes were rolled back in his head, blood flowed from his mouth where he had bitten his tongue almost in half and his visible skin was cracked and blackened. Lös, perched atop the smoking corpse, fixed his good eye on Marcus, favored him with a cry of feline triumph and raced around behind the bar. Marcus, momentarily stunned by his good fortune, barely got Herzsilber up in time to block a backhand blow as the orc-breed leapt past him towards Demetri. His attempted riposte was caught and deflected by the crossed blades of the knife fighter, who interposed himself between Marcus and the orc-breed.

Marcus backed away, extricating himself from the confines of the bench and table while using the superior reach of his sword to keep his opponent at bay. The knife fighter was tall and lean. Lanky brown hair framed a pockmarked face covered with scars from a score of barroom brawls. A brigandine jack protected his torso and heavy leather gauntlets, reinforced with metal plates, covered his hands and forearms. The man dropped into a half-crouch, moving forward cautiously and weaving his blades in a complex pattern.

Beyond the knife fighter, Marcus saw Demetri desperately twist away from a flurry of thrusts and short, controlled cuts as the orc-breed attempted to maneuver him into a corner. The remaining crossbowman snapped a shot off at the dwarf-breed, but he somehow managed to duck away from the bolt. Cursing, the man began to reload. Marcus sensed Gabriella behind him and to his left, but could not spare a glance at her as the knife fighter moved in with a series of high and low attacks.

Marcus had never encountered such a style before, but it was soon clear that his opponent was well versed in dealing with longer weapons. He kept pressing forward, trying to move inside Herzsilber's reach while using his blades and armor-plated forearms to parry Marcus' attacks. Marcus was forced to continually give ground to avoid the knife thrusts that crept closer and closer to his body. The pockmarked man scored two shallow gashes, one on Marcus' right forearm and the other on his left shoulder, in rapid succession. Marcus gritted his teeth against the pain and continued his slow withdrawal.

He heard chanting to his left and vaguely realized that Gabriella was calling up some manner of mystic force. His opponent must have realized it as well, for he sprang forward, using the armored gauntlet on his left forearm to beat Marcus' blade aside then angling both knives upwards towards Marcus' eyes. Marcus staggered backwards, reflexively bringing up his sword to protect his face and slammed into the tavern wall. The knife fighter halted his forward momentum, half-turned and flung the blade in his right hand sidearm towards Gabriella.

She screamed and sagged, clutching feebly at the hilt of the

knife sunk deeply into her right shoulder joint. Whatever power she was calling up fizzled and failed to manifest as her own dagger clattered to the floor. The pockmarked man drew another blade from a boot sheath and turned his attention back to Marcus. Marcus, holding Herzsilber in both hands, lunged forward, aiming for the man's groin. As the knife fighter started to respond, he used his leverage to rotate the blade up and to the left, striking the man just below the heart. The man twisted aside desperately as the keen sword punched through the brigandine jack and opened a gash along his ribs.

Marcus' exultation at scoring a blow was short-lived, for the man dropped his left-hand knife, clamped the hand around Marcus' wrists and jerked him forward, adding to the momentum from the thrust. Badly off balance, Marcus was greeted with a viscous knee to the stomach, which knocked him into a table. His temple struck the edge of the table as he fell. Marcus crashed to the floor, doubled over from the blow to his midsection and unable to focus his eyes.

The pockmarked man loomed over him. Marcus struggled feebly as a calloused hand caught his hair and yanked his head back, exposing his throat. Still unable to focus, he was dimly aware of the dully-gleaming knife being drawn back for a killing blow. "Nice sword, think I'll add it to my collections", the pockmarked man rasped.

Across the room, Demetri continued to evade the orc-breed's assault. He tumbled and twisted, using the tables and benches of the common room as shields against the whirling blades. Inexorably, however, the orc-breed's assault was slowly forcing him into a corner. Behind and to the left of his opponent, Demetri saw the second crossbowman slap a bolt in place and begin maneuvering for a shot.

Changing tactics, Demetri crouched for a moment, then charged straight at the orc-breed, dagger waving wildly. Confused by the rash attack, the orc-breed stepped back a pace, then swept his short swords towards Demetri, angling the blades to take the dwarf-breed at the neck and knee. At the last moment, Demetri dove forward and the converging blades passed above and below him. Hurtling past the surprised orc-breed, Demetri tucked and rolled under a table between the orc-breed and the crossbowman.

Using his considerable momentum, he rolled upright underneath the table and heaved against it with all of his strength. The crossbowman stood in slack-jawed astonishment as the heavy trestle catapulted through the air towards him. Before he could react, the table smashed into him, shattering his crossbow and bearing him backwards into the bar. The crossbowman's scream lifted above the sound of cracking bones as the two unyielding surfaces caught him in a wooden vise. The orc-breed roared in fury and leapt at Demetri, swords flashing.

Gabriella tried to force her will through the veil of pain that shrouded her mind. She felt the blood running down her right arm and knew the wound was a bad one. Struggling, she rose to her knees and her left hand found the hilt of the red-iron dagger. She saw Marcus lunge towards the knife fighter, only to be taken down by the man's skillful maneuver. She began to gather herself, but knew, even in her pain-addled state, that she would be too late. Desperate, she sent a hurried mental plea, 'Lös!'

She saw the pockmarked man's arm draw back and his blade flash down just as her will broke through the pain barrier. She extended her dagger towards the man. 'At least he will not live to savor his victory,' she thought grimly.

Marcus, vision swimming, saw nothing but the point of the dagger diving for his throat. His eyes closed involuntarily.

'Father...'

He felt the pockmarked man jerk and the blade meant for his jugular struck him instead on the left side of his face. The tip of the dagger glanced off of Marcus' cheekbone and the weapon opened horizontal gash across the left side of his face before slicing off the top of his left ear. The intense pain cleared his vision for a moment and Marcus saw the knife fighter lurch forward and sprawl to the floor next to him, a twenty pound ball of screeching and clawing gray fur clinging to the back of the man's head.

Gabriella felt an immense surge of relief when she saw Lös leap from the bar onto Marcus' antagonist, but she momentarily held her will for fear of hitting her companion. Marcus rolled to his knees and elbows, reaching for his sword with a shaking hand. Lös continued to rake the man's neck and shoulders with his claws and clamped his fangs onto his victim's right ear. The pockmarked man cursed and flailed his left arm wildly in an attempt to dislodge his feline attacker. His groping hand finally found the scruff of Lös' neck and he pulled hard, sending the big tom spinning across the room – although a goodly portion of ear and some shreds of skin accompanied the flying cat. Lös hit the vertical surface of the bar and fell in a heap.

The knife fighter yelled incoherently in rage and pain, but found his feet. Crouching low, he lunged at Marcus, aiming for his kidneys with his remaining blade. Still wobbly and still on his knees, Marcus twisted and managed to catch the man's wrist with his left hand, halting the thrust a handbreadth from his torso. At the same time, he swung Herzsilber towards his opponent's left leg. The pockmarked man's left hand shot down and closed on Marcus' wrist, holding his attack at bay as well. The two strained against each other, locked in a silent struggle. Slowly, the knife fighter's superior leverage began to tell and Marcus felt himself being forced over backwards as the man's blade crept closer and closer to him.

Suddenly, the pockmarked man stiffened and Marcus saw his scarred face knot in agony. Some type of clear liquid washed over the top and around the back of the man's head. A few droplets splashed onto Marcus and he felt a terrible burning sensation where they landed. As the liquid ran down the man's face, his lanky hair sizzled softly and fell way, while his features literally began to melt! The man released Marcus as his hands flew to his face and he opened his mouth to scream. Some of the liquid flowed into the open cavity, reducing the scream to a sickening gurgle. The pockmarked man fell to the floor, thrashing wildly.

Marcus blanched for a moment, then steeled himself and brought Herzsilber around, placing the tip of the blade under the man's left arm, above the edge of the brigandine jack. Using both hands and all his weight, he shoved the sword downwards. The blade slipped between the man's ribs, tore through his heart and lungs and exited through his torso on the opposite side before lodging in the floor. The man's mouth flew open in a soundless scream; his body stiffened and then went limp. The liquid continued to eat away at his features and great patches of white skull soon peeked through the morass.

Suppressing the desire to wretch, Marcus looked up and saw Gabriella kneeling a few paces away from him, left hand and dagger still extended, a look of grim satisfaction on her face. The pockmarked man's dagger was still lodged in her right shoulder and the blood flowing from the wound contrasted sharply with her green tunic. He climbed wearily to his feet and took a step towards her, but noticed that a battle still raged on the far side of the common room. With a lingering glance at Gabriella, Marcus lurched off in the direction of the two remaining combatants.

The orc-breed's assault had finally backed Demetri into a corner.

The dwarf-breed's eyes darted back and forth, desperately seeking an avenue of escape. "Go ahead," the orc-breed hissed, a ghastly grin spreading over his face. "Try your little acrobatic trick again and I'll carve you up. You are going to pay for this, Demetri. If you had come quietly, the Master might have been merciful and given you a quick death. But now..."

He trailed off, leaving the unspoken threat hanging in the air and began to move forward, twin blades held wide with the tips slightly up. Demetri was out of tricks and knew his dagger stood no chance of besting his opponent's swords. He tensed himself for the inevitable blows, then saw Marcus loom over the orc-breed's left shoulder, blade flashing down in oblique cut. The alert orc-breed saw Demetri's eyes flick away and sensed the incoming attack. He slid to the right, warding off a deathblow. Herzsilber cut through the armor protecting his upper left arm like so much cheesecloth, sending the orc-breed's left hand sword clattering to the floor from nerveless fingers.

The orc-breed flattened against the tavern wall, eyes darting about and rapidly analyzing the devastation of the common room. He saw that all three of his companions were down. To his right, Demetri dropped into a low fighting stance and moved towards him, knife weaving in a figure-eight pattern. To his front, Marcus came on guard and advanced slowly with his blade pointing at the orc-breed's eyes. Beyond them, the orc-breed saw Gabriella struggle to her feet, using a table to steady herself. She held her dagger out, point up, and began to chant.

The orc-breed considered and discarded half-a-dozen courses of actions within a few moments, then leapt at Marcus, beating aside Herzsilber with a quick flick of his remaining blade then stepping to his left, putting Marcus between himself and Gabriella. Surprised by the unexpected move, Marcus pulled back and brought his sword up defensively. The orc-breed skidded to a halt and threw the short sword, backhand, at the advancing Demetri. The dwarf-breed partially deflected the thrown weapon with his fighting knife, but the point of the weapon tore through his upper right leg, midway between hip and knee. The leg crumpled and Demetri fell hard.

Using the space he had created, the orc-breed backpedaled and pulled small glass globe from a belt pouch. He lobbed the globe at Marcus, who instinctively swatted at it. Herzsilber connected with the glass sphere and it shattered in a blinding flash of reddish-white light. Marcus flung his left arm over his eyes, cried out and stumbled backwards, holding his sword out straight before him. The orc-breed spat, "You are all marked! Savor your temporary victory, for it shall be your last."

Marcus blinked his eyes rapidly, trying to clear the twinkling motes of light from his vision. After the space of ten heartbeats, he could see again. He glanced quickly about the room. Behind him, Gabriella met his gaze and shook her head. To his left, Demetri cursed and struggled to rise, blood seeping between the fingers of his right hand. To his right, Lös staggered to his feet and dazedly made his way back to his mistress. Save for the four of them and the three bodies, the common room was empty. The orc-breed had escaped!

To Be Continued...





This mana system is intended to replace the current D20 spell system. This system is an attempt to provide greater freedom for casting spells.

There are some decisions that I made, such as maintaining the concept of prepared spells, which were implemented to maintain the pace of the game. Nothing is more frustrating than having a player believe that they have a spell, among a list of 1,000 spells available to them that would get them out of this bind. With prepared slots, a spell caster must select a subset of these 1,000 spells and thus can more quickly determine if they do in fact have a spell that can be useful.

This system adds the idea that casting magic is physically and mentally taxing. In the core system, you either have spells remaining or you don't. In this system, you can always try to dig a little deeper to cast the spell you need. However, in digging deeper you are greatly taxing your inner reserves and become more vulnerable.

I envision that this system would work exceptionally well with a combat system that incorporates the idea of combat related fatigue or wounds and a general degradation of your physical state as combat wears you down.

If you have any suggestions or would like to discuss the ideas presented in this document, you can contact me at [fulltincan@hotmail.com](mailto:fulltincan@hotmail.com).

The terms used throughout this document are as follows:

- **Mana** – a measurable unit of mystical energy, used to power all forms of arcane and divine spells.
- **Mana Cost** – the amount of mana spent when a spell is cast. The mana cost of a spell is equal to 1 + the spell level.
- **Mana Debt** – a numeric value indicating the amount of mana that the character has spent and has not yet repaid. If your mana debt is more than your mana threshold you will experience mana strain.
- **Mana Strain** – a metaphysical condition achieved when your mana debt exceeds your mana threshold.
- **Mana Threshold** – the amount of mana that a person can spend without consequences.

## DETERMINING MANA THRESHOLD

Each person that is capable of casting arcane or divine spells has a mana threshold. Use the Base Mana Threshold table (T1) to determine the base mana threshold for the spell caster.

The current mana threshold for a spell caster is equal to his base mana threshold plus their spell casting ability modifier. Thus a 3rd level wizard with an 18 Intelligence ability would have a current mana threshold of 7 points.

In the case of a multi-class spell caster, the character's mana thresholds should be kept separate for each spell casting class.

Example: Regwald, a 3rd level Illusionist and a 5th level Cleric, has a 15 Intelligence and a 16 Wisdom. Consulting table T1, he has a Cleric mana threshold of 8 and an Illusionist threshold of five.

## CASTING A SPELL AND MANA DEBT

To cast a spell, the D20 standard rules apply (i.e. casting time, concentration, attacks of opportunity if not casting on the defensive, etc.). In addition, when a caster begins casting a spell, he increments his mana debt by the mana cost for the spell being cast.

Example: Jama is a 5th level wizard with an 18 Intelligence, and thus a mana threshold of 9. He already has a Mana debt of 2 (he cast Magic Missile earlier in the day). He begins casting Fireball and increases his Mana debt to 6.

## MANA STRAIN

Once a spell caster's mana debt exceeds their mana threshold, they are considered mana strained. The states of mana strain are measured in number of times that the caster's mana debt exceeds his mana threshold. For each time that the mana debt exceeds the mana threshold, the caster has a -2 to all skill checks, caster level checks, saves, ability checks, to hit rolls, and damage rolls and suffers a -2 AC penalty. In addition, whenever the caster attempts to cast a spell, after paying mana cost and determining mana strain, they must make a spell casting ability modifier to make an ability check, DC 10 + the final mana cost for the spell.

## TERMINOLOGY

*Material Component:* A pinch of tar.

Caster Level	Bard	Cleric Druid Wizard	Paladin Ranger	Sorcerer
1	0	1	0	2
2	1	2	1	3
3	2	3	1	5
4	3	4	2	6
5	3	5	2	8
6	4	6	3	9
7	5	7	4	11
8	6	8	4	12
9	6	9	5	14
10	7	10	5	15
11	8	11	6	17
12	9	12	6	18
13	9	13	7	20
14	10	14	7	21
15	11	15	8	23
16	12	16	8	24
17	12	17	9	26
18	13	18	9	27
19	14	19	10	29
20	15	20	10	30

**Option 1:** Instead of allowing “infinite” mana debt, you may instead limit mana debt to four times the spell caster’s mana threshold or any integer multiple of the caster’s mana threshold.

**Example:** Jiles, a 5th level gnome wizard has a mana threshold of 9. He currently has a mana debt of 16, and thus has a -2 to everything he attempts. He insists on casting a fireball, he expends the 4 mana, which increases his mana strain to -4. He must then make an Intelligence check, DC 13. His Intelligence modifier is +3. He rolls a 9 for a total of  $9+3-4 = 8$  and thus the spell fails. Had he rolled a 14 or higher the spell would have been successfully cast. Poor Jiles, he now has a mana debt of 20.

**Example:** Shamus, a 7th level wizard with a 17 intelligence has a Mana debt of 6 and a Mana Threshold of 10. He could spend 4 mana to cast a Fireball, but he would then suffer Mana Fatigue. Instead he could expend his prepared fireball and thus only increase his mana debt by 3 (to 9).

#### Repaying Mana debt

Resting and meditating for 8 hours reduces a spell caster’s Mana debt by their Mana Threshold.

**Example:** Saros, a multi-classed Fighter 2 / Rogue 3 / Wizard 5 has a Mana debt of 12 and a Mana Threshold of 7. He is presently experiencing mana strain. After resting eight hours his Mana debt is reduced to 5 points. He is no longer experiencing mana strain, but still has a Mana debt.

## PREPARING SPELLS

Spell casters that would typically prepare spells must still do so according to the standard rules. Unlike the standard rules, a spell caster need only prepare one instance of any given spell, because unlike the standard method of casting, if a spell is cast, instead of expending the prepared slot, the spell caster increases his Mana debt. A spell caster that wishes to utilize a Metamagic feat must prepare the desired spell with the Metamagic feat.

A spell caster may reduce the mana cost of a spell by one point by expending the prepared slot for the spell that is being cast.

## NEW SPELLS

### Atrophic Field

#### Abjuration

**Level:** Clr 4, Sor/Wiz 4

**Components:** V, S, M

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Personal

**Area of Effect:** 60’ radius emanation

**Duration:** 1 minute / level

**Saving Throw:** None

**Spell Resistance:** No

You create an invisible, imperceptible field that reduces the free flow of mana. Spells cast within this field require two more mana points than normal.

### Mana Drain

#### Enchantment

**Level:** Sor/Wiz 2

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Short (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

**Effect:** Ray

**Duration:** Instantaneous

**Saving Throw:** Will half

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

You convince someone that they have accrued a greater mana debt than they first thought. Increase the subject’s mana debt by 1d6 points. A successful will saving throw reduces this amount by half.

### Mana Leech

#### Enchantment

**Level:** Sor/Wiz 3

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Short (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

**Effect:** 1 target

**Duration:** Instantaneous

**Saving Throw:** Will negates

**Spell Resistance:** Yes

You convince the target to lend you mana, thus reducing your mana debt and increasing their mana debt. The target’s mana debt is increased by 1d6 points. For each point that the target’s mana debt is increased, your mana debt decreases by that amount. A successful will saving throw negates this spell.

### Mind over Matter

#### Enchantment

**Level:** Sor/Wiz 4

**Components:** V, S, XP

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Personal

**Effect:** You

**Duration:** Instantaneous

**Saving Throw:** Will negates, harmless

**Spell Resistance:** No

You convince yourself that you have no mana debt. For the next ten minutes, you do not suffer the effects of mana strain.

*XP Cost:* 100 XP.

### Void Bolt

#### Conjuration (Creation)

**Level:** Sor/Wiz 4

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 1 action





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# Asgard

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## EN WORLD



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