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Character Theme: The Mariner

By Jeff Morgenroth

Illustration by Ed Cox

Developing your character into someone who has a rich story can be a fun and rewarding process. You likely have an idea of what race and what class you want to play, but you might have only a general idea of what your character's life was like before you start playing the character at the gaming table. A theme can help you flesh out your character and provide some interesting options for developing his or her background.

This article details a character theme for those seeking excitement on the high seas: the mariner. It also describes a sample ship that a mariner can help crew or captain during adventures.

THE MARINER

Mariners are intrepid folk who take to the world's great oceans and seas, living on the rolling waves aboard ships of all kinds. Though they hail from many races and walks of life, mariners have one thing that unites them—a love of the sea and the freedom it brings. Mariners set their course for wherever the winds take them, whether dodging icebergs in the arctic circle, clipping through the azure waters of the tropics, or crossing vast seas to unknown lands. The crisp sea air is the siren that turns the mariner's rudder to dry land, drawing him or her to see what's beyond the watery horizons.

No two mariners share the same story. Their backgrounds converge only in the fact that they have

CHARACTER THEMES

Your character's theme is a career, calling, or identity that describes who he or she is in the world. Just as race and class create basic definitions about who your character is, theme adds a third character component to help refine your story and identity. The mariner theme can encompass several unique stories within the same concept. For example, if you're a rogue who chooses the mariner theme, you could be a buccaneer in search of plunder, while a warlord mariner might be a naval officer aboard a royal man-of-war.

For information on using themes as part of character creation and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore," the first article in this series, from *Dragon* 399.

made a life for themselves aboard a ship. For most, this will have been a decision made by choice. Many find ample opportunities to seek wealth by traveling from port to port to trade goods from distant nations. Experienced mariners sometimes seek rich patrons willing to finance daring voyages. Plotting courses to new lands—and claiming them in the name of their

patron—can bring wealth and fame to the mariner. Others might have dedicated their lives to the royal navy, waging war against the realm's enemies by sea. These naval captains are the stuff of legends. Few mariners reach such lofty status, yet even the rank-and-file who crew the ships are rewarded with more adventure and gold than they would ever gain while on land.

Although many raise sail for love of adventure or as a profession, those who spend most of their lives on ships have darker experiences. These folk are the dread pirates who plunder the coasts. For these individuals, the sea might serve as a refuge from the hangman's noose, but most pirates adopt their ways after realizing that the expansive holds of merchant fleets contain enough wealth for a hundred lifetimes. Fighting, drinking, and the feel of gold spilling through fingers are pleasures enough to draw even honest mariners to live the pirate's life.

The importance that great bodies of water play in various cultures means that members of many races become mariners. Though the great fleets of humanity can dominate the trade lanes, flotillas of halfling skiffs ride the rivers far inland. The graceful prows of eladrin ships glide through the shimmering waters of the Feywild. Underground, dwarven barges cruise through subterranean rivers. Still other mariners are independent members of a tribe, paddling swift canoes or catamarans from island to island.

Whether one is a humble sailor, a dashing captain, or a cutthroat pirate, all mariners share a love of freedom. Riding the winds gives them independence unknown by the masses on dry land. The open sea, fleet winds, the song of gulls, and the promise of adventure pull mariners more strongly than the ebbing tide.

Creating a Mariner

Members of any class could enjoy a life as a mariner. Rogues and rangers excel as mariners due to their diverse skills and maneuverability. Fighters, paladins, and warlords might be mariners aboard a vessel, where they adapt their fighting styles to the close quarters of ship-to-ship warfare. Scholarly characters can draw on their studies to help navigate treacherous waters or communicate with newly encountered civilizations, while ritual-using mariners could conjure winds or sea creatures. Primal characters are sometimes drawn by water spirits to the ocean. Regardless of class, mariners develop similar talents learned from a life at sea, which makes them versatile and responsive to the changing winds of fate.

Starting Feature

Crewing a sailing ship requires a host of skills most landlubbers never concern themselves with. Though each mariner typically has a specialty within a crew, mariners are expected to be able to assist at whatever task is needed. These duties often require practical skills such as carpentry, rope use, or navigation. Many mariners pick up these and other talents during their youth, informally mentored by their older shipmates. Other talents a mariner picks up naturally, such as keeping one's balance during turbulent weather, spotting land against the glare of the sea, or enduring the sweltering heat and long days of thirst while exposed to the elements on deck.

Benefit: While you are aboard a ship, you gain a +1 bonus to any skill check or ability check related to life at sea. Examples of such checks include an Athletics check to scale rigging, a Diplomacy check to issue orders to surly crew members, a Perception check to spot a dangerous reef, or an Intelligence check to plot a course using the stars. At 10th level, this bonus increases to +2.

In addition, you gain the *sea legs* power.

Sea Legs

Mariner Utility

Your time spent riding the ocean swells gives you a keen sense of balance and timing.

At-Will ♦ Martial

Free Action

Personal

Trigger: You roll an Acrobatics check to balance or hop down, and you dislike the result.

Effect: You reroll the Acrobatics check and keep the higher result.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

It takes quick wits to manage a seafaring ship. Knowing how and when to promptly adjust a sail's trim, tie down rigging, or adapt to the ever-changing currents might mean the difference between smooth sailing or running aground. These situations train you to remain aware of your environment and adapt quickly to survive. In combat, these skills translate to swift reactions.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to initiative checks.

Level 10 Feature

When landlubbers set foot aboard a ship, they can be clumsy and awkward, stumbling their way across the deck or feeling closed in by the web of rigging. To a mariner, it becomes second nature to maneuver in crowded spaces or across cluttered floors. You move with casual ease through obstacles that would trip others, especially when you can take advantage of a ship's numerous ropes to quickly swing or maneuver between decks.

Benefit: You ignore difficult terrain when you shift. While you are aboard a ship, you can use a minor action once per round to shift 1 square.

BE YE SWAB OR CAPTAIN?

Your character's role aboard a ship depends a lot on the nature of the campaign. You might begin a mariner's life as a youthful sailor or cabin boy reporting to an officer. As the campaign progresses, you will have the chance to distinguish yourself during adventures, perhaps ascending to the rank of captain. With your DM's permission, you might begin as the captain of a humble vessel, crewing it with the other members of the party. Even if the DM doesn't pursue a naval-themed campaign, you can still be an effective mariner. Instead of working aboard a ship, you might be an old sea dog who brings your nautical skills to adventures ashore.

Below are some of the principal titles found on a sailing ship. Your skills can make you an excellent fit for one of these roles, or you might instead be forced into a role by your captain.

Captain: A captain is the ultimate authority on the ship, responsible for delegating orders and determining the ship's actions.

Quartermaster: An officer with almost as much authority as the captain, a quartermaster is largely responsible for all that transpires below deck, such as the organization and dispensation of supplies.

On many vessels, the quartermaster also acts as the crew's representative during important debates among officers.

Sailing Master: A sailing master is the officer responsible for turning the captain's orders into action, whether organizing sailors or navigating a course.

Boatswain: A boatswain inspects the performance and readiness of a ship, as well as enforces the other officers' orders.

Carpenter: A carpenter is a skilled officer in charge of repairs to a ship and its rigging.

Surgeon: A surgeon tends to the wounds and illnesses afflicting those at sea. Many surgeons have no magical ability and must make do with tools used for other repairs aboard, making for messy work.

Mate: Usually young, mates are high-ranking sailors who are apprenticed to senior officers.

Seaman: A seaman is any able-bodied sailor who obeys orders to tend to the numerous needs of the ship.

Swab: Swab is not a rank, but an insult used to describe someone you don't respect.

Sea Chantey

Mariner Utility 2

Your jolly song eases the burden of work or monotony among your comrades.

Daily ♦ **Martial**

Minor Action **Close burst 5**

Target: You and each ally in the burst

Effect: Choose a skill. Until the end of the encounter, each target gains a +2 power bonus to checks made with that skill. In addition, if you use this power on board a ship, the ship's speed increases by 2 for the next 8 hours.

Level 6 Utility Power

Combat amid the tangled rigging and cramped holds of a ship is challenging for those ill adjusted to it, which makes an attacking mariner all the more dangerous when conditions favor him or her. You can change the dynamic of battle as you cause your enemy to stumble or become entangled in difficult terrain while you spring through with ease to set up your next attack.

Shifting Tides

Mariner Utility 6

You quickly pass through cramped surroundings as an enemy advances, using a tangle of ropes or other hampering objects to make the foe vulnerable to attack.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

Immediate Reaction **Personal**

Trigger: An enemy enters a square adjacent to you.

Effect: You shift up to half your speed, ignoring difficult terrain. The first time you hit the triggering enemy before the end of your next turn, the enemy is immobilized (save ends).

Level 10 Utility Power

As a mariner who has sailed upon many seas, your fellow crew members look up to you with the respect befitting a captain. When the need comes, your commands are treated as gospel by your allies, giving them motivation to stand fast against incoming danger or to surge forward to a better tactical position.

Optional Powers

Skills learned as a sailor often carry over into activities ashore, yet although mariners aren't fish out of water when on dry ground, most are more comfortable aboard their ship. Mariners who truly devote themselves to life at sea often pick up a repertoire of abilities different from those of their landlubber counterparts.

Level 2 Utility Power

Long hours, mealy rations, the stink of other sailors, and months between visiting ports can make a mariner's life one of drudgery. To keep from going stir-crazy aboard their ships, mariners pass the time with song, dance, and ribald chanteys. Though as a mariner your vocabulary is often colored with profane metaphors and curses, your merry work songs raise spirits and get the most out of the crew.

Avast!

Mariner Utility 10

A stern command from you causes even the surliest sea dog to hold fast.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

Minor Action **Close burst 5**

Target: Each ally in the burst

Effect: Each target can choose to be slowed until the end of your next turn. If a target does so, he or she gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses and can reduce forced movement against him or her by up to 2 squares while slowed by this effect.

SAMPLE SHIP: THE OSPREY

Starting from humble origins, the *Osprey* is a jaunty carrack whose masts have flown the banners of villains and kings alike. Its crew is a motley assortment of patriots and scoundrels, carrying out orders that make them outlaws to some and heroes to others.

The *Osprey*'s storied legacy is told by bards at ports near and far. Even members of the *Osprey*'s current crew exchange tall tales of their ship's exploits, with none knowing for sure which stories are real. One thing is certain, though: A hundred marks of old battles spark the adventurous spirit of those aboard.

History

The *Osprey* originated as a merchant carrack, plying the waters at the expanding edges of the Nerathi empire. During the empire's final years, it was commandeered by the imperial navy and converted for war. When the empire fell at last, a Nerathi admiral used the vessel to spirit away a small group of survivors to the southern frontier. After coming upon a distant cove surrounded by dark forests, the Nerathi survivors ran the vessel aground and fled inland.

Scourge of the Seas

The *Osprey* waited in the cove's tidal mud flats for generations, its gloomy silhouette the only sign of civilization in the tumultuous wilds. Into this cove rowed Black Cagliostro, a pirate captain who had been exiled by his mutinous crew. Though he was quick to lay claim to the *Osprey*, Cagliostro was captured by barbarians who called the surrounding hills home. The sly pirate not only brokered his freedom, but recruited many barbarians to his service. Shortly thereafter, Captain Cagliostro stood on the forecandle of the *Osprey*, sailing with a ferocious crew eager for blood and glory.

The ocean foamed crimson as Black Cagliostro led his sea-tigers on some of the most ruthless exploits of piracy the world has known. Feared, respected, and fabulously wealthy, Cagliostro set the measuring bar to which every seafaring scoundrel aspires. Cagliostro's wealth eventually caught the eye of the covetous dragon Torclytanox, who attacked the *Osprey* and slew Cagliostro and his reavers. Torclytanox was denied her prize thanks to the crafty pirates, who had scattered their wealth across the isles of the Sea of Mist. Though heavily damaged, the *Osprey* stayed afloat, drifting with the winds back to shore.

Astral Tides

The young explorer Qaelwyn Farsight claimed the *Osprey* for herself, though sailors throughout the port warned that the ship was cursed twice over. Undaunted, she used her family's fortune to repair the *Osprey* and hired a crew eager for adventure. Obsessed with charting the mysterious areas beyond the edges of her navigator's maps, Qaelwyn pressed ever into the unknown. She mastered the eight seas of the Iron Circle and grew famous for her discoveries, yet wanderlust drove her. Ever farther she explored, and legends say she sailed beyond the horizon and onto the Astral Sea. The *Osprey* returned to civilized waters many years later with a full crew—except for

SETTING SAIL

The *Osprey* is a versatile ship that can form an integral element to your adventures, perhaps creating the foundation for a naval-themed campaign. Even with the ship's involvement kept to a minimum, it can provide you and your allies with a speedy mode of transportation to adventure sites, as well as a familiar home base to recover from and plan for your adventures. The sample history and NPCs below can give you inspiration for how to make the *Osprey* as dynamic a site as a comfortable inn set in more familiar campaigns. Additionally, it provides you with an idea for how your mariner character can join or fit into a ship's crew. You might find creative ways to incorporate elements of the *Osprey*'s history into your own background as well as add to its storied legacy.

Check with your DM about how to include a ship such as the *Osprey* into your character's history and the campaign.

Captain Qaelwyn. The crew disbanded and swore a pact to never reveal her fate. Today only the crew's youngest members survive, now elders who refuse to tell the tale. When pressed, they gaze skyward and smile, remembering a time when the *Osprey* sailed among the stars.

The Marque of Lords

In recent years, the *Osprey* has traded hands several times, being sought out by sages, treasure hunters, and kings who hope to find clues that can lead them to lost treasure or fantastic magic. Moreover, the ship's practical qualities have mariners vying to possess the vessel as well, because few ships can keep pace with the *Osprey* or outmaneuver it in combat.

ON DECK

The *Osprey* is a carrack, which is a three-masted ship large enough to be stable in rugged seas and roomy enough to carry crew and provisions on long voyages. Treat it as a greatship (*Adventurer's Vault*, page 18). The *Osprey's* sleek profile and modifications emphasize speed over broadside tactics. Because the ship was designed for speed, lower its hit points to 300 and increase its swim speed to 8. Additionally, the *Osprey* has a load of only 100 Medium creatures and 250 tons of cargo.

Pirates, smugglers, adventurers, and even foppish monarchs have fancied themselves the *Osprey's* captain, though none have held the rank for long—until now.

Today the *Osprey* is captained by Gallus Drake, privateer and cousin to the king of Nera. Given a royal marque to attack any of his cousin's enemies, Drake and his crew prowl the waters of the eight seas in search of fortune and glory. Friends of the captain toast both him and his crew, while his enemies curse his name out of hatred or jealousy. Many claim that no ship's sails fill with the bountiful winds of adventure more than the *Osprey's*.

Captain and Crew

The *Osprey's* crew is a hardy group that numbers two and forty. Each member was handpicked by Captain Drake for his or her skill and grit. Although ostensibly loyal, the crew members have pasts that can be as shady as the history of the *Osprey*. You might have joined the crew recently after impressing the captain with your skill, or maybe you've been a cabin boy for

most of your youth, growing up on the decks of the *Osprey*.

The ship's motley crew includes members of all races and backgrounds, giving you and your DM ample opportunities to create a memorable cast. If your character is just beginning his or her adventures, then Captain Drake and the other officers might be mentors, leaders, or rivals. Some of these individuals might figure into your background or provide you with supplies or information for your adventures.

The following characters can give you and your DM a starting place for developing the daring crew of the *Osprey* and your place in it.

Captain Gallus Drake: Dauntless, cunning, and ambitious, Drake is known for his passionate emotions, command acumen, and ruthlessness to his enemies.

Sir Reginald: A fair and diplomatic voice among the officers, the quartermaster Sir Reginald eases tensions between captain and crew with his thoughtful words, despite being exiled from the royal court.

Jacquelyn Flay: Perhaps the most uncompromising boatswain ever to set sail, Flay has a stern discipline that keeps the ship's performance at its best, though she is ill-loved by the crew, who have nicknamed her "the Tigress."

CREWING THE OSPREY

As an adventurer aboard the *Osprey*, you probably won't be swabbing the decks, but you might not be experienced enough to be captain, either. In this case, you and your allies might undertake missions on behalf of Captain Drake. Also, if the DM has established you and your allies as commanders of the ship, you might find a role as an officer a natural fit. For example, a cleric could easily become the ship's surgeon, while an erudite sorcerer or wizard would excel as sailing master. Establishing yourself and your party as officers aboard the *Osprey* is a perfect way for you to take control of your adventures.

Use one of the following hooks to explain how you might have come aboard the *Osprey* or taken command of her.

- ◆ You're a stowaway, hoping to hitch a ride to distant lands but now forced to work for your passage.
- ◆ You've joined the crew so that you can find your father, a mariner long lost at sea.
- ◆ You discovered the *Osprey* as it drifted crewless into your village's bay, and you worked with your friends to make it seaworthy.

- ◆ You're a pirate captured by Captain Drake, who has given you freedom as long as you can prove your loyalty.
- ◆ You secretly possess part of a map leading to Black Cagliostro's treasure, and you hope to find more clues aboard the *Osprey*.
- ◆ You're a mate to one of the officers, and you've spent much of your adolescence at sea.
- ◆ The captain has died from an untimely fever, and now the crew looks to you for leadership.
- ◆ You've inherited the *Osprey* from its previous captain, who was a close relative.
- ◆ As a member of the royal legion, you have warrior skills that caught the eye of Captain Drake. He recruited you as a marine.
- ◆ You were part of a pirate attack that captured the *Osprey*. Upon taking the ship, your captain met with an unfortunate "accident," leaving you in command.
- ◆ As a devout servant of the gods, you hope that the *Osprey* will take you to the Astral Sea as it did Qaelwyn Farsight.

Trakas Laughingstone: This gregarious goliath is the *Osprey's* carpenter, whose peerless handicraft keeps the ship afloat and friendly demeanor softens the boatswain's discipline.

Nyasha: Nyasha is a mysterious tribal elf from the southern jungles whose communion with the winds fills the *Osprey's* sails.

Blackjack: Bearing every brand of piracy known, the reformed Blackjack tends the galley, where he awes impressionable crew with tales of his pirate days.

Morgan Clegg: Former quartermaster to the *Osprey's* deposed smuggler captain, Clegg is a thorn in Captain Drake's side because of his cynicism and his tendency to gossip with the crew.

Dangle: The captain's pet monkey bears a gold key around his collar, though none but Drake have set hands on the wriggling scamp long enough to discover what it opens.

Kalé the Red: Kalé is a newly arrived seaman recruited for his skilled swordplay, though rumors say his ambition bodes ill for the captain.

About the Author

Jeff Morgenroth is a regular contributor to *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Insider*, giving wind to the sails of his fellow gamers. His recent credits include *Into the Unknown: The Dungeon Survival Handbook™* and "Character Themes: Samurai and Yakuza" in *Dragon 404*.

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Unearthed Arcana: Using Ships in Your Campaign

By *Lori Anderson*

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What could be better than the wind at your back, the sun shining warmly on your face, the soothing sound of waves crashing, and the gentle roll of the deck beneath your feet? As you set sail on the open sea, the air is electrified with the promise of adventure. Travel to exotic locales, explore unknown lands, encounter strange sea creatures, discover forgotten civilizations, and uncover buried treasure.

The ocean is filled with incredible beauty, great dangers, exotic creatures, and thrilling adventure. Adventure does not come without peril, and a good ship can make or break the journey.

Custom ships can add excitement to any seafaring campaign. This article provides a sample ship and guidelines for creating customized ships, as well as sample crew members and adventure hooks for using ships in your campaign.

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EXAMPLE SHIP: THE FALLING STAR

Most people seeking to travel by ship request passage on a merchant ship heading in the same direction. The fare, negotiated with the captain, is typically paid in gold, service, or both, and varies based on the distance, the danger involved, the captain's temperament, and whether the destination requires a change to the original route. Many captains are glad to have adventurers aboard their ship and give them free passage in exchange for protection against creatures or pirates that might attack the ship. That is, of course, if the adventurers wish to travel where the ship is already scheduled to go. Captains are generally reluctant to alter their routes or travel in dangerous areas unless they are tempted with gold.

A carrack is a sailing vessel suited for exploration and ocean travel. It can withstand the high seas and fierce storms of the open ocean and has enough cargo room to carry the supplies necessary for long voyages. Alternatively, it can be used as a merchant vessel to transport goods. A carrack can be rented for 500 gp per week with a full crew or purchased outright for 9,000 gp.

A carrack has the following features, as shown on the map of *The Falling Star*.

1. Main Deck: The ship's main deck holds standard supplies for running and repairing the ship. Near the forecastle (area 2), a large crate is securely bolted down and filled with tools, ropes, and other supplies. A small rowboat is lashed to the middle of the deck. Carracks typically have between two and four masts, and a crow's nest sits at the top of the main mast.

2. Forecastle: The forecastle ("fo'c'sle") serves as a platform for archers to fire on enemy ships and as a defensive stronghold in case the ship is boarded. A ballista is located on each side of the forecastle. A

small rowboat is also stored here. An anchor with a thick metal chain rests near the ship's railing.

3. Quarterdeck: The quarterdeck and its occupants are important for the navigation and control of the ship. The captain commands the ship from the quarterdeck, which is also where the pilot steers the ship and the quartermaster determines the ship's location and course. A large catapult lobs heavy stones or flaming balls of tar at enemy ships.

4. Supply Closet: This small supply closet holds basic supplies such as pails, mops, nets, and rope.

5. Officers' Dining Room: The cabin boy delivers food to the officers and other high-ranking crew members in this dining room. Comfortable chairs surround a wooden table. Fine linens are used for napkins, the dishes are made of porcelain, and the utensils are silver-plated. Prestigious passengers are often invited to dine with the officers.

6. Officers' Lounge: A couch and several plush chairs furnish this room, where the captain and his mates relax between shifts.

7. Chart Room: A large table covered with detailed nautical maps dominates this room. Maps and charts adorn the walls. A drawing table along one wall offers space for mapping unexplored areas. A sextant, compass, and various other navigational instruments sit on a small corner table.

8. Infirmary: Basic first aid supplies and rough surgical instruments are located in a cabinet along one wall. The supplies include bandages, ointments, slings, and herbal remedies. If a sailor has a more serious injury, he or she might be given a scrap of sailcloth to bite down on while his limb is amputated with a saw. Although the crew does its best to keep this room clean, bloodstains are visible on the floor and walls.

9. Head: The head empties directly into the ocean.

10. Crew Quarters: The crew's sleeping quarters are barren, with only hammocks and a series of small

cubbies on the wall for the crew's personal belongings. Chalk marks on the wall count the number of days the ship has been out to sea.

11 & 12. Passenger's Quarters: These rooms have several sturdy, comfortable beds. At the foot of each bed is a large chest with a lock to store personal belongings. Each chest holds a complimentary jar of smelling salts or a pouch of herbs to alleviate seasickness.

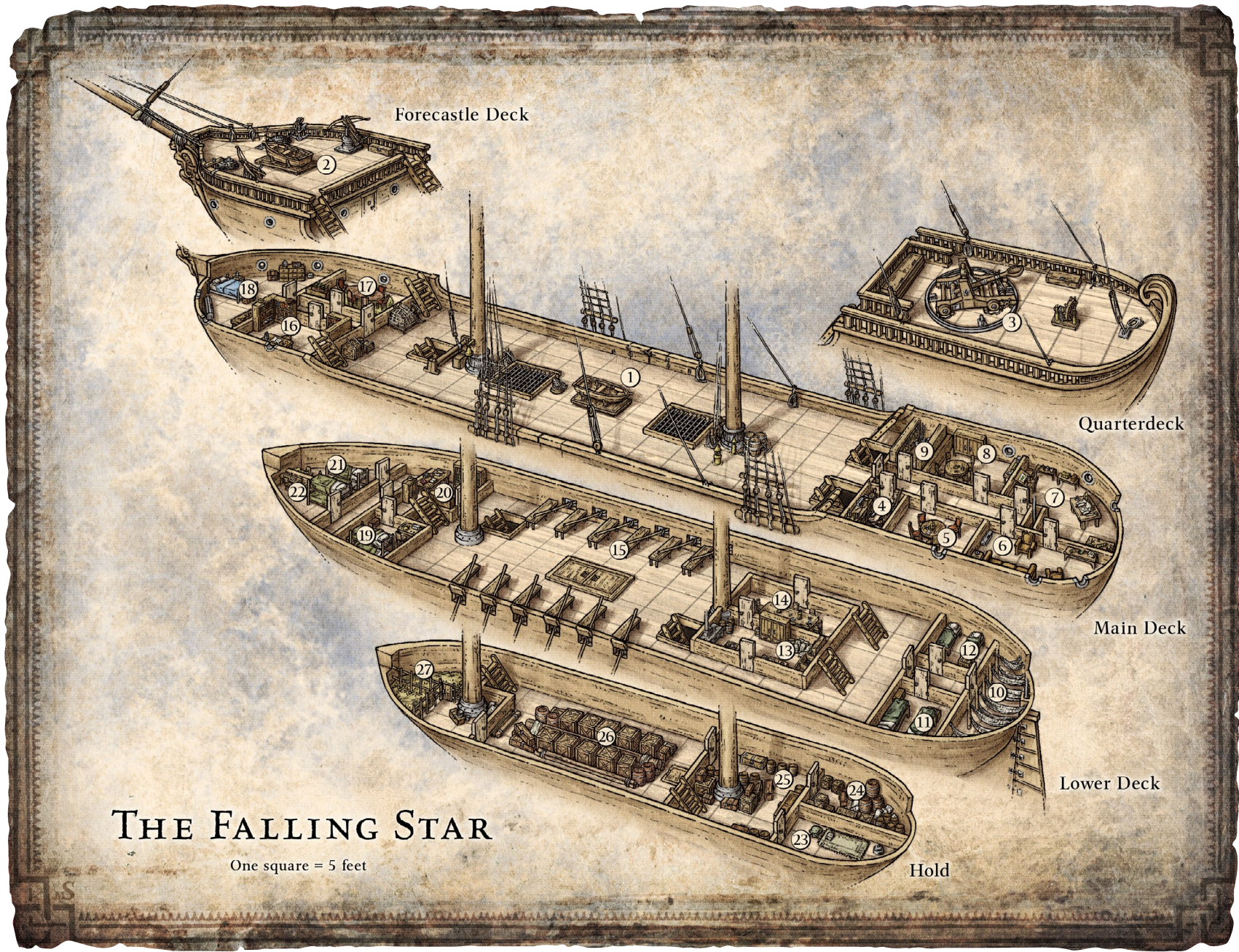
13. Galley: The galley, or ship's kitchen, has a small stove, a wash basin, and wooden cupboards filled with cooking utensils.

14. Mess Hall: This room is filled with two long tables and rows of wooden benches. Crew members gather around the tables to eat or to gamble.

15. Lower Deck: Rows of low wooden benches line each side of the lower deck. Long oars can be slid into the water for use when there is no wind in the sails, or for delicate maneuvering. When the oars are not in use, this area is used for storage.

16. Captain's Study: Against one wall of the study rests a large, sturdy writing table. There are also several bookcases with leather straps across each shelf to hold books in place during rough seas. Only the captain, the first mate, and the second mate are permitted to use this room.

17. Captain's Sitting Room: The captain entertains prestigious guests in this lavishly appointed sitting room. Since it is one of the most private locations on the ship, the captain also uses this room to discuss matters that he or she wishes to keep quiet. Several burgundy chairs with gold trim surround a low mahogany table. An elegant gold candelabra illuminates the room, powered by the magic similar to an *everburning torch*. An intricately carved liquor cabinet graces one corner, and a thick ornamental rug covers the rough floorboards. As in every room, the furniture is bolted to the floor, but here the bolts are cleverly concealed so as not to ruin the room's ambiance. Tapestries of nautical scenes decorate the walls,



Forecastle Deck

Quarterdeck

Main Deck

Lower Deck

Hold

THE FALLING STAR

One square = 5 feet

and one hides a small compartment where the captain stores his valuables.

18. Captain's Quarters: The captain's sleeping quarters are fairly plain compared to the rest of his suite. A large wooden bed with fine linens dominates this room, and a massive wooden bureau stands against one wall.

19. Pantry: One level down from the galley sits a food pantry filled with sacks of grain, large cans of beans and vegetables, barrels of water, casks of brandy, and other consumables.

20. Cargo Hold: Additional cargo that cannot fit in the main cargo hold is stored in this room.

21 & 22. Mates' Quarters: The first mate and the second mate share this room, which contains a bunk bed and two large chests.

23. Brig: The brig is a small, unfurnished room in the bowels of the ship. The door has a window with iron bars and a small slit to pass food through. A straw mat and a chamber pot are the only objects present.

24. Secured Cargo Hold: Unusually valuable cargo is stored in this room, which is locked with a stout iron padlock. The captain carries the only key.

25. Main Pantry: This pantry is filled with large crates of food as well as barrels of water and beer. Supplies from this room are used to restock the small pantry nearer to the galley.

26. Main Cargo Hold: The ship's total carrying capacity is 400 tons of cargo.

27. Livestock Pens: These pens house livestock such as goats, hens, and the occasional pig. The animals provide fresh meat and eggs, and are especially important on long journeys when food supplies may run low.

TRAVEL SPEEDS

A ship's speed can vary considerably, depending as it does on prevailing winds. Typical travel speeds are about 4 knots, or 100 miles traveled per day. The table below shows average travel speeds based on wind conditions.

SHIP TRAVEL SPEEDS

Wind Speed	Knots	Miles/Day
No wind	0	0
Light breeze	1	30
Rowing	1	30
Moderate wind	4	100
Strong wind	6	165
Gale-force wind	8	220

STANDARD CREW

A standard crew for a carrack includes a captain, a first mate, a second mate, a quartermaster, a boatswain, a pilot, a cook, a cabin boy or girl, and eighteen to twenty sailors. The captain is responsible for the safe and efficient operation of the ship. The captain also resolves disputes among the crew and is the ultimate authority on all matters. The first mate and the second mate are second and third in command. The quartermaster is responsible for navigation and maintenance of nautical charts. The boatswain is the supervisor of the deck crew and also performs routine inspections and maintenance of the vessel. The boatswain also serves as the ship's surgeon, since he or she is the most skilled with a saw and can perform rough amputations or stitch someone up if necessary. The pilot helms the ship and is responsible for safely steering the carrack through dangerous or shallow waters. The cabin boy or girl runs errands for

the captain and performs other menial tasks such as cleaning, delivering messages, and carrying supplies. The remaining crew members perform various duties as needed, including cleaning, maintenance, trimming the sails, and serving as lookouts.

The day is broken into three eight-hour shifts. Each crew member works one shift, sleeps one shift, and has one shift for leisure. Three crew members, one from each shift, share a single hammock. The captain usually commands the morning shift, the first mate commands the afternoon shift, and the second mate is stuck with the night shift.

Leisure Time

Life on board, staring out at a seemingly endless sea, can sometimes be enough to test even the stoutest sailor's sanity. Leisure time is important for maintaining order and high morale among the crew. When sailors are off-duty, they engage in a variety of activities for entertainment.

Games of cards and dice are popular ways of passing the time. Dice are typically made of wood, bone, or ivory. Specialty dice bear images of monsters instead of pips, with more dangerous creatures having a higher value. For example, a six-sided die might feature a bronze dragon, a water elemental, a dragon turtle, a kraken, a giant crab, and a shark.

Gambling aboard ship takes many forms, from card and dice games to betting on everyday things. Common bets include who will be reprimanded first on a given shift, what kind of slop will pass as dinner, or which passenger will be the first to get seasick. Sailors aren't typically rich, so they usually bet in copper pieces, small luxuries such as reading material, exotic delicacies, alcohol, or services such as kitchen duty or extra lookout rotations.

No sea voyage would be complete without drinking, singing, and crude jokes. Tall tales might also provide hours of entertainment, each story more outrageous than the one before.

HAVE YOU HEARD THE ONE ABOUT . . .

- ◆ The shipwreck survivor who floated on a plank of wood for a year and survived by catching fish with his bare hands?
- ◆ The prince who died of heartache when his lover went out to sea?
- ◆ A ship that survived a 2,000-foot-tall tsunami without waking the captain's baby or spilling a glass of water on a table?
- ◆ The girl who leaped into the ocean because she thought she was a dolphin? (She was seen many years later swimming with a pod of dolphins—and she had tiny flippers and a tail.)
- ◆ The sailor who was swallowed by a kraken and lived in its stomach for four months before the beast was killed by fishers? (The sailor survived, but her skin was bleached white, she lost her vision, and she went mad.)
- ◆ The sailor who wrestled the dragon turtle and defeated it with his bare hands?

Other pastimes include reading, writing in journals, sketching, and daydreaming. Sailors rarely exercise during their leisure time, since they do plenty of labor-intensive chores while on duty.

Crew members might also spend time praying or making small offerings to their deities. Most sailors revere Melora, god of the sea, and pray to her for safe travel. Sailors might also pray to Kord, the storm god, to spare them from fierce tempests.

The captain does not fraternize with the rest of the crew, as that might cause them to view him as an equal, undermining his authority. He therefore spends much of his leisure time alone or with

officers of similar station. If the ship is carrying a distinguished passenger, the captain might invite this individual to his sitting room for conversation over tea. Some captains entertain their guests with a game of Three-Dragon Ante using a beautifully hand-painted deck, or Dragonchess with a carved ivory chess set. The captain might also spend his or her off hours reading or keeping a log.

TYPES OF SHIPS

When the time comes to purchase a ship, there are several varieties to choose from.

Apparatus of Kwalish: This lobster-shaped vehicle can travel underwater and carries two Medium creatures plus their gear.

Argosy: This bulky trading vessel has substantial cargo capacity and requires only a small crew, making it popular with merchants. However, it moves slowly and is difficult to handle during storms.

Carrack: This is the example ship described in detail in the previous section. It carries 30 people and holds up to 400 tons of cargo.

Clipper: This long, narrow ship is capable of reaching high speeds but has little room for cargo.

Greatship: This enormous ship can carry 200 people and up to 500 tons of cargo. During wartime, it is used to transport large numbers of soldiers.

Longship: Ideally suited for river travel or beach landings, this slender vessel does not have much cargo space.

Pinnace: This ship is versatile and well suited to ocean voyages and coastal travel. The cheapest ship suitable for travel on the high seas, the pinnace is also cheap to run since it requires only a small crew.

Rowboat: This small boat is used for travel on small lakes and streams. Rowboats are also found on larger vessels and are used for exploring new shorelines and beach landings in places where the larger ship cannot dock.

SHIP TYPES

Ship Name	Cargo	Cost (gp)
Rowboat	200 lbs	50
Pinnace*	30 tons	1,800
Apparatus of Kwalish*	200 lbs	5,000
Longship*	3 tons	5,000
Clipper	5 tons	5,000
Carrack	400 tons	9,000
Argosy	2,000 tons	9,000
Greatship*	500 tons	13,000

*Ship first presented in *Adventurer's Vault*

SHIPBOARD MAGIC ITEMS

A ship owner with money to burn might equip his or her vessel with magical weapons and other amenities. This section presents a collection of pricy items designed to make a ship more effective in combat or life aboard the ship more pleasant.

Unless noted otherwise, the items presented below must be installed on a ship to function. In addition, some items might be inappropriate for ships of smaller size; for example, one cannot install a *captain's feast table* on a rowboat. The determines whether an item is appropriate for a particular kind of ship.

A magic item classified as a ship component (as opposed to wondrous items) functions only when attached to a ship or used aboard a ship.

Alchemist's Lab

Level 10 Uncommon

This fully-stocked laboratory is filled with beakers, vials, and strange ingredients such as dragon teeth and jars of bullywug eyeballs.

Wondrous Item 5,000 gp

Properties

- ◆ You take half the normal amount of time to create alchemical items, ritual scrolls, and potions in the laboratory.
- ◆ You gain a +2 item bonus to Arcana checks while in the laboratory.

Cabin of Tranquillity Level 12 Uncommon

Anyone who rests in this comfortable cabin awakens feeling refreshed and ready to take on the world.

Ship Component 13,000 gp

Property

Any creature that takes an extended rest in this cabin gains 15 temporary hit points that last until expended or until the start of the creature's next extended rest.

Captain's Feast Table Level 9 Uncommon

This highly polished round oak table seats twelve and provides a magnificent banquet for all present.

Ship Component 4,200 gp

Utility Power ◆ Daily (Standard Action)

Effect: A delicious feast for 12 creatures appears on the table. Once the meal is finished, the table's owner can use a minor action to instantly clean the table.

Dragonstrike Ballista Level 17 Uncommon

If anyone dares attack your ship, you assault them with magical bolts of lightning.

Ship Component 65,000 gp

Property

A creature can use an arcane ballista by entering a square on deck adjacent to the ballista. Only one creature can use a ballista at a time, and the ballista does not require ammunition.

⚡ Attack Power (Lightning) ◆ At-Will (Standard Action)

Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +20 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d10 + 4 lightning damage. Each creature adjacent to the target takes half damage.

Elemental Engine Level 15 Rare

Water elementals are bound to the ship, providing motive force and making travel less dangerous.

Ship Component 25,000 gp

Properties

- ◆ The ship can travel and maneuver under the captain's command without a crew.
- ◆ The ship is safely guided around reefs, rocks, whirlpools, and other natural hazards.

Figurehead of Balance Level 13 Uncommon

A beautiful figurehead adorns the ship's bow and makes the ship's crew and passengers more sure-footed.

Ship Component 17,000 gp

Properties

- ◆ The ship's crew and passengers gain a +2 item bonus to saving throws made to avoid being knocked overboard.
- ◆ When an effect would knock a crew member or passenger prone, the creature can make a saving throw to avoid being knocked prone.

Flag of Resistance Level 6+ Uncommon

Your colors provide the ship's passengers and crew with a shield of protection against all threats.

Lvl 6 1,800 gp Lvl 26 1,125,000 gp

Lvl 16 45,000 gp

Ship Component

Property

While aboard the ship or within 5 squares of it, the ship's crew and passengers gain resist 5 to all damage.

Level 16: Resist 10.

Level 26: Resist 15.

Nautical Chart of Tracking Level 4+ Common

These charts display the ship's immediate surroundings.

Lvl 4 840 gp Lvl 24 525,000 gp

Lvl 14 21,000 gp

Ship Component

Properties

This nautical chart displays the ship's general position relative to major known ports and landmasses within 100 miles.

Level 14: Within 1,000 miles.

Level 24: Within 1,000 miles. In addition, the chart shows the relative location of any other ship you mention by name, provided the ship is within 1,000 miles of the nautical chart.

Ocean's Keel Level 20 Rare

This magical keel makes the ship glide faster through the water and allows you to create a protective bubble around the ship as it dives under the water.

Ship Component 125,000 gp

Utility Power ◆ Daily (Standard Action)

Effect: The ship's swim speed becomes 10, and it can travel underwater without damage to the ship or its cargo. In addition, all living creatures are protected as if subject to the Waterborn ritual, as long as they remain within 20 squares of the ship. Creatures remain with the ship as it travels unless they swim away from the ship. Similarly, objects remain with the ship and do not float away unless they are thrown overboard. These effects last for 12 hours or until the ship surfaces.

Special: Only those designated by the ship's captain can use this power.

Sails of Speed Level 10 Common

These magically enhanced sails allow the ship to travel at much greater speed.

Ship Component 5,000 gp

Properties

- ◆ When raised, these sails allow the ship to travel at up to twice its normal speed.
- ◆ If there is no wind, the raised sails fill as though there was a light breeze.

Shipboard Shrine Level 10 Uncommon

This shrine provides a quiet place for reflection and prayer.

Wondrous Item 5,000 gp

Properties

- ◆ Divination rituals performed in the shrine take half the normal amount of time to cast.
- ◆ You gain a +5 item bonus to Religion checks made as part of a divination ritual.
- ◆ Once per day, you can cast the Read Omens ritual in the shrine without spending its component cost or possessing a focus. This power functions only once per day, even if multiple individuals visit the shrine.

Smuggler's Hold Level 15 Uncommon

A secret compartment conceals illicit goods.

Ship Component 25,000 gp

Property

The *smuggler's hold* is an easily concealable door 3 inches on a side that, when opened, transforms into the mouth of an extradimensional space 15 feet on a side. When closed, the hold cannot be detected by nonmagical means. The captain can automatically locate and open the *smuggler's hold*.

Spyglass of Perception Level 3 Common

Peering through this handheld telescope brings the world into clearer focus.

Wondrous Item 680 gp

Property

You gain a +3 item bonus to Perception checks when using this device.

Stern Rudder Level 15 Uncommon

This rudder magically fortifies your ship and makes it more resilient in combat.

Ship Component 25,000 gp

Property

The ship gains a +5 item bonus to AC and Fortitude, and its maximum hit points increase by 50 percent.

Teleportation Mast Level 9 Uncommon

This mast is inscribed with magical runes that allow crew and passengers to teleport to other areas of the ship.

Ship Component 4,200 gp

Utility Power (Teleportation) ♦ At-Will (Standard Action)

Effect: You touch the mast with your hand and teleport to any unoccupied space aboard the ship that isn't deemed off limits by the ship's captain. If the space you wish to teleport to is occupied by another creature, you appear in the nearest unoccupied space aboard the ship.

Special: Only crew members and passengers designated by the captain can use this power.

ADVANCED CREW MEMBERS

Here's a sampling of specialized individuals who can be added to any crew for a price. These templates should be used in conjunction with the hiring rules presented in *Mordenkainen's Magnificent Emporium*™.

Hunter

Cost: Standard

Hunters are experts at catching fish and other sea creatures with harpoons or nets. They also know which body parts of aquatic creatures are worth money as components.

TRAITS

☼ **Hunting Expert** ♦ Aura 5

Allies in the aura gain a +2 power bonus to knowledge checks about aquatic creatures.

Medic

Cost: Standard × 2

Medics perform amputations, set broken bones, stitch up wounds, and the like. Ship medics use mostly mundane tools and herbal remedies, as they do not have magical abilities.

TRAITS

☼ **Helping Hands** ♦ Aura 5

Allies in the aura gain a +2 power bonus to Heal checks.

Cleric

Cost: Standard × 4

Clerics use magic to cure diseases and heal grievous wounds. They can also perform rituals and provide spiritual guidance. If someone dies, the cleric can perform the last rites and conduct a proper burial at sea,

as well as provide solace to crew members and passengers. Wealthy, high-ranking individuals typically insist on having clerics with them when they travel.

TRAITS

☼ **Helping Hands** ♦ Aura 5

Allies in the aura gain a +2 power bonus to Heal checks.

Curative Care (healing)

The cleric can attend to one ally during a short rest. At the end of the short rest, that ally regains 5 extra hit points for each healing surge spent.

Sacred Knowledge

The cleric knows and can perform the Raise Dead ritual.

Druid

Cost: Standard × 3

Druids familiar with the ocean can be invaluable when dealing with rough or dangerous seas. They are adept at predicting the weather, and when sea creatures attack the ship, they can help to communicate with the hostile creatures and convince them to stop their attack.

TRAITS

☼ **One With Nature** ♦ Aura 5

Allies in the aura gain a +2 power bonus to skill checks related to natural creatures.

Predict Weather

The druid can perform the Portend Weather ritual once per day without ritual components.

Mage

Cost: Standard × 3

Mages can summon wind into the sails for faster travel or scare off pirate ships by casting illusions of giant sea creatures and the like. Even if they pierce the illusion, most pirates hesitate to mess with a ship that has one or more mages aboard, fearing that their wooden ships might go up in flames.

TRAITS

☼ **Master Arcanist** ◆ **Aura 5**

Allies in the aura gain a +2 power bonus to Arcana checks.

STANDARD ACTIONS

Ritual Expert ◆ **Daily**

Effect: One ally gains a +5 item bonus to the next skill check made for a ritual that uses the Arcana skill.

Summon Winds ◆ **Daily**

Effect: The mage summons winds to assist the ship. For the next 8 hours, the ship's swim speed is increased by 2.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Once they have a ship, the PCs need an exciting seafaring adventure to go on! Drop these adventure hooks into your campaign, or allow their ideas to inspire your own.

The Flower Race: Every year, the heroes' home city hosts a regatta that all of the merchant houses compete in. The ships must travel to Lily Island, collect the rare magenta lily that grows there, and return. The route is treacherous, a rival house might try to sabotage the ship, and competitors sometimes attack each other when they are out at sea and away from the watchful eyes of the judges.

Unwelcome Fate: The merchant carrack *Lady Luck* has fallen on hard times. For the past month, the ship has been attacked by pirates on every voyage, despite taking alternate routes and adjusting its schedule. The vessel's owner hires the adventurers for added security, and to ferret out the cause of this ill luck. One of the crew members is a mole working with a group of pirates. Using a magical beacon, he broadcasts the ship's location and informs the pirates where the most valuable cargo is stored. The pirates then attack, steal the cargo, and split the loot with the mole at the next port.

Undersea Expedition: History books speak of a glorious city of sea elves deep in the ocean, but no one has traveled to the area for quite some time. Scholars are interested in discovering the fate of the city, while merchants are interested in forming a trade

agreement with the sea elves—or plundering the city if the inhabitants are gone.

The Ghost Ship: A ghost ship haunts the waters near Rivenskuul Island. The plot thickens when it is discovered that the ship's passengers were a team of royal diplomats sent to reach an alliance between nations on the verge of war. Who killed them and why? It appears someone would benefit from a war being started.

The Unquiet Maiden: A wealthy noble family commissioned a ship to be built as a wedding gift for their eldest daughter. The *Gentle Maiden* is a finely crafted, elegant ship with hand-carved railings and a stunningly beautiful figurehead. Of late, however, the ship has been haunted by an elegiac wailing, and fierce waves lash around the not-yet-completed vessel. Sailors believe the ship is cursed, and they refuse to sail on it. With the wedding only a few days away, the ship needs to be ready to take the couple on their honeymoon. The figurehead is actually a magically trapped hamadryad, and the fierce waves are sea nymphs trying to free their sister. The wizard tasked with overseeing the ship's construction doesn't want others to know he bound a hamadryad to the vessel, and he tries to subvert the adventurers at every turn.

Nightlands: A mysterious island is said to appear only once every thousand years. It appears out of nowhere on a moonless night, remains for one full day, and then slips silently under the sea once more. What riches and mysteries does this island hold? Where does it come from, and why does it appear so infrequently?

Sing No More: A cluster of islands called the Singing Stones have gone silent. Their soothing lullabies are the stuff of bards' tales, and the stones have served as a beacon of hope for sailors and a navigational aid for as long as anyone can remember. Several ships have reported seeing the mutilated bodies of sea nymphs floating in the water near the now-quiet islands.

RITUALS FOR SEAFARING ADVENTURES

There are several rituals that benefit seafaring adventurers. *Water Breathing* (level 8), *Water's Gift* (level 10), and *Waterborn* (level 14) all grant the ability to breathe underwater, and the higher-level rituals grant additional underwater benefits as well. *Water Walk* (level 2) grants the ability to walk on water, and *Lower Water* (level 2) causes a body of water to become shallower. *Control Weather* (level 14) can be used to calm a deadly storm or create wind when in the doldrums. The *Purify Water* ritual (level 1) can be used to make seawater drinkable.

Rift at Dagger Point: Ships have been disappearing near Dagger Point. Merchants and political leaders in ports along the trade route are growing concerned, since trade has essentially stopped. A huge whirlpool has formed off Dagger Point, and at its center yawns a rift to the Elemental Chaos. An unscrupulous efreet is using the whirlpool to draw merchant ships into the Elemental Chaos, and he has earned a tidy profit selling their trade goods—and selling the crew into slavery!

Ship of Kings: Two warring kings agree to meet one another to discuss a truce, and after months of negotiation it's agreed they will meet in a neutral location, away from the prying eyes and eager ears of their unscrupulous advisors. They elect to hold the meeting on the open sea aboard the adventurers' ship. When a sahuagin baron declares war on both kingdoms and attacks the ship, the adventurers must repel the sahuagin threat and remind the kings they have a common enemy.

About the Author

Lori Anderson is active in the RPGA and the New England gaming community. She has written several *Living Forgotten Realms* (LFR) adventures, including *The Agony of Almraiven*, *Containing Shadow*, and *Plain of Stone Spiders*.

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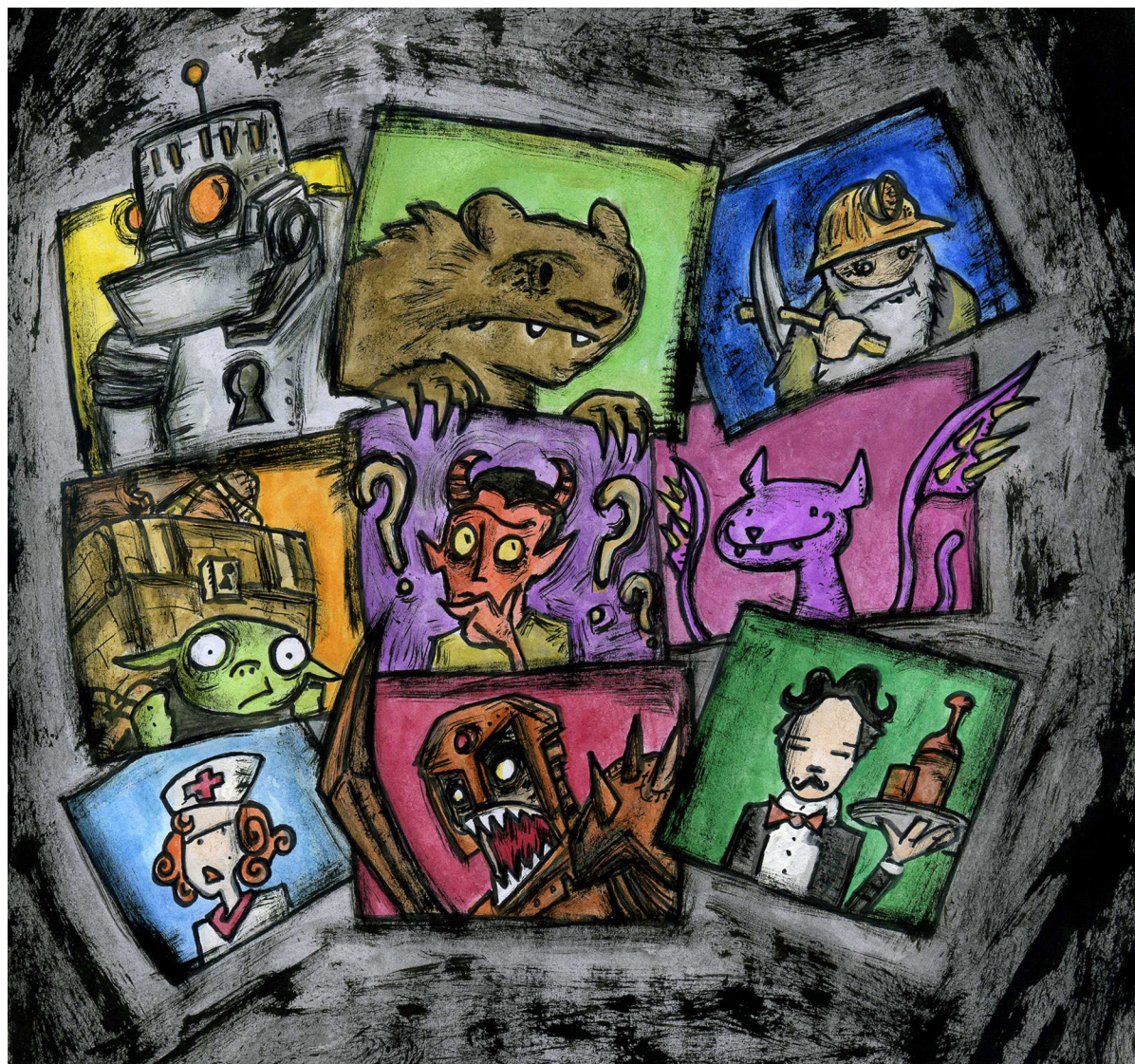
D&D Outsider: More Inhuman Resources

Acquiring an Elite Henchperson: A Chaotic Neutral Seminar

*Written and Illustrated by
Jared von Hindman*

Ladies and gentlemen, I know you're in a hurry. There just don't seem to be enough encounters in the day to get everything done. Dragons lie atop hoards of capital waiting to be liquidated. Archlich mages hunker down, hoping their undead tax bracket will let them wait out the dungeon real estate crisis. And no one is happy with the immigration boom of dragonborn, tieflings, kenku, shardminds, and wilden taking story arcs away from hard-working half-elves across the campaign. In these trying times, it's even more important to outsource the petty labors of your adventures than ever before.

I bring you good news! Today we're going to talk about how to find the right henchperson for your questing paladin, hire the right secretary for your wizard's tomes, and even get an owlbear on staff.



Looking for someone to keep that armor spotless? An informant to save you from the shame of writing Streetwise on your character sheet? A pretty face to make your battle-scarred visage worthy of the royal

court? A soulless automaton festooned with knives for delicate negotiations? We've got you covered. Inhuman Resources is happy to be back, and from the look of things, we're just in time.

INTERVIEW WITH THE HIRELING

First off, you need to ask yourself some questions: Do I want a companion who is a fully fleshed out character, or am I looking for an animal sidekick that looks cute on a lunchbox? Am I horrified at the idea of buying torchbearers in bulk so that when one breaks, I can crack open the case and get a new one? How do I keep my companion from growing up and wanting to have adventures of his or her own?

These questions aren't easy to answer. (Parents, especially, are split on that last one.) The more life you put into nonplayer characters (NPCs), the more likely that their story hooks will become barbed and draw the attention of a wandering Dungeon Master. Likewise, not everyone is willing to lower the bar of the module by letting in "Brecki the pack mule/maid/musical entertainment, who has no opinions and was born both mute and deaf, so stop trying to roleplay with her."

Maybe you want to take direct control of your companion. Have you thought about an animal companion of sorts? Roleplaying a spirited blink dog or falcon can be less bilocating than figuring out how Sir Richard, the retired Knight of the Order of the Black Sphinx, would respond to an unarmed peasant asking for food and shelter. How do you quantify the value of a barrel of monkeys in comparison to a sage who does all your homework while you're out questing in the land?

I can't answer these questions for you. What I can do is sit you down behind this desk, hand you a stack of applications, and send in the first candidate for your henchman search. Steel your reserves, and prepare to decide who lives and who dies.

Question 1

"What is your greatest weakness? What is your lowest defense?"

Okay, Miss . . . Rook, is it? Your greatest weakness is that you work too hard? I'd laugh, but the unoriginality of your answer might be appreciated in a heroic tier mercenary. That's because this question cuts to the core of any henchfolk you might want to delve with. Namely: If you had to take them out, could you do it? Never hire someone as muscle without finding out if she's allergic to peanuts or whatnot.

You can also spin this the other way. Is her passive Insight low enough so that she won't realize that you lied about releasing all the defeated lizardfolk back into the wild?

Question 2

"Where do you see yourself in 5 rounds?"

If things go really badly, as they often do, you want to make sure that you're not wasting your time putting your henchmen through the Undermountain Orientation program. There's a lot of turnover in the hireling world, and if one implodes whenever a ghoul sneezes, that's time you could have spent training someone else.

On the other hand, you don't have to pay dead henchmen and -women. Many of our clients keep a stack of applicants on call for just this purpose. Your insurance premiums will skyrocket once the DM figures this out, but it's not your fault that you keep hiring brave front-line individuals who retire early due to spiked pits and hobgoblin archers, right?

Question 3

"Have you ever had a conflict with a coworker or a solo monster? If so, how was it resolved? What could you have done to improve the outcome?"

There are only two good answers to this question. One: The hireling says she avoids confrontation and brings upper management in on such conflicts. This means you won't have to worry that she'll get the party involved with unnecessary tomfoolery. Employees should respect the chain of command.

The second answer? Something clever. Of course, "something clever" can also translate to "This person is dangerous," but it really depends on the specifics involved. If Liftlin the Mapmaker negotiated a peace treaty with a vampire lord, you should see a red flag in the shape of foreshadowing.

One of the best answers to this question? "Woof." We'll address animal companions in a bit, but just remember, if these questions don't seem to apply to your perfect henchman, options abound.

Question 4

"How would you respond to being set on fire?"

You might think this question is designed to throw an applicant off balance, but we're playing DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® here. This will happen. Admit it.

Question 5

"Why are you looking for a position in our adventuring company? What happened to the last party that employed you?"

Don't forget to check references. Unlike in the mundane world, the answer "All my references are dead/devoured/banished to the Astral Plane" isn't too far out there. That said, no one likes a chronic survivor

(unless it's you), particularly if she is the only survivor (unless it's you).

Question 6

"Do you have any salary expectations?" or "How do you feel about an unpaid internship?"

Where do you draw the line between player characters and nonplayer characters? How much depth does a hireling need before he starts wondering why he isn't getting a chance to roll on the random loot table? Of course, if you want to get aggressive with this, you can use your henchman as an offshore banking account to double your take of the loot. Just



remember to make his story tragic. It'll be hard for the party to tell Linkboy to shove off when he's saving up for an operation to keep his little sister alive. "Little sister" is, of course, code for "My penthouse flat in Waterdeep," but the rest of the party doesn't need to know that.

Question 7

"Do you have any story hooks we should be aware of before we schedule a second interview?"

You might need to ask specific questions to pin the candidate down. "Are you destined to give birth to the Ungod, Destroyer of All Things?" "Does that tattoo show your former allegiance to an evil organization that is still hunting you?" "Are you thousands of years old and looking for your undead lover of eons past?" The Dungeon Master is the fatal flaw in any companion character with . . . well, character.

Some of our clients are tempted to downplay a hireling's strength to keep her under the radar. Henchfolk who become central to turning the tide of battle often meet terrible ends. When signing up new employees, be sure they make the whole team look good, not create a foil of inadequacy. Dungeon Master Wrangling is a seminar for another day, but in a pinch, don't discount the power of a well-placed bribe. [This most definitely includes cake.](#)

Other Questions?

You can find other versions of these questions in *Dungeon Master's Guide*® 2; page 26 of that book features a character survey and a player survey. The problem with that material is that no matter how you spin it, you lose control of the hiring process. In the 13-step process to building your own custom companion (pages 30-31), only the last step—fleshing out the companion's roleplaying details—addresses any of the pitfalls mentioned above. You don't want to put your

HR department through the hassle of filing all that paperwork before learning at the last minute that Princess Petticoat has a demonic soul shard buried in her chest, a remnant of her brief encounter with a death god.

Many adventurers won't want to ask their new, faithful, and underpaid ally too many questions, though. Sure, they start out innocently enough, like these from *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*:

- ◆ "Describe yourself in ten words or fewer."
- ◆ "Why did you choose an adventuring life?"
- ◆ "Which family members or friends do you hold most dear?"
- ◆ "What people, groups, or objects hold your greatest loyalty?"
- ◆ "What magic items do you crave?"
- ◆ "How do you want people to remember you after your death?"

These interview questions might sound great, but by the end of the list, your store-bought companion is suddenly wrangling with his mortality, considering the launch codes for his betrayal, and nurturing the idea that he doesn't know that he is just an NPC, so why wouldn't he ask for an equal share? No one wants to give a hireling the Old Yeller treatment, but in the long run, it's for the best. Ultimately, how you wrangle the narrative of your companion is up to you—and maybe the Dungeon Master. Just throw an extra miniature on the map and see if the DM notices. If she doesn't question why you have two initiative scores, you're golden.

We could flip through the Slaads & Rothéback catalog to choose a companion, but first let's cleanse the palate with a little history about the breeding density of familiars and conjured guard drakes.

FAMILIAR HISTORY

An Introduction to Smart Hench Shopping

No business model stays dynamic and fresh indefinitely. As such, we're going to look back at the innovations that the average adventurer must understand before making a good investment decision.

In the early days, we can see a trend in the availability of companions in D&D®. Early options were severely limited, targeted to the small business owner in the heroic tier. Players in the Living FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign were all too familiar with the consumable item known as a "riding horse" and the hassle of upgrading them to warhorses, celestial chargers, dire battle swine, or giant ants, depending on their regional restrictions.

Although the RPGA® has implemented insurance for all mounts, replacing any steed that falls victim to a carrion crawler bite (referred to by tech support as the "red ring of death"), this problem illustrates why you need to take the long view when shopping for a flanking ally. If you become too attached to your faithful riding horse, how will you react to a flimsy rope bridge leading into eldritch mists above a bottomless chasm? We've all seen innocent animal companions receive that infamous push off the cliff meant to save them from the hook horrors of starvation. Likewise, many a game session and thief skill set have been repurposed to invent an equine-centered pulley system to make sure that Sharbiscuit isn't left behind.

Sure, the emotional and social value of these kinds of companions aren't to be dismissed, but don't forget—Sharbiscuit breaks down to about a week's rations if you can't make it to the Skullport Bar & Grill in time. The meat might be seasoned with paladin tears, but this kind of out-of-the-box thinking will

keep your Dungeon Master on his toes. Be warned, though: ever since the McBaphomet scandal hit, it is considered very insensitive to refer to the party's minotaur rogue as "sneak tartare."

THE THEME OF THE CROP

Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Fey Beast Tamer

The next few products to hit the D&D companion market set the standard for professional henchman placement. Anyone who passed her Polymorph & Potions class could qualify to have a familiar, a magical little creation of her very own.

Beast companions arrived for the niche ranger market. These flavors solved the "red ring of death" problem, albeit from different angles. Worried about your book imp falling to a horde of zombies? No problem! D&D tech support allowed you to reinstall your familiar easily using the patent-pending "Short Rest" technology.

Meant for high-end users, beast ranger companions led the way to new innovations in expendable NPCs. From summoning for almost every power source to shaman spirits to precious metal zoology, it could be a crowded table for the unprepared. Combined with hybrid class options, it was a good time to be a [Litterbug](#).

Precious metal zoology was a particular boon to the dragonslayer on the go. Known to the layman as *figurines of wondrous power*, these magic items let you keep a beast of burden on call without the fuss of having to feed or clean it. (Fun fact: Emerald frogs do not leave tiny piles of emeralds behind them. Many a dwarf mineralzoologist has confirmed such.) Even

better, the figurines make for great collateral. When you pull out an opal as big as a fish or produce a pearl large enough to ride on, it makes a mark on the bartering process. A jade sea serpent might be useful only in an aquatic environment, but a pile of Huge nuggets of jade isn't something to overlook when strapped for cash.

TEAMS, SCHEMES, AND THEMES

Let's fast-forward, shall we? We've had multiple new classes with not one summoned companion but a whole wedding party in the case of warlocks of the White Well, fey zombie bridesmaids, and all. We've had paragon path pyramid schemes, in which your familiar brings another on board, as well as themes, the marble elephant (of power) in the room. With



notable imports from foreign markets such as the Feywild and the Elemental Chaos, themes made it possible for any character to have any possible combination of NPC assistance. It's a buyer's market, and if you're brave enough to capitalize on it, the rewards are there. Instead of just showing you how to turn a bland barbarian into a beastmaster, let's look at some of the more narrative tools available to the gamer on the go.

Oh—you *wanted* to flip through the Slaads & Rothé buck catalog and do a little price comparison between an owlbear and a clockwork horror? If you're not looking for a companion with autonomy, you're spoiled for choice. For example, you've got the fey beast tamer theme. You've got the White Horn knight paragon path, which lets you enslave a unicorn. You've got the moteborn theme, which withholds pacts with lesser elementals who also fetch you coffee. You've got the blackguard, which can summon an avatar of rage to answer trivia questions.

There are a lot of options available—more than ever before. The thing is, with *Heroes of the Feywild* and *Heroes of the Elemental Chaos*, we start to see options that have hints of narrative impact. The familiar bloodsmith paragon path lets you have two familiars, yet the witch class gives you a familiar that's an unholy link to a mysterious patron who whispers secrets in your ear. The sha'ir class has the same mechanic but is the representation of a soul-linked elemental gen that negotiates with higher powers for shortcuts to spells. Similarly, the Sidhe lord theme and the Sarifal feywarden theme both provide a creature that's less of a servant and more of a coworker. You might see it only once per day between extended rests, but it's a recurring character in your daily routine.

Often seen as the Cadillac of story-driven companion options these days, Robert Schwalb's ["[Henchmen and Hirelings](#)"] from *Dragon* 397 is so nice that Mordekainen included it in his emporium. We here

at Inhuman Resources can't endorse this hiring system enough. Mechanically, you get a minion that has a very specific skill. The catch? It's someone in the game whom you've hired to do your grunt work.

Need someone to copy down some ancient texts? Hire a scribe. Found more treasure than you can carry? Don't bother learning rituals—that same money could get you a handful of porters to tote your new luggage. In fact, hirelings are so cheap that you could bring one to your first game session. Who wouldn't want to show up for the "getting hired by the local noble" scene with a valet to dust off your chair and wait on you while the plot unfolds?

Beware the typical companion traps, and conduct an interview or two before going on a second date. Don't be afraid to flesh out your DM's setting by making him figure out what kind of hireling would be willing to risk her neck for 15 gold pieces.

Need a henchman but still want to make a statement? Straight from *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead*, have we got a ritual for you! Just recite the words on the Undead Servitor scroll, shove it into the mouth of a slain enemy, and the body will rise to do your bidding until it falls apart. Although the servant lacks interpersonal skills, animating the corpse of your enemy makes a statement that's not easy to put into words. And if you can't say it with a zombie, is it really worth saying?

DO YOUR PART TO SOLVE THE NPC OVERPOPULATION CRISIS

Inhuman Resources would like to close today's seminar by bringing your attention to the option for making NPC companions in your game. In our home game, we've enjoyed watching one hireling

simply refuse to die despite the odds, and although he interviewed poorly (we're waiting for the inevitable betrayal), we're happy to have him on our team. Don't be afraid to engage with the world that surrounds your character. There's an overpopulation issue with NPCs, and, quite frankly, they have nothing to do when you're not around. Adopt one today—or maybe adopt twelve. If no one speaks for the elemental tree spirit shaman/horse beast ranger hybrid fey beast tamer mage, who will?

Now if you'll excuse me, I have a stack of applications to go through.

—Dire Jared, who learned the hard way that monster.com is the worst possible place to find hirelings and is still confused by the three sneak attacks in a row he suffered during the interview

About the Author

Jared von Hindman is an artist, writer, and sometime comedian whose comics, paintings, and poor choices of words have dwelt upon this very website since 2009. When not drawing on sidewalks in Eternal Chalk, he lairs in Berlin, Germany. Visit Jared on Twitter @JaredvonHindman.

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Channel Divinity: Chauntea and Silvanus

By Chad Brown

Illustration by Claudio Pozas

Those who worship Chauntea and Silvanus, the nature gods of Faerûn, do so out of respect and gratitude for the gifts of nature and the bounty of life. Farmers, hunters, gardeners, trappers, field workers, indentured servants, and wealthy landowners all give thanks to and seek the favor of the Great Mother and the Forest Father.

Chauntea and Silvanus have always been allied. Their priests share the same appellation, druid, and often work together. Both religions are highly decentralized organizations, with little overarching supervision. This aspect of their nature is in no way a disadvantage, because all worshipers of both deities have a shared mindset and often a common goal.

CHAUNTEA, GREAT MOTHER

Chauntea is a kind mistress, revered by those who work the land for their living. From the earliest days of the world, the Great Mother has nurtured life, encouraging growth and bounty. As the mortal races bloomed, Chauntea grew with them, teaching them to treat nature with respect and showing them how to benefit from the fruits of the world.

Once the matron of the wilderness, the Great Mother changed as the world grew, bringing agriculture to the mortal races and teaching them to better coexist with nature. Those who followed her precepts were fruitful and multiplied, bringing ever more life into the world.

Worshippers of Chauntea are common in cities, where large temples often serve as granaries and seed houses, as well as in caravan depots and farm labor markets. The backbone of the religion are the small temples found in towns and villages all over Faerûn. Temples and shrines to Chauntea are absent in places where agriculture cannot take root, such as in the Shaar Desolation. Even in such areas where a structure to Chauntea is rarely found, one sometimes finds a wandering Chauntean or hears a prayer to the Great Mother.

The druids of Chauntea are generally a sturdy, down-to-earth, welcoming lot. You might find one or more of them tending to a seed-house, in a barn pitching hay, or hoisting a mug of mead or a glass of barley wine while leading the village tavern in song. Chaunteans espouse the value of life and the fruits of cooperation.

Adventurers who have joined cause with the Great Mother and her adherents hold uppermost the ideals

of respecting nature and its bounty, and they encourage people to live and grow in a spirit of cooperation and unity with nature.

SILVANUS, FOREST FATHER

Where Chauntea preaches empathy, Silvanus teaches the value of balance and the importance of the cycle of life and death. He and his followers are viewed by some as the guardians of life and nature, and by others as uncaring opponents of the constant encroachment of civilization. When nations first rose and the Great Mother's focus shifted to the mortal races and their burgeoning numbers, the Forest Father retained his connection to the deep wilds, the natural order, and the cycle of birth and death.

Silvanus dispenses drought and rain, fire and ice, mercy and savagery, all in the pursuit of balance. Silvanus and his followers are sometimes seen as heartless, valuing the life of a tree or grove over that of a person or a village, but the truth is that Silvanites value all life: plant, animal, and mortal. Worshipers of Silvanus demonstrate and preach respect for nature, taking only what is needed and maintaining the balance. Some druids of Silvanus consider huge cities such as Baldur's Gate to be tragic examples of civilization run amok and of trying to exceed what nature can sustain.

The holy places of Silvanus are almost all located in the deep wilds, and each one's location can shift with the seasons. It is widely hypothesized that such sacred locations exist in the jungles of Chult, the elf-woods of Aglarond and Luruar, Sarifal in the Moonshaes, and the Great Wild Wood of Murghôm. Many Silvanites become grim when the Chondalwood is mentioned; several sacred groves there are rumored to have fallen to the depredations of the plaguelands and Underdark activity originating from the nearby Underchasm. Enclaves of Silvanite

followers in many large cities such as Waterdeep often serve as gardeners and foresters, but the majority of Silvanus's clergy prefer to dwell in the wild or travel the land.

Adventurers who revere the Trefather are concerned with maintaining and righting balance, stopping the threat of greed run amok, and encouraging all living things to find their place in the great cycle of life.

COMMON GROUND

Although the clergy of the gods of nature have their differences, their areas of agreements are large and strong, and the two are close allies. Both are opposed to unnatural creatures such as undead and aberrants, and they work to stamp out such corruption wherever it appears. Both are opposed to the priests and cults of Bane and Cyric, as well as those of Talona, Umberlee, Talos, and Malar. Their devotion to life and nature frequently leads to conflicts with Thay, Netheril, and the Zhentarim. Although a worshiper of Chauntea might debate and argue with a Silvanite druid, these disputes are set aside when life is threatened.

The Chaunteans are especially active in the areas around Baldur's Gate, particularly in the Cloak Wood, Luruar's Glimmerwood, and the Great Dale. A number of them have traveled to Tymander to assist the various small farming villages that are forming across the region.

Silvanite druids rarely gather in large numbers for very long, and they are most likely found in deep wilderness. The Yuirwood in Aglarond and the Chondalwood in the Vilhon Wilds have active Silvanite presences currently.

The Moonshae Isles are home or refuge to many druids of both religions, especially among the elves and the Ffolk, and their conflicts against the cults of Malar are more vicious than ever. A mixed group

of druids is active near the plaguelands outside Elturgard.

FEATS

The following feats are available to any characters who meet the prerequisites.

Chauntea's Comfort

The Earthmother teaches of cooperation with nature. You have learned to express this ideal through your healing powers.

Prerequisite: Must worship Chauntea

Benefit: When you use a power that allows an ally to spend a healing surge to regain hit points, you can lose a healing surge on that ally's behalf, so the ally benefits from the healing but does not spend a healing surge.

Great Mother's Step [Divinity]

When called to action, Chauntea's faithful reap the benefits of unity and alacrity.

Prerequisite: Channel Divinity class feature, must worship Chauntea

Benefit: You gain the *Great Mother's step* power.

Great Mother's Step

Feat Utility

Chauntea's lessons of unity guide your allies along their way.

Encounter ♦ **Channel Divinity, Divine, Teleportation**
Move Action **Close burst 1**

Target: You and one ally in burst

Effect: Each target can shift up to 5 squares. If this movement can start and end adjacent to a plant that is Large or larger, the target can teleport instead of shifting.

Special: You can use only one channel divinity power per encounter.

Firefoe of Silvanus

The Oak Father has always distrusted fire, a valuable tool of renewal that can be misused to destroy. Some of Silvanus's clergy undertake mystic practices to combat the mishandling of fire.

Prerequisite: Must worship Silvanus

Benefit: You gain resist 5 fire. This resistance increases to 10 at 11th level and 15 at 21st level. If you already have fire resistance, it instead increases by 5.

In addition, against fire creatures, your divine attack powers and primal attack powers deal extra damage equal to your Wisdom modifier.

Forest Father's Fangs

Your devotion to the fury of nature and your affinity with beasts enables you to deliver devastating attacks.

Prerequisite: Must worship Silvanus

Benefit: You gain a +2 feat bonus to damage rolls with beast attack powers and beast form attack powers. This bonus increases to +3 at 11th level and +4 at 21st level.

Mother's Bloom

Chauntea's blessings spread as you take a few minutes to meditate on her glory.

Prerequisite: 2nd level, must worship Chauntea

Benefit: You master the Bloom ritual. You can perform the Bloom ritual in 5 minutes, including during a short rest, and you need no ritual book to do so. Performing the ritual during a short rest does not prevent you from resting. If a creature in the ritual's affected area spends healing surges at the end of the rest, that creature regains additional hit points equal to your Wisdom modifier with each healing surge.

In addition, you can perform the Bloom ritual once per day without expending ritual components.

Forest Father's Grasp [Divinity]

Silvanus loves and protects wild places, where flora and fauna grow untouched by civilization. Druids of Silvanus learn to spread the Forest Father's influence wherever the needs of the balance of nature might carry them.

Prerequisite: Channel Divinity class feature, must worship Silvanus

Benefit: You gain the *Forest Father's grasp* power.

Forest Father's Grasp Feat Attack

Spectral vines envelop your target in a spiritual echo of primeval forests.

Encounter ♦ Channel Divinity, Divine
Free Action **Special**

Trigger: You hit a creature with a divine attack power or a primal attack power.

Effect: The creature you hit falls prone, and it is slowed (save ends).

Special: You can use only one channel divinity power per encounter.

HOLY SYMBOLS

The items described below can provide characters who follow Chauntea or Silvanus with some flavorful options.

Belled Branch

The earliest druids knew a technique for focusing magic through tree branches encrusted with mistletoe and holly, allowing them to cast spells safely. The druids of Silvanus and Chauntea developed these holy symbols to replicate the effect of that ancient knowledge.

Belled Branch Level 2+ Common

This silver tree branch, strung with tiny golden bells, hangs from a simple chain. It allows safe prayer in the heat of battle.

Lvl 2	+1	520 gp	Lvl 17	+4	65,000 gp
Lvl 7	+2	2,600 gp	Lvl 22	+5	325,000 gp
Lvl 12	+3	13,000 gp	Lvl 27	+6	1,625,000 gp

Implement: Holy symbol

Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d6 damage per plus

Property

You provoke no opportunity attacks for using ranged or area divine attack powers with this implement.

Hamadryad Egg

Creatures of nature who live in deep forests, hamadryads are common allies of those who worship nature deities. The first hamadryad egg was a milky stone that a cleric of Silvanus carved and gave, in jest, to the hamadryad Metiai. To his surprise, on the night

Hamadryad Egg Level 3+ Uncommon

This egg-shaped white stone has a carving of an oak leaf that turns green when a worshiper of Silvanus uses it as a holy symbol.

Lvl 3	+1	680 gp	Lvl 18	+4	85,000 gp
Lvl 8	+2	3,400 gp	Lvl 23	+5	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	+3	17,000 gp	Lvl 28	+6	2,125,000 gp

Implement: Holy symbol

Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d6 damage per plus, +1d8 damage per plus against aberrant creatures

Utility Power (Teleportation) ♦ **Daily (Move Action)**

Effect: You teleport up to 5 squares to a square adjacent to a plant, a plant creature, or a fey creature that is Small or larger.

Level 13 or 18: Up to 10 squares.

Level 23 or 28: Up to 15 squares.

of the next full moon, she returned the egg with a potent enchantment added to it.

Rose Scythe of Chauntea

These scythes were made in homage to the practice, attributed to Chauntea, of using a scythe as a walking stick, an implement, and a farming tool. A deva invoker who revered the Great Mother claimed to have been inspired by one of Chauntea's rare battles in a past life, and she spent the next year crafting a similar utilitarian implement.

Rose Scythe of Chauntea Level 4+ Common

This sturdy but worn scythe is carved with images of wheat sheaves, and the blade bears the image of a single rose.

Lvl 4	+1	840 gp	Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp
Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp

Weapon: Scythe

Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d6 damage per plus

Properties

- ◆ For a character who is a member of a divine class or a primal class, this scythe functions as a staff implement.
- ◆ Whenever you use a healing power to allow an ally to regain hit points, until the end of your next turn, any creature that hits that ally with a melee attack takes damage equal to the scythe's enhancement bonus.

OTHER WORLDS

Nature deities are a staple of the fantasy genre and are well represented in many roleplaying venues. Here is some advice on how to use the material in this article for characters in settings other than Faerûn.

In the pantheon presented in the *Player's Handbook*, the goddess Melora represents nature, storm, and the seas, and she has a strong affinity with water. The options presented here for worshipers of Silvanus are useful for devotees of Melora who focus on the nature aspect of the goddess (rather than the sea/storm aspects), and also for any distinct power of your own creation that focuses on nature, its protection, and its place in the world.

The deity in the *Player's Handbook* that most closely corresponds to Chauntea is Erathis, who advances the interests of civilization—though not necessarily at the expense of nature. Erathis, like the Great Mother, places great value on cooperation and communal effort.

In an **EBERRON**® campaign, these options can work well for worshipers of Arawai, Balinor, and Boldrei. Consider allowing worshipers of those deities access to options associated with the related deity from the **FORGOTTEN REALMS** setting: Silvanus for Balinor, Boldrei for Chauntea, and either one for Arawai.

Campaigns based in the world of Greyhawk® have many potential nature deities. The options herein associated with Chauntea are appropriate for worshipers of Beory, Phytan, and Baervan Wildwanderer, while devotees of Obad-Hai, Rillifane Rallathil, and Ehlonna will find more appropriate matches in the options for followers of Silvanus. The followers of Sheela Peryroyl work well with the options for both Silvanus and Chauntea, and the fertility aspects of Chauntea are also appropriate for worshipers of Ehlonna. Several other nature deities of Oerth, such as the Olman mother goddess Tlazoteotl, might find use for specific options from either Chauntea or Silvanus, but such deities have strong portfolios of their own and such choices should generally be considered on an individual basis.

In a **Dragonlance**® campaign, the goddess Chislev is nature incarnate, representing the power of the natural world and all things primal. Her followers are well served by the options listed for worshipers of Silvanus. Zivilyn, the Tree of Life, is a nature power of wisdom, enlightenment, and insight. The followers of the Tree of Life can find suitable choices from the options of either Silvanus and Chauntea, but are likely to prefer those choices associated with Chauntea.

DIVINE BOON

Chauntea and Silvanus can grant divine boons, including the one that appears here. For more about divine boons, see *Dungeon Master's Guide*® 2.

Nature's Fervor

The powers of the natural world teach that the cycles of life and death are an essential component of existence. Creatures that pervert or disrupt these cycles are subject to the ire of the devotees of nature.

Nature's Fervor		Level 3+ Uncommon	
<i>Defeating monsters that corrupt the natural world fills you with zeal, enabling you to carry on the righteous battle.</i>			
Lvl 3	680 gp	Lvl 18	85,000 gp
Lvl 8	3,400 gp	Lvl 23	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	17,000 gp	Lvl 28	2,125,000 gp
Alternative Reward: Divine Boon			
Property			
When you use your second wind, you can make a saving throw against one effect that a save can end.			
Utility Power (Healing) ◆ Daily (Free Action)			
<i>Trigger:</i> You drop an enemy to 0 hit points.			
<i>Effect:</i> You can spend a healing surge or regain the use of an expended encounter attack power. If the enemy was aberrant or undead, you can do both.			

About the Author

Chad Brown is an administrator, developer, and author for the Ashes of Athas organized play campaign, set in the DARK SUN® campaign setting. He has also served as an author, developer, and administrator for multiple organized play campaigns, and he currently resides in Seattle with 1d3 + 2 awesome family members. This isn't his first article, but he's still thrilled to be writing for *Dungeon* and *Dragon* magazines.

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Testing, 1, 2, 3, 4

By Shelly Mazzanoble

Illustration by William O'Connor

We've all signed up for the D&D® Next playtest, right? We all downloaded our packets and have been busy running and playing in the *Caves of Chaos*? All of our surveys have been thoughtfully filled out and submitted? Good. Let's talk about it then, shall we?

Around the office, we started playtesting D&D Next sometime last summer. I'd like to tell you everything I remember about those early days, and I will, but I have the memory of a newborn sea horse, so bear with me.

Playtest Packet #1

I got an e-mail one day from Greg Bilsland that said something along the lines of "Thank you for Participating in the D&D Playtest."

Participating in a playtest isn't exactly something you opt into around here. That wasn't a surprise. It's just assumed you'll be partaking.

What was a surprise was that Greg took the liberty of assigning us our groups. Now some of you might remember I have an irrational fear of playing D&D with people I don't know. Especially people who are really good at D&D, such as anyone from R&D and six-year-olds. Fortunately, Greg had the good sense to put me in a group with Bart, Chris Tulach, and my good friend and editor extraordinaire, Nina. Bruce Cordell would be our DM. *Phew*, I thought. *I have a good group!* (This feeling was not unlike that day in high school gym class when square dance partners were selected.)

The only sucky part about this playtest was our time slot—1:00 p.m. on Fridays. You might not be aware of this, but we have half-day Fridays, meaning we work extra hours during the week and can leave at 12:30 p.m. on Fridays. Pretty sweet, right? I schedule all the things I put off during the week on Friday afternoons—oil changes, vet checkups, and hair colors. (Of course my hair is colored. Do you know anyone with natural "cabernet merlot" highlights?)

Ah well, I thought. *It's only for six weeks*. So I grudgingly rescheduled my eyebrow waxing appointment, rounded up some new dice (new rules require new accessories, right?), and met my new party in a conference room named Graceland.

A few days before the game, Bruce e-mailed asking us to pick our races and classes. I'm not going to name names (Chris Tulach) but someone kind of stole the wizard right out from under me.

I was at his desk three and a half seconds later. "Whoa there, big boy."

"Oh, hey, Mazzy," he smiled, all sunshine and puppies. Sheesh, it's hard to be mean to this guy.

"I was just wondering how much you were looking forward to playing the wizard in our playtest."

"Oh, I love playing a wizard!" he gushed.

"Well . . ."

"Oh, and if I haven't told you yet, I'm really excited to play with you! It's going to be a blast!"

Well, crap. I slunk back to my desk to e-mail the group. "I'll be the fighter."

I decided I wouldn't just leave my comfort zone. I'd smash through its walls like the Kool-Aid man through tissue paper.

"Everyone," I said, taking my place at the table. "Meet Lovey Smithsonian. He's a half-orc. That's right. *Half-orc.*"

"Hi, Lovey," the group said.

Bart beamed, but only because he thought Lovey was named after the Chicago Bears coach. In reality he was named after my beloved stuffed bunny who lost a battle with the clothes dryer.

"Is Lovey a man or a woman?" Tulach asked.

"Isn't it obvious?" I said. "Lovey is a dude. A 350-pound, six-foot-one big dude."

Chris nodded. "Right. Of course. My bad."

Bruce was going to run us through the *Tomb of Horrors*, which made me question what we were playtesting here: a new rules system or how quickly Bruce could TPK four characters. And while we're on the subject, let's talk about Bruce. Here's something you should know. Bruce is *really* nice. He always looks like he's smiling even when he isn't. Or maybe he always is. He drives a Prius. He fosters kittens. I think he's even a vegetarian. So whenever I'm in the company of such niceness, I tend to let down my guard. I mean, this guy *rescues kittens*. Why should I ever question the motivation of someone like this as a Dungeon Master?

And then inevitably something happens that makes me doubt my faith in animal-loving humanity all over again. The "size-of-your-carbon-footprint to how-kindly-you-treat-your-playtesters" ratio is bunk. There is no correlation.

Bruce Cordell is a silent, smiling, kitten-snuggling killer.

I don't remember when it happened. I don't even really know how it happened. All I recall was Tulach's annoying, eager, cloying wizard and that irritating lilt to his voice that made every sentence sound like a question.

"Ooooh, someone should look down this hall?"

"Ooooh my! A basilisk! What a horrible creature?"

"Ooooh dear, I shall use my magic missile?"

Lovey couldn't take it. That stinkin' wizard kept getting in his way! And that whole statement/question thing was confusing! Are you asking me if I think you should fire off a *magic missile*? Lovey's Intelligence was 7. The question of whether it's night or day probably wouldn't be answered with much confidence. The wizard had it coming!

"Lovey grabs Tulach's wizard by the collar of his robe and shoves him."

"Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?" Tulach's wizard screams. "You pushed me down?"

"Is that a question question? Or a statement question? Lovey does not like ambiguity!"

Bruce made Tulach roll an Athletics saving throw, which he (of course) failed, causing 4 damage from Lovey's assault. Neither Lovey nor I felt guilty. What was happening to me?

I remember Lovey's trident. It seemed like a cool weapon because it could immobilize my enemies if I rolled high enough. But I never got a chance to use it. Shortly after Lovey's assault on the wizard, a stupid basilisk turned Lovey to stone.

"So I'm just a rock now?" I asked. "But only for a round or two, right? There has to be a way to save out of this, doesn't there?"

"Umm . . . not really," Bruce said. "There's not really anything you can do." This time he didn't just look like he was smiling. He was.

"Let me get this straight," I said. "I am suffering one extra day looking like Frida Kahlo for a measly 2 rounds of play?"

"You can still hang out with us," Tulach suggested, "even if you have a unibrow."

Not to be a total baby, but hanging out and watching them climb over the rocky remains of my character for the next two hours was like hanging out with your best friend and the crush she stole right out

from under you at the seventh grade dance. Trust me. Not fun. (And yes, I know, I need to get over this.)

"Maybe you could come back to life as a different character," Nina suggested. "Like on a soap opera. Everyone has an evil twin."

I might not know much about playing half-orc fighters, but I do know a thing or two (or 932) about soap operas. I looked at Bruce hopefully.

"Okay, we don't really have time for you to make a brand-new character, and these guys probably do need a fighter, so how about you play Lovey's twin brother . . . Shovey!"

"Hi, Shovey," the group chimed.

I wasn't sure if it was the system, the adventure, or the man behind the screen, but we barely made a dent in the *Tomb of Horrors*. Shovey didn't die but he, like the rest of the party, came really close. Leaving that game gave me the same feeling I had after white-water rafting down a class 4 river in Australia: Did it! Never doing it again.

"Don't forget to fill out your surveys!" Bruce called to us as we were leaving.

Is this guy nuts? He wants us to tell him what we thought? I mean, it's not like he's trying to get tenure or anything, but still, you'd think all the work that went into this rules system, he'd at least try to keep us alive so we could come back next week.

Thing is, my group loved this early playtest. They found it had an "old-school" feel, but to someone who is still relatively "new school," that was lost on me. I'm the first to admit I'm not always good at D&D. I make the wrong move and use the less effective spell. Sometimes I forget to use *detect magic* when the walls around me are glowing green. But I'm at least confidently overlooking these things. And it took a lot of time to get to that place. Leaving this game set me back a few paces. I became a self-doubting, temperamental half-orc whose insecurity manifested itself in violent behavior against wizards. Was that considered constructive feedback?

Shelly's Feedback on Playtest Packet #1: Death comes too easy!

Playtest Packet #2

The next playtest packet arrived a couple months later. This time my group was my usual Wednesday D&D ENCOUNTERS™ party. Instead of playing D&D ENCOUNTERS, however, we were going to playtest the next iteration of the rules.

Surprise! I played a wizard! But Octavia wasn't entirely typical. She was a half-elf as opposed to a purebred. I was definitely more at ease with this character, and because of that, I enjoyed the game much more. One oddity? We didn't use minis or maps.

"How will we know where we are?" I asked Chris Lindsay, completely horrified.

"Dunno," he answered. "Guess you'll have to listen."

Have I ever told you how bad my group is at listening? And because we are poor listeners we constantly ask Chris things like, "Where am I standing? Can I see anything? Is there anything good in here?" With the absence of any visual cues like little triangles to signify rough terrain or red and yellow rings to imply bloodied or slowed, I figured we were goners. After the 84th time someone asks Chris where the monsters are, he's going to pull a Lovey and shove us all into the white board.

But the strangest thing happened. Or rather didn't happen. No one asked. Not being able to look at where the rogue was in relation to the mouth of a cave meant we had to listen. And to do that we had to—gasp!—pay attention.

Octavia had my old standbys such as *burning hands* and *shield* and *sleep* in her spellbook, which was cool. What was not cool was that whole "prepare your spells each day" and, when I used them, I lost them.

"That's how it was in my day," Chris said, blowing off my complaints. "Kids these days and their at-wills and encounter powers. You're so spoiled."

Truth is I'm terrible with moderation. If I find a pair of shoes I love and they're on sale, I'll buy them in every color. If someone drops a 6-inch block of tiramisu on my plate, I'm going to eat the whole lot of it. So if I'm packing a *magic missile*, a pair of *burning hands*, and a *sleep* spell, I'm going to use them. Immediately.

"You already used your *magic missile*," Chris told me when I tried to cast it again.

"I know. I'm using it again. It's magic like that."

"It's expendable. You use it once, and it's gone."

Oh, R&D was going to hear about this!

"So now I have nothing to defend with?" I ask, sheepishly smiling at my group. "Sorry, guys."

"Not nothing," Chris Lindsay said. "Don't you have a weapon?"

"Oh yes," I said, scanning my character sheet.

"Looks like I'm packing an emery board and a plastic spork. If I crit, I'll do a whopping 3 damage!"

Although I certainly enjoyed returning to my magical roots, I was wistful for the days of only a few months prior, where wizards were rich with awesome spells they could fire off willy-nilly or get back with just a few hours of shut-eye. How did anyone in the 1980s get out of a dungeon alive?

Shelly's Feedback on Playtest Packet #2:

Highly enjoying the whole theater of the mind action, but come on! More magic, less using!

Playtest Packet #3

When the third packet was ready for playtesting, I didn't go for the wizard, figuring I'd be better off playing a character proficient with weapons that didn't fall under the use 'em and lose 'em decree.

But I do love the occasional magic trick, so I found the perfect balance by playing a gnome rogue I named Pandora Temperlee. Cute, right? At three feet ten and 43 pounds, Pandora could scale the side of an embankment while conjuring the sounds of ghosts whispering across the pond.

What stood out about this version of the playtest was that Pandora seemed a bit more well-rounded than my previous characters.

And the party—that was something else I enjoyed. We were straight-up fighters, clerics, wizards, and rogues. Nothing fancy. Just good old-school adventurers.

Because everyone's character was relatively up-front, there was a definite distinction in what our roles were. No fancy party-tricks for the fighter. No special scimitar for the wizard. Maybe that was why I started to feel like we were operating as a unit again.

I liked Pandora a lot, especially when I used various tricks in her *prestidigitation* arsenal. (She made quite a robust secondary income performing at nursing homes and children's birthday parties.)

But let's be honest, could a band of orcs really be scared away by making a fake ink stain appear on their collars and throwing your voice? Seriously, could it? Because maybe I needed to give the wizard another chance.

Shelly's Feedback on Playtest Packet #3:

Loving the return to the "original" roles, but watching our wizard try to lift a flail is just plain embarrassing for everyone.

Playtest Packet #4

Rouchard Brouchard was born in playtest packet #4 and heralded my return to wizardry. But Rouchard wasn't just your average wizard. Oh, no. Rouchard was much more than that. Let's just say he had toiled his way around a cauldron or two. Yep, this was the packet where *themes* were introduced.

Now you're talking, I thought.

They had me at "themes describe your place in the world." (You might remember I'm the kind of person who gives a name and backstory to the living room chair, so any chance I can get to add flavor to my character sheet is okay with me.)

I scoured the list of themes for one that spoke to Rouchard. Was he an alchemist? Probably something he minored in at wizardry school, so not quite unique enough. Could he be a gladiator? With his slight build and impeccable style, not likely. Was he a spy? Rouchard could already conjure a disguise with magic if he ever needed to go incognito. In the end, I settled on the witch theme. (I've kind of been obsessed with witches ever since I went to Boston and learned more about the Salem Witch Trials.)

This packet also gave me another gift. Something for my wizard to do when he ran out of *magic missiles*.

"You mean I can use this *javelin of fire* whenever I want?" I asked Chris.

"Well, like, on your turn you can," he said. "Don't just go aiming it at people to illustrate a point or something."

Sure, it didn't deal crazy amounts of damage, but having a magical implement I could use "at will" made me less stingy and more strategic with the more powerful spells. And that in turn made me feel like I was "good at D&D."

Shelly's Feedback on Playtest Packet #4: Even without minis, maps, or crazy mash-ups of hybrid characters (all new to me), this game feels amazingly like D&D. And thanks for the cool javelin. I shall use it with you in mind.

After Action Report

Clearly R&D has been listening to my feedback. I can barely contain my excitement for the next playtest packet. Based on my past success, I'm sure it will contain talking familiars, the "tie goes to the player" concept, and puff pastry pizza recipes.

You're welcome.

About the Author

Thanks to her membership in the beer-of-the-month club, Shelly Mazzanoble has earned the drink like a fish skill found in the Pub Crawler theme.

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ED GREENWOOD'S
Eye on the Realms

The Thing in the Crypt

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Mark Winters

The minor Cormyrian noble house of Keskrel—one of the noble families of Marsember that has never been wealthy or numerous—recently suffered the loss of its elderly matriarch, Asdragarna Keskrel. Her body was taken by coach to the family crypt, which like that of many Marsembian noble houses, stands in the hills inland from the waterlogged city. When the sealed crypt was opened, the Keskrels and other mourners were shocked to find many of the stone coffins inside disarranged—pulled down out of the niches carved in the stone walls and strewn about the floor.

Several coffins had spilled their contents, while others appeared to have been opened and their lids dropped hastily back into place. Nothing of value seemed to be missing—except the body of one Keskrel lord. In his coffin lay a misshapen, mummified dead monster, dressed in the robes of a War

Wizard of Cormyr and clutching a spellbook labeled “Rhauntagar, Wizard of War.”

What has happened? Where are the remains of the lord? How did the monster come to be in his coffin? What did Rhauntagar—if it truly is Rhauntagar—become, and why?

The Keskrels of Marsember

One of the oldest but most often overlooked noble families of Marsember, the Keskrels were ennobled for their martial service and steadfast loyalty to the Obar-skyrs. They often held wardenships and commanded local forces with distinction against mercenary forays out of Sembia. Despite this, the family has neither flourished nor prospered, assembling a long history of few children and bad investments. As one Lord Keskrel put it gloomily: “This is the family that invests in ships that sink.”

The current head of this house is Lord Lhalaundrovam Keskrel. With Lady Murleeme Keskrel, he has two hardy “highrake”¹ sons, Irlake and Jeskren, and a younger daughter Ruvelle. Murleeme, a raven-haired beauty who stands a head taller than her tall husband, hails from House Vaeren, another old-blood Marsembian noble family.

Lord Keskrel’s father Sorlthavarn died almost forty years back, but his formidable, voluble mother Asdragarna perished only a month ago. It was during her interment in the family crypt that a sensational and grotesque discovery was made. The aftermath has brought the Keskrels to the notice of folk low and high from one end of Cormyr to the other—not to mention many gossips in the Dales and Sembia.

Cellars and burial crypts in Marsember flood regularly, and they are so damp the rest of the time that unless one desires to grow grisly fungi—including creeping molds deadly to the living—burials are better made inland, on higher and drier ground. This is expensive, however, and the Marsembian poor must often resort to “dead barge” cremations. An old scow purchased by city burghers is heaped high with bodies until the vessel threatens to sink under their weight, then is towed out to sea and set ablaze. Wealthier Marsembians have taken to constructing crypts inland, using fortified stone construction to prevent unauthorized burials from being made surreptitiously—and to keep grave-robbing to a minimum.

No signs suggested that the Keskrel crypt—a large, dry room dug into a granite cliff, entered through ponderously impressive stone doors—had been opened since the resting of Lord Sorlthavarn’s younger brother Roldran, twenty-odd years ago. Yet when the doors were ceremonially unlocked, unspiked, and unbarred to admit the mourners accompanying the cart that bore the remains of Lady Asdragarna Keskrel,² chaos was found within it.

The crypt is long and rectangular, with rough-hewn walls and ceiling above a smooth floor, all chiseled out of solid rock. A raised dais at the rear holds the heavy, simple stone coffins of Rordurn, the first Lord Keskrel, and his family. Two levels of closely spaced niches cut into the side walls hold all the other Keskrel burials. In the upper, deeper niches, the coffins are slid in headfirst. The lower niches are shallower, and hold coffins placed sidelong. There are not many of these, however, with most of the lower level empty to await future interments. This construction is typical of the most modest noble and wealthy non-noble burial crypts across Cormyr.

Asdragarna’s burial party was shocked to find that sixteen coffins had been dragged out of their niches and moved to the floor. They lay in no semblance of order—three on their sides with their contents spilled, two with lids askew, and four others with the lids replaced wrongly, end for end, so as to fit poorly. None of the coffins had been broken, suggesting some care in handling, though there were fresh chips and cracks in several lids.

Within their coffins, the Keskrel dead are customarily interred in simple shrouds and arranged holding something on their breasts that they valued in everyday life. Such objects are chosen regardless of their worth to others; some Keskrel children were buried with favorite wooden toys. A simple stone slab placed across a body’s hips is graven with full name, title, and birth and death dates. It is possible that many tomb valuables were taken, since records and memories don’t reach far into the Keskrels’ past. It is certain that at least one such relic is missing, along with its owner—one shrouded human skeleton is gone, along with the plain, workaday war-sword known to have been buried with him.

This missing lord was Deremoz Keskrel, a haughty and austere head of the house (and Lord Lhalaundrovam’s grandsire). He died in 1399 DR of “winter chill,”³ and he was buried with his prized blade and

possibly also a chased and gold-inlaid breastplate. There is some doubt about the latter, since its account is based on family tales told by a deceased Keskrel aunt known for embellishing the wealth and importance of her ancestors.

In Lord Deremoz Keskrel’s open stone coffin, lying in place of the tall and white-bearded old warrior’s remains, was a creature described as a goblin—“Aye, a goblin right enough, that jut-toothed snarl and big pointed ears, like hundreds of ’em I’ve seen before. Only this one was taller and strangely green, nigh as bright emerald as a fine lady’s robe.”⁴ Later and more thorough examiners agreed it was a goblin, but certainly not of any sort familiar to Cormyr. Possessing four arms (two pairs, one immediately beneath the other), the creature was bloated and misshapen. Some defect of birth or drastic wounding in early life made its rib cage bulge hugely on one side—a deformity made more noticeable by the skeleton’s skin and flesh having been much shrunken by mummification.

The creature was barefoot and wore no funeral shroud, dressed instead in the too-large court robes of a War Wizard of Cormyr. The body was arranged so that all four claws clutched a slender parchment-and-board working spellbook. The legend “Rhauntagar, Wizard of War” had been burned into the front cover board long ago.

No one who interred Lord Deremoz Keskrel is still alive, but the examiners of today agree that it is highly unlikely this monster was put into the lord’s coffin just after his death and buried as Lord Keskrel. The spellbook, if it is authentic, belonged to a mage who perished years after Deremoz was in his coffin. This suggests that the dead goblin likely perished and became mummified elsewhere and earlier, then was put into the tomb some time after the interment of Roldran Keskrel in 1456 DR.

The Keskrels have had a few bitter internal squabbles, but Lady Asdragarna is the last person

who would have remembered them or harbored any of their passions. So small and poor has the family always remained that they made few foes—and none at all after the days of Lord Deremoz a century ago.

The name of Keskrel is not welcomed with favor by the wealthy Sembian families of Hoelskathur (Selgaunt) or Raembrace (Saerloon), nor by the Cormyrian noble houses of Alsevir and Hawklin. These remembered distastes are hardly strong enough to be termed feuds, leaving few obvious candidates likely to undertake any action so malicious toward Keskrel remains.

The interment was attended by several Purple Dragon officers whose fathers had been sponsored into service by Lady Asdragarna. They lost no time calling in on-duty Purple Dragons and War Wizards from Marsember to investigate the disturbance in the crypt. The ranking attending Purple Dragon was Ornrion Luskar Roeble. After initial reports by the War Wizard Faeruld Thorntentur of Marsember, the War Wizard sent from Suzail to look into the “Keskrel outrage” by the Lord Warder of Cormyr was Antathurr Reignwynd.

Roeble is considered an energetic, sometimes brusque, “by the rules” sort, not gifted with a swift or creative mind. Reignwynd was brought in because he is brilliant, takes chances, and is a restless improviser—the very opposite of Roeble. Reignwynd was placed in command, and he made initial headway in tracing local gossip regarding stealthy attempts by mysterious unknown “outlanders who came over the fields and backlands, from Sembia way”⁵. These outlanders reportedly attempted to breach several crypts among the score or so located in the hills immediately around the Keskrel mausoleum.

As time has worn on, however, Reignwynd and Roeble (who like each other not at all) have made little additional progress. The official investigation remains open but abandoned at the Marsembian end, where Roeble has returned to his daily duties.

Reignwynd continues to work on leads, elsewhere and out of the public eye.

As far as the Keskrels and most citizens are concerned, the crown has forgotten the matter. The sole exception to this is Lord Lhalaundrovam Keskrel, to whom Reignwynd has made several private reports. These meetings have led Lord Keskrel to confide to his wife not that the War Wizard is making progress, but that Reignwynd is a “prize idiot, among an organization full of choice idiots.”

Elgler Rhauntagar, Wizard of War

The precise contents of the spellbook have been kept secret by the Wizards of War, who now have the tome in their keeping. Faeruld Thorntentur was the War Wizard who first came to the crypt and took possession of the spellbook. In the aftermath, he felt few qualms regarding showing the Purple Dragons and other mourners the wizard’s sigil that alone adorns the book’s first page—a backward “Z” transfixed vertically by two identical daggers, their hilts at top and bottom, and their points meeting in the center of the glyph. This sigil, recorded both by local heralds and in the court rolls, identifies the book positively as the property of a particular spellcaster—the War Wizard Elgler Rhauntagar, who took the oath and joined the Wizards of War in 1417 DR.

Elgler Rhauntagar was an adventurer, a consummate actor, and a swindler who served Cormyr loyally rather than enriching himself with his escapades. A trusted favorite of the Royal Magician Ganrahas, Rhauntagar ably assisted the Dragon Throne as a clandestine agent, adopting various “entrepreneurial shady merchant”⁶ guises and using his magic only as a well-concealed last resort

For years, Rhauntagar helped to sow dissent and create open feuds between various cabals of ambitious Sembian investors seeking to subvert or

dominate Cormyrians. Then in the spring of 1434 DR, the wizard abruptly disappeared. War Wizards, Highknights, and a few ex-Harpers and outland adventurers covertly hired by Ganrahas all sought Rhauntagar out, but they uncovered nothing.

The War Wizards thought Rhauntagar most likely dead, murdered by Sembian forces. Some worried that he had abandoned his loyalties to Cormyr under duress or bribery, entering into league with foes of the realm and dropping out of sight to begin a new life. Rhauntagar’s mysterious and never-solved disappearance remains a concern because of how much he knew—and because the lure of Sembian wealth seeking to corrupt Cormyrians is an ongoing fear of the Dragon Throne.

The Missing Lord Keskrel

In person, Lord Deremoz Keskrel dressed, ate, and lived as a simple man. He regarded the fripperies, airs, and fine garments and foods of his fellow nobility as “their rightful indulgences, but also their weaknesses.” He was a stickler for decorum, ceremony, and vigilant reverence to laws, unwritten rules, and tradition—and apt to be very haughty with those who were not.

At the same time, Deremoz was keenly aware of how laws and “proper behavior” could be hindrances to “steering the ways of the world to one’s liking,” which he saw as the proper role and duty of the nobility. Early on in his life, he settled on a means of getting around such hindrances—becoming a sponsor of many adventuring bands and using them to harass Sembian trade rivals. Lord Deremoz Keskrel was most notorious at court for refusing an offer of a well-paid “kissing thy very dreams”⁷ palace position. This would have put him in charge of court etiquette, precedence, and rituals in return for ceasing his “wayward” (as one courtier termed it at the time) adventurer-hiring activities.

The Mummified Monster

Fully a score of War Wizards investigated the remains found in the coffin, including the monster expert Hendren Tharbanner. Working as three independent teams, all agreed that the coffin held a goblin with an extra pair of arms it had been born with, that the creature had been magically transformed more than once in its life, and that it likely perished and was mummified elsewhere before it was put into the Keskrel coffin. They could not determine why the creature had died or who had handled it after its death—though several Crown mages expressed their own dark suspicions.

The Outrage in the Crypt

Royal Magician Ganrahas has stated firmly that the truth regarding the disappearance of Lord Deremoz Keskrel's body and its replacement with the body of "a curious deceased goblin" is not yet known. Officially, the removal and switch were done by unknown hands and for unknown reasons. The investigation proceeds, but any rumors regarding its outcome are speculation and no more. With that caveat, however, certain War Wizards have not been shy about stating their speculations.

Many believe the remains of Deremoz Keskrel were taken "for foul necromantic purposes"—perhaps involving transforming him into some sort of controlled undead to work against the Crown of Cormyr as the ghazneths did. More than a few suggest the mummified goblin was left as a lure to "draw the Wizards of War to places where they might easily be slain, or also turned into controlled undead to be used against the realm."⁸ It is generally thought that the culprits, whoever they are, have connections with Sembia and the shades who seek to rule that land and others.

Elminster has gently commented that none of these explanations begin to answer the question of

why the crypt was plundered, one dead lord taken, and a monster left in his place. His own suggestion regarding the matter seems most cryptic.

"Deremoz dealt with adventurers, some of whom met cruel ends. Their surviving comrades might well have blamed him. So look again at the mummified monster, and ask: Was it always a goblin, or was it once a man? Who might have prevailed upon bitter adventurers—lady sword-comrades who were the lovers of the fallen adventurer, say—to violate the crypt? Given their wrath, anyone with coin enough and persuasive words—which does, yes, lead back to Sembia, and the mages of Shade who have become as weak as I have, reduced to tricking others into doing their work for them. Manipulation—and the gullible—are truly everywhere."

Notes

1. In current parlance, "highrake" means "dashing, strapping nobles who do the gallant, headstrong, and expensive things that nobles are popularly supposed to do."
2. It is customary in crypt burials for the casket or stone coffin to be brought as close as is practical to the crypt. This is usually done by means of an open cart or wagon drawn by mature horses (beasts often retired from other service). A wooden casket will then be carried into the crypt by the mourners, or by military personnel or guild members if not enough family and friends are present to physically do the deed. If the deceased is interred in a heavy stone coffin, the mourners unhitch the horses and themselves pull the cart into the crypt, or will sometimes lower it in slings or conduct it down a ramp if the entrance forces such alternatives.
3. "Winter chill" is now the common name in the Realms for what we would call pneumonia, even

though it might not be caused by the same pathogens as in our real world.

4. Or so said Eskulur Horond, one of the grooms attending the hired grave-cart. Though his account rambles, it provided the description of the remains found in Lord Deremoz Keskrel's coffin that follows this brief quotation.
5. These words belong to Old Maeryamm, a garrulous elderly seamstress who dwells in a cottage not far from the crypt. She takes in mendings and sells eggs and chickens to everyone in the vicinity, busily gossiping with all patrons who come her way.
6. This description was provided by a senior scribe at the Royal Palace of Cormyr. This figure desires to remain anonymous, but attests that he has had extensive access to private notes made by Ganrahas and other "high in experience and regard" Wizards of War.
7. "Kissing thy very dreams" is the Faerûnian equivalent of our sense of ultimate desire—in this case, the notion that Lord Deremoz Keskrel was being offered his dream job. This Realms phrase comes from a well-known anonymous poem, which runs in part:

*No more awakened by groans and screams
Arising to joy and revelry bright
Henceforth kissing thy very dreams
Thy life thine own, no trouble nor plight*
8. Both of the quotations in this paragraph come from the outspoken young Wizard of War Embrurra Halgontar, a bold and energetic investigator whose hair and temper run to the same fiery shades. She has a history of speaking too loudly and clearly, then being sent on long investigations that take her far from home. Even so, Embrurra is thought to be a favorite

and personal friend of the Royal Magician Ganra-hast—perhaps even more than a friend, though in the century-old words of Dove Falconhand, “gossip gives every powerful Cormyrian a dozen lovers, where most can manage but one.”

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.

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Eye on Dark Sun

The Ivory Dungeon

By Rodney Thompson

Illustration by Claudio Pozas

Balic is a city-state of splendor and tyranny, where the sorcerer-king's need for control clashes with his appreciation for beauty. Nowhere else is this contrast more typified than in the Ivory Dungeon, a secret prison where Andropinis keeps those who are too dangerous to be held in normal prisons, and who are too valuable to kill.

The Ivory Dungeon is an underground complex beneath a section of Andropinis's White Palace, accessible only from within the halls of the sorcerer-king's fortress. The only citizens who know that the Ivory Dungeon exists are jailers and templars whom Andropinis trusts. Like much of the rest of the White Palace, the Ivory Dungeon is made of white marble mined from just outside the city. The bars of its cells are polished bone, adding to the pristine and elegant appearance of the place.

The Ivory Dungeon is a prime example of the duality that is Balic; it is a place where lives are stolen and people are crushed beneath a tyrant's heel, and at the same time it appears to be lovingly crafted and maintained as would be a fine palace fit for nobles and merchants. The entrance to the dungeon is behind a secret door, which leads to

a spiral staircase that descends into the depths of the hillside upon which the White Palace is built. Throughout the corridors of the Ivory Dungeon, the sorcerer-king has placed traps both magical and psionic to keep prisoners from escaping (and keep anyone foolish enough to break in from getting out).

Given the sorcerer-king's prowess, both magical and psionic, it says a great deal about the prisoners kept here that Andropinis considers them more valuable alive than dead. Each occupant of the Ivory Dungeon is not just a run-of-the-mill victim of the sorcerer-king's tyranny.

Despite the efforts of Andropinis to keep the inhabitants (and the existence) of the Ivory Dungeon a secret, from time to time word of the place and some of those who occupy it will leak out thanks to a bribed templar or a lucky bit of scrying concerning the presence of a prisoner beneath the White Palace. The prisoners chronicled here are just a few of the important people who have been imprisoned in the Ivory Dungeon over the years.



VULGAR REX

The elf Vulgar Rex is a dunerunner who, at one time, had a dual reputation for being the fastest dunerunner on Athas and the elf with the filthiest vocabulary. The days of celebrity are now over for Vulgar Rex, because he rots in a cell in the Ivory Dungeon with no chance of escape. When he was imprisoned a few years ago, Vulgar Rex was young, vibrant, brash, and uncouth. Years beneath the White Palace have eroded all of those qualities. Now, trapped in a tiny cell, Vulgar Rex is embittered (though still in possession of a salty tongue) and has lost all his youthful qualities. The elf is a perfect example of what a sentence spent in the Ivory Dungeon can do to a person in just a short amount of time, transforming an energetic scoundrel into a worn-down shell.

Vulgar Rex had the misfortune of drawing Andropinis's attention when, during a lengthy run across the desert wastes outside Balic, Rex stumbled upon a secret staging area for Balic's troops. The elf was caught and interrogated, and was about to be executed. But when Andropinis plumbed his mind to see what Rex knew, he found a store of knowledge about the Athasian wastes that far exceeded that of any of his best scouts. Vulgar Rex's reputation as a fast dunerunner was well earned, and that speed enabled him to traverse dangerous stretches of the desert without running afoul of the horrors lurking in the sands.

Rather than having him killed, Andropinis chose to have Vulgar Rex imprisoned in the Ivory Dungeon, keeping him as a living almanac of the deep desert. Whenever Andropinis sends troops marching to war, he uses his psionic skill to peel back the layers of Rex's mind, uncovering information about shortcuts, hazards, and secret passages that his troops can use to reach their destination quickly and without being noticed.

Since Vulgar Rex is being held for his knowledge, he is just as important to Andropinis's enemies as he is to the sorcerer-king of Balic. Many opposing sorcerer-kings would pay a small fortune to have Vulgar Rex extracted from the Ivory Dungeon. Not only would his release give the other sorcerer-kings access to the elf's knowledge of desert routes, but Rex is even more valuable to them because he has become privy to the secrets of Andropinis's troop movements over the last few years, making him a tactical asset for any attack on Balic.

KROLGAR RAMHAMMER

Few prisoners in the Ivory Dungeon are more pitiable than Krolgar Ramhammer. A hulking half-giant bruiser, Ramhammer is kept in a prison cell twice as large as that of any other prisoner, and yet the accommodations are still cramped. Before being imprisoned, he was a typical thug in the employ of Balic. Like his comrades, he enjoyed cracking skulls for a living. Yet despite his brutal profession, Ramhammer had a likable and friendly disposition when he was not on duty. At those times, many throughout Balic would welcome Ramhammer into their company, and he was known as a good customer (if, occasionally, a little rowdy) at various drinking establishments in the city. When he was on duty, however, the half-giant's personality changed drastically. Ramhammer acted as a brute and a thug of the worst sort, and he showed no compunction about maiming or killing anyone when he received orders to do so.

His normal life came to an end when Ramhammer, while off duty, inadvertently witnessed a meeting between conspirators of the merchant House Wavir and a group of patricians who were plotting to overthrow Andropinis. Since he was not working, the half-giant thought nothing of what

he had seen and went about his business without reporting anything. When it was discovered that Ramhammer could potentially identify the conspirators, the praetors questioned him, but could not suss out what they wanted to learn. Then he was brought before Andropinis, who reached into the half-giant's mind and tried to pull out the information he sought. Unfortunately for the sorcerer-king, Ramhammer epitomizes the tendency of half-giants to be malleable in personality while in the presence of others. As a result, each time Andropinis would delve into Krolgar's psyche in search of the conspirators' identities, the memories produced by the half-giant's mind would shift to match what the sorcerer-king expected to discover.

At first, the information the half-giant was providing seemed like a great gift; suddenly, Andropinis found that all the patricians, praetors, and merchants he suspected of plotting against him were, indeed, plotting against him. After a few executions, however, it became apparent that the half-giant's mind was creating false memories, providing Andropinis only the sort of information the sorcerer-king wanted to hear, and not the truth. Andropinis imprisoned Ramhammer in the Ivory Dungeon and periodically interrogates the half-giant psionically, hoping to break through his mind's malleability and uncover the truth of the meeting of conspirators, but so far he has had no such luck.

Despite the fact that Ramhammer's mind seems determined to conceal the truth from Andropinis, the patricians who are secretly involved in the conspiracy fear that, someday, the sorcerer-king will successfully plumb the depths of the half-giant's psyche and pull out the true facts of the matter. As a result, many interested parties want to see Ramhammer freed and whisked out of Balic, because as long as he remains in custody the potential exists for him to shatter the conspiracy.

GENDRA ZALDANIS

Gendra Zaldanis was once a praetor in Balic. A human female in her middle years, Zaldanis was not only a trusted templar of Andropinis, she was also—until her apprehension—a member of the Veiled Alliance sent to spy on the sorcerer-king. Now, as Zaldanis rots in her cell beneath the White Palace, she seems to grow old beyond her years, each day sapping more of her youth and will to live. In fact, many times Gendra has attempted to starve herself to death, willing to waste away rather than endure another day of capture at the hands of Andropinis. Once vivacious and sharp-eyed, she is now a hollow-cheeked husk of a woman, with sunken eyes and a haunted expression.

The reason why Gendra Zaldanis has tried to die, and the reason why Andropinis has not yet slain this known Veiled Alliance infiltrator, is that Zaldanis has been imbued with an enchantment that will alert her superiors in the Veiled Alliance if she dies. When she was captured, several of the praetors detected the enchantment and attempted to remove it, without success. When Andropinis learned the facts of the matter, he ordered her sent to the Ivory Dungeon and kept alive. Meanwhile, praetors who are actually loyal to Andropinis now feed information back to the Veiled Alliance (just as Gendra's contacts had done previously), except that Andropinis controls the information they transmit. As long as Zaldanis stays alive in the Ivory Dungeon, her overseers in the Veiled Alliance will continue to believe they have an infiltrator in the ranks of the praetors, and will continue to happily receive the false information planted by Andropinis.

If Zaldanis dies, that opportunity for counter-intelligence would end, and the Veiled Alliance would likely try to infiltrate the praetors anew, requiring Andropinis to start hunting down another traitor. For this reason, someone in Balic might be

interested hiring adventurers to infiltrate the Ivory Dungeon not to rescue Zaldanis (who is no longer much of an asset, given her wasted condition) but to slay her, which would reveal to the Veiled Alliance that their infiltrator is no longer in place.

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Rodney Thompson is an advanced designer for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® R&D at Wizards of the Coast, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game include the *DARK SUN® Campaign Setting* and the *DARK SUN® Creature Catalog™*, *Monster Vault™*, *Player's Option: Heroes of the Feywild™*, and *Lords of Waterdeep™*.

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EBERRON

Eye on Eberron

The Sovereign Swords

By Keith Baker

Illustration by Thomas M. Baxa

These are desperate times. Refugees strain the resources of our cities and villages. Brigands and crime lords prosper at the expense of honest folk. Hope lies in the Sovereigns, but they cannot act alone; we must be their swords! Boldrei has charged us to defend the hearth. Aureon calls on us to uphold his laws. Join me, and they will give you strength.

—Marshal Harkan d'Deneith

Few people in Khorvaire have heard of the Dreaming Dark. Based in the dream realm of Dal Quor, it is a conspiracy of fiends manipulating the sleeping minds of mortals. After conquering the continent of Sarlona, the quori have turned their attention to Khorvaire. They have agents, spies, and pawns spread across the Five Nations. Some of them are willing servants of the darkness, but many have no idea who or what are their true masters. Sometimes the best way to manipulate good people is to give them heroes, and the Dreaming Dark has provided some: the Sovereign Swords.

SERVANTS OF THE HOST

Deities rarely intervene in the affairs of mortals, so it is all the more remarkable when they do. In just a few years, the Sovereign Swords have become legends. There are hundreds of stories of the Swords, and all share the same form. Somewhere, people are suffering. They could be struggling with bandit raiders, rioting against injustice, threatened by roaming monsters, or menaced by an untouchable serial killer. Whatever the danger, just when things seem unbearable, the Sovereign Swords arrive. They are courteous and brave, and they know exactly what's going on. If the danger is a physical threat, they fight it. If the conflict involves differences of opinion, their officers and priests mediate the dispute. Medics help with injuries and plagues, and engineers address concerns with the infrastructure of the community. Whatever the problem, the Swords see it through to a solution.

To maintain their equipment, the Swords accept any rewards offered to them, but they refuse praise or glory. It is the Sovereigns who led these soldiers to the village, and the Sovereigns who gave them the strength to fight. Let all the glory go to the Sovereigns; the Swords are just their vessels.

Although the altruism and mundane skills of the Swords are impressive, they are supplemented by supernatural power. Boldrei guides them to communities in need. Aureon speaks through the mediator, and Dol Dorn guides the hand of the warrior. Any one of the Sovereign Swords is the equal of a dozen members of a typical village militia, and this fact is remarkable. In Eberron, few people possess the skills of adventurers. Few priests perform divine magic. As such, the appearance of a band of champions wielding supernatural might leaves quite an impression on people in need.

Where did the Swords come from? Most bards know the tale of how the marshal Harkan d'Deneith stood on the steps of the sentinel tower and called his cousins to service just days after the Mourning. Reminding them of the tale of Tira Miron—the warrior blessed by divine forces in Thrane's darkest hours—Harkan told his cousins that the Sovereigns were calling them to serve. The Mourning was a sign and a warning. Khorvaire was in peril, and the Sovereigns needed swords.

As moving as these words were, only a handful of the Deneith mercenaries joined Harkan that day. Yet as their legend grows, new champions take up the mantle. Anyone who wants to be a Sovereign Sword has to display courage, compassion, and skill. Aureon's laws are the foundation of civilization, and Boldrei's love is the mortar that binds a community together; the Sovereign Swords are guided by both principles.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

Although the group's numbers fluctuate with casualties and new recruits, there are approximately one hundred members of the Sovereign Swords. They are split into three platoons and supplemented by a handful of solo operatives (mostly sentinel marshals). Each platoon operates in a different region of the Five Nations, moving in a circular pattern across Khorvaire. The marshals operate in the space between, tackling problems that require only the work of an individual.

People have many reasons to be suspicious of the Sovereign Swords. The Sovereigns have never taken such an active role in the world before. The Swords are willing to lay down their lives for complete strangers. What's the catch?

The simple truth is that most of them are devout soldiers who believe that they are guided and empowered by the Sovereigns. They fight because they consider it to be a divine mission. Detecting lies through magical means and using telepathy won't find any dark secrets because they don't have dark secrets to hide. Instead, their dreams bring visions from the Sovereigns. These visions guide them in their missions and inform them of the dangers that lie ahead.

As it turns out, the soldiers' visions are scripted by the Dreaming Dark. The quori watch the world through dreams and have spies scattered across Khorvaire. It's not Boldrei who tells a lieutenant about the bandit threat in Passage—it's a quori who has been monitoring the situation for weeks. In some cases, the Dreaming Dark creates problems for the Sovereign Swords to solve. Through manipulation of dreams and their other pawns, the quori can exacerbate existing tensions and push unstable individuals over the edge. Thus, a situation that's been holding steady might reach a boiling point just as the Swords

are closing in on the community. Their arrival seems prescient, but in reality, it's been carefully staged.

What is the point of this elaborate ruse? Why is the Dreaming Dark manufacturing heroes and enemies for them to fight?

The ultimate goal of the Dreaming Dark is to conquer Khorvaire, just as it conquered Sarlona long ago. The fiends don't want open war between Riedra and the Five Nations; the chaos caused by such a conflict would threaten the stability of Dal Quor, and there's no assurance that Riedra would win in the end. The Dreaming Dark is manufacturing heroes because one day, it will create a disaster on the scale of the Mourning—a disaster that threatens all of Khorvaire. And when that time comes, a group of heroes will step forward. By then, everyone in Khorvaire will know the selfless reputation of the Sovereign Swords. These champions will lead the people to a new age, one ruled by the living avatars of the Sovereign Host.

Rather than bringing the Inspired to Khorvaire, the Dreaming Dark is making new Inspired that the people of the Five Nations will follow of their own free will—unless the adventurers figure out what's going on first.

THE GIFTS OF THE SOVEREIGNS

The Sovereign Swords are few in number, but every full member of the company wields supernatural power. A soldier blessed by Dol Dorn moves with astonishing speed and strikes with stunning force. An officer chosen by Dol Arrah can grant strength and power to his or her allies with a word. These gifts add fuel to the growing legend of the soldiers empowered by the Sovereigns.

As with much about the Swords, these blessings aren't what they appear. The powers aren't divine in nature; they are psionic. The Sovereign Swords are battleminds and ardents, psychic warriors who

transform their faith into power. Psionics are rare in Khorvaire, and few people understand these arts well enough to recognize them—especially because the techniques used by the Swords are blended with religious trappings and fervor.

The Swords believe that their abilities are gifts of the Sovereigns. They don't realize that they don't need to invoke the gods to use their psionic powers.

Among the Swords, different levels of power and awareness exist.

Pawns: Most of the Swords are exactly what they appear to be. Their powers are psionic as opposed to divine, but the gifts are still fueled by the soldiers' faith.

Mind Seeds: The true patron of the Sovereign Swords is a kalaraq quori named Lashtaqa. This fiend has the power to hollow out a mortal mind and replace it with his own personality, a technique known as *mind seed*. A seed takes time to germinate, and during this period, the victim appears disoriented and confused. Once this process is complete, the victim's personality is replaced with that of Lashtaqa. Mind seeds are the only members of the Swords who know that they are working for the Dreaming Dark. They are the secret coordinators who ensure that the Swords do what the Dreaming Dark wants them to do.

Lashtaqa prefers not to place his mind seeds in obvious positions of leadership because magic or telepathy can expose them as liars and schemers. Instead, most mind seeds are pawns such as old drill sergeants, naïve squires, and the like. They are people who can influence the opinions of others with a few well-placed words while seeming uninvolved. In truth, mind seeds are among the most powerful of the Swords because Lashtaqa has unlocked their psionic potential. But they keep their full abilities hidden unless forced into the open.

Vessels: The most blessed members of the Sovereign Swords are known as vessels. Just as the couatl empowered Tira Miron to fight for the Silver Flame,

each soldier has formed a bond with an angel of the Sovereign Host. The celestial advises and strengthens its vessel, and in times of great peril, it can seize control of the vessel's body and fight on his or her behalf.

Needless to say, the spirits occupying these vessels aren't angels; they are fiends from the nightmare realm. Most are tsucora quori, though a few hashalaq quori guide the mediators and priests. These spirits generally remain in a passive role, offering advice and passing along the so-called words of the Sovereigns. Through their hosts, they teach the Swords the prayers and techniques that have produced a corps of ardents and battleminds. As long as a spirit remains passive, divination and similar effects can't detect its hostile intent; the vessel is the dominant mind and believes that the fiendish rider is benign. Once a quori has been let in, though, it can seize full control of its vessel.

What differentiates these hosts from the Inspired of Sarlona is that the mortal has to voluntarily allow the spirit in at the start. One of the Inspired can never resist a quori spirit. If a Sword vessel realizes the true nature of the quori and somehow exorcises it, the vessel can prevent it from regaining access to his or her mind.

Most officers and priests of the Swords are vessels, along with the independent sentinel marshals who work with the company. Harkan d'Deneith accepted a quori spirit as a divine guide years before the Mourning, and he is utterly convinced of the benevolence of his spiritual companion.

WHY IS THIS ALLOWED?

The Sovereign Swords are vigilantes. Why do the leaders of the Five Nations allow them to operate?

The first answer lies in the Swords' ties to House Deneith. Although the Swords aren't an official arm of the house, many of its members are Deneith heirs and sentinel marshals. There is a long history of

communities hiring Deneith soldiers to fight bandits when their lords won't do it; the difference here is that the Swords act for free.

In addition, the Swords remain in motion, they solve problems that the local authorities can't handle, and they are extremely popular. Individual lords might have doubts about the Swords, but overall, it's better to be seen as part of the solution than as a force opposing it.

What about the Sovereigns—why do they allow this mockery to act in their name? Well, the deities don't actually empower the Swords, and because the soldiers are devout believers who are convinced that they are doing good deeds, the Sovereigns might be fooled. Even if they are aware of the truth and feel an urge to act, it's not their way to intervene directly. If they choose to interfere, they will likely act through a mortal party such as the adventurers.

ADVENTURE IDEAS

There are many ways to work the Sovereign Swords into a campaign. First, decide whether they will appear as allies, rivals, or enemies.

As allies, the Swords can support the adventurers when a situation spreads beyond the party's control. A sentinel marshal aligned with the Swords can provide the adventurers with vital information and, in return, call on them for aid. The Swords are an excellent choice when the heroes need the cavalry to come riding over the hill because that's exactly what they do: show up where they are most needed and ride off to wherever the Sovereigns send them next.

As rivals, the Swords can compete with the adventurers to complete the same missions. Typically, the Swords are driven by altruism. If the characters are working for profit or a particular faction, the intervention of the Swords could jeopardize their mission. This possibility is particularly relevant for heroes aligned with the King's Citadel or another secret service. The actions of the Swords might not only interfere with the

QUORI INFLUENCE

The Sovereign Swords have a knack for showing up just when they're needed the most. Somehow their journey brings them to Passage at the exact moment of the goblin uprising or to Varna just when the Ashbound are attacking. The Swords have a simple explanation for this: the Sovereigns choose their path.

Anyone who carefully studies the history of the Swords will find one detail that defies logic: Wherever the soldiers go, trouble is just ahead of them. Bandits who have been laying low for months start aggressive raids just in time for the Swords to repel them. Political tensions transform into riots on the day the Swords arrive in town. It seems as if problems pop up just so the Swords can solve them—which is exactly what's going on.

How does the Dreaming Dark do it? The group has agents scattered across Khorvaire, and although they aren't behind every bad thing that happens in the Five Nations, they have a few ways to stir things up.

Mind Seed. Want bandits to begin a foolishly aggressive campaign? Turn their leader into a mind seed. The quori don't use this power casually because it's their greatest weapon, and if the people of Khorvaire became aware of the threat, they might develop ways to counter it. Thus, the quori won't risk using *mind seed* on a member of the Twelve, the Arcane Congress, or a cardinal of the Silver Flame, but it's unlikely that a group of bandits will be able to recognize a psionic technique.

Gold. The Dreaming Dark's agents have gold. When subtlety fails, they can set things in motion

by spreading money around. Even if the source of funding is revealed, the truth remains hidden—the unknown patron who paid the rioters has absolutely no connection to the Sovereign Swords.

Dream Manipulation. This tool is the favorite of the Dreaming Dark, though it is also the most limited. Dreams occur in Dal Quor, and a quori can enter a mortal's dream and change it. Whereas most dreams are forgotten upon waking, a quori dream is vivid and memorable. A priest receives a message from his or her deity. A political leader has a vision of change and crafts the perfect slogan to galvanize those around him or her, people stirred by their own restless dreams. A killer is inspired by visions of paradise to be gained through murder. A cruel baron dreams of a treasure that the peasants are hiding from him, so he sends his guards to tear down the village and search for it.

Dream manipulation can't force someone to take an action that he or she would never take willingly. It's just a way to push an idea to the front of one's mind and encourage the person to act on it.

The key point is that the Dreaming Dark sets these events in motion but doesn't steer them with precision. The group might inspire dissidents to riot, but it has no control over the leader and can't stop the ensuing chaos. The Dreaming Dark excels at manipulation and knows just the right time to push, but it can't stop the dominos once they begin to fall.

As enemies, the Sovereign Swords could be more corrupt than they appear. By default, the Swords truly believe in their mission and their faith, but you could decide that the Swords are conscious, willing

agents of the Dark. They play the role of champions in the light but are always working against the party. This option is especially appropriate if the campaign has any kalashtar adventurers because, as a race, the kalashtar are locked in a struggle with the Dreaming Dark.

Here are a few more options to consider.

- ◆ A battlemind or ardent character could begin the campaign as a member of the Sovereign Swords. With the exception of the mind seeds and those possessed by quori, the Swords truly are devout, noble people.
- ◆ An adventurer dedicated to the Sovereign Host receives a vision from the deities. He or she is charged with discovering the force that is manipulating the Swords and then freeing the soldiers from its evil. This adventure idea could be combined with the previous option. But how can the quori be exposed, let alone driven out?
- ◆ Alternatively, a devout hero begins to have dreams that suggest he or she should work with the Sovereign Swords. Is this a quori trick, or do the interests of the Sovereigns and the actions of the Swords truly coincide?
- ◆ An ally of the party begins acting strangely. He or she has been mind-seeded by Lashtaqala and is being used to cause a problem for the Sovereign Swords to fix. This agent might become a rabble-rouser stirring up mobs or even a serial killer. If the heroes figure out what's going on, can they find a way to restore their ally before the damage done is too great?
- ◆ The adventurers become friends with Harkan or another possessed Sovereign Sword. When they learn the truth about his condition, they must find a way to exorcise him and convince him not to let the "angel" return. If the quori feels threatened, it seizes control of Harkan. Can the adventurers defeat their friend without killing him?

heroes' objective but also expose the secret agenda of their employers (which could be why the quori sent the Swords). And yet, the motives of the Swords are, if anything, purer than those of the heroes.

About the Author

Keith Baker is the creator of the EBERRON® campaign setting and designer of the card game *Gloom*. Or he's just a butterfly dreaming that he's a game designer. Who can say?

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The Origins of the Drow

James Maliszewski

With the [Rise of the Underdark](#) campaign underway, this year has been one of drow incursions against the surface world—playing out right now in both the current D&D Encounters season and D&D Lair Assault. To further discuss the role of the drow within the game, Grogardia.com’s James Maliszewski returns for this installment of D&D Alumni.

While the dark elves of *Dungeons & Dragons* are original to the game's co-creator, Gary Gygax, they nevertheless have a basis in real world mythology. According to the folklore of the Norse-influenced islands north of the Scottish mainland for instance, nocturnal fairies were known as either “drow” or “trow” -- a variant of the more common word “troll.” In his column entitled “Books are Books, and Games are Games, and Never the Twain...” in issue #31 of *Dragon* (November 1979), Gygax further explains that “Drow are mentioned in Keightley’s *The Fairy Mythology*, as I recall (it might have been *The Secret Commonwealth*—neither book is before me, and it is not all that important anyway), and as Dark Elves [are] of evil nature, they served as an ideal basis for the creation of a unique new mythos designed especially for AD&D.”



This is typical of Gygax's approach to monster creation: looking to legend for inspiration and then letting his imagination run wild with it.

Dark Elves Enter the Game

The drow's first formal appearance in *Dungeons & Dragons* came in 1977, with the publication of the *Monster Manual*. There, under the entry for “elf” is a brief section discussing these now-legendary villains. The section states that the drow “are only

legend” and “purportedly dwell deep beneath the surface of the earth in a strange subterranean realm.” It goes on to say they are “as dark as faeries are bright and as evil as the latter are good.” Other than the fact that they are “weak fighters but strong magic-users,” the *Monster Manual* has nothing else to say on the matter; the book does not even provide specific game statistics for the drow, leaving that up to the individual Dungeon Master to decide.

It's in the G-series adventure modules published the following year that the drow truly stride onto the roleplaying stage. Written by Gygax, these modules enjoy the distinction of being the first of this type of product ever published by TSR (standalone adventure modules, not to mention the first linked scenarios as well). They tell of giants who “have been raiding the lands of men in large numbers, with giants of different sorts in these marauding groups.” Local authorities task the player characters with dealing with these giants, but also “to expect a secret force, some motivational power behind this unusual banding of different races of giants.” Little direct evidence of this motivational power is found within the first two modules in the series, [Steading of the Hill Giant Chief](#) and [The Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl](#), but the third module, [Hall of the Fire Giant King](#) finally reveals that it is the drow, led by an evil high priestess named Eclavdra, as the puppet masters behind recent events on the surface world.



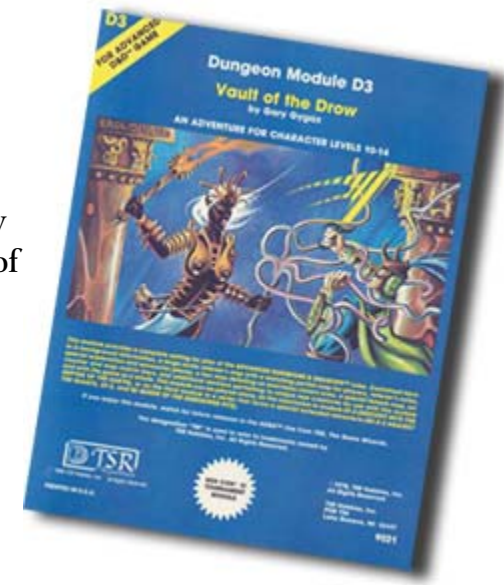
Hall of the Fire Giant King offers up a full *Monster Manual*-style description of the dark elves, which, in addition to detailing their abilities, powers, and equipment, provides some insight into their history and society. As portrayed by Gygax, the drow were on the losing side of an elven civil war in “ages past” and fled into “lightless caverns and endless warrens of twisting passages and caves hung with icicles of stone.” Schooling themselves in magic, the drow plotted for centuries “in order to work out their schemes and inflict revenge upon those who inhabit the world above.” They thus made perfect masterminds for all manner of nefarious plots against the surface world.

Looking back on the entry in module G3, it's amazing to see how much of the iconic image of the drow was established by 1978 -- from their consorting with demons; to their decaying cloaks, armor and weapons; to their female-dominated society. The primary element that's missing is Lolth, the dreaded demon queen of spiders. In *Hall of the Fire Giant King*, there is not a single mention of Lolth. Indeed, Eclavdra and the drow under her command are instead shown to worship a strange deity

called the Elder Elemental God. It is not until the publication of the *D*-series of modules later in 1978 that the full picture of the dark elves is revealed, including Lolth herself.

Descending into the Depths of the Drow

Module [D1: *Descent into the Depths of the Earth*](#), discloses that the drow, true to their Chaotic Evil nature, possess a fractious society, divided into feuding clans or “houses,” each with its own insignia and agenda. One of the first houses the player characters encounter is Despana, its symbol “a golden spider with engraved runes that say in Drowic, LOLTH, DEATH QUEEN MOTHER,” making it the first reference to the infamous Spider Queen. Module [D3: *Vault of the Drow*](#), expands upon this information by introducing the drow city of Erelhei-Cinlu (its name derived from the beginning letters of the first names of each of Gary Gygax's children: Ernie, Elise, Heidi, Cindy, and Luke). There we meet all the houses of the drow, including Eilservs, whose members have turned away from Lolth to serve the Elder Elemental God. In addition, the Eilservs seek to make their mistress, Eclavdra, “Queen of All Drow.” Needless to say, this puts them at odds with most of their fellow drow and which explains their interest in forming an alliance with the surface-dwelling giants.



Vault of the Drow is a remarkable adventure module, presenting a vast subterranean environment where the player characters are able to explore, do battle, or almost anything else they desire -- provided they are careful not to draw too much attention to themselves. Gygax's portrayal of the dark elves as power hungry and, therefore, riven with internal conflict gives them both depth and versatility; it opens the door for Dungeon Masters to use the drow as they see fit, with even details as seemingly integral as the worship of Lolth open to individual interpretation. Gygax even introduces the idea of non-evil drow in the form of “Nilonim, a dissident drow ... [who] led a band of rebels attempting to overthrow noble rule. He is of neutral alignment with a slight tendency towards good deeds.” Remember that Nilonim appeared in 1978, ten years before *The Crystal Shard* by R.A. Salvatore gave the world Drizzt Do'Urden, perhaps the most famous drow in the history of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Like the modules in which they appeared, the drow quickly proved very popular, becoming favorites of players and Dungeon Masters alike. Over the years, they've continued to appear in numerous D&D products (including their 'canonization' of sorts in the [1st Edition Fiend Folio](#)) across nearly every edition and campaign setting. In the current edition of the game, for instance, the drow have clearly maintained sufficient traction as to merit Wizards of the Coast's current *Rise of the Underdark* campaign (starting off with no less than online updates to the *Against the Giants* series).

Yet however the drow have continued throughout the game, each presentation has drawn upon the foundation laid by Gary Gygax thirty-five years ago, adding to the legend of the dark elves.



About the Author

James Maliszewski started roleplaying in the late fall of 1979, when he opened up a copy of the *Dungeons & Dragons Basic Set*, which was edited by Dr. J. Eric Holmes and originally purchased for his father. More than thirty years later, he's still playing. He works as a freelance writer and blogs about old school gaming at <http://grognardia.blogspot.com>.