

# HACKMASTER®



## HackJournal Issue #35 Spring - 2011

Welcome to the newest edition of HackJournal, the HackMaster magazine for players and GameMasters around the world! Whether you profess to be the greatest fighter, thief, mage or cleric, you can't afford to pass up a single issue! Here's just a sampling of the inventory of secrets revealed herein:

- The House of Batani – a noble Kalamaran family
- Details on improving party chemistry
- A new HackMaster monster – the Hellhound
- Skipping Betty Fireball updates

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## HACKJOURNAL 35

This quarterly PDF supplement is written specifically for (and by) the members of the HackMaster Association, a member-driven organization of HackMaster players and GameMasters who meet to discuss and play the HackMaster role-playing game. The HackJournal also previews special pre-release material, including 'alpha' and 'beta' rules previews for future HackMaster products! HackMaster Association members are encouraged to try out these new rules and provide feedback on the Kenzer and Company discussion forums.

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# Improving Party Chemistry

by Andrew Wayne Franklin (#OK-4-00193-01)

In any roleplaying game, players must work to overcome challenges presented to them by the GameMaster. One of those challenges lies in creating an effective party of PCs. Most discussions on creating effective PC groups focus on the mechanical aspects of PC groups. While having the right mix of skills for a campaign is essential to an effective group, having characters able to work well together proves far more important. Party chemistry is important, because the vitriolic effects of bad party chemistry create in-game and out-of-game conflict.

In sports, there's an axiom that good teams win because they have good chemistry. If you can't play well with others, your team is probably going to lose. How teams develop winning chemistry is a subject that pundits have filled countless hours pondering, but the best sports teams have something in common with the most effective PC parties: they've done the planning to ensure that there are methods in place for handling divisive issues and for reaching a consensus in dealing with them.

The difference between a game where you spend hours playing a hero, and a game where you spend hours arguing with other players over trivial issues, is often the result of poor planning. In 25 years of gaming, I've found the best groups were ones where the PCs worked well together, even when they disagreed. Good chemistry didn't come from just being friends or from a good GM forging us into a team through shared pain — it came from how we dealt with party chemistry issues.

## Alignment

Alignment is often the most significant challenge to party chemistry. Regardless of game system, you're playing a character with moral and ethical beliefs. For instance, in *Aces & Eights*, Reputation and Notoriety represent the noble 'white hats' and the back-shooting 'black hats'. Characters with different moral and ethical codes, if properly played, will conflict over which courses of actions are morally and ethically appropriate. Of course, individuals of the same alignment, especially self-centered ones, may interpret their morality differently.

*HackMaster* and *Aces & Eights* use Honor and/or Reputation as tools to motivate proper moral and ethical behavior, so the problem of alignment conflict is even more intense in these games. As a GM, I regularly gave tough choices to my Chaotic Good PCs, making them demonstrate if they truly believed in individual freedom and rights or whether they were just PCs who weren't explicitly evil and weren't lawful. Lawful characters had to deal with whether they supported an oppressive government or whether they would break the written law for a higher purpose. In the end, if you're playing a heroic paladin flashing your blade into the necks of evil cultists to prevent them from starting a plague, you should play that character differently than the selfish thief who disarms traps solely because he hopes to strike it rich.

With proper planning, you can reduce the explosive potential of alignment. A good start is to get your GM to explain how he or she interprets each alignment, since morals and ethics are not universal. That way, you know what Lawful Good means to your GM, the ultimate moral arbiter of the campaign. Once you know where your PC's alignment fits into the game world, you need to know the other PCs' alignments and how this will influence their characters. Determining the alignment of a PC is difficult, because alignment is an out-of-character measure of in-character views. If your PC asks about another character's ethical views, it's a lot easier to understand how they will react in a given situation. Once you understand the other PC's viewpoints, it becomes easier to come to consensus on what behaviors strengthen party chemistry and what behaviors lead to chemistry-killing arguments.

If you know another player plays a ‘the good of the many outweighs the good of the one’ fighter, you know that as long as he is able to fight, he will fight until he has achieved his objective. For example, if he agreed to free slaves from hobgoblin slavers, he feels ethically obligated to free those slaves and kill the hobgoblins, even if it is a challenge the party can’t overcome. If your PC is trying to avoid a losing battle with hobgoblins and you want to respect the fighters’ ethical code, you might remind the fighter that dead fighters free no slaves. Having an honest discussion with the other players about your character’s moral and ethical beliefs reduces miscommunications. While there will certainly be alignment issues, there have been many alliances of convenience throughout history. If you’ve agreed to discuss alignment issues before they explode, you have a chance to succeed with a party of differing alignments. Get the alignment stuff out in the open before it emerges from the darkness and kills your party.

### Quirks and Flaws

Character-defining disadvantages are an important element of many games, as they offer the option of giving the character more power in exchange for greater complexity. Unfortunately, PCs with quirks and flaws have sometimes led to greater party tensions. While these promote better roleplaying, they also make the world a more reactive place. Any chemist will tell you that you have to balance your reactions or the results can get unpleasant. . . The honest knight who does not believe in breaking the law is a poor fit for a group of greedy thieves who flaunt their lawbreaking activities. A racist PC who hates dwarves creates a potentially party-crippling problem when dealing with dwarven PCs and NPCs. Lusty PCs may create uncomfortable situations if roleplayed to the hilt, or may just have to be watched very carefully to make sure they don’t get robbed—or worse-- by the local talent. Flaws represent physical problems. A character’s lisp can create major communication problems, potentially to the irritation of other players, especially in online play with live voice chat. A blind PC create many challenges in describing a visual environment. Quirks are usually more of a problem than flaws, because flaws are often described in a more mechanical manner.

Again, planning helps ensuring that characters with inappropriate quirks and flaws create less party tension. Learning about a group member’s preferences, such as which alignments they refuse to play (or play with),

and which quirks and flaws could interfere with their enjoyment of the game will greatly ease potential discomfort as you may identify strategies to avoid chemistry problems.

For a lisp or stutter, you could make sure that the player doesn’t verbally play the flaw too much in a session if it’s ruining the game—you know the player is playing their flaw but it’s disruptive if they overplay it. Also, be clear of what bugs you out of character. I had two Foul-Mouthed PCs in my most recent campaign, and made it clear that there were certain swear words that really offended me. The players were able to play PCs with extreme potty mouths, but by avoiding those words, they made the game enjoyable for all of us. Every adventurer is a crazy jerk in their own way, but most adventurers are more tolerable if some planning is put into controlling their quirks and flaws.

### Treasure Division

In any game, there are rewards, yet there is never enough treasure, even in a Monty Haul game, because you know there’s always more out there. Thus, players and PCs quibble over the copper pieces, the pennies, and every little knick-knack. If you’ve read the ‘Five Green Towels’ strip (check out *Knights of the Dinner*



*Table: Bundle of Trouble* volume 3), after you laughed until it hurt, you saw how easily treasure division in an RPG can turn into an accounting nightmare. The other extreme, letting individual group members pick up treasure and report back to the party depends on the trustworthiness and organizational abilities of each player and PC. Letting each group member individually track their own treasure usually leads to a loss of information—or players claiming the same item multiple times.

When I'm GameMaster, I never told the players exactly what any special item was—a potion was a potion or in *Aces & Eights* a six-gun was a six-gun. Characters had to learn in-character how valuable a non-coin item really was. I also placed treasure items in a manner where the party had to decide whether to sell items for cash to buy needed and wanted items, or to keep them. When my players argued, it was often because one player wanted an item for his characters that others wanted and didn't agree to their methods of distributing that item. I could put in one really powerful item everyone wanted, and some days, just sit back and watch as the party trust eroded in the ensuing

argument over treasure division. You don't want the GM to turn you against your party, for a divided party soon gives the GM a few more skull stickers.

Non-divisive treasure allocation proceeds from clear communication between the PCs. You need an agreement on how to split the loot. The simplest agreement is to split everything evenly, but that only works when you have coins. When you have other types of goods, the question of how to divide them becomes complicated. You'd better agree on that early in the campaign, or you'll have arguments, have weaker party chemistry and give the GM extra time to plan your PC's doom. Make a treasure division agreement early. Everyone has to live with the agreement, so make one with provisions for revision. Few people enjoy discussing financial issues in the real world, let alone the game world, but your adventuring party is like a corporation: its success or failure depends on effective use of financial resources.

### **Party Goals**

Like a corporation, a party is organized to achieve a set of goals. Simple corporations are organized for one



major goal: to make money. Your party has more goals, as each individual party member seeks to advance in their profession, become wealthier and to complete personal quests. Some of those goals, particularly the quests, are important to just one PC, but very important. One PC might wish to end the reign of Emperor Kabori or the domination of a specific territory by a cabal of corrupt cattle barons, but your character might want to start a boar-hunting business. Your party needs to figure out which goals are essential to the party and can be achieved in-game and which are something the PC is best doing in another campaign or on their own.

Even if you all agree on morality and financing, having different goals can be divisive. For example, that boar-hunter may find that cattle barons or Emperor Kabori like hunting boars. The boar-hunter may dislike Kabori and cattle barons. However, the boar-hunter does not want to irritate potential clients, which conflicts with the goal of the tyrant-toppler. If you end up playing a bunch of adventures you don't want to play, either you get some other compensation for your troubles or you begin turning sour--and that hurts the party chemistry. This tension over goals can be reduced by planning!

Although mission statements and strategic plans have become cliché, they prove valuable in creating good party chemistry. A mission statement makes it clear what your party is after. My first group of *HackMaster* players, after seeking fame and fortune for a while, gained a mission: fighting an elven empire. Even when they went on other adventures, in the back of their mind their goal was to free good beings from the tyranny of the elven empire. Whenever other problems arose, someone always reminded the party that the elven empire was still there and it would take them out if they didn't take it out first!

A strategic plan takes your mission statement goals and helps you identify the methods you will use to achieve them. If you decide Kabori must die, you can start discussing how you're going to make that happen as a party. By making clear the methods and reasoning behind them, you know that, if fortune favors you, Kabori's head will be on a pike. Successful parties don't just follow the GM's whim—they set goals and stick to them. The GM will try and get you to push your luck in every encounter. With a plan in place, you reduce the risk because you know when your GM is just messing with you and when you need to win that battle!

## Tactics

Tactics can also be a major source of bad chemistry in parties, even when a game rewards tactical thinking and intelligent play. *HackMaster*, utilizing second-by-second combat actions, makes tactical coordination even more important. If your javelin-wielder from Lake Jorakk just starts throwing javelins at kobolds while the uptight Kasite fighter runs into them with his shield, a pointy stick might end up perforating the uptight Kasite. How well your party plays tactically depends on its members. If you don't apply solid tactics, you'll have to live with the consequences—and constantly creating new PCs—unless you play with a wuss GM who has the tactical skills of a young Timmy Jackson.

Good tactics stem from good communication. If the party thief makes it clear that everyone should stand back when she's disarming a trap, she's helping you make a decision that keeps the party alive. If the party mage makes it clear that if he yells 'Fire in the Hole,' a fireball is coming your way, you can prepare appropriately. Effective parties multiply each other's skills and extend their victory beyond what others thought possible. Ineffective parties lead to players yelling at each other about how they got everyone else's character killed.

In conclusion, the real key to successful party chemistry lies in communication. Team chemistry cannot follow a set formula, because people are all different. However, people like to be included in decision-making and having their individual needs respected. If your gaming group puts in the effort to establish good chemistry before the game starts, you'll have fewer chances for misunderstandings with the other players. Putting in the time to communicate pays benefits in the end. My group that fought the Elven Empire had a rotating stable of PCs, but as each new PC came in, they were told what the group was fighting for. When a great opportunity to take out the Elven Empire arose, the PCs worked as a team. They worked together and succeeded, making them the most dangerous group in the universe. A little effort in communication led to an epic game.

I hope that by communicating with your fellow players, you are able to dilute party chemistry issues and thus get to play a more enjoyable game.'



o family more in the  
middle ye never saw.  
Neither gaining nor  
declining, the Batanis  
tread the safer middle path and  
seem quite glad to do so.



# The House of Batani

by Kurt Evans (#NY-1-10370-10)

In the 250 plus years since the establishment of the Batani family as a noble house, few members have given cause to question – or exemplify – its place within the Kalamaran hierarchy of nobility. This stems from the methodology established by its founder, Amar Batani I, who made famous the colloquialism, “*Swayeth not on the hanging bridge; standeth not on the narrow boat.*”

Consequently, where the Emperor goes, the Batanis seem to follow.

## Lands Owned

The Batani family directly controls the village of Wewidu and surrounding farmlands. Their serfs provide the Empire with little more than a token amount of wheat, though the area is known for its more-than-adequate weavers. The patriarch of the family, Kalam Batani, travels to Wewidu several times a year but otherwise resides in Bet Kalamar.

## Family Motto

Follow The Wind

## Crest

The shield is divided into four partitions. The upper left partition resembles a checkerboard, with the squares alternating between green and white. The upper right partition is an image of a watchful eye. The bottom left partition is of a shortsword, and the bottom right partition is that of a hawk in flight.)

## Overview

The family always demonstrates a middling kind of loyalty to whomever rules; when events inevitably turn sour they neither lead any betrayals nor are they held accountable for any past deeds committed in the name of the now-fallen tyrant – after all, they would have done the same for you, had you led...

In any event, while some families are known for possessing large quantities of wealth, or for controlling hundreds of loyal soldiers, the Batanis have little coin and few men. However, their position in Kalamaran society remains unchallenged; the family patriarch Kalam Batani

simply does what he is asked and little more. If Emperor Kabori needs two dozen soldiers, Batani somehow finds three dozen conscripts. When taxes are due, Kalam turns over just a little more than expected.

Thus, while the Batanis live comfortably in their humble estate, their neighboring nobles rarely – if ever – order their privateers upon Batani owned land, as to rob such a noble would only be an act of robbing the Emperor himself. (This act – robbery committed by soldiers disguised as bandits, commanded by nobility – is a common occurrence as Emperor Kabori continues to raise taxes as preparation for an imperial expansion.)

Due to Kalam’s reluctance to keep extra coin for his family, the Batanis control fewer-than-usual house soldiers. Despite this, the Batanis are capable of rousing perhaps three or four dozen men when given a call to arms. These combatants are tradesmen and serfs, not trained soldiers, although the keen fighting skill and military mind of Sulam Kar’Kina, Kalam’s brother-in-law, could offset this militia’s lack of expertise were he given command.

The Batani family holds no prestigious position within the capital. They control no guild masters, nor do they serve as master tradesmen or sit upon any councils or quorum. The family simply owns its parcel of land, pays its taxes and stirs no waters. It is perhaps this middling nature of the family – their lack of accumulated wealth, their easy loyalty towards the Emperor and the absence of any titles or roles worth taking – that makes them such an unappealing target for other houses seeking to advance in prestige. Instead, they are often overlooked, to their benefit.



## Patriarch Kalan Batani

At 67 years old of age, Kalan has guided his family for more than 30 years. A firm believer in Amar Batani I's "middle path" approach, Kalan is loyal to the Emperor and regularly insists upon sending more tax than what is asked to Kabori's coffers – though rarely enough to warrant Kabori's notice.

As a youth, Batani entertained different dreams for his family – he imagined collecting wealth and power as if they were trinkets one could play with. He argued long and passionately against his father's passive policies. As a result, he was sent to aid the Empire in crushing a noble house that had fallen out of favor. What he saw in that conflict changed him forever – men and women who were much like he and his family being hunted down like dogs and run through by swords. Their only crime had been greed – they'd sought to move too far above their station and angered the wrong families. When Kalan returned from this conflict, he brought with him a new attitude on the Batani way of living, and less than a decade later, his father introduced him to the family's secret oaths.

Since that time, Kalan has established his own style of leadership. A seasoned expert of negotiation, he proves easily able to take a point of perspective that seems to agree with all sides – no matter how bitter or divisive the dispute. Thus, he finds himself occasionally called upon to broker otherwise untenable negotiations. Though disinclined to admit it, this reputation is, perhaps, his greatest regret – for he has no wish to seek any attention.

In the past year, Kalan's health has begun to deteriorate. He regularly wakes with a raspy cough and struggles to find his strength when the weather remains cold. He is calm about his future, though, as he knows that he has successfully served as his family's steward, guiding them onward to their greatest goals.

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**Kalan Batani:** CG Kalamaran human noble; HP 19; Init 3; Spd 9; Reach by weapon; Dmg by weapon -4; Def -2; DR 0; ToP 6/ 5

*Notable Skills:* administration 57, current affairs 63, diplomacy 88, glean information 45, history, ancient (Kalamaran 61), language (Kalamaran 83, Brandobian 54), resist persuasion 42, riding 27

*Flaw:* Tone deaf

*Typical Equipment Carried:* noble's outfit, 12 sp, 10 cp

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## Heirs

Kalan Batani has three sons and five daughters from three marriages. The eldest son, 32-year-old Ilan Batani, works faithfully side-by-side with his father, serving in an intermediary capacity between warring houses. Ilan has

achieved what his father failed to do – his skills of negotiation are advanced, but he has managed to conceal this and is commonly seen as being "serviceable in a pinch."

Ilan and his now-deceased sister Ina are products of Kalan's first marriage. Their mother, Eri, died during childbirth – a fate which Ina sadly followed while birthing her only child, Kala. Kala herself is now 13, and has been raised as a daughter by Kalan and his third wife Sajia.

Kalan's second son is the 26-year-old Jadan; he is presently enlisted as a captain in the Imperial Army. Some feel that one day he will supplant his uncle as supervisor and Baron of Wupido. Jadan is the product of Kalan's second marriage and has three other siblings, all sisters: Jula, 28, Inara, 23, and Sabara, 19. Jula left the family holdings to marry a noble of the Dar'Ku family, while Inara is betrothed to a general in the 2nd Legion. Sabara, the youngest, remains at home, occupying herself with philosophy.

After the death of Kalan's second wife Tarea to the withering disease, he took his third – and current – wife, Sajia. Together they have two young children: Amir, 12, and Ami, 9. These offspring are commonly referred to as Kalan's Jewels, and, while they are entitled to the least of his estate, he seems to cherish them the most.

Generally, Kalan's children understand the family philosophy and are all well practiced at "the meander," as they call it. However, there are occasional arguments and internal disagreements from behind closed doors. In particular, the younger members often lament the family's lack of extravagance, and wish that Kalan take more from his serfs and give less to the Emperor.

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**Ilan Batani:** CG Kalamaran human; HP 25; Init 2; Spd 7; Rch by weapon; Dmg by weapon; Def +1; DR 0; ToP 7/6

*Notable Skills:* administration 47, current affairs 67, diplomacy 66, glean information 55, history, ancient (Kalamaran 51), language (Kalamaran 81, Brandobian 44), riding 37

*Flaw:* allergies (pollen)

*Typical Equipment Carried:* knife, noble's outfit, 7 sp, 22 cp

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**Jadan Batani (67 EPV):** CG Kalamaran human fighter 1; HP 29; Init +2; Spd 9 (7 jab); Rch 3½"; Atk +3; Dmg 2d8p+2; Def +9; DR 6 shield, 2 body; ToP 9/ 7

*Notable Skills:* administration 35, appraisal (armor) 27, intimidation 50, language (Kalamaran 85, Brandobian 65, Merchant's Tongue 37), observation 47, resist persuasion 17, riding 52

*Quirk:* close talker

*Typical Equipment Carried:* longsword, leather armor, medium shield, 13 sp, 18 cp

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## Oaths & Duties

Throughout the Batani Family's history, loyalties have been sworn and duties taken. Kalan swears to and administers the following roles:

**Keeper of the Census:** As per his oaths, Kalan serves as one of several censors in Bet Kalamar, compiling the lists of citizens for taxation, assessment of military strength and social standing.

**Taker of the Forgotten Names:** In the rare event of a noble family falling from favor and being evicted or being sold into slavery, it is Kalan Batani's sworn duty to collect all legal parchments and maintain them. These official records are often all that exists to distinguish a fallen family's place in the civic hierarchy. If they have not earned their way back into favor after a generation (20 years), these scrolls are destroyed and their nobility is gone forever.

## Family Faith

Although Kalan welcomes his family to worship any good god of their choosing, the Batani family traditionally attends service at the Temple of the Caregiver. Whenever practicable, the family pays a double tithe.

## Famous Relatives

In the 200+ years of the Batani house, there have been a handful of family members who have broken the mould and sought fame and fortune as treasure seekers. This is a record of some of these members, living and dead.

**Aranus Batani (323-347 IR):** A famed warrior who explored ancient temples under the motivation of accumulating an incredible amount of wealth. He died penniless in Pekal, having been killed in a skirmish with a hobgoblin.

**Saloni Batani (352-381 IR):** Cleric of the Knight of Gods. Saloni brought truth and light to the Young Kingdoms, having once successfully orchestrated the destruction of a Temple of Scorn in 377 IR. He fell to his death in a spiked pit trap beneath the mountains of Legasa.

**Tomar Batani (361-385 IR):** A warrior who was raised on the tales of his deceased relatives, Tomar gained great renown throughout Kalamar for having once single-handedly defeated an owlbeast. He was later killed in a battle with a tribe of lizard men.

**Elin the Brown (370-422 IR):** A mage of some

renown, Elin spent much of his spare time trying to develop potent healing potions and other incredible concoctions. He was disemboweled by an angry kobold.

**Olin the One (523-552 IR):** In his lifetime, Kalan's nephew enjoyed a storied career. In only a few years of treasure seeking, he lost an ear (thus making him, for a time, Olin the One Ear), an eye (thereby making him Olin the One-Eyed), a hand (thus causing his name to change to Olin the One Hand), later the same arm up to his elbow (Olin the One Armed), his leg (Olin the One Leg) and certain other body parts (behind his back, some call him Olin the One Stone). Eventually, his comrades began to only refer to him as Olin the One, as he had lost so much of his body. He fell, ignominiously yet somehow appropriately, in battle with a one-armed orc.

**Olin the Younger (545- ):** Olin's son took up his father's profession, with some degree of success. To date, he has suffered only a facial scar (after setting off a trap). Olin sometimes travels with his father, but his attention generally turns to the Young Kingdoms.

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**Olin the Younger (EPV 242):** CG Kalamaran fighter 5; HP 50; Init +4; Spd 8 (7 jab); Rch 2'; Atk +5; Dmg 2d6+2 (short sword); Def +5; DR 6 shield, 4 body; ToP 20/ 9

*Notable Skills:* cartography 21, climbing/rappelling 28, current affairs 20, fire building 15, interrogation 20, language (Kalamaran 65, Merchant's Tongue 34), literacy (Kalamaran 35), intimidation 21, listening 23, observation 35, recruiting 18, resist persuasion 14, survival 15

*Flaws:* hairy, facial scar

*Typical Equipment Carried:* short sword, dagger, ringmail, medium shield, 23 sp, 32 cp

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## The Batanis in Your Campaign

### For Players:

It is entirely possible for a player to use an extended family member of the Batani family – after all, Kalan has brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles. However, it should be noted that the Batani family strives to avoid attention, and officially disowns and disinherits any of their family who chooses a mercenary's life. Thus, any such explorer receives no additive benefits at character creation.

### For GameMasters:

Not all with House Batani is as it seems. Consult the GameMaster section at the end of this issue for further details...



# **GAMEMASTERS ONLY BEYOND THIS POINT**

The following section in its entirety has been expressly classified by the HMGMA (HackMaster GameMaster's Association) as GM Proprietary Information (a.k.a. "GAMEMASTERS EYES ONLY" material). What does that mean exactly? Well, for one, if you are a player, then this is your frickin' cue to stop reading. Put this book down, and step off — PERIOD.

You should only be reading this section if:

- I. You are already a certified HackMaster GameMaster or;
- II. You are a GameMaster-in-Training and have dedicated yourself to mastering the game of HackMaster and are working toward becoming a GM yourself (i.e., you plan to study the material herein, actively assemble your own group of players and step behind the Shield).

Take heed, the consequences for a player reading GM Proprietary Information are severe and such transgressions are taken very seriously. I should also add that it is reprehensible to feign interest in becoming a GM simply to gain access to GM restricted material such that one could use it to gain an edge as a player. Such individuals are the lowest of the low and are universally despised. They risk eternal banishment from the game. So please, consider this a friendly warning and proceed accordingly. If you do not meet the criteria set forth in I. or II. above, please stop reading now.

This section reveals secret GameMaster information relating to the article on House Batani, above.

# Batani Family Secrets

The Batanis have worked diligently through the years to avoid attention or stir up trouble. Of course, it is all a clever ruse. Within the Batani estate in Bet Kalamar lies a secret room – more of a closet, really. From there, Kalan Batani meets in secret with the patriarchs of a handful of other small families. There, they discuss and plot their purpose as the Society of the Uplifted Eye.



This purpose can be summarized thusly: these dreamers and schemers hope for an Empire is free of tyranny. As such, they have covertly established a nominal network of operatives, which they call the Silk Strand. “One silken strand can be broken,” Kalan has said, “but a hundred or a thousand form an invincible web.”

While they chip away at Emperor Kabori – in small increments so as to not be noticed – they remain vigilant and prepared for the “inevitable uprising,” as Kalan describes it. The Uplifted Eye plans neither to lead, nor to instigate any revolt, but if the true king is restored to the throne they shall be an integral part of any uprising.

No family member save Kalan knows of this Society’s existence, although they are aware of – and secretly share – his general distaste for the Empire. Some time soon, Kalan plans to indoctrinate his sons into the cause.

## GM Actions

House Batani’s secret purpose is a slow and diligent one. Though they hope that the myths are true and that someday a youthful Thedorus will return to reclaim his throne and enact vengeance for his family, they prefer not to wait but to take action.

The Batani Silk Strand is intricate and invisible. Men are regularly hired to serve ‘The Cause,’ often

with no real knowledge of their greater purpose. Instead, treasure seekers may be employed by a mysterious woman – whose face they never see – to rob a traveling band of merchants.

Little do they realize the purpose of such a crime is to merely cause dissension, thus chipping a bit more at Emperor Kabori’s rule (little knowing that the woman herself is merely a hired hand, working for yet another mysterious stranger.)

In fact, it may be entirely possible – and convenient – for the GM to intricately manipulate any group of players in this way. All events which hurt the Emperor, or strengthen his enemies, can be attributed to the Cause of the Uplifted Eye.

Of course, the key word is that they “can” be. Not every act against the Empire is orchestrated by Kalan and his fellow patriarchs. Not every action in favor of the Pekal and other enemies of Kabori is committed by the Order. In fact, few events at most occur by their hand.

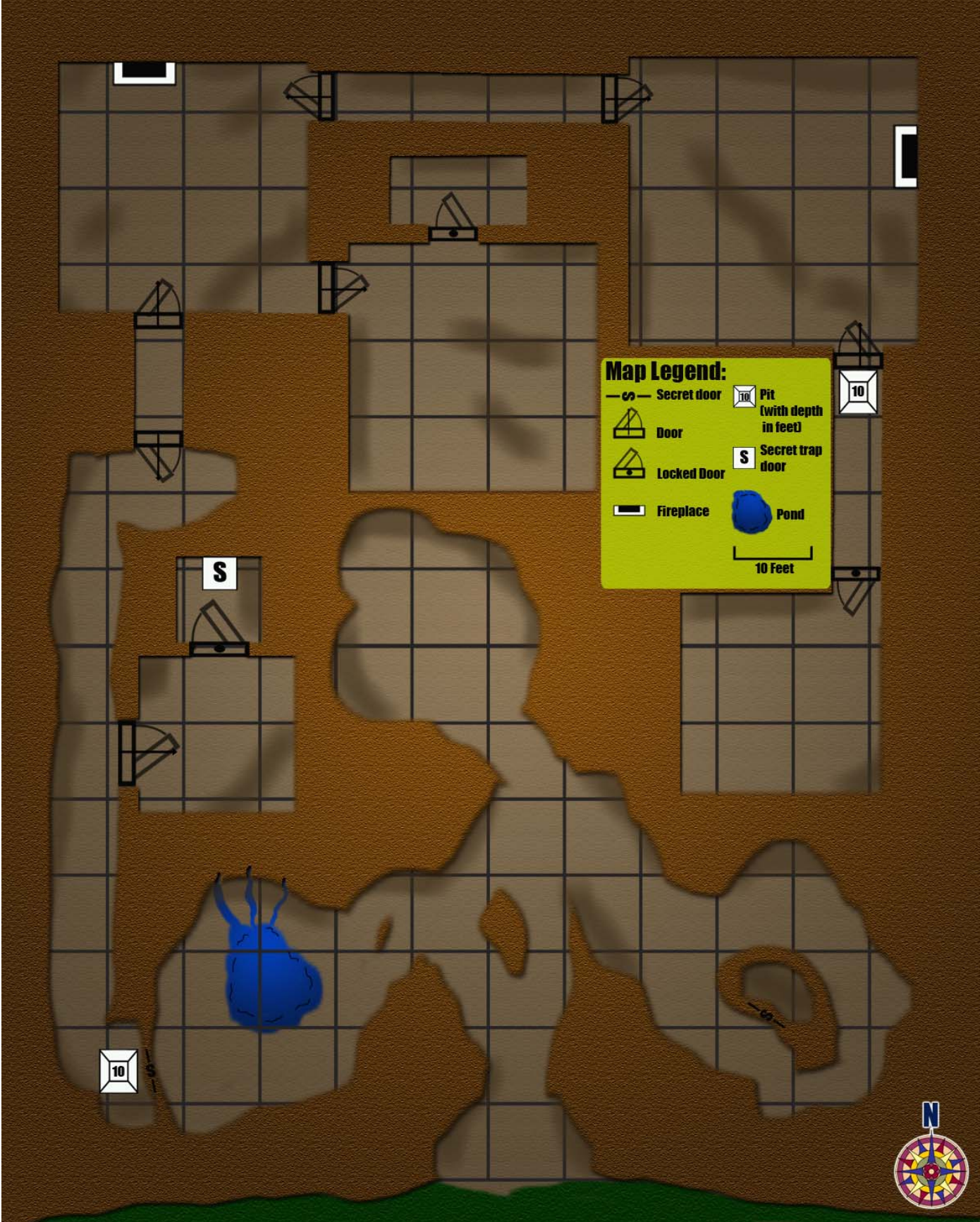
However, if a GM desires to weave a thread, to tie together a greater story, then the Order may serve as a means to accomplish this goal – particularly as the player characters increase in level and prominence.



*You can place NPC members of House Batani anywhere...*

# Dungeons: Ready to Occupy

*"Thieves' Den map" by Kurt Evans (#NY-1-10370-10)*



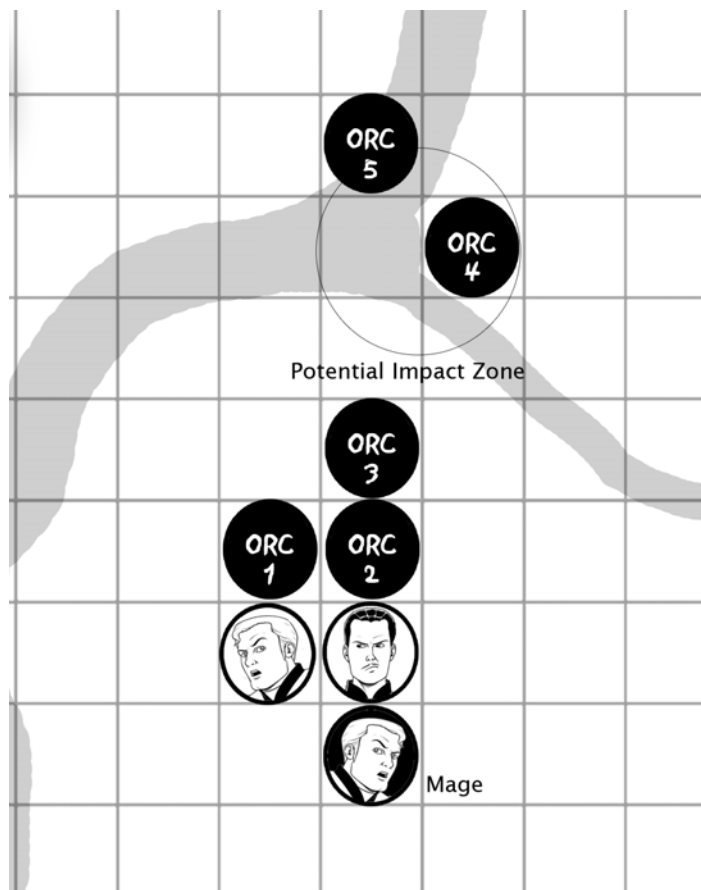
# The Skipping Betty Fireball

*errata and clarifications from Kenzer and Company*

## Fireball, Skipping Betty

Base SP Cost:	80
Components:	V, S
Casting Time:	2 seconds
Range:	Special
Volume of Effect:	Individual(s)
Duration:	10 skips
Saving Throw:	evades (no damage)
Saving Throw Type:	Dodge
Additional Spell Point schedule:	<b>Increase Potency of Fireball:</b> 20 SP per d4p (maximum 10d4p) <b>Increase Duration:</b> 10 SP/skip

A Skipping Betty Fireball conjures a blazing spheroid projectile approximately 2 feet in diameter that the caster may direct at an opponent. Unlike many other line-of-sight spells, the fireball travels in an arc making it ideal for leapfrogging nearby allies that might be interposed between the Mage and his intended target.



*Orcs 1-3 are too close (10'-15') to be affected by the Skipping Betty Fireball as it will coast over their heads. The fireball lands 20-30 feet from the caster (the exact value being at his discretion).*



The initial target must be between 20 and 30 feet from the caster. Targets closer than this cannot be targeted because the Skipping Betty must travel a minimum of 20 feet in each hop. The flaming ball completes its initial arc (and any subsequent ones) in a lone second. Thus 1 second after casting, the fireball impacts at a point 20-30 feet away. The variability exists for the Mage can direct the missile on its trajectory and thus has some leeway as to its exact landing point.

If a target exists in this impact zone (only a single individual may be affected), it is permitted a magic saving throw (using its "Dodge" saving throw bonus value). Those failing suffer 5d4p damage (or more if the spell was "amped up"). A successful save results in no damage.

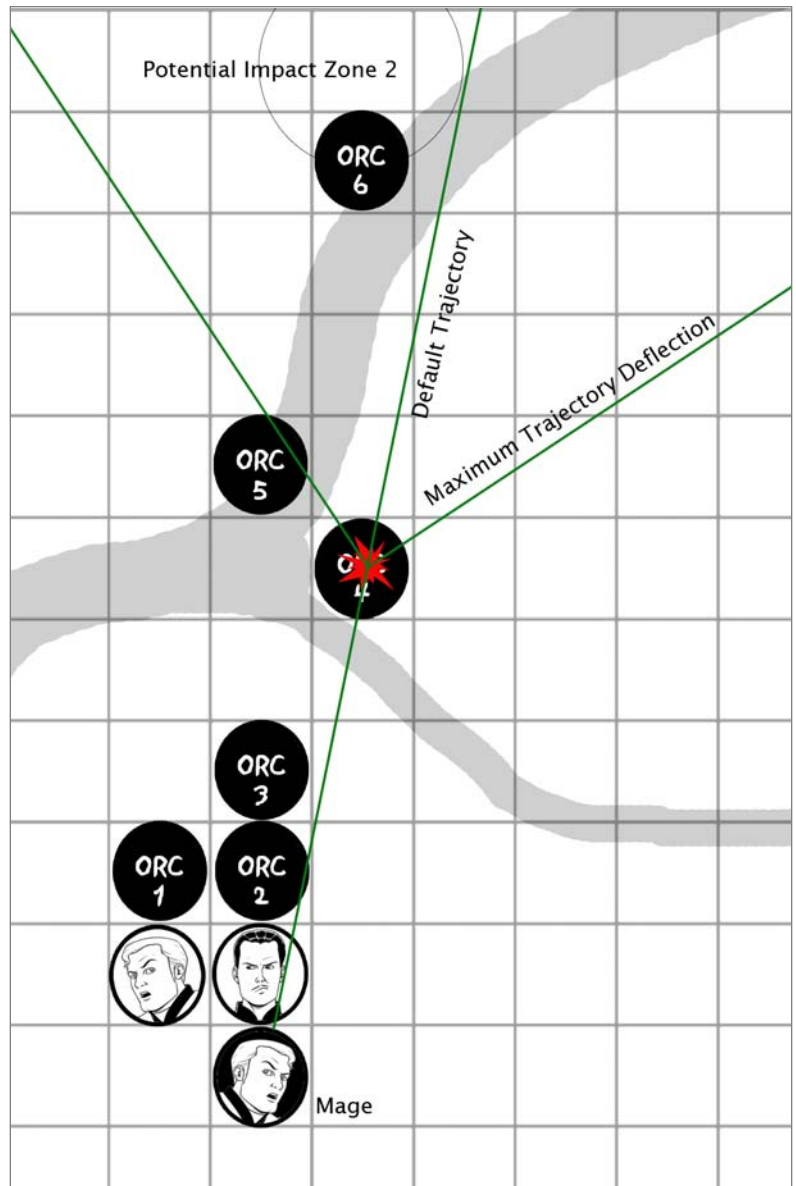
Regardless if a target was struck or not, the fireball then skips off the ground continuing its forward momentum along a path from the Mage to its initial impact point. The Mage has some control over the fireball and may direct it to veer up to 45 degrees left or right as well as choosing to have it land again anywhere from 20-30 feet from its last contact with the earth.

A second after the first impact (2s total), the fireball will again strike ground. If a target lies within its potential impact zone, he/she/it is permitted a magic saving throw – again using the “Dodge” saving throw bonus value. It then skips again and the process repeats until the fireball reaches its maximum duration.

Contact with a solid horizontal surface (e.g. a brick wall) will cause the fireball to skip off that surface (the angle of incidence equaling the angle of deflection). Such contact will, unfortunately, induce uncontrollable instability in the yaw axis of the missile effectively severing the Mage’s control. The missile will then follow its default trajectory governed by the laws of classical mechanics if additional horizontal obstacles lie in its path.

More experienced casters can exert greater control over the fireball’s motion – this control being reflected in their higher bonuses applied to their d20 roll during the opposed check.

The Mage must continue to concentrate on the skipping Betty in order to control it and direct it to its target(s). Barring the mage’s direction, it continues on a straight line bouncing every 25 feet until it runs its course. Naturally the caster may relinquish control once any likely targets are beyond range. Spell fatigue sets in only after control of the fireball is relinquished or the maximum range is reached.



*After choosing to have the Skipping Betty strike Orc 4 (25’ away), the Mage can veer its trajectory to the left and have it strike Orc 6 (20’ further) on its second bounce. Had he alternatively chosen to target Orc 5 (30’ away) with the initial skip, Orc 6 would have been too close (only 15’) to be a potential target for the second bounce.*

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# HELLHOUND

Also Known As: Grim, Old Shuck

If thou wouldst 'scape from that accursed dog of Hell, take haste in headlong flight as best thou may, and halt not 'til thy breath no longer sufficeth to speed thy sinews. Save for battle, no greater advice canst I give, for its ravenous will cannot be sated.

From the demoniac realm it comes in visage vile, as I canst say from my own sight. It was once I did travel near the Rokk Woods when, attentive to danger, loud rustling I did perceive. And lo, out of the boughs there appeared a naked man torn with briars, in headlong flight followed by four black mastiffs gaunt and fleet of foot, as starving hounds that had newly slipp'd the leash. Yet, the heads held aloft with intelligence and the hunger-mad want in the glowing eyes showed them to be no mere beasts of the land. Indeed, they near o'erwhelmed me with the fell cruelty of their appalling presence and I stood fear-struck e'en as the man cried me to haste.

They were nearer now, the closest then opening wide its sharpen'd visage and protuberant teeth to draw down air for (I thought) utt'rance of some savage bite or howl. Instead, superfluous flame flew from the slavering mouth to consume the shrieking man.

He fell in flame, his belly stretch'd out prone, barely an instant fore the hound of flame stuck deep his fangs in a shoulder-joint, whilst the other fell pair took hold on the legs. Their teeth affixed, they dragg'd him o'er the ground for but a pace or two, then vanished I know not how, by force demoniac and powers invisible to man, bearing away the tortur'd limbs.

I stood disconsolate for a time while the sun in silence sat, haunted by the visage of those furious shades on whom mine eye had rested. Mourn with me now that man, perhaps never at peace and impell'd to flight from their cursed shapes for all eternity.

The hellhound's glowing red eyes, not to mention the foul stench of brimstone clinging to its black fur, make it impossible to mistake for any normal canine. Its tongue and razor-sharp teeth are jet black, though few persons survive coming so close as to notice this odd feature. Its growling is loudest when it is at a distance, and lessens as its draws nearer.

A typical hellhound stands about 3 feet tall at the withers, though its emaciated appearance belies its strength and makes it appear somewhat smaller than its true size.

## Combat/Tactics:

Hellhounds possess the capacity to expel flame from their mouths, a tactic they often use as they approach prey before moving into melee. This fiery expulsion takes the form of a 10-foot long arc of fire that engulfs all creatures within an adjacent 10' x 10' area. Anyone scorched by these supernatural flames suffers 3d4p points of damage (bypassing Damage Reduction from armor or shields, though a successful Dexterity check reduces this to half damage). A clever tactician, or one with direct experience of hellhounds, will wisely attempt to remain outside the potential area



## SIZE COMPARISON

Hellhounds excel as watchdogs possessing Listening and Observation masteries of 100. Their senses are so keen, in fact, as to permit them to Sense Invisible Beings (as the 5th level Mage spell).

**WILL FACTOR**  
**18**



of effect. Hellhounds may also breathe flame when in close quarter combat, but forego a bite attack to do so (*i.e.*, hellhounds can bite or expel fire when they attack, but not both simultaneously).

A hellhound's razor-sharp black teeth inflict 4d4p+4 points of damage with a bite. When hunting in packs, a hellhound often chooses to latch onto its prey, automatically inflicting bite damage every 5 seconds thereafter. The hellhound's grip can be broken with a successful knock-back or Feat of Strength (*vs.* d20p+9). Otherwise, the hellhounds follow the standard dog pack mauling rules as detailed in the Hacklopedia's dog entry.

As natives of Hell, they are immune to toxins, diseases and to all intensities and types of fire. Silvered and greater magical weapons are the best hope of inflicting damage on such a creature. When slain, they burst into flames and crumble into nothingness.

Against cold attacks, Hellhounds receive only a d20p+4 saving throw. They avoid cold climates, for sustained ambient temperatures of less than 40 degrees Fahrenheit dispel them back to Hell.

They are the keenest of trackers, with all hellhounds having Listening and Tracking skills of 100%.

### Habitat/Society:

Hellhounds, as their name implies, originate in the bowels of Hell. Although a few run wild through the fiery plains, most serve a devilish master as hunters, trackers and guard dogs. They are ruthless in protecting their master and can be incredibly loyal to that individual. They appear on the Terraverse mostly in the capacity of retrievers, hunting down their master's enemies.

Should their nefarious master be defeated by some greater force, or even neglect or abandon his pets, the hellhounds may become strays. As pack animals, stray hellhounds naturally gravitate towards the fiercest male or to powerful and evil masters (such as fire giants) whom they voluntarily serve of their own accord.

They have a limited vocabulary and can communicate in a rough, growling speech, but do so only for their masters.

### Ecology:

Though lacking any need to consume flesh, hellhounds do still enjoy the thrill of the hunt. They attack and kill for the pure savage joy of it, leaving their victim's corpse behind for whatever carrion-eaters might happen by.

When they appear on the Terraverse, they are said to often materialize in lands of heat and fire (*i.e.*, in or near volcanoes). Whether this is because such locations are more easily breached, are the locations of planar gates, or simply because the hellhound has some innate preference for them, is unknown.

### On Tellene:

Tales of supernatural black dogs abound throughout the Sovereign Lands. Though they may be known by different names, they all display one or more of the typical physical characteristics of a hellhound. Glowing eyes are particularly common in many of these stories. This often makes it difficult to tell whether such a tale truly involves a hellhound, a phantom or merely a stray black dog.

In most stories, a sighting is thought to be a precursor of imminent death. Some legends even speak of folk dying merely upon hearing the creature's howl. A few tales even state that a pack of hellhounds, each latched onto their victim with a bite, can drag that poor soul down to Hell along with themselves. The veracity of this is also unknown.

## Hellhound

<b>HIT POINTS:</b>	34+6d8
<b>SIZE/WEIGHT:</b>	M/75 lbs.
<b>TENACITY:</b>	Fearless
<b>INTELLIGENCE:</b>	Slow
<b>FATIGUE FACTOR:</b>	n/a

<b>SPEED</b> 6	<b>INIT</b> -2
<b>ATTACK</b> +10	<b>DISGRESSION</b> 12*
<b>DEFENSE</b> +4	<b>DAMAGE</b> n/a
<b>short REACH</b>	<b>TOP SAVE</b> ▼

### MOVEMENT

<b>CRAWL:</b>	10
<b>WALK:</b>	15
<b>JOG:</b>	25
<b>RUN:</b>	25
<b>FLY:</b>	30

### SAVES

<b>PHYSICAL:</b>	+10
<b>MENTAL:</b>	+8
<b>DODGE:</b>	+10

**ATTACK:** Breathes 10-ft area of 3d4p fire damage (ignoring armor/shield DR but Dex save for half damage) or 4d4p+4 bite damage (may hold on and deal auto damage each 5 seconds; knock-back or FoS *vs.* d20p+9 to break

\*silvered/magic weapons lower DR to 8

### SPECIAL ABILITIES:

Listening and Tracking mastery 100%

## General Info

<b>ACTIVITY CYCLE:</b>	Any (always active)
<b>NO. APPEARING:</b>	1-8, or as dictated by master
<b>% CHANCE IN LAIR:</b>	25%
<b>FREQUENCY:</b>	Exotic
<b>ALIGNMENT:</b>	Lawful Evil
<b>VISION TYPE:</b>	Undead Sight
<b>AWARENESS/SENSES:</b>	See invisible, two die better for Init roll
<b>HABITAT:</b>	Any
<b>DIET:</b>	nil
<b>ORGANIZATION:</b>	Individuals or pack
<b>CLIMATE/TERRAIN:</b>	Hell (native); Any warm

## Yield

<b>MEDICINAL:</b>	nil
<b>SPELL COMPONENTS:</b>	nil
<b>HIDE/TROPHY:</b>	nil
<b>TREASURE:</b>	nil
<b>EDIBLE:</b>	no
<b>OTHER:</b>	nil
<b>EXPERIENCE POINT VALUE:</b>	600