

Summer 2008 Issue 5

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

WOLFGANG BAUR PRESENTS

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On the Cover

Darren Calvert brings us a golden look at our mascot, Jiro, and a scaly friend of his. Room enough for big and small here, apparently.

You might think that this is an expanded version of our premiere issue's cover, and you'd be right.

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by Cynthia Ward and Pierce Watters

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New Math



KOBOLD QUARTERLY, or KQ if you like, is one year old. Thank you to all of you—readers, designers, artists, and everyone who has contributed—for making it happen.

It's a sad fact that most new magazines don't survive, and KQ has at least as many foes as your typical kobold. Like our wily mascot, though, we're beating the odds. We've outsmarted them and outlasted them, and I'm happy to say this coming year looks even brighter. Or at least as bright as it gets, down in the mines.

This issue is our Midsummer Madness issue, appearing on or around the summer solstice, the longest day of the year. I've always treasured the long summer days since moving to the Seattle area 10 years ago. The sun stays up long past bedtime, until 10 or 10:30 at night, and people get a little strange around this time of year. Everyone stays up late because, well, it's light out and it's hard to sleep.

And frankly, I've been staying up late as well, working on the magazine and finalizing the most recent Open Design project, Nicolas Logue's *Blood of the Gorgon*, which went off to its patrons about the time KQ went to press. It's glorious, with beautiful maps, a rich and engaging storyline full of cults, blood, and all the entertainment that a madman villain can bring.

The next Open Design project, *Tales of Zobeck*, will be just as exciting. It provides an anthology of about eight adventures written by a both professional designers and promising Open Design patrons. It also includes a gazetteer on the city of Zobeck itself, by yours truly. *Tales of Zobeck* will be the short version of the larger setting book I've been wanting to write for about two years, and I'm up to my eyeballs in it and loving it.

The summer madness has also brought new and weird experiences this summer. There's no more Vancian magic

in the new edition of my favorite RPG, when I know Jack Vance was a founding influence on Gygax and the original editions the game. There's no more gnome PCs in the players' book.

That one actually kind of hurts.

I love gnomes, because one of the defining characters in my high school campaign was a gnome who always thought he could beat the odds. Gotta respect him for trying. And for running an illusionist/thief. Man, the weird thing isn't the new math involved in a new edition, it's fighting off the nostalgia for the way it used to be.

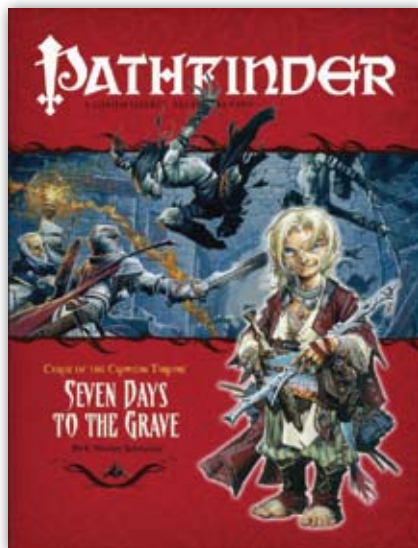
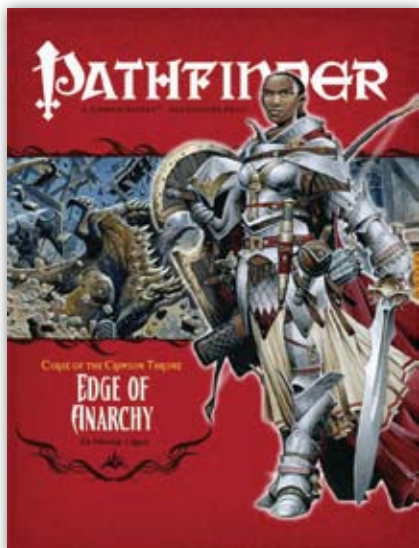
I digress. KOBOLD QUARTERLY is heading to GenCon and I will have a surprise for those subscribers who stop by and visit the Open Design booth there, near either the Green Ronin or Paizo booth. Ask all you like about the subscriber prize, there will be no hints until 10 AM on Thursday, August 14th, when the dealer's hall opens. Kobolds love to spring surprises and I promise no traps are involved in this one.

If you have comments on this issue's articles, the state of the RPG field, or an opinion on whether the next issue should be 3rd Edition or 4th Edition, direct your couriers, *message* spells, sealed letters, and email to letters@koboldquarterly.com or to Kobold Letters, PO Box 2811, Kirkland, WA 98083.

Until then, I look forward to serving you nothing but the best in independent Wizards & Warlocks for another year, and thank you for your patronage.

Wolfgang Baur
Kobold in Chief

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Open Game Content: This issue contains two items of Open content: the "V is for Vermin" article and the "Horn of Triumph, Harp of Despair" article. All other material is Product Identity. No other portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without permission.

Submissions and Design: Each issue of KOBOLD QUARTERLY supports Open Design, an RPG design community. Article queries are accepted from freelancers, from KQ subscribers, and from all Open Design members. To become a member, visit wolfgangbaur.com and donate to support the Open Design community.

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From the Stans

Kobold-in-Chief and Tribe,
I would like to be added to the Adopt-A-Soldier waiting list.

I found issue 3 on the rack in the exchange last week as I was passing through Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan last week. Then found issue 4 in the exchange when I arrived here in Afghanistan.

Reading the letters section, I found out about the Adopt-A-Soldier program.

It's really great to know that there is support for soldiers in the gaming community, as gamers are a very generous and caring community.

This is my third tour here in Afghanistan. On my previous two excursions I have had very successful gaming groups. I just got here and once things settle down I am hoping to see what I can put together.

Until then, I look forward to reading Kobold Quarterly, whether off the rack or through an Adopt-A-Soldier subscription. I devoured issue 3 in a day while in transit, issue 4 will take a little longer as things are pretty busy right now, not to mention that there is so much more KQ to read.

Thank you for your support and a great publication,

David Cornwell
Unit 3G
APO AE 09354

P.S. Feel free to publish my name and address in case any gamers would like to contact me.

David, glad to hear that the worldwide distribution is working out: Uzbekistan and Tadjikistan cannot be far behind.

And yes, you are on the waiting list, along with a couple other soldiers who are eligible for the Adopt-A-Soldier subscription. Any readers who are feeling generous and would like to sponsor a subscription, please visit the Kobold-Quarterly.com. This ain't a money-maker for us folks; KQ covers the postage for all these subscriptions.

More Free Stuff, Please

I would definitely like to see more free subscriber stuff!

-Dave Mallon

Yes, we thought you might! Issue #4 went out to subscribers with a freebie for the NeoExodus setting, and we learned that the word free is a power word.

Though there's no subscriber premium for this issue, future issues may have freebies just as issue #4 did. When publishers offer something that we think is of interest to the KQ readership, we'll definitely pass it along.

Color: Just Say No!

Dear Wolfgang,

I am writing in response to Constantin Terton's letter (KQ4) concerning color on the inside of the printed Kobold Quarterly. PLEASE—JUST SAY NO! One of the great downfalls of both DRAGON and DUNGEON was the move to full color. I couldn't think of a single worse thing to do to this wonderful magazine! While I enjoy the color in

the PDF version, I loathe the idea of color migrating to the printed version.

Rather, please increase page count, since that adds a usable quantity to the magazine—more articles! B&W is one of the venerable forms of printing, and I think the creative use of the media is a dying art form. Please, seriously consider B&W as the *soul* of the young Kobold you hold in your hands. Sway but a little, and it will never be the same again.

Finally, I think you should invent a referral program for new subscribers. How about this: current subscribers who get new subscribers get a 1 issue extension to their subscription for free?

-Trevor Stamper
Batavia, Ohio

You know, after consulting with our printer on the price of color, and looking at the circulation, it's become clear that your argument makes a lot of sense.

Seriously, right now we're spending every copper on more art and articles. Color will come later. Is black and white the soul of the young KQ? Maybe not, but it is what we can afford right now. And increasing pagecount is probably more important than color.

Your referral program has a lot to recommend it. Any new subscribers who mention an existing subscriber's name when they sign up will extend that referring person's subscription by an issue. I hope to see your name on some of those, Trevor. Word of mouth is a kobold's best friend.

You can write to us at letters@koboldquarterly.com or send paper mail to
KOBOLD QUARTERLY, PO Box 2811, Kirkland, WA 98083

Not Much Fantasy Here?

I would like to make a comment about issue #4, there's not much in the way of general fantasy. At first glance it seems one article, the rest were pretty much geared only towards specific flavor types of d20. My first thought after looking over it last night was, the better looking it becomes the less useful it is as well.

If possible, throw in a column that covers some magic items and another with spells. Then the mileage of the magazine will start to increase.

-David Jones

Well, it's an honest letter and I don't mind complaints, but sometimes I don't think we're reading the same magazine.

Issue #3 included a ton of spells and an entire new school of magic. Issue #4 included literally nothing but generic fantasy, unless you somehow count the "Gangs of Zobeck" article as setting specific (a fair critique, though Zobeck is well within the scope of homebrew settings). And this issue includes magical instruments, vermin usable anywhere, and articles on general topics like monks and GM improvisation. I'm not sure how much more generic fantasy we can print without cutting out ad space or doubling the price.

There's a larger point, though. We can only print what we receive as submissions, and what we have received is overwhelmingly d20 material. If you'd like more spells and magic items, or something else entirely, please query an article along those lines to wolfgang@koboldquarterly.com.

Link Goblins

I went to try to download the latest issue (I have been away on vacation with net access for 2 weeks) and YouSendIt! tells me that the file associated with the link has expired. This is for both the new issue and the NPCs freebie and the *Havenmine Gauntlet* Easter Egg (which I just didn't get around to downloading before I went away).

Can these files be reenabled for me? If not, would you mind putting some

info in the emails that there is a time-limit to download them within? That way I can make sure to do that before they expire...

By the way, I love the magazine so far. Both issues I have received have had great content, a good mix of old school layout, fluff and the trendier crunch we have become accustomed to. It really fits my needs. I find it difficult to read a lot of content on the computer and having a print magazine that I can take with me makes me happy.

Of course having a PDF of it all in color (or so I hear) will be cool too. I think that the other company with gaming 'magazines' will find that some of their readership will go missing—I don't want to pay money for a publication with its content only delivered online. Thank goodness Kobolds appear to be smarter than some way than their ancestors.

Keep up the good work!

-Sean Kelly

Thanks, Sean, for bringing up a useful topic all around. The email announcement that a new issue is available always includes links good for 2 weeks; after that time they expire.

However, as a subscriber you can always get a copy of the PDF file directly from the Koboldquarterly.com store. Just log in, and look in the sidebar on the right under "Recent Purchases". Presto, your download awaits!

The Vexing Question: 1st Edition, or 2nd Edition?

Dear Chief Kobold,

I just got my 4th issue of KQ, along with my reminder to renewal. As I pored over the issue my attention was caught by your comment in the editorial that you'd be having a poll to see if you should support 3.5 or 4th edition going forward.

I'd really want to see the result of that poll before I renew, as since I won't be jumping on the 4th Edition bandwagon any time soon, I wouldn't want another periodical (the others being online) that will be mostly unusable to me. And, yes I know I could convert

the stuff, but the point of buying modules or magazines is because I don't have the time to do the conversion or the preparation (four kids can be a hamper to ones GM skills) and thus I'd rather have the crunchy bits all done for me.

My reasons for not jumping onto 4E are mostly fiscal and partially familial. I've already invested thousands of dollars in 3.x and can't see any reason to replace the books that I have. And if I were to start spending the cash, the wife would literally kill me. Then gaming wouldn't be much fun at all, as I'm certain Gary's table has a huge waiting list.

So my question to you, why cater to just one or the other? Why not 1) have material the doesn't bog down with crunch but is a lot more fluff, or 2) have a mixed bag of 3.5 and 4 stuff so that both sides get catered. Now I expect to hear arguments like 1) having stat blocks for both versions isn't only impractical but a waste of space or 2) by catering to both you are really catering to neither. To these I say, no matter what is done someone will complain and if the work is being used by a large enough portion of the readership then it is most certainly not a waste.

After all that, I will be renewing, as it will take you more than the next 4 issues to really get full into 4ed, should you end up doing that. And your magazine is certainly worth the money you charge for the quarterly quality and quantity you produce.

I will make a rather bold statement here and now, KQ will be a monthly magazine within 2 years (either that or be a fond memory).

Thanks a bunch for all your efforts, the lashing may now commence.

-Trevor Chapman

Thanks for your letter, and for your subscription vote of confidence.

The situation with the GSL and the edition change has gotten a bit clearer. We'll continue to publish material usable in both editions (like the Zobeck setting, DM and design advice, interviews, and ecology articles). I hope to make a deci-

sion very soon, when folks have seen the license and the rules, and have had a chance to play them long enough to have an informed opinion.

Plus, I'll be asking you, the readers, directly. Look for the poll to decide whether to shift to the new edition, posted on koboldquarterly.com now.

Note also that, according to the rumored terms of the GSL, the magazine cannot publish 4th Edition rules material before October. Either way, KQ will lose subscribers, and this fragmentation of the gaming public marks a sad day in the history of the hobby.

Half-Mithral, Half-Monster

I've been a subscriber since the very first issue, and have always enjoyed the great material that you bring with every issue. My only major complaint is that three months is a long time to wait between magazines. I hope that as your popularity grows (as it quite obviously is) that you'll be able to ship bi-monthly, or even every month. Though should that happen, a name-change would quite clearly be in order.

My one gripe about last issue revolves around the Mithral Dragon. Mike McArtor did a great job showcasing the new creature, but there was one crucial omission: no information on half-mithral dragons.

It's something of a rule of thumb that whenever you write a new true dragon, you should list the qualities of half-dragons of that particular type. This isn't that hard to do, since it just requires a sidebar listing their breath weapon and immunity, and perhaps some fluff text to round things out.

As it stands, I'd recommend the fol-

lowing for those who want half-mithral dragons in their game: The breath weapon is a 60 ft. line of mithral shards (using that half-dragon's normal stats for damage and saving throw) that deals slashing damage, and overcomes DR as a silver, cold iron, and adamantite weapon (the shards quickly melt away to nothing). A creature that takes damage from a half-mithral dragon's breath weapon takes half of the damage it suffered (round down) again on the next round, as continuous damage. After this it suffers no further damage from the breath weapon; creatures immune to critical hits do not suffer this damage on the following round.

For immunities, a half-mithral dragon has none, but rather has the following resistances: acid 10, cold 10, electricity 5, fire 10, and sonic 5.

I know that half-dragons are a minor point in regards to the rest of the article (which was excellently done) but it's the little things that make good work into great work, which is the bar that KOBOLD QUARTERLY regularly sets.

-Shane O'Connor
Lexington, KY

Thanks for the half-dragons! Mike was totally willing and able to provide a set of stats, but we just ran out of space.

Regarding bi-monthly publication (or monthly!), as you say, we would need to see an increase in circulation. You can help make it happen; tell your friends to subscribe, or give us a shout-out on your favorite messageboard.

KQ depends on word of mouth, so please don't be shy and talk us up if you like what you see in this issue. And if you don't, write and tell us why!

KQ 4 Is Missing a Page

Another excellent issue! I do have to voice a minor disappointment—the last page of KQ4 didn't have anything on the Free City as KQ 1-3 did.

Although three times in a row isn't a graven in stone precedent, I really had begun to look forward to another tidbit on Zobeck as the closing article.

-Otto

Otto, I have to admit that we missed it too. Despite having the meaty "Gangs of Zobeck" article with the other features up front, it wasn't quite the same. So, this issue features the triumphant return of the back page Zobeck rundown! The topic was chosen by readers in the Next Issue poll on the koboldquarterly.com forums.

Kobold Rocks Iraq

I love your magazines. When I get back from Iraq and have a definite place to live, expect my subscription.

Your magazine brings new light and ideas to our little piece of the world over here. Rock on Kobold!

-SGT Sloat, Cody
United States Army

Happy to oblige, and also, we have a free subscription for you through the Adopt-A-Soldier program. Yes, we mentioned this in response to a prior letter, but it's worth repeating: We're looking for both sponsors and soldiers (of any nation).

If you would like to sponsor a KQ subscription, please do so at KQ.com. If you are an active-duty soldier who would like free magazines, please send an email to custserv@koboldquarterly.com.



A Correction

The Table of Contents for issue #4 should have shown the author of "Dragons without Belly Buttons" as Derek Kagemann, not "Kaufmann". KOBOLD QUARTERLY regrets the error, and offers its heartfelt apologies to Mr. Kagemann, whose "Dragons Without Belly Buttons" received quite a bit of fan mail and several forum posts including new recipes for abiogenesis.

Jezebel

PRINCESS OF
POISON WINTERS

by James Jacobs
Art by Cris Griffin

“Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.”

—Revelation 2:20-21

When the poets write of nature’s beauty, it is most often of the blooming flowers of spring or the heady days of summer or the color riots of deep autumn. But some steel-eyed poets hold that true beauty can be found only in winter, in the unyielding purity of fresh-fallen snow, the glitter that frost gives every blade of grass, and the delicate crystals in each snowflake.

With winter come landscapes both simple and majestic in their stark beauty, yet it is not a kind beauty. To know winter is to know the bite of cold, to feel the rumble

of hunger in the belly, to languish in days consumed by night. It is a time when animals seek the dark, when trees languish and shrink to wooden skeletons, and when the rivers cease their life-bringing flow. Even the mighty ocean dies in the coldest reaches of a northern winter.

Winter is the onset of death: a slow but rapturous poison visited upon the world. No wonder, then, that Hell’s

own princess of winter has claimed the hearts of so many kings and prophets, for to invite Jezebel into your soul is to invite death in.

History of Jezebel

Jezebel was born a mortal; she was the seventh daughter of a brazen and promiscuous actress who made a habit of bedding adulterous noblemen who



wandered backstage after her performances to congratulate her on her talents. After enduring six pregnancies and abandoning six bastard daughters to the boneyard because their fathers spurned them, the actress was ready to give up on her plan to invade nobility through promiscuity when she was visited by a strangely handsome man who claimed to be the prince of a far distant kingdom.

Charmed by his words and looks, the actress took the stranger to her bed. Even though he was gone the next morning, she remembered his final words to her before she slept: "Our daughter shall rule not just one kingdom but dozens."

The actress spent the last nine months of her life on the trail of this mysterious prince, following him from city to city on a route that led her ever north. Always she seemed to arrive in a town just moments after he had left, yet always there were ample clues to follow. The actress gave birth in the dead of winter after the pilgrim caravan she was traveling with was forced to halt its progress in the face of a sudden blizzard.

The birth was particularly difficult and took nearly 16 hours. When the baby finally emerged, though, the truth of the mysterious father's heritage was obvious—the child had horns, coal-black eyes, skin the color of snow, and a long tail tipped with a lancet of bone.

Panic took the gathered pilgrims, yet before they could decide what to do with the devil child, her father appeared. Stepping out of the blizzard as handsome as ever, his dark suit and hat seeming to repel the whirling flakes of snow, Baal took his daughter from the stunned pilgrims. "She is mine," he said, voice filled with malice and love, and as he set the baby down in a fresh drift of snow, the freezing flakes gathered and clung to her.

Before the shocked eyes of the pilgrims and the child's dying mother, the baby grew to adulthood in the span of a few monstrous seconds, until standing before them was a fully-grown and beautiful woman. Baal spoke again,

"This is Jezebel, and she shall be my heir upon your world. And you shall be her first subjects." Baal handed his daughter a pair of long, curved knives, and stood and watched, for she instinctively knew what to do. The slaughter was slow but efficient. By the time she was done, naked but for the armor of frozen blood, Jezebel stood over the last survivor—her mother. With one hand she gouged her mother's eyes away, while with the other she took her mother's hand, lifted her to her feet, and took her to Hell.

Since that fateful evening, Jezebel has served her father well. She travels the reaches of the world, always appearing in a city on the first day of winter and always choosing her target within a week of her arrival. These victims are nobles, priests, and scholars—men of high social standing or of impeccable moral fiber.

Yet, very few can ever resist Jezebel's charms. Those who do resist are murdered on the last day of winter, their bodies mutilated and impaled upon church steeples or hanged from tower peaks by their own viscera. Yet, those who perish in this manner are the lucky few, for men who succumb to Jezebel's promises are tricked away from their faith and devotions. Worse, they become so enraptured with their new lover's words that heresy spreads like the red cough, infecting those who look to them for guidance. By winter's end, corruption has taken entire churches, noble houses, or in some cases city governments, and when Jezebel leaves, she does so with a new base of power in her wake.

Jezebel's palace in Hell, it is said, grows larger with each triumph on the Material Plane, new wings and towers and courtyards and dungeons rise to match in every detail those she has captured in the mortal realm. This constantly growing palace is peopled by the shades and damned souls of those she has corrupted whose reward in death is an eternity of slavery in a place they helped destroy in life. Legends say that in the highest tower of the palace and in the oldest of its stony chambers,

Jezebel's mother languishes still, unable to do anything but watch through empty sockets at each new triumph her daughter works upon the world.

Allies and Enemies

Jezebel's greatest ally remains her devilish father Baal (known to many mortals also by the name Bel) who is one of Hell's greatest generals and the lord of the infernal realm's first circle. A tactical genius, Baal understands that not all wars are fought and won on the battlefield. Jezebel is his response: a loyal child and agent whose strengths are in the poisoning and corrupting of realms best taken with guile and deception.

Jezebel herself prefers to work alone, disguised as a humanoid woman as best suits her current needs. She often relies upon the aid of erinyes or even ice devils as guardians, but when she can't disguise them (or they can't disguise themselves), she prefers these guardians remain behind the scenes where they can come to her aid if needed.

Many oppose Jezebel in Hell, particularly those seeking to corrupt the Material Plane's leaders and philosophers and priests to their own ends. Mephistopheles has long opposed her works in the world, but his desire to displace Asmodeus generally prevents him from focusing too long on opposing Jezebel's actions.

Much greater opposition comes from Lilith, Hell's greatest seductress. Jezebel has stolen many of Lilith's conquests over the years, and Jezebel is often forced to leave much of her work to subtlety and anonymity lest her public claim over evils wrought upon the Material Plane arouse Lilith's jealousy and reprisal. Jezebel chooses her public victories carefully, leaving her complex route (and the lives she has ruined) obscure so as to give her more powerful rival relatively little concrete evidence to accuse her with—except, of course, for her palace, which Jezebel keeps as a taunting form of scorekeeping against Lilith.

Jezebel greatly has tentatively sought additional support among Hell's rulers

to help her dethrone Lilith and take her place as Hell's harlot queen. False humility does not suit her.

Jezebel in the Real World

Jezebel appears in the Old Testament as a queen of ancient Israel who promoted the worship of the Phoenician god Baal and who turned her husband Ahab away from the worship of God. Her rule and influence as a prophetess led her people into an age of sin. The name "Jezebel" has come to be associated today with one who performs particularly wicked or sinful acts.

The Cult of Jezebel

Jezebel works alone when she is active on the Material Plane, but she leaves in her wake numerous seeds that quickly germinate into cultists. When she desires a particularly public or powerful mortal soul, she spends years establishing cults in outlying regions or vassal states, so when she makes her final move, she can orchestrate her cults in ways to distract and harry her goal to lower his defenses.

Yet Jezebel more often leaves these cults to their own devices. They work to subvert and poison society for her, leaving the Princess of Poison Winters free to focus her attention on larger targets. Her cult is at its most active during winter, when they work in secluded areas on the edge of civilization to sabotage food stores, lure loners away from their hearths, and generally bring despair to all. Those whom her cult cannot seduce are marked for either assassination or extortion.

Rituals to Jezebel occur at night, atop frozen lakes or on hilltops surrounded by sacred standing stones. Only when her cult enfolds and replaces another local religion do her cultists hold mass inside a church—these cultists replace or subvert priests in such ways that the local worshipers never suspect that their prayers are now offered to a darker power.

Clerics of Jezebel seek out a powerful public figure, priests, philosophers, or nobles, and seduce that figure into Jezebel's worship (knowingly or not).

Once this target has turned over his or her resources, he or she is typically offered up as a sacrifice on the Winter Solstice. A cleric of Jezebel who fails to tempt, seduce, recruit, or murder such a public figure before she reaches 10th level receives a punitive visit from Jezebel herself—priests who receive such visits often don't realize their time has come until the last moment, even if they know they are due such a visit. Such is the power of Jezebel's guile.

Jezebel's cultists spend their winters bringing pain, sorrow, despair, and death to their enemies, but during the other seasons, they almost enter a form of hibernation. They carry on their normal daily routines, perhaps meeting once or twice a season to take comfort in each other's arms or minds, but rarely, if ever, do they seek victims during these months. Autumns are spent preparing for the winter festivities. This is also a time for the priests of Jezebel to recruit new members; those who are found wanting are sacrificed later in the year.

Spring is the most dangerous time for the cultists, and known worshipers often retreat to hidden fortresses at this time, when rage and anger at their actions remains fresh in the minds of their enemies.

One of the greatest ceremonies for the cult is the Day of First Frost; this date changes year upon year; but generally occurs near the start of winter. The Day of First Frost is the first day that frost appears in the place of morning dew and symbolizes the start of a new winter's hunt.

The last day of winter is also of religious significance, since on this day Jezebel is said to return to her palace in Hell, taking with her the shades and spirits of her latest victims. The cultists mark the occasion with a celebration called Melting of the Last, a day of mourning that always ends in lustful song and debauchery.

During rituals, the faithful of Jezebel wear diaphanous white robes and cloaks in order to blend with the snow and seem as ghosts to their victims. By the end of most such rituals, the cult-

ists have shed these robes in favor of nudity and some cultists clothe themselves in packed snow. Not all of them employ protective magic to prevent frostbite, opting instead to bear such wounds for a time as a mark of their faith before seeking healing.

Jezebel's symbol is a silhouette of a dagger pointed up toward the heavens, so that it resembles an upside-down cross. The dagger itself is inscribed within a triangle, its point aimed downward. Some of her cultists wear this symbol against the flesh on a bleached leather cord, but most are branded or tattooed in some secret area of the flesh with this symbol, a mark only their most intimate lovers or victims ever see. Clerics of Jezebel have access to the domains of Charm, Law, Evil, and Winter (the Charm domain is detailed in the SRD, and the Winter domain is detailed in the sidebar). Jezebel's favored weapon is the dagger.

Portraying Jezebel

Winter Domain

Granted Power: Your spells manifest at +1 caster level during winter.

Winter Domain Spells

- 1 Chill Touch
- 2 Chill Metal
- 3 Sleet Storm
- 4 Ice Storm
- 5 Commune with Nature
- 6 Cone of Cold
- 7 Control Weather
- 8 Polar Ray
- 9 Storm of Vengeance

Jezebel is a temptress and an assassin of both the flesh and of the reputation. Her name is often invoked as an insult against women, typically from lovers who have been betrayed in some way. Many marriage customs include invocations against Jezebel to ward off adultery.

Jezebel lives at the heart of winter storms where the cruel freezing cold approaches the icy chill of her own passion and heart. She often sends

messages to her faithful and threats to her enemies in the form of erotic, violent dreams—those who receive these dreams waken to a bed coated with rime and frost. She works through the eyes of starving wolves, wolverines, ravens, and foxes.

The presence of unusually large snowflakes or of freakish hailstorms from a cloudless sky are said to represent her favor. Her displeasure is represented by a sudden and painful chill as if the recipient had been suddenly plunged into freezing water. Patches of frozen blood, or of blood staining fresh snow, are said to presage her arrival in a region, particularly if the markings resemble a dagger.

Jezebel herself is a soft-spoken and patient creature, roused to anger only rarely. She appreciates great beauty in both the male and female forms, and particularly beautiful or handsome victims have been known to stave off the inevitable by dragging out conversations about art or philosophy.

Usually, Jezebel grows tired of these conversations and gets on with her murderous work, but if a victim can hold her attention long enough for help to arrive, a confrontation can often be resolved peacefully. Jezebel appreciates those who can outwit her, and rarely holds grudges against those who escape through dint of their own charisma and wordplay—especially if they are physically attractive. Woe to those who themselves succumb to Jezebel's charms, though, for she rarely lets her "lovers" live long after a tryst unless she is assured of their blind devotion.

Appearance and Powers

Jezebel often cloaks her true appearance in illusion, but never does so to appear unattractive or even commonplace. In all of her forms, she is a vision of haunting desire.

In her true form, Jezebel appears as a seven-foot tall human woman clad only in jagged swaths of bloodstained ice and a pure white dusting of snow.

Her figure is lithe and slender, a vision of gothic beauty with long dark hair, blood red nails, and sensuous full lips. Yet in her eyes, which are coal-black orbs, one can see the true treacherous depths of her nature, even before one takes note of the jagged red horns on her brow, the snow-white furred batlike wings on her back, or the long slender tail tipped with a narrow bony stinger.

As the Princess of Poisoned Winters, Jezebel's strengths lie in cold and venom. She prefers to seek out victims who dwell in colder climates and, as a result, avoids those who dwell in deserts, jungles, or other warm regions. This plays well into her use of poisons, for it is in the warmer regions of the world where creatures are most likely to use venom to kill their prey; since few venomous creatures dwell in the colder climates, few denizens of such regions can counter this method of murder swiftly.

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Princess Jezebel

CR 23

LE Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar, lawful)

Init +12; **Senses** blindsight 30 ft., see in darkness, see invisibility; **Listen** +37, **Spot** +37

Aura cold (60 ft.), icy glare (30 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 35, touch 18, flat-footed 27

(+8 Dex, +11 natural, +6 armor)

hp 406 (28d8+280); fast healing 10

Fort +26, **Ref** +24, **Will** +22

DR 15/good and silver; **Immune** cold, fire, poison; **Resist** acid 10; **SR** 35

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee +3 *icy burst dagger* +37/+32/+27/+22 (1d4+7/17–20 plus 1d6 cold) and

+3 *icy burst dagger* +37/+32/+27/+22 (1d4+5/17–20 plus 1d6 cold) and

sting +31 (1d6+2 plus poison)

Special Attacks sneak attack +5d6, summon devils, venom curse

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th)

At will—*blasphemy* (DC 27), *chill metal* (DC 22), *control weather*, *detect chaos*, *detect good*, *greater dispel magic*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *suggestion* (DC 23), *veil* (DC 26)

3/day—quicken poison (DC 24), *cone of cold* (DC 25), *plane shift* (DC 27), *polar ray*, *wall of ice* (DC 24)

TACTICS

During Combat Jezebel avoids combat unless she can summon devils first. She prefers to remain at range for the first few rounds of combat to study her enemy's strengths and weaknesses, remaining within range of both her aura and gaze. She pelts targets with spell-like abilities especially *blasphemy*, which reveals which foes are most powerful.

In melee, she fights with a deadly grace, focusing on creatures vulnerable to cold. Faced with targets immune to cold damage, Jezebel tries to work with allies so that her sneak attack damage helps drop the foe faster. Against foes immune to both cold and poison, Jezebel attempts to *plane shift* them to some distant corner of Hell where they will have plenty of time to reconsider the gall of confronting the Princess of Poisoned Winters with such defenses.

Morale Jezebel flees combat if reduced to 40 or fewer hit points, typically via *greater teleportation*.

STATISTICS

Str 19, Dex 26, Con 30, Int 21, Wis 22, Cha 31

Base Atk +28; **Grp** +32

Feats Combat Reflexes, Greater Two-Weapon Fighting, Improved Critical (dagger), Improved Initiative, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Perfect Two-Weapon Fighting, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (poison), Two-Weapon Fighting, Two-Weapon Rend, Weapon Finesse

Skills Bluff +41, Concentration+41, Diplomacy +49, Hide +39, Knowledge (nature) +36, Knowledge (religion) +36, Knowledge (the planes) +36, Listen +37, Move Silently +39, Sense Motive +37, Sleight of Hand +43, Spot +37, Tumble +39

Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 120 ft.

Gear two +3 *icy burst daggers*

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Aura of Cold (Su) Jezebel exudes an aura of freezing cold to a radius of 60 feet. Fire within this area does not burn as brightly (halve illumination radii for objects like lanterns and torches), and all creatures in this area gain a +4 bonus on all fire-related saving throws. Saving throws against cold effects suffer a –2 penalty, and any creature that takes cold damage in this area is numbed by the aura, taking a –2 penalty on Dexterity-based checks (including Reflex saves, ranged attack rolls, and Initiative checks). Creatures with the fire subtype take 3d6 points of cold damage each round they remain in this area. Creatures with the water subtype are slowed as long as they remain in this area.

Calm water in Jezebel's aura of cold freezes to a depth of three inches. This allows Jezebel to effectively walk on water. Potions freeze in one round and must be protected from her aura (inside backpacks, for example) and imbibed the same round they are withdrawn. Jezebel can suppress or activate her aura as a free action. Creatures with cold resistance or immunity to cold are immune to Jezebel's aura of cold.

Ice Armor (Su) Jezebel is encrusted with thick layers of ice that grant her a +6 armor bonus but do not impede her movement. Although she is immune to fire, any fire attack that inflicts at least 20 hp damage melts her ice armor, reducing her Armor Class by 6 points. Her ice armor replenishes at the rate of one point per round.

Icy Glare (Su) Any creature within 30 feet who meets Jezebel's gaze must make a DC 34 Fort save or be frozen solid. This lasts as long as the temperature remains below freezing (or until the victim leaves Jezebel's aura of cold). When the surrounding temperature rises above freezing, the victim thaws but takes 6d6 points of cold damage in the process—a DC 34 Fort save negates this damage. Creatures with cold resistance or immunity are unaffected by Jezebel's icy glare. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

Poison (Ex) Injury, Fortitude DC 34, initial damage 1d8 Dexterity drain, secondary damage 2d8 Constitution drain. The save DC is Constitution-based.

See Invisibility (Su) Jezebel benefits from the effects of *see invisibility* at all times.

Sneak Attack (Ex) This ability functions as the rogue ability of the same name.

Summon Devils (Sp) Twice per day, Jezebel can automatically summon four erinyes or one ice devil. This ability is the equivalent of a 9th-level spell (CL 20th).

Venom Curse (Su) Jezebel can control how quickly poison affects a creature she has touched and can manipulate a creature's poison resistance. When she touches a creature (or when a creature touches her, including creatures successfully striking her with unarmed attacks or natural weapons), she can opt to delay any pending secondary damage from poison to that creature. She can, at any point thereafter, remove this restriction as a free action as long as she has line of sight to that creature (including scrying effects) and all delayed secondary damage affects the target at once. While delayed, poison inside the creature cannot be removed by *neutralize poison* or other magical effects.

Alternately, Jezebel can reduce a creature's resistance to poison rather than delay any pending secondary damage. If she does, that creature gains a –4 penalty on all saving throws against poison. A creature (excluding constructs, elementals, and undead) that is normally immune to poison, either by spell or racial ability, loses its immunity to poison. These effects are curses that operate at CL 20th, and persist until removed by *remove curse* or *break enchantment*. A creature can resist either effect with a DC 34 Fortitude save. The save DC is Charisma-based.



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ECOLOGY OF THE Homunculus

Creatures Born of Alchemy and Hubris

By Joshua Stevens

Art by Pat Loboyko

“I have never given him reason to think me unfaithful. Alas, Jharun’s jealousy knows no bounds. I loved him once, until he created that thing to watch over me. They have some dark rapport, him and his precious spy. It makes my skin crawl!

“Naming it ‘Chaste’ was the worst insult. It is my constant jailer. I dream sometimes that I will run away, but as the candle burns low at night, I know it watches me even in the dark, with its inhuman eyes.

“It goes outside my room and waits in the garden like some wild animal. But it is no animal, for the flowers bend away from it, while it lays in wait for me.”

*—Diary of
Alesa Dain,
shortly before her death*

Poets say the eyes are the windows to the soul, windows that reveal the spark of humanity. Life recognizes life. Peering into the eyes of a homunculus is like searching for a reflection in a pool of tar; nothing is reflected. These soulless creatures feel no emotion, yet they move and react with such seeming ease; it is only natural to interact with them as if they were living beings.

These abominations are a defiant rejection of the natural order, born of man’s arrogance and desire to master the divine. Neither living, dead, nor undead, homunculi are uniquely animated by a shadowy essence that makes them considerably more than mindless constructs but decidedly less than men. Through wondrous alchemy, they are

instilled with a burgeoning sense of identity that serves as a cheap pantomime to the human psyche. A homunculus' blossoming self-awareness, unfettered by the shackles of a soul, can become a great danger to its master.

Myths and Origins

Nearly 800 years ago, the court magician Seb-Gesiret served as a confidant to the Duke of Ismaen. Indeed, Seb-Gesiret had served in that capacity for many years and served the Duke's father before him. To such a powerful man, many things seemed possible that, perhaps, were best left undone.

In his early 60s, Seb-Gesiret fell in love with a local tanner's daughter, a maiden more than 40 years his junior. Forced into marriage by the Duke and her father, the girl and Seb-Gesiret quickly wed. The young bride became pregnant within weeks of marriage, and Seb-Gesiret was overjoyed.

His joy lasted just eight months. Seb-Gesiret's heart broke on the day the couple's daughter was born, her hair and eyes the mirror of the young, philandering Duke. Destroyed by this betrayal, Seb-Gesiret drove the harlot and bastard child from his tower into the street. Determined to have the child that was denied him, Seb-Gesiret stormed into the Duke's private chambers and demanded an apology from the Duke. Having been cuckolded made him dare much more, and he demanded strange changes at the palace.

Fearing the raving but powerful old man at the foot of his bed, the Duke agreed to Seb-Gesiret's odd demands. He granted the court magician complete privacy and a small share of the duchy's annual taxes to fund his secret research. Seb-Gesiret returned to his tower, where he remained for several years.

Servants glimpsed dark shapes moving about Seb-Gesiret's marble tower. Bubbling masses and noxious fumes wafted from its uppermost reaches. Strange minerals, flesh, and hide sculptures were sometimes found at the tower's base, pitched from above and usually smoking in the dawn light.

Obsessed, Seb-Gesiret continued his peculiar work until he mastered black alchemy. He made an alchemical distillation of the soul, fused with purest chaos-stuff, and he funneled it into a small statue of queer design. The lifeless clay doll mewled and coughed up an afterbirth of stinging, acrid chemicals and flailed its limbs spastically. Its ooze-encrusted eyes opened, and it beheld the world. Using an alembic as a surrogate womb, Seb-Gesiret had made an artificial man.

The tiny creature was weaned on Seb-Gesiret's blood, and it matured far faster than any natural child. It learned to read and write and even to fly clumsily with its grafted wings, all within days. Seb-Gesiret discovered that he and his manufactured child could also peer into each other's thoughts as easily as one stares through a clear glass window. In the first few weeks, the oddity aped his every movement and perched itself on his shoulder. Seb-Gesiret was delighted in what he had fabricated, until he realized that the strange little creature, for all its rapid maturation, stopped growing at a mere 18 inches tall. For all his sweat and heartbreak, Seb-Gesiret had crafted only a curious pygmy, not a true heir.

Seb-Gesiret lost interest and kept the thing locked in a birdcage for days on end. He spent long hours staring at the damned thing and often found himself thinking of the Duke's illegitimate daughter, wishing it were more like her. He let it out to fly, to get it out of his sight for a time when he could no longer bear to see it. This gave the homunculus more freedoms than one; it discovered that at a certain distance from the tower, Seb-Gesiret could not access its mind.

In time, the homunculus began to wonder about the world at large. It read Seb-Gesiret's tomes in secret and captured small creatures in traps. It dissected them in a grotesque quest for knowledge. Seb-Gesiret was often annoyed with the bloody messes his homunculus' curiosity wrought, but he did nothing to stop the creature as it left him be. Filled with an insatiable

curiosity, the homunculus turned its attention to the one thing that Seb-Gesiret thought of most often—the Duke's illegitimate daughter. It wanted to know why Seb-Gesiret hated it so much and compared it to this girl so often, so it flew to the girl's window and found her sleeping.

The homunculus set about dissecting her in search of the piece that made her so special to Seb-Gesiret. The entire keep was awakened by the girl's screams, and when her chamber door was battered down, the guards saw a coal-eyed, horrific looking creature, fishing around inside the girl's intestines. The homunculus escaped to Seb-Gesiret's tower.

The Duke ordered his guards to burn Seb-Gesiret's tower to the ground, and the court magician barely escaped. He fled the duchy with the clothes on his back and the vile creature clinging to his flapping cloak. The Duke's riders were soon in pursuit. Hunted and desperate, Seb-Gesiret made his way to a small fishing village and hid in an abandoned hut. Daily, he cursed the creature for its wickedness, and finally, attacked it with a fiery poker from the hovel's hearth. To his surprise, when he stabbed the creature and burned it, a searing brand appeared on his own chest. Seb-Gesiret fell back in pain, and the creature quickly fled the hut.

When the Duke's guards cornered Seb-Gesiret several weeks later, his body was rigid in his flea-infested cot, and a taut lute string had cut across his throat. Neither the magician's homunculus nor murderer was ever found. The Duke was told that Seb-Gesiret's hut seemed strangely undisturbed, save for a stinking pool of ichor beneath his bed and corpse.

Seb-Gesiret's journals survived the destruction of his tower. His original formula has been altered over the centuries, and many purported variations exist though most of these lead to hideous failure. A true recipe for creating a homunculus is always difficult to obtain and is usually found as part of a collection of occult oddities. Mages wishing to recreate Seb-Gesiret's design

Table 1: Knowledge of the Homunculus

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (arcana) can learn more about homunculi. When a character makes a successful skill check, reveal the following lore, including the information from lower DCs.

Knowledge (arcana)

DC Result

- | | |
|----|---|
| 10 | A homunculus is a small statuette animated by wizards and sorcerers to serve them. A homunculus is crafted from its master's own blood, and its master can see everything the homunculus sees. |
| 14 | Homunculi are unique constructs with the ability to reason and are animated by a chaotic essence. When homunculi bite creatures with a soul, a bit of this chaos-matter is transferred to the victim, putting it to sleep for a short time. |
| 18 | Because a homunculus and its master are inextricably intertwined, the death of the master usually causes the immediate destruction of the homunculus, which slowly melts into a puddle of muddy ichor. A homunculus' destruction also causes grievous injury to its master. |
| 22 | Some homunculi may conspire to destroy their masters if they are mistreated. Some have discovered a ritual that frees them of their master's control. |
| 26 | A ritual called the Rite of Thirds allows a homunculus to turn against its master. |

must learn directly from one who has created such an aberration or must chase a long trail of lore and notebook ownership to track down a true recipe.

Physiology

Homunculi are crafted, never born. As such, they vary wildly in appearance, and their hair, skin, and form are influenced by the whims of their creators and the particular alchemical recipe used.

Homunculi can be created from stone, wood, pottery, bone, or even assembled pieces of dead creatures. The only constants for homunculi are that they must be between 1 and 2 feet tall and weigh between 1 and 8 pounds. Anything more and the alchemical recipe fails because there is too much gross matter to animate. Anything less and the homunculus simply cannot hold enough chaos-essence to arise abiogenetically.

Additionally, homunculi eyes never have pupils. Many commoners believe this is because homunculi are made without souls, and their inky black eyes

are the proof of this. Lastly, homunculi can never speak, although they can make a host of guttural sounds.

Homunculi are constructs and share many basic traits with golems and the like. They lack internal organs but, unlike golems, bleed when injured, seeping viscous, black liquid from wounds. Homunculi cannot be healed with healing spells, but spells that mend objects or repair constructs erase their injuries. Homunculi do not regenerate lost limbs, but severed limbs can be reconnected with a mending spell. Any harm done to a homunculus is exacted simultaneously upon its master with the same type and location of injury (the maximum damage to the creator is equal to the homunculus' total HD).

When created, a homunculus must be fed a few drops of its master's blood every day for one week. Thereafter, a homunculus may eat anything it wishes or nothing at all without any effect, but the only foodstuff that sates its strange hunger is its master's blood. If weaned from its master's blood, a homunculus will "live" for exactly 6 years,

6 months, and 6 days from the time of their last blood-nursing. In the final six days of its life, a homunculus ages rapidly, while its master likewise ages 1 year for each of these final six days. On the sixth day, the homunculus' body deflates, leaving only a shriveled husk with no further ill effects for its creator.

The entropic essence that gives a semblance of life to a homunculus has an odd effect if injected into a creature with a soul. This entropic essence wells up within all homunculi, and it forms a dark, viscous liquid akin to saliva in their mouths. They can transmit it to a victim with their bite, at which time the essence momentarily suppresses the bitten creature's soul, dampening its humors and fire. This suppression causes a catatonic state akin to sleep for several minutes.

Psychology and Society

At creation, a homunculus' personality is a cross between a housecat and a chimpanzee: they are clever and prone to mischief and killing, and they possess a fondness for stalking mice and rats. A homunculus always retains these mannerisms, but this is where any comparison to natural creatures ends.

Within mere days of its "birth," a homunculus can walk, fly, think, and reason. It learns at a preternatural rate and masters skills like reading, writing, and menial tasks seemingly overnight. In these formative days, a homunculus watches its creator very closely and mimics nearly everything he does. After one week, a homunculus turns its single-minded focus from its creator to the world at large and asks an endless string of questions. The telepathic bond between a homunculus and its master cuts both ways, and their constant mental probing is not limited to their master's waking hours. While its master sleeps, a homunculus is fond of delving into its master's subconscious and inspecting long-forgotten memories.

After a few weeks, a homunculus establishes an identity apart from its master's, a mishmash of childlike wonderment and devious cunning. While

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a homunculus shares the same basic alignment as its creator, the transparent nature of its identity is always clear. Homunculi never develop morals, and they only come to separate what is right from wrong in a cold and purely logical fashion.

After many trial and error experiences, a homunculus will learn that something is wrong, but it never feels any guilt for its actions. Many will perform indecent acts to sate their curiosity. Lacking true emotions, a homunculus learns roughly how to interact with others, but it is prone to asking its master about inappropriate and sensitive matters through its mental link.

Homunculi by their nature are solitary creatures, save for their symbiotic relationship with their creator, and they never develop any sense of community. These creatures are unnatural in virtually every sense, and most beings feel intensely uneasy around them. Animals find them off-putting and often either attack a homunculus or flee from it.

Conversely, homunculi are quite interested in living creatures and study them closely whenever an opportunity presents itself. On the rare occasion when one homunculus meets another, something very peculiar occurs—the two abominations completely ignore one another. No amount of manipulation changes this strange relationship, for they simply cannot see, hear, or feel one another.

Homunculus Feats

Not all homunculi are the same; each recipe yields variation. Witch's Mark is a feat for homunculus creators, the others are for their creations.

Witch's Mark [General]

You regularly feed your homunculus your own blood, and you have developed an incredibly strong bond with it. You grow a scar on a part of your body of your choosing, which resembles an extra nipple. This scar is known as a "witch's mark," and it is where your homunculus nurses from.

Prerequisites: Must have created a homunculus

Benefit: Your homunculus now stays in contact with you to a range of 3,000 feet. It cannot be dominated (see below), will never turn against you, and gains 10 bonus hit points.

Physical Variant [Monster]

Your homunculus has unusual characteristics.

Prerequisites: Homunculus, can only be taken when created

Benefit: Choose one characteristic from the following list:

Cyclopean: The creature has a large central eye that grants superior low-light vision and can see three times as far as a human can in dim light. Poor depth perception means attack rolls suffer a -1 penalty.

Flightless: The homunculus cannot fly but gains both a climb speed of 40 ft. and a +2 bonus to Strength.

Gaping Maw: An oversized mouth grants the Swallow Whole ability and allows the homunculus to swallow creatures of the same size or smaller. A swallowed creature takes 1d4-1 damage per round. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by dealing 5 points of damage (against same AC). If the creature swallowed is the same size as the homunculus, it cannot fly until the creature has escaped or been devoured.

If the creature is one size smaller, the homunculus can only fly at half speed. A homunculus may swallow a maximum of one creature its size, two creatures one size smaller, or 4 creatures two sizes smaller, before it must regurgitate the waste. This process takes 1d6+2 rounds. During this time, the homunculus is denied its Dexterity bonus to its AC.

Multiple Arms: With four arms, the homunculus gains +4 to grapple checks, but its wings are smaller and thinner, and it can glide but not fly. Its wings negate any falling damage, and it can glide 25 horizontal feet for every 5 feet of falling, at a speed of 50 ft.

Oversized Arms: Long arms increase its reach to 5 ft., but its body is spindly, and the homunculus' attack rolls suffer a -1 penalty.

Scorpion's Tail: A large stinger

injects poison (instead of the bite) for 1d4 damage, DC 15. However, the large tail reduces fly speed to 30 ft.

Special: Taking the Physical Variant feat replaces Lightning Reflexes for the homunculus; the DC for Craft (pottery) or Craft (sculpting) checks is raised to 13.

Alchemical Variant [Monster]

The variant recipe used in construction has granted your homunculus unusual abilities.

Prerequisites: Homunculus, at least 4 HD, can only be taken when created.

Benefit: Choose one ability from the following list:

Acidic Spittle: The homunculus can spit acid (3/day) in a 20 ft. line against a single target as a ranged touch attack, causing 1d4 acid damage the first round and 2 points of acid damage the following round unless neutralized. The spell *acid arrow* must be cast during the creation.

Ashen Lung: The homunculus can breathe a cloud of thick coal dust (3/day). The effects are identical to *obscuring mist* at a CL equal to the homunculus's HD.

Blind Eye: The homunculus gains *invisibility* at will for 10 rounds +1 round per HD per day.

Dense Hide: The homunculus gains a +2 natural armor bonus to AC. This requires the creator to cast *barkskin* during creation.

Dire Growth: The homunculus grows to Medium size for 10 rounds +1 round per HD, gained from casting *enlarge* during creation.

Screech: The homunculus can emit a piercing scream in a 15 ft. cone (3/day) that causes 1d4 sonic damage (2d4 damage to crystal, glass, ceramic, or porcelain) and deafens for 1d4 rounds. Gained from casting *shatter* during creation.

Special: This feat adds 2,000 gp to the homunculus' creation costs, and the ability is treated as a spell-like ability. In addition, the DC for Craft (pottery) or (sculpting) checks made at creation is raised to 15.

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Flaws in the Design

Fabricating a homunculus is never easy. Even with a true recipe and a well-equipped laboratory, the products of this magecraft are never more than a handbreadth from ruin. The smallest impurity in the occult materials required—clay, ashes, mandrake root, spring water, and blood—can destroy the entire effort. Moreover, the statuette used as the frame for the alchemical bindings must be free of flaws, cracks, and abrasions. Any break in the surface of the figure allows the chaos-essence to gush out violently, destroying the model with a torrent of inhuman screams.

Not all flawed homunculi are destroyed at creation. If the DC check fails but is within 2 points of success, the homunculus awakens and appears normal, but it soon attempts to murder its master. Flawed homunculi and those that have been mistreated or neglected often conspire against their masters.

The bond shared between them often makes it impossible for them to emancipate themselves. The Rite of Thirds allows a homunculus to either achieve independence or be bound by another.

The Rite of Thirds is based on the principal that a homunculus comprises three parts: man, earth, and chaos-matter. By subverting these forces, a homunculus may become independent or dominated by another.

Regardless, the Rite of Thirds requires at least three days to complete. The homunculus must convince its master to consume a pint of its entropic essence over three days. On the fourth day, the homunculus must choose a name for itself, scrawl this name in its master's blood on parchment, and consume it. Finally, someone must cast the spell *false life* on the homunculus, at which time it becomes independent of its master.

A freed homunculus lives until destroyed, without fear of its former master's death. Due to the nature of its creation, though, the mental link between a homunculus and its former master remains whenever they are close. Only

after a homunculus becomes independent may it attain class levels.

To bind a homunculus, the binder must separate the homunculus and its master for three days. On the fourth day, the homunculus must consume three drops of the binder's blood. The binder must then carve his or her name into an area of the Homunculus that does not usually see daylight, using alchemical reagents worth half of the homunculus' creation costs. The armpit, inside the mouth, and bottoms of feet are all popular areas. Finally, the binder must cast *mirror image* and have his image pass through the homunculus.

When the rite is complete, the homunculus makes a Will save opposed by the binder's Will save. If it fails its save, the binder is treated in all ways as its master. If the original master reestablishes a mental link with the homunculus before the rite is completed, the homunculus uses its original master's Will save. The homunculus retains its telepathic link with its original master, but the binder is secretly privy to this shared bond when all three parties are within telepathic range. The original master can discover this eavesdropping by the same means as discovering spying through a crystal ball.

History of the Homunculus

"I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion."

—FRANKENSTEIN, Mary Shelley

The term *homunculus* is derived from Latin, meaning "little man." The concept of a homunculus was first attributed to the famed Swiss alchemist Paracelsus, who in the early 16th century claimed that he had created an artificial human being that he referred to as "the Homunculus." The creature reputedly stood a mere 12 inches tall and was created to serve Paracelsus. As myth has it however, the homunculus soon turned on Paracelsus and ran

Good-Aligned Homunculi

Though the ecology presented here assumes that most homunculi are trouble-making and even dangerous creatures, the creature may have any alignment. This is largely determined by its maker, though Good-aligned alchemists and wizards are perhaps less likely to create such a servant than evil ones.

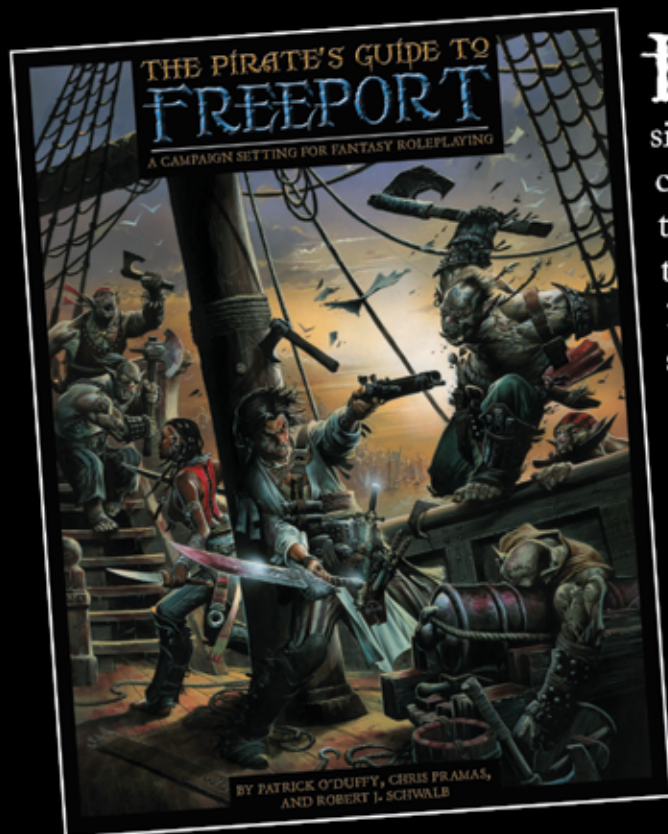
The tricks and wiles of such homunculi are more gentle, restricted to teasing cats or painting dogs with ink, but a degree of independence and mischief seems to be a part of all homunculi, perhaps owing to the chaos-matter that animates them.

away. Tales of the homunculus also occasionally appear in Eastern European folklore, described as a construct made from natural materials such as dirt, roots, insects, feces, blood, and any number of other fetishes.

According to legend, there are three ways to create a homunculus. The first method used a bag of bones, sperm, skin fragments, and hair from any animal for which the homunculus was to be a hybrid. These materials were sealed hermetically in a jar or animal bladder, magnetized, and laid in the ground near horse manure for 40 days, at which point a tiny homunculus would emerge, transparent and without a body. The homunculus then fed daily on human blood and maintained a constant temperature for a period of 40 weeks, after which it grew into a childlike creature (though never larger than 18 inches tall). The homunculus, reputedly, could then be raised and educated like any other child, until it matured and could take care of itself.

A second method says that the fabled mandrake root grows only from the semen ejaculated by hanged men during their final convulsive spasms before death. The root should be picked before dawn on a Friday morning by a black dog, then washed and nourished with milk and honey (or, in some prescriptions, blood), where it would slowly grow into a miniature creature that would resemble the mandrake and protect its creator.

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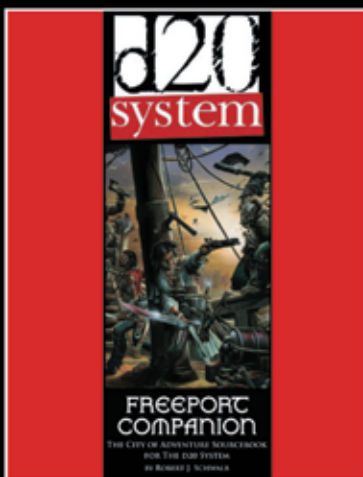
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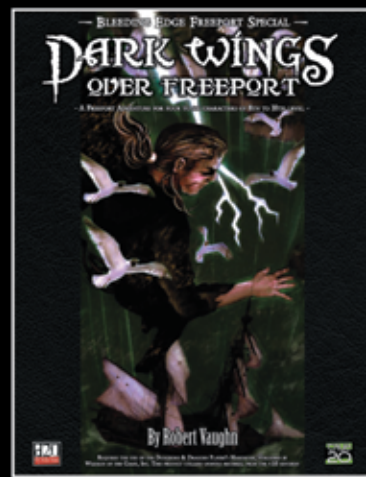
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Building on the work of Paracelsus, Dr. David Christianus taught at the University of Giessen in the 18th century. He wrote that a homunculus could be created by taking an egg laid by a black hen, making a small hole in its shell, and removing a bean-sized portion of the egg white and substituting human sperm. The egg thereafter had to be sealed with virgin parchment, buried in manure on the first day of the March lunar cycle, and in 30 days, a homunculus would be born. This homunculus would protect its creator in exchange for a steady diet of lavender seeds and earthworms.

Interestingly, the German alchemist Johann Konrad Dippel, who lived in Castle Frankenstein and who is widely reputed to be the inspiration for Mary Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein, was a student of Dr. Christianus at the University of Giessen. Additionally, the character Dr. Septimus Pretorius in the movie *The Bride of Frankenstein* grew small homunculi from "seeds" and kept them trapped in jars.

The Murderous Homunculus: Qesh

Qesh was constructed by Father Craedus after a bloody battle at Trager's Pass had left many dead, and the rotting bodies had spread the plague to the nearby town. Father Craedus was to be sent there to erect a temple and to aid

the villagers. Shortly before leaving, Father Craedus' order confiscated a bag of devouring and Father Craedus was tasked with destroying it.

Rather than destroy an implement with obvious practical uses, Father Craedus put the item to use helping the people of Trager's Pass with the many diseased corpses. To this end, he created a homunculus and hid the *bag of devouring* in the thing's stomach. Craedus' homunculus resembled a small cherub, so as not to scare anyone with its intended gruesome purpose. Its mouth was specially constructed to appear two sizes too small, in a tiny "o" shape, but the inside of its mouth was lined with hundreds of razor-sharp monkfish teeth. Its entire chest cavity, chin, and throat formed a set of interlocking flaps that opened into an overlarge mouth to help the creature devour the many unburied corpses.

The homunculus set to devouring the dead at Craedus' command, and the villagers were overjoyed as the plague began to subside. Knowing nothing about the *bag of devouring*, Craedus had no idea of the danger he courted. The constant influx of rotting bodies awakened the slumbering beast connected to the other side of the bag in the cherub's stomach, and the beast took interest in this orifice that was suddenly providing it more sustenance than all of its other bag mouths combined. Probing outward, the devourer discovered Craedus' homunculus and dominated it using the Rite of Thirds. Soon, Craedus' cherub began exhibiting strange and violent behaviors and adopted the alien moniker, "Qesh."

After several weeks of increasingly deviant behavior, Father Craedus was awakened one night to a rending pain in his leg and saw Qesh, mouth agape, swallowing his leg. All went black a few moments later as Qesh's poison went to work in his veins. By daybreak, not a scrap remained of Father Craedus.

Qesh is now frequently forced to devour creatures to sate its new master's hunger, leaving a trail of mysterious disappearances in his wake. Recently, after devouring a loving farming family

that had taken him in, Qesh lost his left hand to the desperate flailing of a farmer's cleaver. Seizing a rusty meat hook from the barn and jamming it into the oozing stump, Qesh fled into the night.

Qesh can be encountered almost anywhere, and few suspect something that stands 2 feet in height, with straw blonde hair, rosey cheeks, porcelain skin and the wings of a swan, to be as devious as it is. Qesh communicates in pleasant coos and whistles, and if its rusty hook-hand is inspected, it pretends sadness and embarrassment. Qesh prefers to surprise creatures, and usually waits to use dire growth and devour them until they are alone and defenseless.

Qesh CR 3

Advanced homunculus
NE Tiny construct

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, Listen +5, Spot +5

Languages (understood, but not spoken aloud) Common

AC 16 (14), touch 16 (12), flat-footed 13 (11)

Hp 48 (6d10)

Fort +2, Ref +5 (+3), Will +3

Spd 20 ft. (30 ft.), fly 50 ft. (good)

Melee +3 hook (1d3-1/x2) or

+3 bite (1d4-1 plus poison) or

+3 hook and +1 bite

When medium-sized, Qesh attacks as follows:

Atk +7 hook (1d6+3/x2), or

+7 bite (1d8+3 plus poison), or

+7 hook and +5 bite

Base Atk +4; **Grp** -5 (+7)

Atk Options bite (with poison), dire growth, hook hand, swallow whole,

Spell-Like Abilities

16 rounds per day, Qesh may use dire growth to become a medium-sized creature. (Parentheses show Qesh's statistics using dire growth.)

Abilities Str 8 (16), Dex 16 (12), Con —, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 7

SA poison (DC 13; sleep 1 minute/5d6 minutes), swallow whole

SQ construct traits

Feats Alchemical Variant (dire growth), Physical Variant (gaping maw)

Skills Bluff +2, Hide +15 (+7), Listen +5, Move Silently +5, Spot +5

Possessions *bag of devouring*, +1 ring of protection, rusty meat hook; 96 gp; small diamond worth 340 gp.



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IT CAME FROM MONSTER ISLE!

By Matthew J. Hanson
Art by Herman Lau

Adrick and his crew had seen it all. Giants, dragons, demons, and more fell before their blades. Hunting monsters was their bread and butter and was what brought them to Caddsville.

"It's less than our standard price, but I like you," Adrick told the mayor. "I agree to your terms. Now where is this beast?"

"There." The mayor pointed to a small mountain not far away, its sides impossibly steep.

"In the mountain?"

"No," the mayor replied. "It is the mountain."

Adrick and his crew thought they had seen it all. But they hadn't seen this.

Role-playing games have a long and proud history of borrowing ideas from any source that isn't nailed down. One source ripe for looting is the classic monster movie, also known as kaiju film.

What Is a Kaiju?

Kaiju is a Japanese term that means "strange beast" and often translates as "monster." Kaiju are often reptilian, always enormous, and prone to destroying entire cities. Godzilla is easily the most famous kaiju; some other prominent kaiju include Rodan



(a giant pteranodon), Gamera (a giant turtle), and Mothra (a giant moth). Expansive definitions could also include King Kong and the monster from the recent American film *Cloverfield*.

They need not necessarily be Japanese-inspired: epic giants, overgrown hydras, shoggoths, and enormous rocs could fit the mold (with a few tweaks). But not just any monster can be called a Kaiju. Goblins, rust monsters, and even most dragons don't make the cut.

What makes a classic Kaiju? They must be size Colossal, must be of modest intelligence, and should have powerful melee attacks without great spellcasting. A kaiju template is possible, of course, but the point of these monsters is that they are all huge and all unique. Take a normal creature, bump it up to Colossal and give it the associated Strength, Constitution, and Armor Class bonuses.

Of all the classic RPG monsters, the tarrasque is closest to the kaiju model: an engine of destruction that is almost impossible to kill. Goblins are too small, dragons are too smart, and rust monsters just don't dish out the mayhem in the right way.

Kaiju are more than a typical RPG opponent; they are forces of nature and plot devices. Defeating a kaiju is not an encounter but rather an adventure and possibly a campaign.

Kaiju Adventures

Kaiju adventures can follow any structure, but they often share several elements. Here's a four-step outline to build your own kaiju adventure:

The Warning Signs: Before encountering the kaiju itself, the PCs should discover glimpses of its power: giant footprints, mysteriously destroyed fishing villages, witnesses driven mad by sheer terror. These warning signs should convey the danger the party faces and raise their curiosity.

The First Encounter: You can build suspense around an unseen monster for only so long. At some point, the PCs need to fight the giant monster face-to-

toe. And, if you stay true to kaiju form, the adventurers should probably lose this first fight.

This first defeat can be tricky to handle. It can frustrate players to confront a challenge they cannot overcome, especially if it leads to a party death, or worse, a total party kill. One way to deal with this is to make the kaiju's defenses far beyond the characters' abilities but to keep its attacks appropriate to the character's level.

Perhaps the kaiju chooses not to unleash its most powerful attacks on the PCs. After all, why bother to attack things that cannot hurt you? This works especially well if the monster's destruction is unintentional. It also might be a good idea to have numerous NPCs tell the party, "Don't attack the beast! It's a suicide mission! There's no way you can possibly defeat it!"

Even so, if you think that certain failure is not fun for your players, you can skip this step, and move right to...

Find a Way to Defeat It: This is the largest section of the adventure. Knowing what they face, the characters must find a way to stop the unstoppable. This could involve scouring ancient ruins, developing a new super weapon, or gathering the components necessary to activate the sacred shrine. It might mean finding a weak spot or uncovering the secret of a special DR type (blessed weapons, perhaps).

To keep the pressure on, you can supply your characters with steady reports on the villages crushed beneath the monster's feet. Remind them that every day that passes costs more lives.

The Final Showdown: Now that the PCs have discovered how to defeat the monster, they just have to put the plan into action. This is easier said than done. Unlike the initial battle, this time the heroes have a chance, though by no means will this fight be easy. For instance, the characters might have found an artifact capable of destroying the monster, but it only works if it's thrown straight down the monster's fire-breathing throat.

Kaiju-Related Side Quests

Not every adventure dealing with a kaiju requires all of the focus to be on destroying it. The party might also be asked to help rebuild a town, locate a missing relative, or stop the pillaging bandits that are taking advantage of the chaos. These side quests often occur during the initial build up of the adventure, but could also happen while the party searches for a solution or after the Kaiju has been defeated. These side quests could also happen for a party that is much too weak to challenge the kaiju directly; in that case, defeating the kaiju might be a long-term goal for the party.

Kaiju Origins

Where do kaiju come from? Players may ask, and you may want to consider it when creating your kaiju.

Magic Gone Wrong (or Right)

Kaiju in popular films are often created accidentally as a result of humans pushing science to the limit, such as testing atomic weapons. In a fantasy setting, science can easily be replaced by magic. Perhaps powerful wizards constructed a colossal stone guardian to protect their civilization only to have the construct turn on its creators.

Or, the swath of destruction might be exactly what the creators intended.

Visitor From

Another Time, Another Place

Another common origin for kaiju is that they are revived prehistoric monsters. Your game could take this approach, or using magic, the monster could literally travel through time. In fantasy settings, these timeless monsters might be something truly exotic, especially if campaign includes an "Age of Demons," or the like.

Kaiju fiction also features giant monsters that come from outer space. If your campaign world contains other planets, this is a perfect option. In many fantasy worlds, "planet" can easily be replaced with "plane." Evils from the abyss, elemental colossuses, or horrors from the realm of madness make great kaiju.

Finally, the kaiju could come from an

exotic location on the prime material plane, typically an uncharted island where the natives revere the monster as a god. These monsters are typically content on their island; however, some enterprising parties have managed to capture certain kaiju outright or lure them away from their homes by kidnapping worshippers.”

How Do We Defeat That?

Players will be less interested in the backstory than in the practical question of how to beat it. Here’s seven options.

Chink in the Armor

The kaiju has one weak spot where it can be injured. For instance, the monster might be covered with impenetrable scales, except for a small patch in the hollow of his left breast.

Typically, the party must learn or uncover this weakness in lost lore or from a wise NPC. Once they have, they can attack the weak spot directly (rather than attack the monster as a whole). Of course, the weak point is significantly harder to hit given its smaller size. The PCs might only need to strike the location once, but more likely, they will need to deal a certain amount of damage to the vulnerable spot.

To make things more complicated, the monster might have several weak spots, such as three eyes that must each be destroyed in the proper order.

Weakness

Though most weapons do not scratch the kaiju, it has a weakness. This can be as mundane as cold damage but is probably something esoteric, like weapons forged from a rare metal found only in meteorites. Ideally, the weakness is not something the characters have on hand; they must either create it or seek it out.

Another variation of the weakness is an environmental condition. Perhaps the creature can only be killed under the light of the full moon, or perhaps, it loses its defenses when not in contact with the ground.

A Bigger Sword

The kaiju can only be defeated by some kind of super weapon. This weapon might be a new creation or an ancient artifact. The nature of the weapon should prevent the characters from using it on anything other than the kaiju. It might only work once and then be either destroyed in the battle or confiscated by the government to be examined by “top men” after the battle. If a new creation, the wizard responsible for creating it might even take his own life to prevent his secret from endangering humanity.

Seal it Away

The kaiju cannot be killed, but it can be imprisoned. This may require a specially prepared location, an ancient ritual, or a massive portal leading to another plane. If the monster escaped from some prison, the best way to defeat it is to return it to the same place, and this time, make sure the bindings hold. Characters might also seal the monster away inside of a volcano or within a polar ice cap.

Love and Duty

The kaiju isn’t evil; it’s just misunderstood. All it needs is somebody (especially a young child or beautiful actress) to show it some compassion.

Or, the kaiju may only have awakened to accomplish a specific goal, such as retrieving relics stolen from a sacred tomb. If the party can help the monster accomplish this goal, the monster stops its rampage and settles down for a millennium of sleep.

From the Inside

The kaiju is so large that it becomes a “dungeon” while its antibodies and parasites play the role of traditional monsters. The player characters must enter the monster (probably through the mouth) and travel through blood vessels, intestines, and other bodily passages to strike at a particularly vulnerable area (usually the heart).

This strategy also works well for giant constructs, which may have a more conventional dungeon within.

It Takes a Giant Monster...

That’s right. To stop the first rampaging kaiju, the characters need to awaken/create/enlist the aid of another kaiju. This typically occurs after they have already defeated one or more monsters.

When the big fight comes, let the players run the “good” kaiju or, better yet, let each player run a separate monster. Alternatively, the characters may uncover a mystical ritual that temporarily transforms them into kaiju themselves, retaining most of the powers of their character.

Sample Kaiju

Everyone knows Godzilla and the tarasque. Here are some other options for kaiju.

The King of Sadness

The last great war ended when one of the combatants detonated a weapon of unimaginable power. Though it forced surrender, the weapon killed thousands and, worse, left a barren wasteland now called, “The Sad Lands.”

As a result, most of the creatures in The Sad Lands died, but not all. The residual energies from the weapon transformed many creatures into terrible monsters. The greatest of these monsters is the King of Sadness. While it vaguely resembles a tyrannosaurus, the King of Sadness is something far more terrible, equipped with venomous spines, a second pair of powerful arms, and a breath of pure destruction.

In the past, the King of Sadness was only a story told by those foolish enough to brave the Sad Lands and lucky enough to survive. Recently, the King of Sadness has ventured into the world beyond the Sad Lands, leaving a swath of destruction in its wake. While it always returns to the Sad Lands, each time it ventures forth the King of Sadness travels a little farther from home.

Nobody knows how to stop this terrible beast. The key may lie within the Sad Lands, or it might lie with a young but gifted mage who discovered a weapon more terrible than the one that created the Sad Lands.

Kondulu, the White Ape

The great kingdoms of man require resources to fuel their expansion, and the Southern Forest has proven a rich source. Not only are the trees a prized source of lumber, the cleared land feeds cattle and several veins of precious ore lie beneath the earth.

It seems, however, that man has cut too much and dug too deep. They have awakened a terrible spirit. Taking the form of a massive white gorilla, this spirit seems intangible until its foes are crushed beneath its feet. Not even the most powerful of spells has any effect on the monster.

Farms, mines, and logging camps are all destroyed. Only the People of the Wood, who live in harmony with the Southern Forest, seem immune to the White Ape's rampage. The People distrust outsiders, but if befriended, they explain that they know much of this white ape—who they call Kondulu—including that she can never be defeated, only appeased.

The Ancient Deep

Some beings were ancient even before even the elves appeared: unspeakable entities whose visage drives the strongest mind insane. Fortunately, these monstrosities long ago retreated from the mortal realm to planes far beyond our grasp. But not forever.

Recently, an apocalypse cult dedicated to the return of these ancient ones has committed the unthinkable and drawn something from distant realms into the material plane. The Ancient Deep destroys anything it meets at sea, and based on where ships have gone missing, it's heading towards shore. The only description comes from a half-mad sailor who saw a many-eyed tentacle reaching from the water.

Sages agree that fighting such a monster is suicide. The only solution is to banish it to the plane from which it came. Alas, the only ones that know how to accomplish such a feat are the doomsday cultists who first summoned it.

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The 4E PHB Designers want you to switch editions.. and they finally explain how to convert a campaign.

by Kobold Staff

Andy Collins, Rob Heinsoo, and James Wyatt are the authors of the 4th Edition Player's Handbook and work at Wizards of the Coast in the R&D department. See if you can figure out which is the chatty one...

KOBOLD QUARTERLY: What are the particular strengths of the individual members of the R&D team? Describe each other in simple terms as the “number cruncher” guy or the “world and imagery” guy.

Andy Collins: Rob is our Mad Genius, James is the Storyteller, and I'm the Stat Junkie.

Rob's definitely the mad genius of the group, particularly when it comes to mechanical design. We explored countless crazy ideas of Rob's over the past three years, and some of them actually worked!

James's designated role on the team was as the “world and story guy,” but that diminishes the mechanical talents that he also brought to the table. I don't know why it's important to clarify that the “story guy” was also making contributions elsewhere, but story gets a bad rap among many gamers so maybe that's why.

My focus was definitely on nuts and bolts design work. I was the guy who kept asking, “So how do we make that work in the game?”

James Wyatt: I think Andy was the one with the clearest sense of what

would and wouldn't fly, based on issues of mechanical balance, player perception, the way people actually play D&D, and the weight of tradition. He was, in that sense, the perfect developer voice, even in the throes of design.

Rob was the game designer on the team. He pushed our boundaries, made us consider some crazy ideas, and led us down a path of design that was different than anything I'd experienced before—much more akin to the kind of design that happens when you're working on a TCG or an entirely new game than to “writing D&D stuff.”

I feel like I wore a number of hats over the course of these three years, including being the numbers guy (largely, I think, by virtue of being the guy with a laptop and Excel) until Steve Schubert settled much more comfortably into that role.

Now I'm the “story guy”—the lead story designer for D&D—and I guess that's the role I played quite a bit during the design process.

Andy Collins: James is right; I'd totally forgotten that he was the number cruncher for a good long stretch of the design phase. (2005 is a long time ago.)

In a lot of ways, I was tasked with being a voice of sanity in the room. Rob and James are both creators at heart, and creators want to explore



Andy Collins in his mountain retreat.

new territory without worrying about consequences.

I, however, am a developer/editor at heart: All I *ever* think about are consequences.

KQ: What events, if any, from the DDXP preview testing made you reconsider various 4E class abilities and powers? What changed and why?

James Wyatt: D&D XP was a preview, but not a playtest. At the time of the show, the core books were just about finished, and we were ready to show the game to a wider audience. That said, I do feel the need to point out that there were elements of the characters used at the 4E events at D&D XP that were out of date or erroneous. For example:

- The fighter's combat challenge works a little differently.
- The paladin can't use divine challenge and then run away from the fight to deal ongoing damage to the challenged foe.
- The ranger's careful attack doesn't do as much damage as his other at-will attack.

We did do lots of playtesting, and those three things are all elements that changed fairly late, though still before D&D XP, thanks to playtest feedback and careful in-house examination.

There was one thing that we fixed when we got back from D&D XP, though: we made sure that the gelatinous cube can move easily when it has engulfed characters.

Andy Collins: Agreed. We didn't approach D&D Experience as a massive playtest—for one thing, we weren't collecting data in anything like an organized fashion—but we certainly took advantage of the opportunity to make some anecdotal observations of how people were playing the game.

Our experiences at the show did support some changes that were already in the works: for example, adjusting the stats of solo monsters to make them challenging but still fun to fight.

That said, we're still giving a shout-out to the Experience crowd in the playtest credits page... just not individually.

KQ: In Wizards' research about the problems 3.5E suffers from, what kind of games were you looking at: convention game play, home games, games run by teenagers, or what?

Andy Collins: Yes, yes, yes, and then some.

Our best sources of experience were the campaigns that we played in ourselves. There's no better way to learn what works (or doesn't work) in a game than by playing it, and we learned plenty from our own experiences as DM or player. If you assume that everyone in RPG R&D interacts with 3-6 players who don't also interact with anyone else in the department, that's over 100 different experiences every week or month.

Since every group's experience differs, however, we also recognize that it's important to listen to what's happening in games around the world, whether at a big con, in the back room of your FLGS, or in your own basement. Each one of us hears from folks at conventions, by email, via our RPGA contacts, and yes, through the message boards, and we take those messages back to the department.

And yes, we've even run focus group testing on D&D games, bringing in

new or existing players to watch how they interact with the game. Let me tell you, there are few experiences more humbling than watching a 12-year-old look over your painstakingly crafted game for 2 minutes then discard it in boredom.

KQ: Ouch. The 12-year-old audience is brutal. I know this next question may be perceived as applying only to the web/older gamer audience, but really it's everyone.

What surprises you about the reception 4E is getting in the gaming community as you approach the launch, if anything?

James Wyatt: Honestly, I'm a little bit surprised at how positive it has been, overall.

Going to GenCon last year for the Big Announcement was nerve-racking. The Internet can be such a negative place that I was half-expecting to be tarred and feathered by the time the show was over. But, as Mike Mearls pointed out once, GenCon is the anti-Internet. Almost everyone at the show seemed excited by the news and hung on every word we let slip about the new game.

Since then, that experience has repeated several times—most recently at D&D XP. Tons of really enthusiastic fans made that my favorite convention of recent years. Everyone I've played 4E with has just loved the game, as I do. I guess I shouldn't be surprised, but I have to confess that I am.

KQ: How would 4th Edition have been different if the big push had started six months earlier? That is, what systems, classes, or rules do you wish you had another six months to tinker with?

Andy Collins: The issues that come to mind for me are more like flourishes than actual systems—I can't think of anything big that I think now would have benefited significantly from more time.

That said, I'm sure a year from now, like any creator, we'll see one or two things that we might want to have done differently. Ask anyone who's ever



James Wyatt at home.

worked on an artistic endeavor and they'll admit that you're never really "done," it's just that at some point somebody makes you stop working and move on.

James Wyatt: As Andy said, we've been down to fine-tuning for months now, after working on the game for three years. Starting six months earlier would have changed details here and there, but nothing big.

KQ: Ok, fair enough. Next question, and time for some details! I'm interested in kobolds as player characters: What do you think is an optimal build for 1st-level kobold class, abilities, and feats?

Andy Collins: Well, the kobold rogue is an obvious choice. The kobold's +2 Dexterity meshes ideally with the rogue's reliance on Dex, and kobolds are naturally sneaky thieves who are tough to pin down in a fight.

That said, kobolds will make pretty decent fighters, too. They're reasonably tough, there's no Strength penalty any more, and the kobold's mobile nature means it can maneuver around really easily in a fight.

Ooh, and a kobold ranger would be pretty fun. Probably an archer, to take advantage of that Dex boost, with other feats and powers that focus on mobility and sneakery. (Not a word? Don't care.)

Rob Heinsoo: The kobold has Shifty,



The Devilish Mr. Heinsoo

the one racial ability that is pretty much too darn good to hand out to player characters.

The bizarre fact is that if we ever do a full kobold PC treatment, I'm gonna want to nerf the Shifty racial power. "Want to" isn't the same as "going to." So for the moment kobold players who are enjoying their shifty speed don't have to be told optimal builds—as far as I'm concerned they've already got an optimal racial ability!

KQ: What new RPG book are you most excited about (after June, naturally)?

Rob Heinsoo: I'm excited about *Players' Handbook II*. I love the new directions we're taking the classes. That's about all I can say, at this point.

Andy Collins: Probably *Martial Power*. It explores some interesting new builds for the martial classes, some of which are pretty different in feel from the base classes, but without straying from the core identity of the class and its role in the party. I like the way that the book showcases the flexibility of a class—something that I know many players are concerned about.

KQ: Cool! Care to drop a class name? Or when you say builds, do you mean alternate class abilities?

Andy Collins: The builds in this book each include a new class feature

and a new array of powers, both suited to that particular style of character (but also useful to others in the class as well).

That is, the powers we've designed for "New Warlord Build X" are best for that build, but they're also entirely playable and useful to warlords of builds Y and Z, as well as to warlords who prefer a general approach rather than a particular build.

We're still nailing down names and such, so I'd rather not put one out there quite yet.

KQ: James, why did you want to shake up the "story elements" of D&D so much, changing the planes from the Great Wheel cosmology, making eladrins into a type of fey elf, changing demons and devils around, and so on.

James Wyatt: I can't take full credit for any of those decisions, but I'm certainly happy with them. The Great Wheel cosmology was an expression of needless symmetry—a structure of infinite planes based on the symmetrical alignment grid. Mechanus existed purely because the structure demanded a plane for the Lawful Neutral alignment. Modrons existed purely because that plane needed inhabitants. Neither of them was particularly good for the play of the game.

The Inner Planes were worse—built on the symmetry of the four classical elements, and none of them hospitable or interesting for adventure. Combining them all into the tempest of the Elemental Chaos gives us a vibrant, exciting, dangerous-but-not-lethal environment for incredible adventures that the Inner Planes could never be.

We changed the alignment system in the game to help players understand what commitments their characters were making, and the result left us no need for a symmetrical grid of outer planes and creatures to populate it. With no more "chaotic good" alignment, we didn't need outsiders to populate the chaotic good plane.

Eladrin have always been ultra-fey outsiders, so moving them to the

Feywild was a natural step. Using that name for the fey player character race was a later flash of insight that made perfect sense once we'd gone that far. The powerful ghaeles and bralanis still exist as potential enemies or allies in the Feywild, and I think they have a much more interesting place in the world than being the embodiment of the chaotic good alignment.

Demons and devils haven't actually changed that much. In the past, they have blurred together quite a bit, and we did want to make sure that players not steeped in 30 years of history might have a chance of understanding the difference between the two. We emphasized their differences and downplayed their similarities. So far, only one creature has changed sides—the seductive succubus, we felt, worked much better as a devil than as a demon.

Shaking things up wasn't our goal, but an occasional consequence of decisions we made for the sake of improving the game. We avoided change for its own sake, and didn't make any of these decisions lightly. The result of our work on the cosmology of the game is a bunch of planes that make great places for adventure—different and challenging, without being so alien or deadly that characters would never want to go there.

And that's why the book I'm most excited about is *Manual of the Planes*. (To be fair, my answer to that question will almost always be "whatever book I'm working on right now.")

But I'm thrilled about this book, because it's just dripping with adventure possibilities. I have nothing against past incarnations of the title, but I'm just so glad we don't have to spend precious pages talking about places you can't go (like three pages on the Negative Energy Plane, where you have to save or gain a negative level every round), and can instead talk in detail about places you can go and will want to go.

KQ: I'm very excited to hear about the *Manual of the Planes*. I guess I'm hoping that some PLANESCAPE

elements will survive into the new cosmology.

James Wyatt: I'm working on the section on Sigil right now, and *In the Cage* is open on my lap. Hurray, confirmation that PLANESCAPE survives into 4E!

KQ: What advice do you have for someone wanting to continue their 3E campaign in some form using 4E (besides "don't!")? Surely some rough conversions are possible, as long as your PC isn't a druid or bard. What are the unofficial hacks and rules of thumb?

Andy Collins: Speaking as someone who successfully converted his 3E campaign to a 4E playtest, I'd say that "conversion of concept" should be the goal of the DM and players looking to follow that plan.

That is, don't fixate on the exact mechanical manifestations of your character. Obsessing over one-to-one conversions of every feat or spell on your character sheet will drive you batty (and ultimately be unsuccessful).

Instead, focus on the overarching themes of your character, and look for new ways of expressing those themes.

For some characters, that's really easy—the eight classes in the new PH cover the most popular character choices from 3E, and many can effectively be adapted to cover other classes as well. Add the eight PH races to the basic racial information provided for other creatures in the *Monster Manual* and you have a pretty broad selection there as well.

Your 3E dwarf fighter can become a 4E dwarf fighter pretty easily—he's still wearing heavy armor and swinging a weapon, but now he also gets fun exploits to use in combat. Your sorcerer can become either a wizard or a warlock, or perhaps a mix of the two.

Did you play a crafty illumian spellthief in 3E? You'll probably want to be a human or half-elf rogue who uses the new multiclass system to sample some wizard powers (or vice versa). They might not be the exact spells that your spellthief used, but you

should be able to recapture the feel of the character with similar (or even more exciting) effects.

Your knight, crusader, or warblade can pretty effectively be recreated as a fighter or perhaps a paladin or even a warlord, depending on his particular attitude and the special features he preferred.

There will always be exceptions: The mongrelfolk ranger in my 3E game didn't have an easy racial translation, and James Wyatt's swordsage didn't feel enough like a fighter, rogue, wizard, or multiclass combo of any of those classes for the "conversion of concept" guideline to be helpful. In both of those cases, the players created entirely new 4E characters—the guy playing the mongrelfolk tried an elf ranger for a while, then decided to play a wizard instead (and ended up finding it to be the most fun spellcaster he'd ever played), and Mr. Wyatt went with a tiefling paladin.

James Wyatt: There's no good reason not to convert your campaign, as long as you're willing to be flexible. Andy did it, giving each player the choice of "converting" an existing character or creating a new one. I was playing a xeph swordsage, so I made a new one.

The way I see it is that your character isn't the statistics on the character sheet. Your character is the person in your head, with background and history from the games you've played. The character sheet is an expression of that character in the rules of the game, just like if you tried to stat out a character from a novel. My advice would be to set your 3E character sheet off to the side, concentrate on the character in your head, and work toward the best expression of that character you can produce in the 4E rules.

Given that it's going to take us a while to design 4e versions of all 50ish standard classes we published in 3E (and there are some we probably won't do—the fighter is a good replacement for the knight, for example), you might have trouble expressing some characters in the new rules as they stand right now. But there's enough newness in the

eight PH classes to engage the interest of the players who have wandered off to swordsages and incarnates during 3E.

But then, in my opinion, this game gives a lot of room for flexibility if you're willing to get creative with the rules. Let me tell you a story.

My son is 11, and he's getting increasingly interested in D&D. The toys drive his interest quite a bit—he loves playing with *Dungeon Tiles* and helping me open minis boosters. A few months ago, when I brought home *Desert of Desolation* minis, he fell in love with the fire archon, and he announced that he wanted that to be his character.

Rule number 1 for a good DM is to say yes whenever possible, so I did. I built him a 7th-level fire archon as his PC. I used rogue powers, but I changed the flavor to fiery stuff wherever I could. Instead of "sneak attack," I let him do extra fire damage when he had combat advantage. I gave him powers that did ongoing damage, but made it fire damage. I might have given him fire resistance as a racial feature. He had only a vague resemblance to any of the fire archons statted up in the *Monster Manual*, but he was a perfectly balanced, viable character inspired by that miniature.

With similar creativity, I'm pretty sure I could have built my swordsage, drawing on rogue and warlock powers, and maybe altering the flavor here and there when necessary.

KQ: Why does Wizards use the Delve format for adventures designed for home consumption? Isn't it more of a tournament format?

Andy Collins: Here's the question I'm going to answer. It's my best guess for what you're trying to learn: "Why does Wizards use the same encounter layout in published adventures as in Delve-style events?"

The encounter layout aims to make it as easy as possible for a DM to see all the relevant information he needs to run the encounter—to minimize page flipping and book references, for example.

Delve-style events at conventions led

the way in identifying this need. DMs running such events often have no time to prep before rolling initiative. We saw that all DMs could use a more helpful format for encounter presentation. Few among us have as much time to prep for games as we used to, so making the game easier to run is helpful no matter where you're playing.

James Wyatt: This format was designed to give you (the DM) everything you need to run an encounter on a single spread of two pages, and that's just as helpful in a home game as it is at a convention. (The name "Delve format" does come from the fact that it's an outgrowth of using it for our Dungeon Delve at GenCon—but the goal was to get it on a single page that would be on the DM's clipboard.) You've got enough going on behind the screen without having to shuffle back and forth between a map on one page, room descriptions on another page, and stat blocks on still another page—which is what our previous format made you do.

KQ: Well, it's a question from the readership, and I admit it's a little opaque. I think the real question-behind-the-question might be more like "Why do you use the Delve format/layout when I don't like it?". But moving swiftly on....

What do you think about the PATHFINDER RPG, currently in Beta? Are you worried it might fragment the RPG market?

Andy Collins: Wizards of the Coast recognizes that Paizo Publishing must make decisions based on their own best interests, and we wish the best of luck with this project.

KQ: Yeah, I hear that. Which is why the KQ readership offers this followup, already prepared for this occasion:

How do you feel about the competition with Paizo and Mona?

Andy Collins: I think there's plenty of room for both companies to succeed in their respective endeavors.

KQ: Ok, ok, dodge and weave. What non-WotC games are you playing these days?

Andy Collins: I've become a huge board game fan in the past decade, as my love for the cardboard became reinvigorated by *Settlers of Catan* (still a favorite). In the past few months I've played *Ticket to Ride: Europe*, *Fury of Dracula*, *Puerto Rico*, *Carcassonne*, and *Vegas Showdown* (OK, that's a WotC game), to name a few.

When I can get a group together I enjoy *Age of Renaissance*, and once a year we blow a day with *Advanced Civilization*.

I haven't been playing computer or console games much lately, but I did have some fun with *Zoo Tycoon 2* a couple weeks ago. It's like *Civilization* meets *The Sims*, but with zoo animals! I've dabbled with *Guitar Hero*.

Apples to Apples is undoubtedly the best non-gamer game I've encountered in my adult life. I can crack it open with anyone in the world and have them laughing within minutes.

James Wyatt: When I'm not playing D&D with my friends, I'm usually playing something with my family, so my gaming runs to board games from *Life* and *Sorry* to *Starfarers of Catan* and *Vegas Showdown*. (My wife always kills us with the red diamonds...)

My son also got me back into *World of Warcraft*, though he's already showing signs of becoming a game designer: When he starts telling me that he wants to make a character who's a combination of rogue and paladin, I tell him we have to switch to D&D! We've tinkered with the *Pokemon* TCG rules (we have a *DuelMasters*-style variant) and *Uno* (keeping track of hands won, and incorporating a catch-up mechanic). We also enjoy games on the Wii, especially *Lego Star Wars*.

The other brain candy that keeps me busy in odd moments is sudoku. I started playing with creating my own, using letters to spell out two or three anagrams in the puzzle.

Rob Heinsoo: I've been enjoying GMT's *Commands & Colors: Ancients*, which is much easier to get going than

the other GMT Ancients system I like, *Simple Great Battles of History*.

The other two-player game I've been playing recently is also from GMT: *Manoeuvre*, a wargame/eurogame hybrid about 18th century warfare.

I play a lot of *Ingenious* with my family and non-gamer friends, it's an abstract tile-laying game by Reiner Knizia. Another Knizia game we had fun with recently is a card game, *Formula Motor Racing*. And let's see, rounding out the list with games we played in the last two weeks... *Scrabble* and *Cheeky Monkey*.

KQ: Excellent, sound like you have a well-varied gaming diet.

I'm sure you've answered this one before, but what is the one reason gamers should switch their games to 4E? I'm not looking for a laundry list, mind you. But I do wonder about the size of a new generation of grognards.

Andy Collins: For me, the overarching reason to move one's game to 4th Edition is for everyone around the table to have more fun playing D&D.

We've eliminated a huge range of "game-stopping" rules complications to keep the game (and your story) moving.

We've broadened the character power options for all classes, ensuring that every player has something exciting and special to do in every round of every combat, no matter how many encounters you have during the day.

We've streamlined monster and encounter design to help the DM build and run fast, compelling combats with multiple foes.

You said you didn't want a laundry list, so I'll forgo listing any more examples of how 4th Edition increases the fun you'll have at the game table. But whether you're a player or a DM, we believe—and hundreds upon hundreds of playtesters are backing us up on this—that 4th Edition provides a more enjoyable, exciting, and entertaining RPG experience than any previous version of D&D.

James Wyatt: Yeah, it's hard to put it

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any more clearly than that: More fun. Definitely don't switch if you hate fun.

Rob Heinsoo: I'll help gang-tackle this answer: it's most significant that 4e is more fun for the DM. 4e makes it easier for the DM to get a session or a campaign started, and more fun to keep the sessions rolling. DM fun translates into player fun with a very high exchange rate.

KQ: Well, I don't think anyone will argue against fun. But how do you define fun, in design terms? If DM fun = player fun (and I'm not sure it always does), how does 4E provide more of that?

Andy Collins: It's much better for players if their DMs enjoy crafting adventures and running games. A DM having fun may not guarantee that players also have fun, but that's way more likely to be true than if the DM isn't having fun.

A DM who's frustrated with the rules, or who finds creating encounters too daunting, or who feels panicked every time he has to run an encounter with more than one monster, is not only likely to transfer that unease to his players (reducing everyone's enjoyment), he may also just walk away from the DM role entirely. And players without a DM definitely aren't having much fun.

KQ: Why should publishers switch to the 4E Game System License (GSL)?

AC: Ultimately, I believe this is an economic issue for each company to weigh and decide for itself.

In other words, publishers should switch to 4th Edition and the Game System License if they believe it's in their best business interests to do so.

There will undoubtedly be publishers who believe their best plan is to continue supporting (or to create) their own house system, and others who believe that continuing to publish under the 3rd Edition OGL is the optimal decision for them.

We certainly believe that publishing via the 4th Edition GSL is a good choice, but ultimately only the market

can prove or disprove any of those theories. The customers will speak with their wallets, and any publisher interesting in staying in business will listen.

KQ: Given that 4th Edition is a product you're naturally proud of, and which will connect with a lot of people, how has the delay in releasing the GSL affected Wizards' plans? Are any ship dates moving around to fill some of the likely gaps?

AC: We don't have any plans to adjust the release dates we've announced.

KQ: Purely personal opinion: What are your favorite monsters in the new edition, and why?

Andy Collins: I'd be remiss in not mentioning that the dragons in 4E are actually playable right out of the book, rather than requiring an hour or more of DM design work before using them. That alone makes me 127% more excited about using them in my game.

The foulspawn ("deranged humanoids corrupted by contact with the Far Realm") have made several appearances in my game lately. I really like the combinations of powers and role that these critters offer me in building encounters.

I've seen the bugbear strangler at work both as a player and as a DM, and I think it's fiendishly fun.

Rob Heinsoo: The monsters I love having in the MM are the slaads. "Come, Chaos, and rain befuddlement upon the PCs." The slaads play havoc with carefully laid plans, almost as if the slaads were an unpredictable group of rival PCs.

James Wyatt. 1) Orcus and friends. First, I'm just tickled that they're in there—it's something I suggested as a joke a long time ago, because we were using Orcus as a code name to talk about 4th Edition. Orcus is the highest-level monster in the book, he's bad, and he looks cooler than ever. And he has a nice cadre of companions—his aspect, his exarch Doresain, and a deathpriest cultist. He has a great story and some awe- and terror-inspiring mechanics.

2) Cyclops. I'm happy to see the cyclops in the *Monster Manual I* for the first time. And there's a stupid little thing that makes me inordinately happy: We went from the stereotypical, pseudo-scientific, "Well, cyclops only have one eye so they lack depth perception," to giving them an evil eye power. That strikes me as a brilliant little insight into our design philosophy.

3) Yeah, dragons. They've never been so fun, dangerous, and impressive.

KQ: Tell us what your hopes are for the GSL. Third-party publishers might release their own versions of popular 3E elements to fill the void before Wizards releases an official version. Are you concerned about that delay?

Also, how committed are you personally to keeping the new GSL SRD updated with content the gaming community feels is critical, like druids, bard, or gnome racial options?

AC: I'm confident that the quality of material published by Wizards of the Coast will make our books compelling even to those gamers who've already seen other folks' versions of, say, psionics.

We're still talking about how to handle future SRD content for the GSL, so it's premature for me to guess as to exactly what form or scope that content will take.

KQ: Fair enough. Last question: How is the work on 5th Edition coming along?

Andy Collins: <BLAM!> Thud.

KQ: I swear, the readers voted that as their favorite question. My apologies for even making you think about it.

Rob Heinsoo: Jonathan Tweet is probably hard at work on it.

Andy Collins: If my experience in the last 2.5 editions of D&D has taught me anything, it's this:

One of the key contributors to the next edition of D&D just started working here within the last year, and another one doesn't even work here yet... and we don't know who they are.

Let the guessing commence!

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MAKE YOUR ACTION POINTS AWESOME

More Player Options in Every Game

By Roger Carbol



Action points are a popular, if sometimes tricky, variant rule. Players like them because they provide more ways to make characters awesome. DMs like them because they are easily added to a campaign and cause much less disruption than many other variant rules. And the good people over at Wizards of the Coast must like them, because they are an official part of at least one 3.5 Edition campaign setting and the 4th Edition core rules.

The tricky part comes from the scarcity of action points. Most resources that a character has are usable a few times per encounter or a few times per day. Action points, in contrast, do not replenish until the character gains a new level and any unspent points from the previous level are lost.

Adding to the confusion, a player can only spend one action point per round, and exactly when you can spend them varies from effect to effect.

Many players, paralyzed by the scarcity of action points and the fear of squandering them, simply hoard them. A character that dies with unspent action points is twice the tragedy, but you can avoid this gruesome fate by following these helpful tips for the most common action point usages:

Which Action Points?

This article discusses the variant rules for action points from the standard version of the game. Some readers only experience with action points will come from playing with action points in a certain pulp fantasy or science fantasy campaign setting. If so, you may be terribly confused at all these new options from the core rules; give them shot!

Increasing a d20 Roll

One of the easiest ways to spend an action point is to increase the result of a d20 roll by rolling a d6 (or, at higher levels, rolling more than one and picking the highest). The most common d20 rolls to modify are attack rolls, saving throws, and skill checks.

Attack rolls: If you think you've missed the target AC by only a couple points, spending an action point is a good way to increase your chances of hitting. In cases where your odds of hitting are high to begin with, however, you may be better off spending your action point to gain an extra attack instead.

Spending an action point to confirm a critical hit is particularly useful, especially if your weapon has a critical modifier greater than x2.

Saving throws: Making a single saving throw can mean the difference between victory and total party kill. If you expect to be make several saving throws of the same type during a round—after charging a carrion crawler while naked, for example—you may, instead, want to consider emulating one of the saving throw feats: Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes (see below for details on emulating feats).

Skill checks: Skill checks can be as important as any attack roll or saving throw, especially for rogues. If you don't already have Skill Focus in the skill in question, emulating it for a flat +3 bonus can be a safer option than rolling 1d6 (see below for details on emulating feats).

Activating Class Abilities

You can spend an action point for an extra use of a class ability that has a limited number of uses per day. This type of ability includes a barbarian's rage, a druid's wild shape, a monk's stunning fist, and a paladin's smite evil.

The ability to retain spells is essentially a specific form of this usage, allowing you to cast your spell and keep it too. If your spellcaster is constantly stressed-out about whether any given round is exactly the right time to cast his only prepared *dispel magic* or *fireball* for the day, he can stop worrying. Cast it, and use an action point to retain it.

Your DM will be surprised, but it's a completely legitimate use of an action point. Ok ok, you may not want to surprise your DM with it too much; it would slow down the game in the middle of combat. But it's fun to watch the reaction when people hear about this option.

Extra Attack

You can spend an action point to make an extra attack at your highest base attack bonus. Note that you can only do this during a full attack action. However, you can spend the point after your full attack has resolved.

This is especially helpful if your full attack missed completely, your attack wasn't quite enough to take your target down, or there's another irresistible target nearby. This can often be a more

effective way to damage your opponent than spending an action point to gain +1d6 on your attack roll.

Automatically Stabilize

When your own character is dying in a pool of his own blood, you can spend an action point to automatically stabilize him. This is not a bad use of an action point, and it is certainly better than a character dying, but don't be too quick to use it. If you are only at -3 hp and surrounded by your cleric friends who have just defeated the monsters, you probably don't need it. Don't let your character die needlessly, but don't panic, either.

Emulating and Improving Feats

The ability to spend an action point to emulate any feat (as long as you meet the prerequisites) or to improve a feat that you already have is one of the most powerful ways to use an action point. The wide array of available options can make it one of the most bewildering choices to make, however, so take heed of the following advice.

Note that, with most of these uses, the action point must be spent at the beginning of your own turn (as a free action) and that the effect lasts until the beginning of your next turn. Although it would be great to gain Great Cleave right after dropping a monster with your attack, it is not actually legal to do so (although your DM may allow it).

The following are among the most popular feats to emulate or improve:

Cleave: Cleave is useful when you cannot use the action point to get an extra attack because you cannot take a full attack action—for example, after you have charged. If you cannot emulate this feat because you don't have Power Attack—or if you think you might not manage to drop your foe with one attack—consider using your action point to get an extra attack instead.

Combat Casting: Even the most combat-averse spellcaster occasionally

finds himself in melee or in a grapple. Losing a spell to an attack of opportunity in that crucial situation is no fun, so keep Combat Casting in mind.

Eschew Materials: Every once in a while, you may find yourself without your required material components, whether by enemy action, DM plot twists, or your own incompetence. Emulating Eschew Materials can make this problem go away, at least for one round.

Far Shot: It might not come up very often, but just knowing that you can shoot at someone 600 yards away—that's 360 squares!—with your heavy crossbow and Far Shot is a good feeling (provided you already have Point Blank Shot).

Great Fortitude, Iron Will, and Lightning Reflexes: If you expect to make more than one saving throw of the same type during your round, emulating Great Fortitude, Iron Will, or Lightning Reflexes is more efficient than spending an action point to gain +1d6 to a single saving throw.

Improved Initiative: Sometimes you really want to act before your opponents. Emulating Improved Initiative, or improving the bonus to +8 if you already have the feat, goes a long way.

Power Attack: Power Attack is especially useful when trying to batter your way through an inanimate but tough object. If you already have Power Attack, you can double the bonus. Note that the doubling from using a two-handed weapon and this doubling combine to give you “only” triple damage.

Quick Draw: Quick Draw is a great way to draw your backup weapon after being disarmed without losing your ability to take a full attack action.

Run: Run gives you the head start you need when you really want to run away from (or towards) something or someone. It can be the difference between a lone survivor and a TPK.

Skill Focus: Emulating Skill Focus for a flat +3 can be safer than gaining +1d6 to a skill roll—unless you already have this feat, of course.

Metamagic Feats: You can spend an

No, Wait!

Spending an action point to improve a d20 roll has to happen after you roll the die but before the DM tells you whether you succeeded or failed. Make it easy on your DM—before an important roll, tell him that you might want to use an action point on it. You will never be disappointed by premature failure again.

action point to apply any metamagic feat you already have to a readied spell without changing the spell's required slot or its casting time—single-handedly making metamagic feats worthwhile. So go ahead and maximize that fireball or quicken that expeditious retreat.

Armed with these tips and tricks, you can stop hoarding action points and start spending them in the best ways possible, making your character even more awesome than ever before.



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BOOK REVIEWS

ALL TOMES READ BY CANDLELIGHT

by Cynthia Ward and Pierce Watters



Clockwork Heart

by Dru Pagliassotti
Juno Books, April 2008
Mass Market Paperback
978-0-8095-7256-421
\$6.99 390 pages

Taya is an icarus, a messenger serving the government of Ondinium. The icarii are couriers with a difference: they soar above the mountain city on wings forged from a lighter-than-air metal.

Taya's life changes when she rescues the passengers of a wireferry car whose cables snap in mid-air. The passengers are exalted—members of the highest caste in her rigidly stratified city. Since the icarii pass freely among the castes, plebian-born Taya is accustomed to dealing with exalted. But the rescue gives her unprecedented contact with the caste, and especially with the Forlore brothers: elegant Alister, an exemplar of the exalted, and caustic Cristof, who, shockingly, has abandoned his caste to become a clockwright.



Ondinium, with its industrial factories and its steam-powered Great Engine, is the world's high-tech capital. It has many enemies, including a bomb-throwing terrorist group, the Torn Cards. And when a wireferry tower

explodes, killing two of the Forlore kin, Taya unofficially investigates their murders in clash-filled collaboration with the acerbic outcaste, Cristof.

The name of Ondinium, transparently derived from Londinium, suggests London, and the steampunk technology suggests an alternate history of the Nineteenth Century. However, this isn't the Nineteenth Century, England, or Earth. A significantly different world is the setting of Dru Pagliassotti's debut novel, *Clockwork Heart*. It's a well-thought-out, skillfully developed world, extrapolated in rigorous science-fiction style from two key items: its lighter-than-air metal, omnium, and its steam-powered "Great Engine," a Charles Babbage-style difference engine (i.e., a mechanical computer).

Steampunk fiction tends to bend and blend genres. Sometimes a steampunk work ultimately ends up in the SF camp; sometimes it ends up fantasy; sometimes it's science fantasy—yet, wherever it lands, a steampunk work commonly feels like both SF and fantasy. To this speculative-fiction mix, Pagliassotti ambitiously adds a murder mystery and a romantic triangle, making a tasty multi-genre stew of *Clockwork Heart's* science fantasy.

The novel doesn't achieve the brilliance of steampunk classics like William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine* (1990), China Mieville's Bas-Lag novels, or Hayao Miyazaki's anime movie *Castle in the Sky* (Tenku no Shiro Laputa, 1986). But *Clockwork Heart* is a well written, entertaining novel with complex, sympathetic characters, and it will appeal both to steampunk fans and to SF/F readers unfamiliar with the subgenre.

-C.W.



The Samarkand Solution

by Gary Gygax
Introduction by Ed Greenwood
Planet Stories/Paizo, April 2008
Trade Paperback
978-1-60125-083-4
\$12.99 205 pages

Gary Gygax (1938-2008), the father of fantasy role-playing games, also wrote several fantasy novels. Three of his best comprise the Magister Setne Inhetep series (tied to his *Dangerous Journeys* game): *The Anubis Murders* (1992), *The Samarkand Solution* (1993), and *Death in Delhi* (1993). Paizo Publishing is doing the hobby a great service by reprinting the trio (not trilogy: each book stands alone).

A powerful Ægyptian wizard-priest and Pharaoh's former agent, Magister Setne Inhetep remains an investigator. *The Samarkand Solution* seriously challenges his considerable detective and magic skills. Ærth's most dangerous magician-assassin has come to Ægypt for unknown reasons. An undetectable magic is slaying powerful men, causing them to dance to death in mid-air. And a beautiful young foreigner, Lady Xonaapi, is kidnapped.

Magister Setne Inhetep must work with a distrustful police official, Chief

Inspector Tuhorus, to uncover the deadly conspiracy of an unknown foe before they—and Ægypt—are destroyed by the mysterious “Samarkand solution.”

Gygax proudly wrote in the pulp tradition. *The Samarkand Solution* embodies the form’s strengths: fast action, vivid prose, heroic protagonists, dastardly villains, an exciting plot, and a rousing climax. It also shows some of the form’s weaknesses: clichés, clumsy phrases, two-dimensional characterizations, and a tendency to make the darker-skinned characters villainous and the women scarce and silly.

The Samarkand Solution ably pairs two pulp genres, sword-and-sorcery fantasy and detective fiction. Suitably, Setne Inhetep is larger than life... but he’s not cast in the mold of brawling pulp heroes like Conan of Cimmeria and Mike Hammer. Cerebral and magically adept, Setne more closely resembles Sherlock Holmes, Lord D’Arcy, Vlad Taltos, or Harry Dresden.

Setne’s adventures are especially recommended to fans of these more cognition-oriented protagonists, but will also please many fans of two-fisted sword-and-sorcery or private-eye fiction.

-C.W.

Elric: The Stealer of Souls Chronicles of the Last Emperor of Melniboné, Vol. 1

by Michael Moorcock
Illustrated by John Picacio
Del Rey, February 2008
Paperback
978-0345498625
\$15.00 496 pages

Elric of Melniboné (pronounced Melnibonay) is the albino lord, final Emperor of the Bright Empire, eternal pawn in the struggles between Chaos and Law and wielder of the dread sword Stormbringer. Renown fantasist Michael Moorcock has been chronicling the adventures of this fey hero since 1961.



Del Rey publishing has just released *Elric: The Stealer of Souls*, volume I in their Chronicles of the Last Emperor of Melniboné. This excellent edition is fully illustrated by John Picacio.

Veteran readers of swords and sorcery are, of course, familiar with this tragic hero Elric and his evil sword, Stormbringer. The Bright Empire of Melniboné flourished for ten thousand years, “Ten thousand years before history was recorded—or ten thousand years after history had ceased to be chronicled.”

But now the empire has fallen and the albino warrior wanders the Earth with his sidekick, Moonglum, fighting and loving and ultimately and intimately involved in the battle for supremacy between the forces of Law and Chaos. Stormbringer does not just slay, but consumes the souls of its unlucky victims and nourishes the physically weak Elric who depends on Stormbringer for his mortal vitality.

The tales of Elric were radical departures from traditional swords and sorcery changing the genre forever. They were also a powerful influence on roleplaying: Consider the endless struggle between Chaos and Law and then consider one axis of your character’s alignment.

This new volume includes, chronologically, the first adventures of Elric as published in *Science Fantasy* magazine, and the first Elric novel, *Stormbringer*. Also included are essays by the author, the original editorial comments from John Carnell of *Science Fantasy*, magazine covers, the first book review,

a new foreword from the author, and a fine introduction by Alan Moore, creator of the acclaimed graphic novel, *Watchmen*.

This edition offers a splendid entrée to the world of Elric, or a look back for those who know this tragedy-torn swordsman too well, along with excellent support materials and fine illustrations. Recommended!

-P.W.

An Author Speaks: Moorcock on Elric in RPGs

“During the 70s my work was being so thoroughly ripped off by people who didn’t ask, that I decided I had to let one person do games, one handle comics and so on — the way you pick a lad in Morocco to be your ‘representative’. He then drives away or prosecutes the rest. I didn’t know who to trust, who to go with. I had given Gary Gygax permission to run Elric, but I’d also told others they could do the same. No money was involved.

“We were still in the hippy period as far as many of us were concerned, and I thought we were all in this for fun rather than profit. Then games started to become big business and the guy at Chaosium threatened TSR with a lawsuit. My agent then formalised a (very bad) contract with Chaosium (he would have done exactly the same with TSR) who were going to do Eternal Champion games.

“Of course, Chaosium turned out to be crooks, paying no royalties, ripping me off, behaving in a dodgy way. I tried over the years to get the stuff away from them but it wasn’t until Mongoose made a serious offer to Chaosium, plus an offer to me, that I was able to switch. Mongoose have proven a completely trustworthy firm, offering me all scenarios and so on for inspection before publishing. In the main, too, they have used better artwork.

“Gary told me that he wished he’d known the circumstances, since he had other ideas for EC games. I too wished I’d signed with GG, who seemed a pleasant and agreeable guy.”

Ask the Kobold

Abilities, Bonuses, and Monks

by Skip Williams

Skip Williams is a co-author of 3rd Edition and the author of the world's longest-running rules advice column.

If you have a question for the kobold, send it to tsrsage@aol.com.

Do inherent bonuses to ability scores count as part of the ability score itself, or are they separate bonuses?

For example, if my druid has a +4 inherent bonus to Strength (say, from four castings of wish) and wild shapes into an elephant (Str 30), by the rules he now uses the elephant's Strength score instead of his own. Would his +4 inherent bonus apply to his new Strength score, or not?

An inherent bonus is a bonus, not part of the ability score. That's why it's called a bonus. In general, inherent bonuses stack with other bonuses (but not with other inherent bonuses).

In cases where a character's physical ability scores are completely transformed, such as through wild shape or polymorph, I recommend tossing out any inherent bonuses along with the base ability score and replacing them with the assumed form's score.

I suggest this because inherent bonuses are intended to reign in rampant wishing and rampant use of ability enhancing books and not to provide characters with portable ability bonuses that take effect no matter what form the character takes.

The ability of deities to grant spells says that gods can grant spells from the cleric and the ranger spell lists automatically, but a god must have paladin levels in order to grant spells from the paladin spell list and druid levels in order to grant spells from

the druid spell list. Does this hold true for other classes with divine spell lists as well? For example, does a god need levels in blackguard to grant spells from the blackguard spell list, or can a god do this automatically?

I suggest that you allow any deity that accepts evil clerics to grant blackguard spells also. In general, if a divine spellcasting class is not on the prohibited list, go ahead and allow the deity to grant the spells—alignment permitting.

Specialist wizards gain a bonus spell for each spell level that they gain. What about epic spells? Could an abjurer have a bonus epic spell using the Ward seed? What about bonus spells from other sources, such as feats or prestige classes?

No. You don't gain epic spell slots for specialization or for any other process that uses a spell's level. An epic spell has no "level."

Some feats and prestige classes require a certain number of ranks in a skill. Does this mean one's acquired skill ranks or one's effective ranks after all bonuses are applied?

Acquired ranks. That's always the case for a skill prerequisite. Keep in mind that a character's maximum rank in a class skill is character level +3 and half of that for a cross-class skill.

Can extraordinary, spell-like, or supernatural abilities be used in conjunction with the *spectral hand* spell? I'd guess "no" because the spell description refers explicitly to touch



spells, but it sure would be great for monsters if some abilities did combine with a *spectral hand*.

I would be inclined to suggest that anything that has a "level" of 4th or less could work, provided the power or ability in question has a touch range. That generally means spells and spell-like abilities.

To determine a spell-like ability's level, use the level for the sorcerer/wizard version of the spell. If the spell has no sorcerer/wizard level, use cleric, druid, bard, paladin, or ranger level. Check each spell list for the spell in the order given; for example, a spell's level as a cleric spell takes precedence over its level as a druid spell. If a spell-like ability does not have an assigned level and the ability doesn't appear on any class spell list, it is best to disallow the ability's use through a *spectral hand*.

I do not recommend allowing any extraordinary ability to work through a *spectral hand*. An extraordinary ability is not magical, so there is nothing to channel through the hand. Supernatural abilities that have a touch range and an assigned level of 4th or less should be okay for use with *spectral hand*. If there is no assigned level, I do not recommend allowing the ability to work through a *spectral hand*.

A monk can use her unarmed strike ability as either a manufactured or a natural weapon, is that correct? What is this ability to switch categories good for?

It is correct that a monk can treat her unarmed strikes as either manufactured

or natural weapons (see the monk class description). This is useful when qualifying for feats, such as Improved Natural Attack or when receiving enhancing spells, such as *magic weapon* or *magic fang*.

Can monk use a flurry of blows (unarmed or with a special monk weapon) to attempt a trip or to initiate a grapple? For example, a low-level monk with two attacks per flurry, Improved Grapple, and Improved Trip uses his flurry of blows as a full attack action. For his first attack, he uses a stunning fist (unarmed) and stuns his foe. On his second attack, he trips his foe with a kama held in one hand and takes his free attack to make another unarmed strike at the same attack bonus or, alternately, to initiate a grapple to further damage the prone foe.

That sounds fine to me. Tripping and grappling count as attacks and not as full-blown actions. That is, you can trip or grapple in lieu of a melee attack, even as an attack of opportunity.

Keep in mind that you are under some severe limitations when grappling. For example, you can make an attack only with an unarmed strike, natural weapon, or light weapon against an opponent you are grappling (not a problem when you using a flurry). Additionally, if you grapple someone during a flurry, any additional attacks you make against that foe suffer a -4 penalty (unless you decide to let go).

What is the Fortitude save DC against massive damage? Should the DC increase in an epic campaign?

Do you mean death from massive damage? The Fortitude DC is 15 (see Chapter 8 in the PHB or the combat section of the System Resource Document).

Frankly, I think death from massive damage is a stupid rule (see sidebar). I would not recommend kicking up the DC for epic campaigns. I suppose you could, however, increase the DC by +2 for every 50 points of damage a character takes (or whatever threshold you're using for possible instant death).



Death from Massive Damage

This rule has a fairly long history, going all the way back to the old AD&D game. It's intended to address some of the consequences that arise when characters start accumulating high hit point totals.

When players think they have hit points to burn, they can start doing some ridiculous things. One player character I know about kept a supply of daggers easily at hand by literally sticking them into his arm. Tales of characters simply flinging themselves into deep chasms because they knew they would survive the fall were fairly common some years ago.

The death from massive damage rule discourages players from deliberately exposing themselves to big slugs of damage, and it allows truly overwhelming attacks a chance to obliterate characters. So, for example, if a whole castle wall falls on you, there's a chance you will be killed outright no matter how many hit points you have.

I have several problems with the rule. First, it punishes

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fighter and barbarian type characters. These characters have more hit points than anyone else and anything that makes those hit points irrelevant makes these characters weaker.

More importantly, I think the way a DM runs a campaign has more influence over how silly the players act than any single rule can have. If the players don't value their characters' lives, they're going to take absurd risks, no matter what rules are in play. On the other hand, if players value their characters and they know that unexpected dangers lie in wait for them they will not expend their hit points foolishly.

Finally, consider what hit points are supposed to represent. Hit points are only partly derived from physical robustness; luck, persistence, defensive skill, and a general ability to sidestep a lethal attack have more influence on hit points. The death from massive damage rule shifts things more firmly back into the physical realm.

When I run a game, I only invoke the death from massive damage rule when I think a player deserves it. If you deliberately jump down into a crevasse of unknown depth, I have no problem calling for that Fortitude save. Of course, even if the character survives the fall there is likely to be a giant remorhaz or white dragon lurking down there to chew on the foolish character.

On the other hand, if I create a horrible fire giant fighter with Power Attack and Improved Critical, I do not force a save-or-die roll if that villain scores a lucky hit.

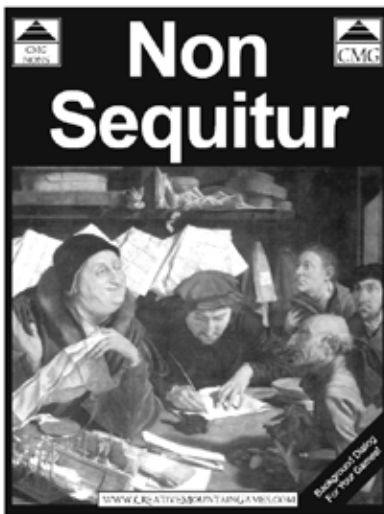
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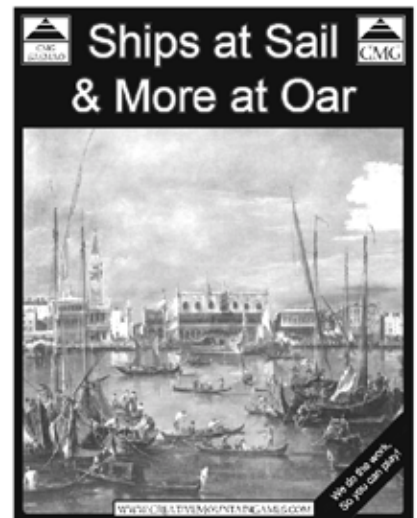


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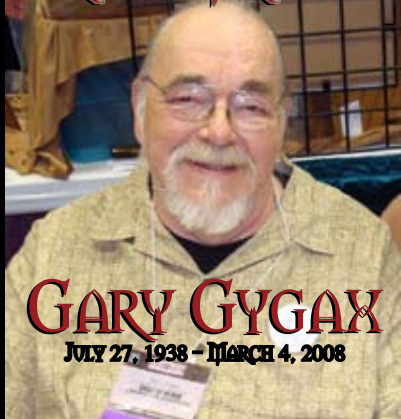


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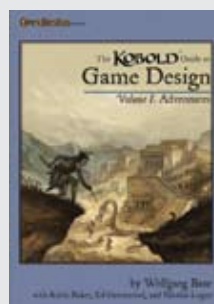
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Improving Your Improvisation

Campaigns by the Seat of Your Pants

by Nicolas Logue

In my recent OPEN DESIGN project, I examined what the screenwriter has to offer us hard-working Game Masters, and an excellent point was raised by many patrons that the techniques therein may provide for a very exciting single session of play (more akin to sitting down and enjoying a kickass movie), but they simply can't address the grueling task of creating the ultimate, full-length campaign.

In this article I will tackle the challenge of campaign design, but not in the way you might think. When I originally sat down to bang out this article, I skimmed my trusty Crafty TV Writing softcover and thought about a few of my favorite long-running television series to see if screenwriters could offer any insights for a full-on campaign. Well, they did; they offered me plenty of insights but, ultimately, left me in a dilemma. A campaign is nothing like a television series for one very important reason—you don't get to write the characters' actions and control what the protagonists will care about or do. The players do.

Exhaustively architecting a master plan for your campaign often leads to frustration when your players, as they are apt to do, completely destroy it and burn down the pieces left over. Your evil vampire duke plot seems like the shiny shiny joy to you, but when the PCs decide to flee his evil grasp and seek adventure on the high seas instead...well, there goes all that hard work right down the crapper.

Down with masterpieces says I. The best campaigns I've run in my life have had nothing to do with master plans and everything to do with running by

the seat of my pants.

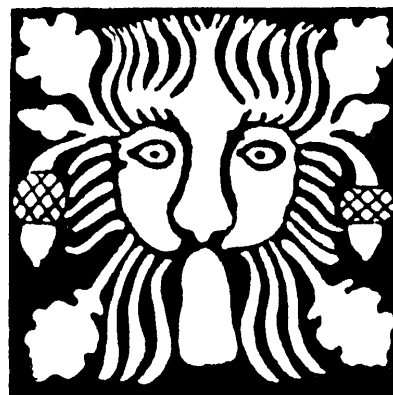
An awesome TV series might be the end goal we're shooting for in our campaign, but truth be told, the skills of a highly experienced improvisation actor are probably a better means to that illustrious end.

Talent at improvisation is often a gift, it's true, but it's also a learned skill set, and one with very clear guidelines and techniques that actors practice for years on end. Guidelines and techniques we GMs can steal and employ to great effect when enacting (note: not planning) a long-term campaign.

Winging it ain't just about making it up as you go along...no siree! It takes hard work. More hard work and, oddly enough, more preparation than crafting a scripted adventure path. But, if you give yourself in to the true spirit of improvisation, you will find your players will do a lot of the heavy lifting for you if you let them.

Defining the Setting... The Collaborative Way

In improvisation, everything happens through collaboration. Before you sit down to create your masterpiece campaign, you may want to have a preliminary planning session with your players to establish the setting together. In improvisation, you need to establish the particulars of the setting you are acting in very quickly to show your audience and your fellow actors where you are and what exactly is going on. In gaming, that audience and those actors are one and the same; very convenient.



In the case of a campaign, I suggest making it a team decision. Last year's Origins Award winning RPG is an excellent sci-fi game called *Burning Empires*. One of the coolest aspects of this game is a huge chapter devoted to what the game refers to as *World Burning*. In *World Burning*, the players and you put your heads together and decide what kind of planet/setting excites everyone the most. Do we want a high-tech universe ala *Star Trek* with interesting politics among multiple races? Do we want a low-tech world where space travel is hard, dirty, and dangerous, and the society on our homeworld is caught up in a horrible *World War* where a race for the effective weaponization of space is the key to victory for the PCs? Do we want to play in a *Firefly*-like setting?

For a fantasy game, it helps to offer the players some options, or let them dream up their own, and then compromise to make sure the campaign you all are playing satisfies everyone.

For instance, do you want high magic where the Arcane Council of archmages duels with a sprawling theocratic state whose god grants them near-infinite power over life and death? Or, are you and your players looking for a gritty, mud and blood, "swords and horses" genre game where magic is a rarity and heroes live and die by the sword. Do you want high intrigue or dungeon crawling galore? Do you want to play in the cold, hard, unforgiving tundra or in a floating city made of thatched-together derelict ships?

Or, are you all after a mix of several of the above styles? This will definitely be the case if you have several players with disparate interests. It's best to decide along with your players and even give them the chance to offer a few specific details to the setting.

Player A: "Hey can there be a dynasty in decline that is beset by enemies on all sides and rotting from within thanks to its own frivolous decadence?"

Player B: "Cool! I want horselords! Barbarians on the fringe who have long lived under the thumb of said dynasty and now see the chance to bring it down and dance in its ashes!"

The GM: "Excellent, are we talking a "hot" war? Or are we gearing up towards one? A wartime campaign might be a lot of fun."

Player A: "I'm okay with a hot war, though I'd really prefer gearing up, mostly because I'd love some crazy politics and intrigue going on behind the scenes. I want emissaries of the horselords at the dynasty's court, factions vying for alliances in these troubling times, and the like."

Player B: "What if we do the "gearing up" but with all sorts of border skirmishing going on...best of both worlds with wartime-mission adventure and political stuff and combining both?"

Player A: "Sounds kick ass to me!"

Player C: "I'm cool with all that, but let's talk magic...I really want magic to be mysterious and rare."

The GM: "Excellent: High or low magic...good question...let's rap about this some now..."

Even if you use a published setting, you still need to decide where and under what circumstances your group will go adventuring in that world. In a certain pulp fantasy setting, do we want a high stakes intrigue/espionage game involving the dragonmarked houses? Or do we want an campaign about exploring the unknown lost continent? If we are talking Golarion, do we mean a game on the wild frontiers of Varisia, the sun-scorched deserts of Qadira, or the bureaucratic beast that is Absalom with all its political perils and hidden knives?

It helps to prepare a list of questions for your players that pertain to the setting of the campaign. No need to probe too deeply, for after all, you want plenty of surprises and mysteries left for the PCs to discover in-game, but allowing them a little control over the basic premise, themes, and set pieces of your campaign is a sure fire way to get everyone excited from the get-go.

The campaign premise is the seed from which everything grows. Collaborate on it; plant it together and you are off to a good start.

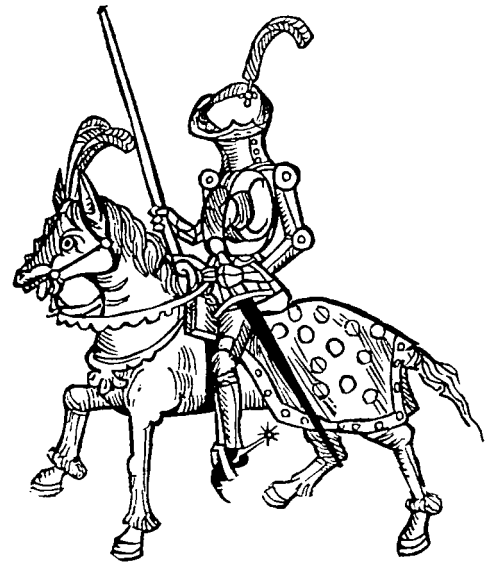
Make Offers, Not Plans

The first thing you do in improvisation is to make offers. You can't create an interesting scene with your partners if you don't offer fodder for them to play with and interesting hooks for them to pick up and run with. When designing your campaign, don't write anything in stone.

Instead, introduce NPCs, situations and conflicts, and introduce lots of them. Make lots of offers, and see which hooks the PCs bite on. Then you know you've got them, and you can give them what they really want out of the campaign. Work with them. Develop those offers they show the most interest.

Don't railroad the PCs into one path, but rather, place several options for adventure before them and see which they are most interested in. Be prepared to do most of your work on your feet and some in between sessions. For my first session, I like to throw the PCs several encounters I like to call "inciting incidents" (you might remember this term from the "The Play is the Thing" essay in the *KOBOLD GUIDE TO GAME DESIGN*). Prepare a bunch of encounters, not one, for your first session, and let the PCs seek out and involve themselves with any they like.

For example: Let's look at the setting we started building with Players A, B, and C above. Maybe the PCs are asked to find a missing eunuch of the court, and in the process, stumble across a street brawl between members of a



visiting horselord's entourage and some imperial guards, and then find a dead body behind a brothel the eunuch frequents (he likes to watch) and a secret missive concerning a plot to overthrow the Obsidian Throne sewn into the corpse's coat. BAM! Three offers. See which one the PCs want to follow up and then develop it before your next session. Make your campaign a buffet of exciting options. Not a boring, pre-ordered, three-course meal (here's your salad, now you *must* have your soup, then your entrée...you only get the fish, we're out of chicken).

A Nebulous Cast

Introduce some NPCs, but remember you don't need to know their ultimate role in the campaign from the beginning. After all, when you start watching *Deadwood*, you don't really have any idea who the bad and good guys are in the first few episodes. In George R. R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire*, characters you assume are good guys really aren't, and by book two, you find yourself rooting for a few characters you thought were definitely baddies before.

For example: Let's look at our "decaying dynasty with horselords on the frontier" setting. Instead of deciding the Big Bad Evil Guy (BBEG) is Arch Seneschal Matthias Rodalgo who plans to usurp the Obsidian Throne, hold on a minute. Instead, introduce a slew of NPCs, all with their own motives and

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machinations, and see which ones the PCs get involved with. When I create a campaign, I like to create a cast of suspects who all have BBEG potential, as well as a cast of NPCs who could be allies, neutral parties, or enemies to the PCs depending on how they choose to interact with them.

Assume nothing. If you create a paladin hero as a mentor to the PCs, one or more of your players may decide that their character hates this guy. Don't worry, don't fret, don't cry "Damn you stupid players!" Roll with it. You made an offer; they took it in a new direction. If the PCs hate an NPC you were hoping they would like and accept as a mentor, start dreaming up ways this NPC can become an interesting source of opposition instead of an ally.

The same is true of the "bad guys" you create. If the PCs think Matthias Rodalgo is the greatest guy in the world, and he is the breath of fresh air the empire needs to bring it back to its former glory, then cool! Find ways to make the Emperor sitting the Obsidian Throne worthy of the PCs' disgust. Be ready for anything, and don't chastise the party for not picking up on your leads. Instead, pick up on their leads and allow them to get excited about what interests them the most.

Agree and Add

In improvisation, the worst thing you can do is block another actor's offer by refusing to allow them to add to the story in the way they want. To really get your players involved in your campaign, you have to let them in.

Never block an offer. If the PCs decide to go west at that fork in the road, don't make them go east. If the PCs decide to slaughter the really funny/quirky troupe of thespians that you introduced to the story to help them—then that's awesome and that's what they get to do. If they decide to join the troupe of thespians who are actually assassins in disguise, then that's cool too! This may seem like rudimentary advice (No GM fiat!), but it bears repeating and remembering. And let's

take it a step further...

Agreeing is step one. You have to *add*, too. Adding is simply a matter of taking their idea, fleshing it out, and possibly introducing further twists on it.

For Example: If the players decide to create a resistance movement to act against the Emperor, don't shoot down this creative idea. Instead, make it the focus of your campaign. Come up with NPCs who might be interested in helping them, sure, but also create a few who want to spy on them (hence adding to their idea in a fun way that will create conflict).

Maybe the Emperor hears of the plot, and not suspecting that one of his previously loyal PCs could be involved in such skullduggery, invites that character to the palace to discuss this new threat at weekly meetings over a game of chess. This is another cool addition to the player's idea that allows one PC a chance to spy right back on the Emperor and puts them within striking distance when they decide to make their attempt on the Emperor's life).

Creating Conflicts, Not Scripting Them

For a campaign to succeed and truly give the players what they want, the conflicts need to be developed in-game, not scripted by you ahead of time. Introduce the above NPCs and provoke the party. See which ones they end up hating. Don't plan on them picking one. Be ready for anything.

Try play a character as incredibly self-righteous and see if the PCs take umbrage. If they don't, no need to force the issue, throw another potential adversary their way. Allow enmities to spawn based on the player's interests and, more importantly, their actions. Let the players make decisions and take action, letting the chips fall where they may. Make sure your NPCs are ready to react in myriad and interesting ways.

For Example: If the PCs intervene in the incident between the horselord entourage and the imperial guard described above and end up killing a retainer of the horselord, well there

ya go: instant enemy. Decide how the horselord intends to get payback. Does he kidnap the PCs cousin? Does he poison their mother? Does he defame and slander them, resulting in that PC being kicked out of the Imperial Court? Does he demand vengeance in a trial by single combat with the PC? Does he pretend to be grateful, since that retainer was his wife's idiot of a cousin who he always hated, so he can lure the PCs into a dangerous plot? Is he truly grateful that retainer was his wife's idiot cousin, but his wife is pissed as hell and plots her own revenge?

Add to the PCs offer (killing the horselord's retainer) with new and interesting offers of your own and BAM! You've got an awesome conflict, and the best thing is, your PCs are connected to it by decisions and actions they made in-game, not some master plan of yours that you dreamed up behind closed doors and then forced down their throats. These kinds of conflicts really engage your players in the action, and keep them coming back to the table week after week.

Have a Plan Just In Case

The above is all about improvisation, and these techniques create the strongest and most organic campaigns in my opinion. That said, what happens when your players decide to take no real course of action on their own?

You'd better have a planned adventure up your sleeve just in case.

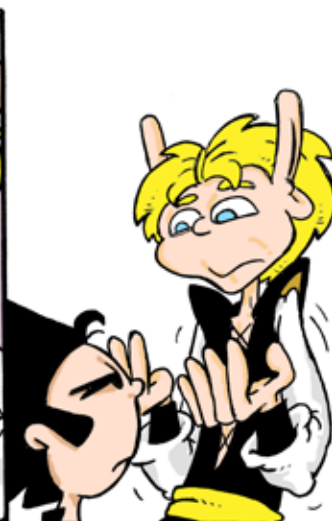
I belong to an avant garde theatre troupe that operates in New York and Hawai'i called Cruel Theatre, and the artistic director created their own special type of improvised shows. One might think that preparing for an improvised show is easy, but actually, it requires far and away more work than preparing for a traditionally scripted show. You have to be ready for anything. In particular, you have to be ready for an audience member who is passive, takes no real actions, and doesn't really do much with all your offers. In this case, you have to have something of a "score" or "framework" of a show up your sleeve to make sure they are entertained.

I suggest you come to the table with all of the above (inciting incidents; a host of NPCs who might be enemies, allies, or something in between; and a readiness to agree and add to ANY offer the players make), but you should also have a "scripted" adventure at the ready in case the party doesn't feel like initiating crazy stuff on their own and makes no real solid offers. Be ready to toss this plan at the first sign of your players' excitement about an offer (yours or theirs) but have it ready just in case.

Improvisation is a role player's best friend as far as I'm concerned, and it is especially useful to a GM.



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Unique Altars

by Phillip Larwood
Art by Joanna Barnum



Altars are a common sight in temples, shrines, abandoned ruins, and ancient crypts. Ranging from magnificent marble altars clad in satin and gold to crude stone slabs covered in foul litanies and melted wax, altars are used by the forces of both good and evil for devotion and sacrifice to a plethora of gods, demons, and various unknowable entities.

This article details 10 magical altars usable in any campaign. Each altar is built for a specific type of deity (or philosophy) but easily works for related deities without making drastic changes.

Sacrifice: Each altar requires a sacrifice of some type to activate its abilities. The sacrifice can be either a living creature or a valuable object, depending on the type of altar and the deity it is dedicated to.

Creatures sacrificed must have at least 1 HD though they need not be intelligent. Certain altars might require the sacrifice of particular creatures, including nonliving creatures such as constructs and undead.

Objects sacrificed must be worth at least 100 gp, and some altars require particular objects or types of objects. Most sacrificed objects are artwork, gems, magic items, or masterwork items.

Primary Power: All of the altars featured here grant a primary power that activates with the sacrifice of a creature or object placed atop them. For these purposes, lying, kneeling, sitting, or even standing on an altar counts as being atop an altar. Without this sacrifice, the power of the altar remains locked away. Unless otherwise noted, primary abilities

take the form of spells and usually have a Caster Level equal to the minimum needed to cast the spell. Sacrificial creatures or objects which are associated with the deity (or actively hostile to it) may increase the power of the primary ability when sacrificed, as noted.

Secondary Effect: Tied to the primary power, each altar also has a secondary effect. This effect can be purely cosmetic, or it may have some small game effect depending on the type of altar; it comes into play automatically when the primary power of the altar activates.

Altar of Darkness

This slender altar is made of polished black stone or paler stone painted in dark hues. Runes or symbols for darkness are written on the altar's surface or drawn on the altar in white chalk (these symbols are magical and do not simply wash off).

Deity: This is an altar typically dedicated to a god of darkness or night such as the Babylonian god Anhur. Gods of secrecy, subterfuge, thieves, or lies might also have altars like this in their temples.

Sacrifice: Activating the primary power of the altar requires the sacrifice of a living creature with at least 3 HD. Alternately, any art object or jewelry worth at least 500 gp can be sacrificed atop the altar.

Primary Power: As soon as the sacrifice is complete, the altar radiates a *deeper darkness* spell (CL 5th). If an object that sheds light (such as a gem of brightness) is sacrificed atop the altar, the *deeper darkness* effect gains the benefit of the Widen Spell feat or Extend Spell feat, as chosen by the creature performing the sacrifice.

Secondary Effect: Creatures that touch the altar are instantly struck blind unless they are a follower of the deity to which the altar is dedicated. A creature can negate this blindness with a DC 14 Will save.

Altar of Flame

Usually constructed of basalt, obsidian, or fire-blackened steel, the altar surface

looks scorched, and the smell of burnt flesh and charred wood hangs about it like a shroud. Its surface radiates heat and may contain a small fire pit for coals.

Deity: This is an altar typically dedicated to a god of fire or volcanic activity such as Surtur. Deities of destruction or metalworking might also have altars like this in their temples.

Sacrifice: Activating the altar requires the sacrifice of a living creature with at least 5 HD. Alternately, a wooden or metal object worth at least 1,000 gp can be burned or melted atop the altar instead.

Primary Power: Once the sacrifice is made, the altar summons a Large fire elemental to attack the enemies of the god. The fire elemental remains until destroyed or 24 hours have passed. Sacrificing a creature with the aquatic subtype atop the altar improves the resulting fire elemental with the benefits of the Augment Summoning feat.

Secondary Effect: The altar bursts into flame when sacrifices are made, and anyone touching or striking the altar takes 1d6 points of fire damage.

Altar of Gears (Machine Altar)

This altar consists of fused bits of machinery. Often the altar has working clockwork components or gears, though these move only when the primary power activates.

Deity: This is an altar typically dedicated to a god of invention, time, or industry. Deities of architecture, craftsmanship, civilization, or magical technology also may have similar altars in their temples.

Sacrifice: Activating the altar requires the sacrifice of a construct with at least 5 HD or an object worth at least 1,500 gp. Objects tied to industry or invention, such as steam-driven clock, tools, or a crucible, are the preferred form of sacrifice, but any well-crafted, expensive object will do.

Primary Power: With the sacrifice made, the altar becomes empowered with a strange form of techno-magical energy. This energy can be used to re-

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place the XP cost in the creation of any magic item or construct. Once used in this way, the altar returns to normal.

Secondary Effect: While energized, the gears and clockwork mechanisms on the altar whirl to life, creating a constant mechanical din. Blasts of steam or small electrical shocks accompany this movement though neither effect is powerful enough to cause harm.

Altar of the Green God

This natural stone slab hides beneath a thick layer of either moss or clinging vines. Druidic signs, leaves and fruits, or fertility symbols are engraved in the altar's surface.

Deity: This altar is typically dedicated to a deity of nature or harvest such as Demeter, the Greek goddess of grain. Deities of agriculture, forests, and rain often have similar altars in their holy places.

Sacrifice: Activating the altar requires the sacrifice of a living creature with at least 1 HD. The sacrifice usually takes the form of an animal such as an antelope, calf, or wild goat, though a particularly savage deity might require the sacrifice of a living fey or humanoid. Gentler gods might accept masses of wine, fruit, or grain worth at least 200 gp.

Primary Power: The altar produces the effects of an *entangle* spell within a 30-foot radius (CL 1st). This does not affect clerics or druids of the deity to which the altar is dedicated. All others in the area must make a DC 13 Reflex save to avoid becoming entangled.

Secondary Effect: The vegetation

covering the altar springs to life with plants writhing and twisting to some unknown rhythm. Any runes on the altar also glow with golden or greenish light.

Altar of Lust and Death

Erotic pictograms of humans and undead cavorting in various lewd acts cover this crude stone altar. Beautifully engraved lips adorn the top of the altar. The lips are painted black and sensuously parted to reveal several sharp serrated teeth.

Deity: This is an altar typically dedicated to a deity that embodies the principles of lust, fertility, and death, such as the black earth goddess Kali. Deities of envy, pain, and depravity might also have similar altars in their temples.

Sacrifice: Activating the altar requires the sacrifice of an intelligent living creature with at least 3 HD. A celestial of some kind is the preferred sacrifice, though just about any intelligent living creature will do in a pinch.

Primary Power: Any living creature within 30 feet of the altar must make a DC 15 Will save. Creatures who fail this save are affected as if by a *suggestion* spell (CL 5th) and offer themselves as food to the nearest intelligent undead (usually a ghoul or vampire), removing or discarding any weapons or armor in the process. As soon as the victim is attacked, the *suggestion* effect is broken.

Secondary Effect: Any sacrifice makes the lips atop the altar animate and moan pleurably, the sound at once both alluring and horrifying.

Altar of Magic

Hundreds of arcane runes and numbers decorate this simple stone altar. The writing includes snatches of spells, names of famous wizards, and various draconic symbols of arcane power. The whole altar shimmers with motes of pure power.

Deity: This altar is typically dedicated to a god of magic or knowledge such as the Norse god Odin or the Egyptian god Thoth. Gods of astrology, numerology, dreams, and writing often have similar altars in their temples.

Sacrifice: Activating the altar requires the sacrifice of an object worth 100 gp. The object is usually a spell component or a material used to create magic items, such as diamond dust (the dust is ceremoniously thrown over the altar and disappears).

Primary Power: When the primary power is activated, a 30-foot radius around the altar is affected by *detect magic* (CL 1st). Anyone with ranks in Spellcraft can check to see what auras the magic items radiate just as if they had concentrated for the requisite number of rounds. The power lasts for 1 minute before fading, and during this time, any magic item brought within the radius is affected. Spells that foil magical detection continue to function within the range of this altar.

Secondary Effect: While the primary effect is active, the runes covering the altar glow with soft blue or white light. Any magical scroll or tome placed on the altar can be read without the need to cast *read magic*. This does not take the place of the Decipher Script skill, and non-magical writings are unaffected.

Altar of Storms

Carved from the trunk of a lightning-struck oak and encircled by thick copper bands, this altar appears slightly scorched. The smell of ozone lingers around the altar, and anyone touching it receives a small electric shock.

Deity: This altar is typically dedicated to a god of storm and thunder such as Thor. Gods of disasters or of the sky often have similar altars in their temples.

Sacrifice: Activating the altar requires the sacrifice of a creature with at least 3 HD or an object worth at least 500 gp.

Primary Power: All allies of the faith within a 30-foot radius of the altar gain electrical resistance 10 for 30 minutes just as if a *resist energy* spell had been cast on them (CL 3rd). As a swift action, a creature can choose to end its electricity resistance to deliver a *shocking grasp* spell (CL 3rd) to an opponent.

Secondary Effect: The altar begins

crackling with electricity. Any creature touching or striking the altar takes 1d6 points of electrical damage.

Altar of the Sun

Crafted from a single slab of beautifully worked stone, this fabulous altar features carvings of sunrays and solar disks gilt with gold. Its sides are studded with topazes and other orange and yellow gems.

Deity: This is an altar typically dedicated to a sun god such as Ra. Gods of dawn, light, the sky, or prophecy might also have an altar like this.

Sacrifice: Activating the altar requires the sacrifice of an object worth at least 5,000 gp. Rare altars dedicated to evil sun gods might require the sacrifice of an intelligent living creature with at least 10 HD instead and often involve ritually cutting out the creature's heart and setting it on fire.

Primary Power: The creature performing the sacrifice is suffused with energy and can now cast a *sunburst* spell (CL 15). The creature retains this ability until nightfall or until the spell is used. Until the spell is used, no one else can access the altar's power; the altar grants the power to only one individual at a time.

Secondary Effect: While the primary power is active, the altar glows with intense golden light, and the gems on the altar burn with a bright inner fire. This glow is identical to that created by a *light* spell (CL 15).

Altar of War

This altar is made of hard basalt, polished iron, silver, or steel. The iron and steel versions often include weapons and pieces of armor fused, melted, or riveted together while stone and silver altars display glorious scenes of battle and carnage. Some altars consist entirely of rune-covered trebuchet stones.

Deity: This is an altar typically dedicated to a god of war such as Ares. Deities of chivalry, death, strategy, and slaughter might also have altars like this in their temples.

Sacrifice: Activating the altar requires the sacrifice of a warlike creature

of at least 2 HD (such as an orc or human warrior) or a suit of armor or a masterwork weapon worth at least 300 gp. Sacrificed creatures are often war prisoners or enemies of the faith.

Primary Power: All allies of the faith within 30 feet of the altar gain the benefits of an *aid* spell (CL 3). If the creature sacrificed is a cleric of an enemy faith or a champion of an enemy race, country, or organization, the *aid* spell is heightened to 3rd level (CL 5). The same benefit applies if magical armor or weaponry is sacrificed atop the altar (which includes suits of armor or masterwork weapons enchanted with a spell such as *magic aura*).

Secondary Effect: While the primary power is active, the sounds of battle can be heard in the distance and the altar gleams with pale red light.

Altar of Winter

This altar consists of glacial or frost-affected stone or, more rarely, of an enormous chunk of ice. Carvings often cover the altar's surface.

Deity: This is an altar typically dedicated to a god of winter and cold. Deities of darkness, entropy, hunting, or frost giants might also have altars like this in their holy places.

Sacrifice: Activating the altar requires the sacrifice of a living creature with at least 3 HD. Warm-blooded creatures are the preferred form of sacrifice, especially creatures with the fire subtype.

Primary Power: A *sleet storm* strikes the area, with the altar at its center (CL 5th). Creatures of the faith to which the altar is dedicated are unaffected by the spell, and they can traverse the area without slipping. If a creature with the fire subtype is sacrificed atop the altar, the *sleet storm* gains the benefit of the Extend Spell feat or Widen Spell feat as chosen by the individual(s) performing the sacrifice.

Secondary Effect: The altar radiates intense cold. Anyone touching or striking the altar takes 1d6 points of cold damage. If the altar is made of ice, any blood spilt atop it sinks within, staining it a ruddy crimson.



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For every
action,
there are
consequences.

Maximize Your Monk

by Ross Byers

Art by Jose-Manuel Benito

Monks are one of the most misunderstood of the core classes. They are fundamentally melee combatants, but they cannot take or deal the same amount of damage as a fighter, barbarian, or paladin. Many an unprepared player has taken their monk toe-to-toe and bitten off more than they could chew. So how do you play a monk effectively? By thinking, planning, and making the most of your unique abilities.

Know your Strengths and Weaknesses

Monks have a lot going for them. They have a decent armor class, a decent attack bonus, and the best saves in the game. They have great mobility, even stepping through dimensional boundaries. They are immune to disease and poison, are resistant to mind control, and can dodge many attacks. They can speak any language, can heal their own wounds, and can smash steel objects with their bare hands.

For all their powers, though, monks have weaknesses that they must be aware of in order to be successful. A monk's base attack bonus is equal to that of a cleric or rogue and is certainly nothing to sneer at, but a monk will have much greater difficulty cracking the highest armor classes than a fighter or barbarian. Likewise, a monk's armor class and hit points are both above average but pale beside those of a more hardened combatant. For these reasons, a monk should be cautious when engaging opponents dedicated to the art of melee, like dragons, giants, and many outsiders.



Bonus Feats

A monk gains a number of bonus feats as he gains levels. Any of his options are excellent choices.

Stunning Fist

Even though Stunning Fist is available to any character as a feat, it is one of the monk's signature abilities and granted as a bonus feat. Stunning fist allows the monk to stun his opponents, leaving them unable to act and vulnerable to attack. A stunned character or creature loses his dexterity bonus to armor class and takes an additional -2 penalty to AC.

Since this effect only lasts until the beginning of the monk's next turn, a stunning attempt is best used at the beginning of a full attack action or a flurry of blows; if a monk can stun his opponent on the first or second attack, his later attacks are much more likely to hit because the foe's AC will have dropped. Of course, even if the monk is only using single attacks, stunning an opponent can keep him from fight-

ing back or can leave him vulnerable to the monk's allies. Rogues, in particular, love stunned opponents because they can add their sneak attack to damage (because stunned opponents are denied their dexterity bonus to AC).

Stunning fist requires opponents to make a fortitude save, so it may not be the optimal attack to use against tough opponents like barbarians or giants. However, even at moderate levels, monks have a good number of stun attempts per day, so in situations where it is crucial to stop a foe from acting, it is worth considering using stun attempts in the hope that the opponent will roll poorly on his save.

An important, but oft-neglected effect of being stunned is that the creature drops all items it is holding, be it a handaxe or the dreaded Orb of Abyssal Imprisonment.

Improved Disarm

Monks forgo heavy weapons and armor of any kind. Why should an opponent be afforded that luxury? With a simple

disarm check, monks can force their opponents to face them on *their* terms.

The most important thing for a disarming monk is to have the right weapon. It is easy to be misled by the bonuses that nunchaku or sai provide to disarm checks and assume that they are ideal disarming weapons. This is not the case, because a sai's disarm bonus merely offsets its penalty for being light. It would be as easy to disarm using a club.

A quarterstaff, however, is ideal. Unlike the other monk weapons, it is two-handed, and therefore, it gains a +4 bonus on disarm checks. Use the quarterstaff, just like they do in the movies.

Improved Trip

Tripping an opponent leaves them prone and quite vulnerable (see "The Ups and Downs of Tripping Attacks" in KQ#1). Improved Trip, predictably enough, makes a character better at tripping. Improved Trip is an attractive prospect for a monk, as the initial attack to perform the trip is a touch attack, and the free attack that Improved Trip grants receives a +4 bonus since the target is prone. Given the monk's reduced attack bonus compared to an equivalent fighter, these effects are quite welcome.

A monk who plans to specialize in tripping is advised to carry a kama, in order to avoid an unfortunate reversal from a failed trip attempt.

Improved Grapple

Monks have a unique advantage when grappling: they may deal their full, enhanced unarmed damage with a successful grapple check. Improved Grapple, simply enough, makes the monk even better at grappling. Grappling can entirely shut down unprepared opponents, but a monk planning to specialize in grappling should be wary of opponents who can overpower him: grappling is based on a creature's base attack bonus, giving many opponents a head start.

Additionally, since larger creatures gain Size bonuses to their grapple

checks, there are times when a grapple just won't work. A grappling monk must be prepared to fall back on more conventional tactics when he is outmatched.

Combat Reflexes

Combat Reflexes allows a character to make many more attacks of opportunity than he otherwise could. Clearly, the way to make the most of this ability is to force foes to provoke attacks of opportunity.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to force opponents to drink potions, cast spells, or take risky combat maneuvers, short of using mind-controlling magic. However, when paired with Improved Trip, a monk character can force several opponents to make the unpleasant choice between provoking an attack of opportunity by standing up and fighting from a prone position.

Combat Reflexes has the added benefit of making a monk a more effective blocker, because foes risk several attacks of opportunity in a row when passing through a monk's threatened spaces.

Deflect Arrows

The ability to deflect incoming missiles is a straightforward defensive ability. To maximize its effectiveness, a monk should force his opponents to target him with ranged weapons instead of fighting in melee. Monks themselves make poor ranged combatants, so staying out of melee reach while remaining an effective fighter requires moving in and out of combat. A monk considering these tactics should consider Spring Attack as an option.

It should be noted that Deflect Arrows and Combat Reflexes are at odds. While Combat Reflexes suggests that the monk stay within reach of as many foes as possible, Deflect Arrows suggests that the monk stay far away whenever possible.

Ki Strike

Ki strike is a potent ability, allowing monks to overcome the damage reduction of certain foes. Ki strike (lawful) and ki strike (magic) are both straight-

forward abilities, but it is important to note that ki strike does not actually transform a monk's unarmed strikes into magic weapons. For instance, it does not allow the monk to strike incorporeal creatures. Ki strike (adamantine), on the other hand, has the interesting effect of also allowing the monk's unarmed strikes to bypass the hardness of most objects.

Sundering weapons is not the best plan, however, as an unarmed strike is considered a light weapon, and a monk is, therefore, automatically at a disadvantage when attempting to sunder using this ability. On the other hand, sundering held items like wands or holy symbols should be a snap. It is also possible to strike the newly unattended items that opponents drop (due to being stunned or disarmed, for example.)

Movement Abilities

Monks possess a suite of abilities that all serve the purpose of increasing their flexibility on the battlefield; these include fast movement, slow fall, and abundant step. A monk should use these abilities to strike wherever he is most needed on the battlefield, be it defending his more fragile allies, setting up flanking opportunities, or running down retreating foes none of his allies can catch. These innate abilities can be complemented with skills like Jump and Tumble and feats like Mobility and Spring Attack to give the monk truly unparalleled freedom on the battlefield.

Defensive Abilities

A monk gains a wide variety of resistances and immunities as he gains levels, from still mind to diamond body. There is not much thinking necessary when using these abilities, and the monk can simply laugh when attacks wash off harmlessly. Usually.

Diamond Soul

At 13th level, a monk gains spell resistance. Unlike his other defensive abilities, spell resistance is not all upside since it applies to beneficial spells cast by allies as well. Lowering spell resis-

tance voluntarily is a standard action and requires concentration to maintain. For this reason, it can be tricky to receive spells during combat, which is particularly worrisome with respect to healing. While wholeness of body can take up some of this slack, high-level monks should also carry healing potions as well as potions of any important spell effects they desire. Drinking a potion is not affected by spell resistance and will usually be faster than voluntarily lowering resistance. A monk may also suggest that any allied clerics or druids take the Spell Penetration feat, for it increases the chances that emergency healing will be effective while still being useful on offense.

Tactics

A monk fighting an arcane spellcaster is a contest made in heaven (as far as the monk is concerned, anyway).

With all good saves, a high touch AC, and even spell resistance, a monk is a spellcaster's worst nightmare. Ad-

ditionally, arcane casters have low ACs and Fortitude saves, making them ideal candidates to receive some kung-fu beatdown.

When he meets an enemy spellcaster, a monk should know his target immediately. He can use his high mobility to evade any bodyguard the spellcaster may have, and then, lock him out from casting spells in retaliation by using Stunning Fist or by grappling.

Monk Weapons

Monk weapons generally look less than exciting. Not only are they simple sticks and other peasant weapons, but a monk's unarmed strike will always do at least as much damage, so why bother? The first and most obvious reason is to diversify your character's damage types.

An unarmed strike deals bludgeoning damage. Against foes with DR/piercing or DR/slashing, a kama or a siangham is a better choice. This principle applies to special materials as well since it is

difficult to have one's hands cast of silver. A monk who carries a cold iron kama and an alchemical silver siangham can have most of his bases covered when it comes to damage reduction.

Since a monk can make unarmed strikes even with his hands full (think kicks, elbows, and martial arts slams), monk weapons only increase his options. A masterwork or magic monk weapon also boosts a monk's attack bonus, crucial for cracking those high-AC targets. The quarterstaff allows the monk to add 1.5 times his Strength modifier to damage (except during a flurry), so monks with high Strength scores should consider it as a way to increase their damage output.

The monk is a versatile character class: perhaps more versatile than one might realize at first. Keep some of these tactics and options in mind, and your maximized monk will have the best chance of success against any foe.



Coming Next Issue

Our GEN CON Special Issue. KOBOLD QUARTERLY is going to Indianapolis for GenCon, and we don't want to arrive empty-handed. So, next issue will be a little kobold's chance to show off at the big show.

The Truth about Tieflings by David "Zeb" Cook

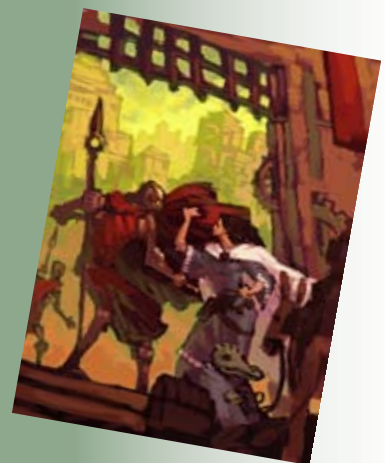
The creator of the tieflings talks about his creation and how they should REALLY work in your campaign, plus a new variant on this theme inspired by a mythos you might not expect. A master of the RPG field and the creator of the TSR planar campaign setting comes back to tell it like it is!

Crab Soothing by Joshua Stevens

The secrets of Zarik fortunetelling, plus rules for oracular pronouncements in any campaign.

Plus, an ecology we're ready to ride into town for, goodies for bards and rogues, possibly some ranger alternate class features, and clockwork magic. Maybe. Clocks might not keep time. Not to mention the great Skip Williams deliver a scathing rebuke of 4th Edition heresy (ok, not really) and an interview with Monte Cook.

We are 3E-tastic but 4E-friendly. Don't hate the KQ because it's bi-edition. It just wants to be loved.



The Horn of Triumph, the Harp of Despair

Magical Musical Instruments

By Stefen Styrsky

A bard's instrument is akin to the fighter's sword. It's the possession that identifies his class and channels his unique abilities. Yet compared to weapons and other items, magic instruments are much rarer.

Even when a bard does find a magic instrument, it might not be one he can use. The character with 20 ranks in Perform (string instruments) is out of luck if the *pipes of pain* turn up in a dragon's hoard. A fighter, on the other hand, can employ most weapons with a basic level of competence.

Using the enhancements and special abilities for weapons in the *DMG* as a base, similar add-ons can be applied to a bard's favored instrument—be it lute, whistle, or drum.”

Musical Enhancement

The music from all magic instruments is especially pleasing to the ear, and this is reflected as a +1 to +5 enhancement bonus that applies as a bonus to Perform checks. This enhancement bonus stacks with the +2 circumstance bonus to Perform checks granted by masterwork instruments, and this effectively makes the total bonus to Perform checks +3 to +7. As is the case with weapons, only masterwork instruments can be magically enhanced.

This total bonus applies to any Perform check, including those that determine the saving throw DCs for the bard's countersong and fascinate saving throws. For example, a +1 horn adds a +3 bonus to all Perform checks and, therefore, a +3 bonus to the saving throw DC of the fascinate ability.

Constructing a magic instrument

requires the Craft Wondrous Item feat. However, unlike other wondrous items, the cost of materials (namely the instrument) is not subsumed into the creation cost, and the instrument must be of masterwork quality.

The following table shows the base price of instrument enhancement bonuses. This price does not include the cost of a masterwork-quality instrument. Like weapons, the caster level must be three times greater than the enhancement bonus placed on an instrument, and the enhancement bonus cannot exceed +5.

Table 1: Enhancement Prices

Instrument Bonus	Base Price (gp)	Instrument Bonus	Base Price (gp)
+1	1,000	+6	32,400
+2	3,600	+7	44,100
+3	8,100	+8	57,600
+4	14,400	+9	72,900
+5	22,500	+10	90,000

Special Abilities

Besides enhancement bonuses, instruments can be granted special abilities. An instrument must have at least a +1 enhancement bonus before any special abilities are added, and its total bonus can never exceed +10.

Use of a magic instrument's special ability requires a standard action and at least 3 ranks in the appropriate Perform skill. Magical instruments are not limited to bards; anyone with the requisite skill ranks can use them. However, magical instruments do not grant bard class abilities.

Bane: A bane instrument excels at affecting one type or subtype of creature.



Any saving throw made by the designated foe to resist an effect from the instrument suffers a -2 penalty.

If the instrument also deals damage (such as through the *blare* special ability) it deals an extra 2d6 points of damage against the designated foe.

Moderate conjuration; CL 8th; Craft Wondrous Item, *summon monster I*; Price +1 bonus.

Blare: An instrument with the blare ability can emit a burst of damaging sound. Three times per day, the performer can focus this ability on a single target up to 30 feet away. The target takes 2d8 points of sonic damage and must make a successful Fort save (DC equal to the user's Perform check) or be stunned for one round.

Moderate evocation; CL 6th; Craft Wondrous Item, *soundburst*, Price +1 bonus.

Dancing: When commanded, a dancing instrument performs on its own for four rounds. If released, it will hover in mid-air and then drop after the fourth round. During this time, it can continuously use one bardic music ability that the owner possesses, but the ability used must be declared before the instrument is activated. This use counts against the bard's total number of daily uses of bardic music. The bard does not need to concentrate while the instrument performs and may use other bardic music abilities. After the performance, the dancing ability cannot be activated for another four rounds.

The instrument occupies the same space as the owner, and it is considered held by him for all effects that target items. If the user moves, whether through normal or magical means, the instrument follows him.

A user may also command the instrument to play a normal song without any special effects.

This instrument does not grant bardic abilities to non-bards.

Strong Transmutation; CL 15th; Craft Wondrous Item, *animate objects*; Price +4 bonus.

Despairing: When activated, a despairing instrument sounds like a damned soul wailing from the Abyss. The noise saps an enemy's strength and willpower. With the expenditure of one use of the bardic music ability, a bard of 3rd level or higher can cause all foes within 30 feet to suffer a -2 penalty on attack rolls, damage rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks. This penalty increases to -4 at 9th level and -6 at 15th level.

These effects last as long as the bard's enemies hear him play and four rounds thereafter. A Will save (DC equals Perform check) negates the effect.

Any creature that successfully saves cannot be affected by this ability for another 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting effect.

This instrument does not grant bardic abilities to non-bards.

Moderate evocation; CL 10th, Craft Wondrous Item, *crushing despair*, creator must be evil; Price +2 bonus.

Disruption: A disruption instrument carries positive energy in its notes. Three times a day a disruption instrument can target one undead creature within 30 feet. The undead creature must make a successful Will save (DC equals user's Perform check) or be destroyed. Intelligent undead gain a +5 bonus to this Will save. On a successful save, the undead creature still takes 2d8 points of positive energy damage.

Strong Conjunction; CL 14th; Craft Wondrous Item, *heal*; Price +2 bonus.



Table 2: Instrument Properties

Minor	Medium	Major	Special Ability	Base Price Modifier ¹
01-25	01-20	01-09	Bane	+1 bonus
26-50	21-32	10-15	Blare	+1 bonus
51-75	33-43	16-17	Harmony	+1 bonus
76-99	44-58	18-20	Screaming	+1 bonus
	59-71	21-27	Disruption	+2 bonus
	72-81	28-30	Interrupting	+2 bonus
	82-85	31-40	Reverb	+2 bonus
	86-95	41-59	Speed	+2 bonus
		60-71	Heroic	+3 bonus
		72-80	Spell Storing	+3 bonus
		81-85	Dancing	+4 bonus
		86-90	Orphic	+4 bonus
100	96-100	91-100	Roll Twice Again ²	--

1 Add to enhancement bonus on Table: Magic Instruments to determine total market price

2 Reroll if you get a duplicate special ability or if the extra ability puts you over the +10 limit. An instrument's enhancement bonus and special ability bonus equivalents can't total more than +10.

Harmony: With an accompanying harmony, an instrument imbued with the harmony special ability can be used to increase the save DC of another performance's effects whether by delivering an impressive duet of string instruments or by accompanying a stunning oratory or song. Three times a day, a bard can increase the Will save DC of another bard's suggestion or mass suggestion ability with a +2 bonus.

This instrument does not grant bardic abilities to non-bards.

Faint Transmutation; CL 5th, Craft Wondrous Item, *eagle's splendor*; Price +1 bonus.

Heroic: Instruments with this ability allow a bard to use the inspire competence, inspire courage, or inspire greatness abilities an additional two times per day. The instrument does not

grant use of these abilities if the bard is not of the appropriate level or does not possess the required number of Perform skill ranks.

This instrument does not grant bardic abilities to non-bards.

Strong Enchantment; CL 12th, Craft Wondrous Item, *greater heroism*, creator must be good; Price +3 bonus.

Interrupting: Three times a day, an interrupting instrument can be made to emit a grinding noise that blots out the verbal component of a spell. Upon activation, the instrument plays for up to three full rounds. During this time, any spellcaster attempting to cast a spell with a verbal component within a 30 foot radius of the instrument must make a successful Concentration check (DC equals user's Perform check). If the check fails, the instrument's vibra-

tion disrupts the spell and the spell is lost.

Moderate evocation; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *shout*; Price +2 bonus.

Orphic: A bard with this type of instrument may use his fascinate, suggestion, or mass suggestion abilities against undead three times per day. Each use counts against the bard's daily limit of bardic music.

This instrument does not grant bardic abilities to non-bards.

Strong Necromancy; CL 13th; Craft Wondrous Item, *control undead*; Price +4 bonus.

Reverberating: A reverberating instrument increases the duration of the effects of bardic music by three rounds. The bard does not need to concentrate during this time and may take other actions, including using other bardic music abilities.

This instrument does not grant bardic abilities to non-bards.

Strong Transmutation; CL 12th; Craft Wondrous Item, *Extend Spell*, Price +2 bonus.

Screaming: A screaming instrument emits a high-pitched yowl that terrifies other creatures. Three times per day, the wielder may target a single creature within 30 feet. The target must make a Will save (DC equals user's Perform check) or become shaken for three rounds.

Faint enchantment; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, *doom*; Price +1 bonus.

Speed: An instrument with this special ability can be activated with a swift action instead of a standard action. Bardic music played on a speed instrument can be maintained each round as a swift action but still prevents the bard from casting spells, activating magic items by spell completion or activating magic items by spoken word.

Moderate Transmutation; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *haste*; Price +2 bonus.

Spell Storing: Spell storing instru-

Table 3: Magic Instruments: Roll When Instrument Appears in Treasure

Minor	Medium	Major	Instrument Bonus	Base Price
01-70	01-10	--	+1	1,000 gp
71-85	11-29	--	+2	3,600 gp
	30-58	01-20	+3	8,100 gp
	59-62	21-38	+4	14,400 gp
		39-49	+5	22,500 gp
			+6 ¹	32,400 gp
			+7 ¹	44,100 gp
			+8 ¹	57,600 gp
			+9 ¹	72,900 gp
			+10 ¹	90,000 gp
86-90	63-68	50-63	Specific Instrument ²	--
91-100	69-100	64-100	Special Ability and roll again ³	--

¹ An instrument can't actually have a bonus higher than +5. Use these lines to determine price when special abilities are added in.

² See Table 4: Specific Instruments.

³ See Table 2: Instrument Properties for instruments.

Table 4: Specific Instruments

Minor	Medium	Major	Specific Instrument	Market Price
01-35			Pipes of the Sewers	1,150 gp
36-63			Pipes of Sounding	1,800 gp
68-83			Horn of Fog	2,000 gp
84-91			Chime of Opening	3,000 gp
92-98			Pipes of Haunting	6,000 gp
99-100			Horn of Goodness/Evil	6,500 gp
	01-33		Harp of Charming	7,500 gp
	34-62		Pipes of Pain	12,000 gp
	63-74		Lyre of Building	13,000 gp
	75-86		Horn of the Tritons	15,000 gp
	87-98		Chime of Interruption	16,800 gp
	99-100		Horn of Blasting	20,000 gp
		01-61	Drums of Panic	30,000 gp
		62-99	Horn of Valhalla	50,000 gp
		100	Horn of Blasting, Greater	70,000 gp

ments contain a single targeted spell of up to 3rd level. (The spell must have a casting time of one standard action.) Any time a musician uses the instrument, including using any bardic music ability, he may cast the spell at any target within 30 feet. Once the spell has been cast from the instrument, a spellcaster can cast any other targeted spell of up to 3rd level into it.

The instrument magically imparts to the performer the name of the spell currently stored in it.

Strong evocation (plus aura of stored spell); CL 12th; Craft Wondrous Item; Price +3 bonus.



“V” is for Vermin

Can there ever be too many kinds of slithering, crawling, biting, stinging, mindless, poisonous, chitinous bugs?

We don't think so.

by Aeryn Rudel

art by Michael Jaecks

For as long as I can remember, giant insects, spiders, and other creepy crawlies have been standard fare in fantasy novels, movies, and RPGs. Whether the infamous giant spiders in *The Hobbit* or the wonderful stop-motion scorpions in *Clash of the Titans*, big bugs abound. For RPG players, giant vermin are a common adversary in nearly all the major RPGs on the market. Most of us have at one time or another battled enormous spiders in dark, shadowy dungeons, faced down swarms of giant ants, or wondered if armor can be made from giant scorpion chitin.

As much as I love the standard giant spiders, centipedes, and scorpions that are so common in RPGs today, they pale in comparison to the sheer weirdness that other real-world vermin bring to the table. Our world teems with bizarre, poisonous, repulsive, and sometimes downright horrifying insects, arachnids, worms, and other invertebrate beasts. Surprise your players with new vermin the next time they embark on an underwater adventure, stroll along a placid beach, wander through an eerie forest, or enter a dank dungeon. The massive pincer bug, velvet worm, and sand worm present nasty tricks to make any PC's life a nightmare. Hopefully, they can find a home in your campaign, and give the giant spiders, centipedes, and scorpions a bit of a much-needed break.

The three new vermin featured here are all super-sized versions of real creatures, and each one features a nasty trick or two that can make a PC's life a nightmare. Hopefully, these giant versions of the pincer bug, velvet worm, and sand worm can find a home in your campaign, and give the giant spiders, centipedes, and scorpions a bit of a much-needed break.



Giant Pincer Bug (Earwig)

This massive beetle is a dark, chocolate brown and has a long, narrow abdomen tipped with a pair of enormous pincers.

Giant Pincer Bug CR 1

N Medium vermin

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +0

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14

(+1 Dex, +4 natural)

hp 19 (3d8+6)

Fort +5, **Ref** +2, **Will** +1

Immune mind-affecting effects

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.; fly 40 ft. (poor)

Melee pincers +5 (1d6+4) or bite +5 (1d4+4)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Special Attacks constrict 1d6+4, improved grab

TACTICS

Before Combat A giant pincer bug may occasionally hide in dense foliage and attack creatures that wander too close.

During Combat A giant pincer bug attempts to grasp creatures in its pincers, pinning prey in place while it bites with its powerful mandibles.

Morale A giant pincer bug attacks creature its own size

or smaller relentlessly and fights until killed. However, it may instinctively retreat from larger creatures (size Large or larger).

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 12, **Con** 15, **Int** –, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 2

Base Atk +2; **Grp** +5

Skills Hide +1 (+5 in forests or overgrown environments)

ECOLOGY

Environment warm forests and underground

Organization solitary, pair, or colony (5-8)

Treasure none

Advancement 4-6 HD (Medium), 7-9 HD (Large)

Level Adjustment –

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Constrict (Ex): A giant pincer bug deals 1d6+4 points of damage with a successful grapple check. It can make a bite attack against a grappled foe in the same round it constricts.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a giant pincer bug must hit an opponent of the same or any smaller size with its pincers. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict

Giant pincer bugs are large, carnivorous beetle that capture and kill prey with a set of powerful pincers on their abdomen. They are sometimes called “earwigs” as the young of these giant insects have the nasty habit of burrowing into the ear canal of sleeping humanoids.

Ecology

Giant pincer bugs are nocturnal predators that hunt the forest floor in warmer climes. Typical prey consists of small animals and other giant insects, but giant pincer bugs are opportunistic and often attack any Medium-sized or smaller creature that crosses their path.

Although giant pincer bugs can fly, they rarely do so and are rather clumsy in the air. Typically, a giant pincer bug takes wing only when threatened by larger predators or when seeking a mate.

A giant pincer bug is 6 feet long and weighs 175 pounds.

Habitat and Society

Giant pincers bugs live in warm, moist environments. This includes both tropical and subtropical forests and any large, lush cave systems. Being mindless creatures driven solely by instinct, giant pincer bugs have no social order.



Giant Velvet Worm

This gigantic, thick-bodied worm has gray, rubbery skin, and moves about on dozens of pairs of small, clawed feet. Its head is adorned with a pair of slender antennae, which wave about vigorously as the giant invertebrate turns in your direction.

Giant Velvet Worm CR 3

N Large vermin

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +0

DEFENSE

AC 13, touch 10, flat-footed 12
(–1 size, +1 Dex, +3 natural)

hp 32 (5d8+10)

Fort +6, **Ref** +2, **Will** +1

Immune mind-affecting effects

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.; climb 20 ft.

Melee bite +6 (1d8+6)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Special Attacks glue

TACTICS

Before Combat When a giant velvet worm detects prey by sight or tremorsense, it moves immediately to attack.

During Combat A giant velvet worm fires its glue at the nearest opponent and then attempts to bite the entangled foe until it dies. As a mindless creature, a giant velvet worm cannot deliver a *coup de grace* attack.

Morale A giant velvet worm flees if reduced to 50% or less of its starting hit points.

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 13, **Con** 14, **Int** –, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 2

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +11

Skills Climb +12

Ecology

Environment warm forests and underground

Organization solitary or pair

Treasure none

Advancement 6-10 HD (Large); 11-15 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment –

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Glue (Ex): Twice per day, a giant velvet worm can shoot thick strands of sticky glue from two glands behind its antennae at a single target. This is a ranged touch attack with a range of 30 feet. The glue hardens almost instantly when exposed to air, and a creature struck by the gluey strands must make a DC 14 Reflex save or become completely entangled and unable to move. An entangled creature is considered helpless but can attempt to free itself with a successful DC 14 Strength or Escape Artist check (a full round action). Creatures that succeed at the Reflex save are not entangled but are considered *slowed*, as the spell, for 2d4 rounds. Creatures size Huge and larger are unaffected by the glue. The Reflex save, Strength check, and Escape Artist DCs are Constitution-based.

Skills: A giant velvet worm has a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks and can always choose to take 10 on a Climb check, even if rushed or threatened.

Giant velvet worms are large, predatory invertebrates that immobilize prey with sticky strands of organic glue. They are voracious and quite dangerous, posing a serious threat to even well-armed groups of humanoids.

Ecology

Giant velvet worms are active, nocturnal predators that pursue prey vigorously. The worm locates prey by detecting minute vibrations through the ground with sensitive pads on each of its many clawed feet. Once a potential meal is detected, the worm targets its quarry with strands of sticky glue fired from two glands behind its antennae. This glue hardens immediately, and can easily trap and immobilize

prey, allowing the worm to dine at leisure.

A giant velvet worm is 14 feet long and weighs 900 pounds.

Habitat and Society

Giant velvet worms are found in warm jungles and occasionally underground. They favor dark, wet environments as their rubbery skin quickly dries out if not frequently moistened. Like many mindless vermin, velvet worms only seek out others of their kind to mate.

Giant Sand Worm

The placid beach before you suddenly erupts in a geyser of sand and grit, disgorging a gigantic, rubbery worm. Perhaps forty feet in length, the massive invertebrate has a thick, segmented body, and a bulbous head crowned with a nest of short, writhing tentacles. Within these waving appendages, you see a pair of black, horny mandibles, easily large enough to dismember a giant with little effort.

Giant Sand Worm CR 6

N Huge vermin (aquatic)

Init +1; **Senses** scent, tremorsense 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +0

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 9, flat-footed 14
(+1 Dex, +6 natural, -2 size)

hp 75 (10d8+30)

Fort +10, **Ref** +4, **Will** +3

Immune vermin traits

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft.; burrow 20 ft., swim 20 ft.

Melee tentacles +13 (1d6+8) and bite +8 (3d6+4)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks improved grab

TACTICS

Before Combat When hunting, a giant sand worm lies just below the surface and leaves only its tentacles exposed. It waits for prey to wander within range of its tremorsense.

During Combat A giant sand worm attacks anything that comes within range of its tremorsense. It attempts to snatch prey with its tentacles, bringing the unfortunate creature in range of its terrible jaws.

Morale A giant sand worm retreats beneath the sand when reduced to less than 50% of its starting hit points.

STATISTICS

Str 27, **Dex** 13, **Con** 16, **Int** –, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 2

Base Atk +7; **Grp** +23

Skills Hide -3 (+9 when it is buried in the sand), Swim +16
SQ amphibious, blind

ECOLOGY

Environment tropical shallows and beaches

Organization solitary, pair, or colony (3-6)

Treasure none

Advancement 11-20 HD (Huge); 21-30 HD (Gargantuan)

Level Adjustment –

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Immunities: Giant sand worms are immune to gaze attacks, visual effects, illusions, and other attack forms that rely on sight.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a giant sand worm must hit an opponent of its own or any smaller size with its tentacles. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and automatically deals bite damage.

Skills: A giant sand worm has a +4 racial bonus on Hide checks (+12 when it is buried in the sand with only its tentacles exposed). A giant sand worm has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

Giant sand worms are immense, blind, predatory worms found on warm, coastal beaches, and in tidal shallows. They are voracious carnivores, preying on all types of animal life, and even humanoids that wander too close to their burrows. Beaches infested with sand worms can disrupt shipping and trade in areas inhabited by intelligent, sea-going races. For this reason, adventurers and other mercenaries are often hired to clear areas inhabited by the worms—a dangerous undertaking to say the least.

Ecology

Giant sand worms construct burrows on wet, sandy beaches. These burrows are sometimes lined with a layer of crushed shell and mucus but are often simply holes in the sand. Typically when hunting, a sand worm lurks in its burrow with its tentacles extended above the surface. The worm locates prey by scent and by detecting the subtle vibrations of moving creatures through the sand. These two senses allow it to home in on any target with frightening accuracy.

A giant sand worm is 30 feet long and weighs 6 tons.

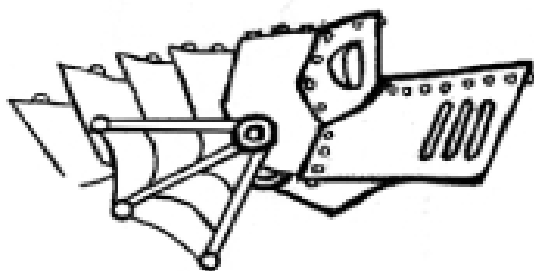
Habitat & Society

Giant sand worms are often found in small colonies numbering up to half-a-dozen individuals. However, these colonies are simply the result of worm larvae deposited in the same area, and no true cooperation exists among these mindless creatures.



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The Kobold Ghetto

By Wolfgang Baur

Art by Jeremy Corff

For many, living in a ghetto – dingy, crowded, walled off from the rest of the city – might be seen as a miserable fate, a hard life of poverty and an early grave. For the kobolds of Zobeck, this is actually an improvement.

Slaves and Worse Than Slaves

The kobold ghetto in Zobeck lies directly along the river and is a warren of streets which are no more than six feet wide (at best). Roofs meet overhead to keep out the worst of the sun and provide a great deal of sheltering shade.

The ghetto has only two entrances and exits, with gates that are carefully watched from both sides. Ruling over the district is a set of concurrent kobold “kings” or tribal chieftains, each of which has power so long as he keeps his relatives and feudal minions in line. One king generally holds the others in check until their united strength undercuts him; currently, that leading king is Brandorek, the 12th of that name. Few kings last more than a decade.

But more than 80 years ago, the kobolds were still slaves, and the ghetto was the kobold slave pen. They were the chattel of House Stross, the aristocrats who ruled Zobeck for long centuries. The Stross had an alliance with the worshippers of the Sun God that kept them in power. They used kobolds, thousands of them, to do all the dirty work of the city so that the humans and dwarves could work and live and philosophize.

Kobolds dug silver from the mines, built clever clockworks and worked with deadly steam and boilers for constructs and automatons that fueled Zobeck’s industry. As slaves, they were never written into the histories, but some believe they helped invent the everwound spring, the aeolipile gen-

erator, and the reciprocating balance wheel — and thus laid the foundations for Zobeck’s rise.

Now, the Ghetto is a place of free kobolds, the legal equal of any man or woman of the Clockwork City. But they remain a breed apart, keeping their own nocturnal hours, returning before dawn to spend the day in sleep and rest before returning to labor shortly before sunset.

The Inhabitants

While the kobold ghetto is a place that no respectable human or dwarf visits often, it is full to bursting with various kobold mine gangs, silver syndicates, followers of the Red Mask and related cults, and also with perfectly respectable servants and clockworker kobolds.

Clockworker kobolds deserve some notice; they are mechanically adept and trained by a Gearworker’s Guild. They serve as the protectors and stewards of the city’s many gearwork doors, bridges, gates, lifts, devices, and scullions.

Kobolds repair locks, wind-up keys, and gravity-fed devices. Unnoticed, they feed coal to boilers in the guild-halls. They are even responsible for winding up the springs and oiling the joints of the automatons of the town watch, though not its human and clockwright officers. This maintenance takes them to every corner of the city, but their dusty grey-green uniforms might as well be invisible.

The dock crews in Zobeck’s small but bustling harbor also make good use of kobolds, which allow them to maintain a working night shift. The river crews wear blue hats and work in sets of 3, 6, or 9, carrying crates as a team that a single human could carry easily. Most longshoremen from the day shift assume that kobold dock crews are corrupted by smugglers, but it seems to be the exception rather than the rule.



Big Trouble in Tiny Streets

Kobolds hold themselves as a breed apart, and are instantly suspicious of anyone who comes to visit them. While they can pass unnoticed among the rest of town as servants beneath anyone’s dignity, no human or dwarf can visit the ghetto without becoming an object of curiosity.

This makes it all the more interesting for the visitor, because it means that the kobold kings instantly take an interest in whatever the intruder is up to. Any combat in the ghetto is quickly hushed up by the kobolds; people disappear there all the time, and when kobolds die at the hands of outsiders, well, no one wants to talk about that either. Because it remains out of sight of respectable society, it is a perfect place for assassinations, gang fights, and plain old murder.

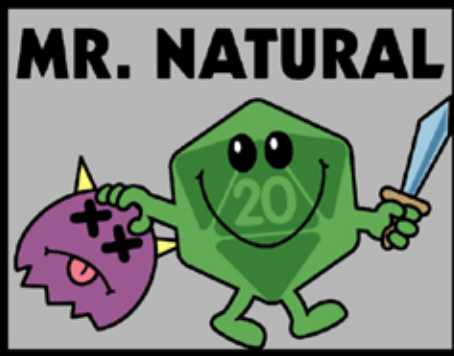
A Reptilian Heart

Somewhere under the streets of the ghetto are the king’s halls and queen’s boudoirs where kobolds fight, scheme, and gossip among themselves. The wilder stories claim these underground halls are just as large as the surface buildings, or larger.

The truth is that humans and dwarves largely don’t care what the kobolds are up to, as long as it means the drudge work of mining and maintenance is done cheaply and well. In return, the kobolds are granted one small patch of ground to call their own, and for now, that seems to be enough.

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