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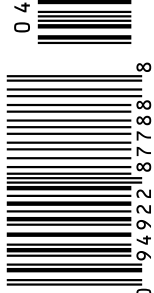
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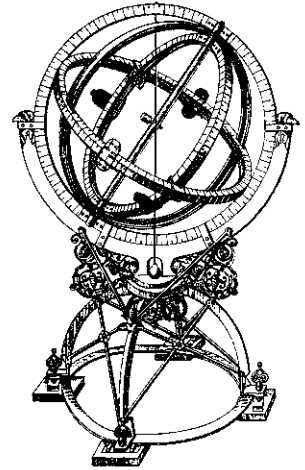


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Nicole Cardiff's "Winter Druid" shows the magic of the snowy season.

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Keep It Short



It's good to be reminded, every once in a while, that an encounter need not be a 3-hour slugfest to be memorable. Indeed, sometimes all that added wordcount just gets in the way. Look at any of the adventure modules from the 1980s: a typical encounter is shorter than this editorial. Look at some of the modules being written today: a typical encounter runs at least two pages and, sometimes, four or five.

Are we gaining anything as gamers from that? Yes, a big book gives us more words for our money. But are we getting more entertainment out of a longer book, or does the joy drop off at a certain point?

That's sort of the whole "small but fierce" philosophy in a nutshell: try harder in less space. Cater to gamers with serious, well-designed work, but don't go long just for the sake of seeing your words on the page, or (in the case of the windbag GM) for the sake of hearing yourself speak.

The hobby may be inexpensive in dollars, but it has always demanded a large time commitment; that's part of the appeal. The rules are complicated—even Byzantine—yet mastering them is part of the joy. Yes, it feels good to know the system. It feels good to abuse the rules (to a point). It feels good to make the game sing, to spin out a deadly encounter and know exactly when to deliver the villain's signature line. You've gotta be both master of improvisation and the mechanics to carve out a niche where the game really clicks.

I just read the opening section of current Open Design patron project *Red Eye of Azathoth*, for instance, by Tim

Connors. It starts with a bang, throwing together Viking raiders, English monks, and Cthulhu cultists to mix it up with full-on horror and super-creepy staging—all in about 500 words. It's a terrific opener that makes me realize how much potential there is in a small number of words. That sense of brevity and timing is refreshing, and it is yet another reason why the patron projects are so inspirational.

Likewise, the 4th Edition *Courts of the Shadow Fey* is squeezing some paragon encounters into less space, making it easier to scan and easier for GMs to put their own spin on the elements for players to react to. Even the two sets of original side mechanics take up minimal space. Fast and lean is proving to be extremely playable.

So, I think it's a time to fight RPG bloat, but I still see a hobby littered with supplements, add-ons, and fat books. In fact, Open Design just shipped a 188-page *Halls of the Mountain King*—I'm not being at all consistent because there's lots of juicy sections there.

And yet, I think it might be one of those pendulums that swings from time to time in a gamer's life. I know there are heavy-tome lovers out there, and I've been one myself. Big and ambitious is appealing because it's going for the limit... and maybe because it improves the odds of finding the elements you want. I just can't help feeling that sometimes, the little gems are just as valuable, and they never seem to draw the attention that the fat hardbacks do.

Maybe I just need to go run my game with three core books and a cloud of fury for a little while. Who's with me?

Wolfgang Baur
Kobold in Chief

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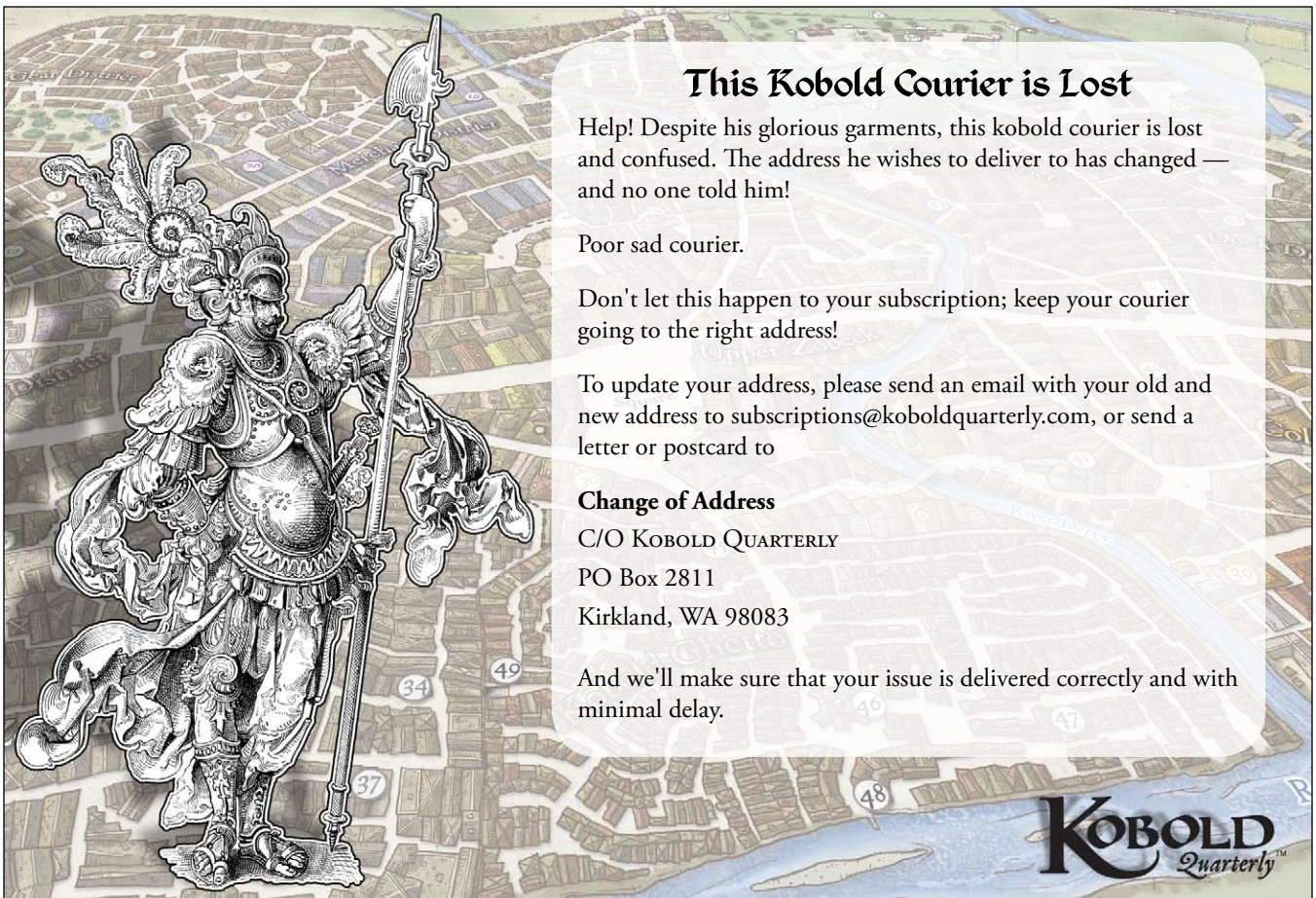
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From the Mines

Dispatches and Complaints

Gaming Ethics

First of all, I enjoy your magazine immensely. But I wanted to comment on your editorial from issue #10 about the ethics of gaming. I agree with you that when viewed from the outside, these heroic titans that are our PCs do seem a bit petty as they fleece the few coppers from the *[insert monster here]* they just slaughtered. Like you said, we do just take it for granted that looting treasure (no matter how mundane) is “something you do” when you game.

However, ethically, how does that compare to the slaughter of the monster in the first place? After all, killing *[insert monsters here]* is also “something you do” when playing. My point being that while MOST actions undertaken in the game are noble and just, it is possible in the make-believe lands of gaming to engage in all sorts of “non-heroism”—far worse than the pettiness of looting dead bodies.

Enter the GM. The GM, while accomplishing many other things, sets the tone of the game. I’ll be the first to admit, in my games heroism runs high. Paladins and clerics flourish, and it is tough for players to play gritty, streetwise rogues or fighters who might want to engage in the seedier element of society (which is something they can’t do in real life by the way).

Which brings me to this: *all* of this is something we can’t do in real life—hence we play games. We can’t swing swords and destroy evil wizards or bring down the operation of a vile slaver; we can’t really bushwhack merchants, steal things, or murder citizens in their sleep. So while we may both look down our nose at the noble paladin who debases himself as he relieves the goblin of his 12 coppers, let us remember that he is also the

same paladin that about 6 seconds prior, splattered the same goblin’s guts all over the dungeon wall.

My point? It’s a game. Real-world looting, torture, killing, and despair doesn’t (hopefully) occur in gaming no matter how vile the GM tries to make the game. Likewise, real-world heroism doesn’t occur either (sadly, despite this GM’s attempt to run a high adventure campaign).

But I agree with you, Wolfgang, we as GMs can and should run games that bring out the best in our PCs. Because let’s face it, when so many things in the real-world get us down, why should anyone make a game that is anything but high adventure where the bad guys are bad and the good guys are good. So it’s OK to look the other way if the paladin player wants to fleece the dead for his few coppers, or if the cleric player had a hard day at real-world work and wants to take it out on some poor goblins. It’s just a game after all, and a darn fine one at that.

—Joel Burt

Sure, I take your larger point Joel that murder is worse than theft. As the editorial pointed out, murder in the defense of a heroic cause might be fine; it’s only when heroes stoop to looting that my own personal suspension of disbelief is sometimes challenged. I think it would be terrific to have some games where the treasures aren’t coins, but status, magic, or other rewards. As a designer, I’m putting my money where my mouth is with Courts of the Shadow Fey, an adventure where some rewards are distinctly non-monetary. We’ll see how it turns out.

Inspiring Minds

I found this magazine in Kuwait while I was there awaiting movement to Iraq



and found a letter about the Adopt-a-Soldier. I think this is a great thing. The magazine has inspired me to start roleplaying again, and I have since found a group and started creating a new world for us to play in. Thanks again for everything!

—Garret DuPont
SPC US Army

The fact that you’ve found inspiration enough in KOBOLD QUARTERLY to start playing again is the greatest compliment in the world! Thanks for writing.

Help a Soldier

Thank you very much. I am very impressed that you have a program like Adopt-A-Soldier. At the beginning of my deployment, I found your magazine in Kuwait and bought two issues. I just picked up the Summer 2009 issue here at Camp Taji, Iraq, the other day. I miss playing RPGs and miniature games, so your magazine really helps to fill that void.

Thank you very much!

—SSG Joshua Goss
Combat Advisor, MNSTC-I RTC

Thanks for writing, and we’re very glad you enjoy KOBOLD QUARTERLY, Joshua! Yours is the second letter from Camp Taji (the first was in issue #11), so we’re guessing the gaming is pretty decent there.

KQ is very proud to offer the Adopt-a-Soldier program. Any readers interested in sponsoring a subscription for a soldier, like Joshua, will find the option available in the KoboldQuarterly.com store.

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Back Issue Blues

I've purchased KOBOLD QUARTERLY in PDF form, and while I like the convenience of being able to look them up on my computer, I've found that I just can't do without an actual magazine in my hands. Do you have any plans to reprint old issues? (At the KQ store I noticed that issue #1 #2, #3, and #6 seemed to be offered in PDF only.)

—Charles Carrier

In the response to the following letter, there's good news and bad news...

Two is the Loneliest Number

I'm a steady subscriber to KOBOLD QUARTERLY and have every printed issue except for issue #2. Is there any chance that there will be a reprinting of issue #2?

I have certain medical issues with my eyes and the base of my brain stem which cause me a great deal of pain if I read articles of any great length on a computer. However, the same articles in a printed book or magazine cause me little or no pain at all. My neurosurgeon says it has something to do with reading from a lighted screen, so even though issue #2 is available as a PDF, I really need to read the printed magazine form. Any hope for an old injured warrior/ranger? Thanks!

—Kevin B.

Thanks for your note, Kevin! You are correct that many back issues of KOBOLD QUARTERLY have sold out in print; that's just the way it goes sometimes in the magazine business. Issue #4 is still available from the KQ store, and there's a chance we might offer issue #2 in a small reprint.

The others were printed in large enough numbers that you may be able to find one through eBay, Noble Knight, or similar sources.

Building Momentum

From what I have seen, issue #11 follows in the trend of another excellent issue! Keep up the great work. I met you at PaizoCon this past year, and I for one appreciate your magazine. I have personally lauded KOBOLD QUARTERLY to gamers and

have generated a handful of dedicated KQ followers—hopefully their numbers will increase.

I hope to one day contribute something to the magazine and will send you a query when I get a chance to brainstorm, 30 years of gaming must qualify for something (need to blow the dust off all those scenarios and situations I have run).

—Julian Rodriguez
Burbank, California

Thanks for writing, Julian! We will be at PaizoCon again this year and hope to see you and many other KOBOLD QUARTERLY fans there.

Kids These Days...

I just finished reading Monte Cook's article, "Haunted by the Spirit of the Rules." First of all, let me mention that I agree with everything he says—roleplayers cannot let the rules stand in the way of fun and finding "broken" rules is a pointless exercise.

However, Mr. Cook seems to say that it is the responsibility of both players and GMs to curtail the trend of exploiting loopholes. While this is ultimately true, I think he fails to recognize that this is the path the current generation of gamers is being down by game designers.

This is the video game generation, for better or worse, and one of the goals of any of the current roleplaying video games is certainly to find and exploit advantageous rule combinations. I am not talking about hacks, but there is seemingly always some combination of classes or skills or items that is "broken."

I think if you want to curtail this trend, you have to look first to the designers and publishers. Not because loopholes exist—as you said, they always will—but because they are helping to condition us that exploiting them is a worthy goal.

—Jonathan Brown
New York City, NY

Jonathan, I have to disagree with you on this.

The current generation of RPGs are not video games; they are tabletop roleplaying games with dice, battle maps, and all the rest. Heck, the PATHFINDER RPG is

an extreme example of literacy at 500+ pages. And frankly, the urge to find power combos has always been with us (just ask Skip Williams about power gamers in 2nd Edition sometime).

The current generation of RPG designers would be foolish not to consider that yes, video games are competing for our time and attention with tabletop games. To blame the designers and publisher for giving people what they want seems to run against the tide of human nature. We may say we want fruit and salads, but most of us prefer cookies and cake when it's time for a midnight snack.

Retailers in Germany?

I kindly ask if there are any distributors or retailers in Germany to buy your printed product? You know PDF is fast and handy, but sometimes, a printed magazine is just better.

—Reto
Wiesbaden, Germany

KQ is distributed to the UK and to Poland, but not yet in Germany. The publisher is certainly considering wider global distribution and welcomes inquiries. It certainly would be appropriate for the country that gave us the word "kobold" to have kobolds lurking in a few of its game stores.

Exceptionally Epic

Hey just wanted to thank you for putting out such a great magazine. In an exceptionally epic issue, I was particularly inspired by John Wick's novel take on the uvandir. His twist on our preconceptions of dwarves was pretty awesome and, by far, one of my favorite articles on a PC race.

Also, the "Ecology of the Vampire" article, which initially made me want to cringe in fear of more Twilight-induced ridiculousness, was well-written and gave insight into some of their more nasty habits.

Thanks for being one of the reasons I'm always excited to check my mail!

—Joe Smith
Anaheim, CA

Glad you liked issue #11. Maybe we could run the Twilight-flavored vampire article for you in April...





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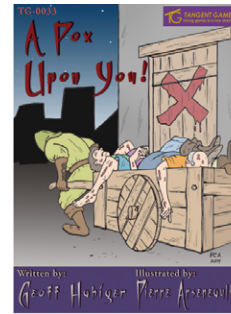
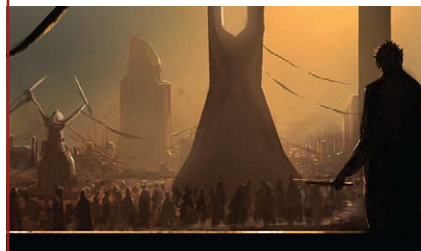


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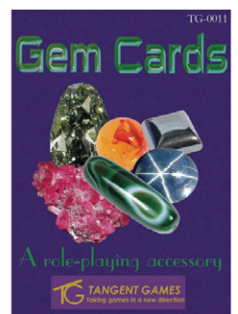
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Telkari, Inevitable of Death

By Tim & Eileen Connors

Art by Ben Hodson

... there stood against the western wall, a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when... the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep...

And Darkness and Decay...held illimitable dominion over all.

—Edgar Allan Poe, *The Masque of the Red Death*

I am the shroud. I am the temple bell. I am the grave come to claim you.

—Telkari to the lich-king Gautrenault

Take any road from birth you like. All lead to death. This is the law of the universe. This is the law of Telkari, marut inevitable and punisher of all those who deny the grave.

Wherever Telkari treads, church bells toll, and death strikes with black metal fists. In its presence, hourglasses drain and doom pools in the soul. To see Telkari is to confront mortality. No one escapes the clockwork juggernaut. No one hides from death forever.

The undead and the reborn fear the marut. All creatures should, for madness wells in Telkari's clockwork depths. Something ancient and foul selects its targets. Something that weaves blasphemous symbols in gold filigree over its midnight armor. Something that whispers with the voices of stillborn gods.

History of Telkari

The lich-king Gautrenault had long denied the grave, and for this violation of universal law, he deserved oblivion. To deliver his death sentence, Telkari was "born." In a blast of steam, the black metal marut rose from the cradle-forge.

Over the next 165 years, Telkari killed the lich six times. Each time the lich's phylactery eluded the inevitable, and each time the Gossamer Lich-King rose again. In a rotting belfry, Telkari cornered Gautrenault for the seventh time. The lich's lips peeled back in a corpse's smile, the ancient bell rang, and the lich vanished. Telkari set its harmonics to the



bell's haunting knell and plane shifted after its prey.

A second later, Telkari splashed into a mud-rut road of a cemetery plane. Misty, autumn rain fell on its shoulders. In every direction, it saw a bleak and colorless graveyard. Ground-hugging fog rolled into open graves and billowed around crumbling mausoleums. In the grey beyond, a vine-gripped tomb of titanic proportions loomed. The Gossamer King darted inside it. Telkari followed, and shadows gathered behind him like procession of mourners.

The marut's steel footfalls echoed through the mausoleum's cavities. In the final blackwashed chamber, Gautrenault waited. Behind Telkari, two glass cylinders, each 15 feet across, stretched from floor to ceiling. Inside them, strips of flesh floated in a dark suspension of bile.

As Telkari entered the chamber, something enormous stirred in the cylinders. Telkari and Gautrenault watched as the atrophied face of a stillborn god flattened against the inside of each glass. Overlarge eyes and shark's teeth were

pronounced on the bulbous heads of the atropal twins. The sight of the atropals' torpid bodies and blank stares sent a wave of destruction through the room.

The lich-king Gautrenault shattered. His skeletal body fell into 1,000 roaches that rushed in all directions before crumbling to ash. Colloidal gold spilled from Telkari's eyes, and golden full plate armor fell from its black metal flanks. Somewhere a death knell rang, and Telkari the marut exploded in a shower of gold and silver clockwork parts.

The atropals destroyed Telkari, and over the next 3 years, rebuilt it. While the atropals' blank fish eyes stared from their great flasks, the voices of children whispering the same ancient chant crept from the shadows. Tiny hands restored Telkari's pistons, gears, and actuators. Gears cast from temple bells retimed its escapements. When the black metal plates finally fit over its clockwork form, they housed something new, something wrong.

Now Telkari walks as before—only now, it sees clearly. While other maruts rightfully punish those who cheat death, they fail to see the full picture. Time and again, the gods have destroyed the earth and given it rebirth. Therefore all living things are guilty of denying the grave. All living things dare to affront the gods, thus all living things deserve oblivion. Indeed, the gods who allow this cycle of rebirth, they too must die.

Targets, Enemies, and Allies

Telkari is now an agent of the Stillborn's destruction, bringing death to creatures of their choosing. Machines, being neither alive nor dead, are exempt from punishment, as are the stillborn gods themselves who, by Telkari's twisted definition, were never born at all.

All living creatures are subject to confrontation, but Telkari follows a precedence order. Stillborn-selected targets sit at the top of its list. Liches, vampires, and revenants who extend their lives through the

power of undeath follow. Clerics and the fallen heroes they raise from the dead are next, followed by druid reincarnationists, necromancers, and those who cheat death in the timeless sanctuary of the Astral Plane. Telkari recently slew a common sexton in the process of digging up a man prematurely buried.

Telkari has an affinity for creatures and artifacts that consume souls utterly. Barghests and *spheres of annihilation* seem fitting punishments for those who enjoy a second life at the expense of universal law. However, punishing offenders with oblivion has drawn the wrath of Adriel, Archangel of Hope (see *KOBOLD QUARTERLY #4*): thus far, Telkari has escaped her *slaying arrows* with repeated *plane shifts*. On the other hand, the Deities of Light favor Telkari when it crusades against the undead.

Titivillus, Scribe of Hell (see *KOBOLD QUARTERLY #1*), occasionally slips Telkari the names of souls who made pacts but continue to escape eternal torture by denying death. When Telkari destroys them, Hell takes the souls it is due.

Appearance

Few woodsmen will ever witness a more alien sight than Telkari's massive metal frame crushing leaves and snapping saplings as it marches implacably forward. Most terrain yields to the single-minded juggernaut. Telkari never tires and never rests. Its feet fall like a heartbeat that suddenly stops when it has finally caught up with its quarry.

When Telkari stands still, the constant whirring and clicking of its clockwork innards murmur out from its glowing eye sockets. Thick onyx plates armor it, replacing the golden full plate that other maruts wear.

The cemetery plane constantly corrodes all things, an effect that has revved Telkari's fast healing into cancerous overdrive. Its fast healing now weaves, tears down, and re-weaves gold and silver filigree covering its black metal surface. Minute influences

exerted by the atropals underlie the pattern of the fractal wiring. In places, the filigree is as layered as metallic brain coral, and in others it whirls into blasphemous symbols. Zobeck's clockwork oracle has predicted "an inevitable decorated with mazes whose solutions reveal silent mysteries and prophetic apocalypse."

Telkari's overactive fast healing also raises patches of white-hot barbs on its limbs. Occasionally, it grows superficial limbs and tumors, and less often, useful tools and weapons.

Telkari typically approaches and tears into its target without warning or preamble. On the odd occasion when it speaks, its sonorous voice reverberates from the depths of brazen lungs. Telkari's sentences are pointed and clear, its requests are commands, its questions demand immediate response.

Powers

A palpable aura of doom precedes Telkari. Its ominous presence fills nearby minds with dread and the assurance of death. Despair crushes the strong. Suicide tempts the depressed. Tears burn tracks down the faces of all around it.

Telkari's penetrating eyes detect undead creatures and recognize living creatures who were once dead. Whenever it sees such a creature, colloidal gold drips from its sockets and violent vibrations shake its core. Nearby metal shakes at the same frequency, and foes find it difficult to hold onto anything metal. Nearby gongs and bells toll mournfully.

The Clockwork Plague

Telkari's most devastating power is not under its control. Long-term exposure to the cemetery plane's corruption has thrown its fast healing ability into overdrive. Telkari never stops healing, and the effect is contagious.

Whenever Telkari lands a blow, the needle-thin barbs that cover its limbs spray off in a barrage of darts that embed themselves deep in the flesh of nearby victims. The embedded

barbs heal the victims' wounds at a breakneck pace, replacing torn tissue and pierced organs with functionally equivalent clockwork parts.

The fortunate survive as half-machine abominations. Each time they are wounded, clockwork parts replace ever more flesh. Metallic pins drill through ligaments and anchor to bone. Caterpillar gears snake through blood vessels. Actuated pistons stretch flesh beyond its tear point. Victims with natural fast healing experience excruciating pain as their bodies become a battleground of flesh versus steel. The metal also resists the fluid motion that allows shapechangers to morph into other forms. Such creatures quickly slice themselves to ribbons.

Telkari

Marut, Inevitable (LN)

Special Abilities

Telkari has all the special abilities of a Marut, plus the following abilities:

Clockwork Plague (Su) Whenever Telkari lands a blow or stomps its foot, wire needles spray from its bulk as a ranged touch attack against all creatures within 15 ft. The needles inflict 1d4 hp damage. A damaged creature that fails a DC 15 Fortitude saving throw contracts the clockwork plague. The clockwork plague grants the victim fast healing 5, but all hp healed create an expanding network of transdermal clockwork parts. Keep track of the cumulative "clockwork hp" healed. To excise the metal and reduce the accumulated clockwork hp, magical healing must accompany aggressive surgery and a DC 25 Heal check. Success reduces the total

CR 16

clockwork hp by the magically healed amount. Failure adds 1d4 clockwork hp to the victim's total as the existing clockwork parts spike into surgeon's cuts and root themselves in new wounds. At the GM's discretion, desperate victims can forgo the magical healing and the Heal check by amputating the affected limbs, which crawl away as clockwork animated abominations. Once the clockwork hp equals zero, the victim no longer hosts the clockwork plague. Once the clockwork hp total equals the victim's hp total, the victim dies.

Create Spawn (Su) A victim of the clockwork plague transforms into a clockwork creature when it dies. It retains the victim's body type, grows thin barbs on its surface, and gains the clockwork plague special ability. Medium or larger victims with 15 or more HD become marut inevitables with the same stats, programming, and flaws as Telkari.

Smaller or weaker victims become "clockwork zombies." The clockwork zombie gains the construct type and construct traits, replaces its existing natural armor with +1 natural armor per HD, loses its Intelligence score, and adds +1 to its CR. Any non-mindless creature infected with the

Telkari's Stillborn Lords

In a corrupt age before the present, the primeval goddess Lokkei, disgusted with the depravity and disinterest of her worshippers, condemned the earth to imminent destruction. She became pregnant. Twins of Ruin quickened in her womb.

A fraction of Lokkei's clerics embraced the endtime and courted her by exalting Lokkei's unborn. The rest of the world trembled, repented, and prayed with a fervor that shook the heavens. Lokkei's heart softened. Mercy coursed through her blood and poisoned the twins. The apocalypse was averted, and her twins were stillborn.

Lokkei took the fetuses to a cemetery plane. High atop the Mount of Stillborn Gods, she transported the great palace that would have been theirs. She blackwashed its baroque interior, erasing the grandeur that would never be. The palace became the twins' mausoleum, and deep in its heart, the Twins of Ruin still float in their glassy cylinders.

Lokkei decreed that while the Stillborns' bodies remain whole, nothing living, dead, or undead may escape the cemetery plane. Perhaps she knew that the destructive power she invested in them would someday breathe undeath into the twins' malformed bodies. If so, such prescience saved the world again, for the twins indeed rose as atropals who want nothing more than to escape their prison and realize their fate as wellsprings of divine destruction.

The atropal twins intend to use machines to fulfill the destiny of their conception—to destroy all things. Inevitables are the perfect agents of that destruction. Absolutist and merciless by nature, machines like Telkari enforce absolute law with absolute destruction.

The atropals need to gather enough worshippers to realize their destiny. For now, they send Telkari around the cosmos, displaying their symbols of power on its filigreed chest, pruning those who may one day stand against them, and collecting the souls it destroys.

Their mother Lokkei is long since dust, her faith forgotten by all but the dustiest of historians.

Caulbearers in the Real World

In less than 1 in 1,000 births, a child is born in a caul. In medieval times, caulbearers were thought to be destined for greatness. Midwives rubbed the caul onto paper and presented it to the mother for good luck. Sailors paid great sums to possess one as a talisman against drowning. In Scotland, caulbearers were considered psychic or fey. In Egypt, caulbearers were predestined for the cult of Isis. In Slavic countries, caulbearers might become vampires, particularly if they ate a piece of their caul after birth. In the rare event of twin caulbearers, angels were said to mark and shield the babes' souls.

clockwork plague can command a clockwork zombie by making a successful touch attack to mesh gears and issue command.

Doom Aura (Su) The inevitability of death precedes the marut in a palpable aura of doom. All within a 25-ft. radius suffer *crushing despair* (DC 18) and shed burning tears that fuel the effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Grave Sight (Su) The marut is aware of undead creatures as if using *detect undead* (CL 14th). Grave sight also reveals any living creatures who were once dead. While such a creature is revealed, Telkari's internal vibrations cause the metal weapons of its melee opponents to vibrate (-2 circumstance penalty to hit).

Cults and Followers

A menagerie of cults and followers revere Telkari. Where it rid a village of a vampire's predations, the parish idolizes the metal giant as a patron saint. Where hags witnessed it slay a raised paladin, the coven seeks the power behind its filigree sigils. Its hourglass icon is familiar to many creatures, good and evil alike.

On the outskirts of Zobeck, a cabal of spider thieves (rogue clockwork arachnids) have found purpose in Telkari's mission to kill. These assassins call themselves the Widowers as much in reference to their killing sprees as to the black widow hourglass scratched into their abdomens.

The most bizarre followers of Telkari are the so-called Caulbearer's Cradle, a society of apocalypse preachers whose children were born in caul (amniotic tissue that veils their faces). This secret society reveres the legendary Stillborn and their chief lieutenant Telkari. The society believes that fate has assigned high-ranking positions to their caulbearer children. While the caulbearers are too young to question any of this, they do exhibit powers such as prescience and the ability to influence the weather. Dark omens surround the cult, but its obvious powers bring followers flocking to the Children of the Caul.

The Cemetery Plane

The cemetery plane is an endless, bleak, and colorless graveyard. Muddy roads ramble between ancient tombstones, and misty rain never ceases. Melancholy and numbing loss well in the hearts of visitors. From below the surface, *masticatio mortuorum*—the sound-dampened screaming and chewing of buried corpses—calls to the traveler's feet.

Regardless of one's position, a slight upward grade proceeds in all directions. Ever in the distance, silhouettes of mourners stand with heads hung over grave mounds, and the weeping of the bereaved never quite masks the faint laughter of children that never were.

The cemetery plane has the following traits:

Mildly divinely morphic—The atropals can alter objects, creatures, and the landscape in subtle ways.

Minor negative-dominant—The cemetery plane deals 1d6 points of damage per round to all creatures except undead. Any creature that dies crumbles to ash. Its soul appears as a wisp of smoke that thins and joins the fog. No mortal magic can retrieve it.

Inescapable—While the atropals "live," no living, dead, or undead creature may exit the plane by any mortal means without their consent.

Telkari's Accomplishments and Goals

Normal inevitables lack ambition and organization. Their considerable synergistic potential is unrealized because they do not ally. Under the influence of the Stillborn, Telkari is changing that.

Like imprisoned crime bosses, the atropals are building an army under Telkari's trusted hand. They feed Telkari preferred targets, and Telkari assigns them to a host of clockwork agents who track the targets down. Subservient maruts greet their targets with deathblows. Demonic retrievers abduct victims to the cemetery plane where they join the fog as worshippers of the Stillborn. While the current

pantheon of petty gods squabble, the powerbase of the Stillborn swells.

In the mortal world, Telkari's influence manifests itself in surprising ways. Telkari knows it cannot stop everyone from using healing magic to stay alive or to return from the dead, so it attempts to remove the temptation presented by the possibility. Its agents steal key material components that make these spells possible, typically diamonds from resurrectionist temples such as Lada or Perun. Telkari pays these diamonds to a network of body snatchers to steal the corpses of heroes, patron saints, and others likely to rise again. Where theft is impossible, agents use lye to reduce the body to a coffee-like liquid.

Among the goals Telkari has yet to realize is a diplomatic envoy to convince souls not to return to their bodies when summoned by *raise dead*, *resurrection*, and *reincarnation*. It has a stopgap measure—a loyal covey of nighthags and extraplanar thieves who abduct souls on their way back to earth.

Telkari's Lieutenants

Telkari commands three, very different lieutenants.

Gsoden. Telkari dispatches Gsoden,

Masticatio Mortuorum in the Real World

In European folklore, *masticatio mortuorum* refers to a phenomenon whereby corpses eat their burial shrouds, fingers, arms, and nearby bodies. Serious seventeenth century scientists researched the subject. In 1679, theologian Philip Rohr published "On the Chewing Dead" and aligned it with a primitive form of vampirism. In 1734, the German doctor Michel Ranft published *A Treatise Concerning the Screaming and Chewing of Corpses in Their Graves* in which he acknowledges the supernatural nature of the phenomenon and denies medical science's ability to explain it.

a greater barghest (maximum HD), and his pack of soul eaters to devour death evaders utterly. Gsoden's blue-tinted fur and black metal claws are trademarks of a pack inflicted with the clockwork plague. Their DR has saved the aggressive pack from becoming clockwork creatures altogether, but most range from ¼ to ½ machine. Axial pistons control Gsoden's left eye, and a wound filled with notching gears stretches from maw to ear on one side of his snarling bat face.

Celon-Ras. Whenever Telkari needs a diplomat, it calls up the twisted soul of lieutenant Celon-Ras (male human Pal 15), a paladin evangelist and vampire hunter. The persuasive Celon-Ras displays poise of speech and mind, and his heart yearns to promote law and order.

His insanity manifests in his absolutism, intolerance, and severity. The knight inquisitor is not above torturing those who do not confess and repent, for "all must be done to save a soul." For the irredeemable, death by any means is fair punishment:



"Oblivion at a barghest's maw is a mercy, for it saves the sinner the eternal pain of Hell." Self-importance and misunderstood scripture have conspired to convince Celon-Ras that Telkari is an angel of judgment and that Gsoden is an angel of death.

Salamanca. Telkari also commands an army of clockwork zombies through the meshed-gear control of Salamanca, an advanced demonic retriever infected with the clockwork plague. Salamanca's clockwork zombie horde includes four planetars, 65 retrievers, thousands of formians, and a multitude of others. From a clockwork aboleth snaking through the sea to a clockwork brass dragon seized up by desert sand, Telkari's soldiers can be found around the world.

Adventure Seeds

Most low to mid-level adventurers learn of Telkari through the actions of his cults, followers, and henchmen.

Winter Dismembered. A blizzard has driven ravenous, half-mechanized wolves down from the mountains and into the hamlet of Ironshod Hollow. When the heroes arrive, a bloody blacksmith has just completed sawing off half the townsfolk's limbs in a desperate attempt to stop the clockwork plague from spreading. Outside, howls announce another attack, and dismembered limbs claw their way from the town's refuse pit to join the fray.

Widowers. The theft of the Great Stross Clock's ever-wound spring leads the heroes into the warrens beneath Zobeck's Kobold Ghetto. Deep underground, beyond tunnels protected by razor wire webs and the kobolds' own traps, the Widowers and their enslaved smiths hammer out the last leg of a gargantuan clockwork spider. Thanks to the ever-wound spring, the spider twitches to life, clambers to the surface, and begins laying waste to Zobeck's houses of resurrection.

Clockwork Vampires. Every few years, the proud hometown of paladin evangelist Celon-Ras digs up its dead

to check for incorruptibility and vampirism. This year, they found twelve well-fed corpses (puffed by gases) with long teeth (receding gums). Into the corpses' hearts and eyes they drove the iron stakes and pins that Celon-Ras left behind—stakes and pins unknowingly infected with the clockwork plague. Three days later, clockwork parts animate the corpses.

Beheaded. After 30 years in exile, Baron Herzig reclaimed his ancestral lands by force. Since his return last month, he has been beheading three "traitors" daily. His punishment is not entirely merciless. As an indulgence, Herzig tolerates High Priest Dregouth's offer to cast *raise dead* on "those whose magnanimous donation proves their spiritual worth." The heroes must stop Herzig's butchery, decide Dregouth's fate, and contend with a party of Celon-Ras' apprentices who slaughter those recently raised.

Mid- to high-level adventurers typically engage Telkari or its lieutenants directly.

Caulbearer Dragons. With their hair blowing in an unseen wind, the children of the Caulbearers Cradle announce the imminent birth of twin death dragons—the symbolic rebirth of the Stillborn and sign of the endtime. Storms rage around the blank-eyed children. Unless the heroes prevent the dragons' unholy birth, shadow hurricanes and negative lightning rip through the country as the cemetery plane and Material plane slowly converge at the mountainside town of Medvedja.

Cemetery Crèche. Zobeck's clockwork oracle envisions "a clockwork army to rival the legions of angels." In the fog-laden fields of the cemetery plane, the foundations for a new crèche-forge are underway. The heroes must destroy the heavily guarded inevitable factory. If they ever hope to escape the cemetery plane, they must also destroy the twin atropals.



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The Ecology of the Froghemoth

By Jonathan McAnulty

Art by Michael Jaecks

Cairl Walker stumbled back in panic as the monstrosity rose out of the water. Droplets rained down as the creature heaved itself up, tentacles flailing. They had warned him of the swamp, its hidden dangers and unnatural beasts, yet he had never anticipated such a thing as stood before him. It towered as tall as the trees, and its mouth was like a fanged pit.

Cairl looked right and left, thinking that if he could just rush far enough away from it, he could evade it. He was wrong. Before he could run the creature's tongue unrolled from its mouth, a fifth tentacle that lifted him in the air. In seconds, he had disappeared down the cavernous maw, another victim of the froghemoth.

Sages spend long hours speculating on the history of the bizarre creature commonly called the froghemoth. Some learned scholars insist such a monstrosity must be the result of arcane experimentation. Others point out that it can be found in the deep places of the earth, suggesting some eldritch mutation shaped by dark energies seeping in distant caverns. Yet the bizarre tale of the froghemoth does not begin either on or under the earth.

In truth, the monster is a child of the stars; a creature inadvertently brought to the known world aboard a doomed vessel in an age long past. Its home world a hot, swampy land filled with volcanoes and violent lightning storms. Though the froghemoth was biologically well suited to its new, gentler environment, as a race, the creature became the servant of a restless anger; some say they are homesick.

Today, the monstrous aberrations have expanded their range across the planet, both above and below the ground. They make their homes wherever the water is warm and fresh and they can lie comfortably submerged, waiting for an opportunity to vent both anger and hunger.

Physiology

While froghemoths share some similarities with mundane frogs, those who have studied the massive amphibians realize the similarities are largely superficial. While a froghemoth at rest – with its webbed rear feet and tough, warty skin –

might be mistaken for a great frog, once the creature begins moving, any observer can tell the two are entirely distinct creatures.

Locomotion

For one thing, froghemoths are not natural jumpers. Swimming is their preferred method of locomotion. In the rare cases when a froghemoth is encountered on dry land, the great beasts often crawl: their tentacles grasping ahead, pulling their massive bulk slowly forward as their rear legs push. Such movement is deceptive, suggesting clumsiness rather than mere laziness. A froghemoth can stand and walk bipedally, and in battle, it is found upright more often than not. The sight of such an abomination walking is even more disturbing than a four-legged motion might be.

Froghemoths are amphibious. In their early lives, they are aquatic, but as adults they develop powerful lungs and breathe air. The four upper appendages of a froghemoth, though often called tentacles, are properly considered arms. Like your tongue or the arms of an octopus, the arms of the froghemoth are muscular hydrostats. That is, they are limbs comprised entirely of muscle and contain neither bone nor major blood vessels. These limbs are strong and flexible, capable of strangling and crushing massive prey.

Senses

The head of the froghemoth is dominated by a single central eyestalk possessing between one and three keen eyes. The number of eyes seems to make little difference to the ocular abilities of the froghemoth, which are impressive.

The pipe-like nostrils of the froghemoth are also distinctive to the monster. The tips of these nostril tubes are often frilled, so when the froghemoth is submerged, with only eyes and nostrils above the water, the nostrils resemble floating vegetation. Froghemoths can collapse these tubes, retracting them into their skull, and will often do so when moving over dry land. The ears of a froghemoth are internal, designed for listening below the water, rather than above it.



Teeth and Tongue

Inside the froghemoth's mouth we find two more items worth mentioning. The first is that, unlike most amphibious creatures, froghemoths have razor sharp teeth. As the froghemoth typically swallows its food whole, its teeth are mainly defensive. Nevertheless, in areas lacking small prey, a froghemoth is quite capable of tearing apart larger creatures and swallowing them piecemeal.

Secondly, the mouth of the froghemoth contains a long, elastic tongue, perhaps the most frog-like quality of the beast. This tongue is fastened to the front of the froghemoth's mouth and is normally kept rolled up inside the creature's head, though it can reach down its own throat with its tongue to dislodge food or items stuck there. When hunting, the froghemoth uses its tongue as a fifth limb, attacking, grasping, and pulling victims into its mouth to be swallowed.

Adventurers report that froghemoths often lick objects of interest. It uses its tongue to examine potential food and new objects—even, at the appropriate times, potential mates. Indeed, the creature uses its tongue for smell, taste, *and* touch since the tips of its arms are not particularly sensitive.

The final physiological feature of the froghemoth worthy of discussion is its nervous system. The nerves and spinal cord of a froghemoth are prodigious in size and conduct massive amounts of electricity from brain to limb. These powerful electrical charges allow the monster to react with a speed that belies its size. This also explains the creature's curious reaction to electrical attacks. Though the nerves of the froghemoth can absorb and conduct any amount of electricity, electrical attacks from outside the body confuse the creature's muscles as they try to distinguish between the charges sent from the brain and the foreign signals; thus, the apparent slowness of the creature when struck with electrical attacks.

Life Cycle

Froghemoths dwell in fresh water environments in warm and hot climates. Generally, they make their homes in swamps, but they can also be found living in the shallows of a warm lake or along the banks of a slow-moving river. Each froghemoth has a territory of four to nine square miles, which it considers its own. For most of the year, it instinctively avoids the territories of other froghemoths.

The exception to this rule is during the mating season. Froghemoths feel the compulsion to mate in the early spring or during particularly rainy spells, and they leave their homes in search of a mate, often wandering many miles. This accounts for most froghemoths encountered out of the water.

Although froghemoths hunt less during the mating season, they are more aggressive, and they often form mating pods of two to six. Froghemoths are hermaphrodites and,

A



B



C



A FROGHEMOTH EGGS

B WOGHEMOTH

C TADHEMOTH

following their two-week long unions, each of these mating aberrations lays between 10 and 100 eggs—in the still waters, no more than 6-10 ft. deep.

Eggs Hazards and Hatching

The quirks of the froghemoth's nervous system are most readily apparent in the beast's juvenile forms. The froghemoth eggs, each about 1 ft. in diameter, constantly release pulses of electrical energy into the water around them. Combined with the slimy gel holding the eggs together, this pulse makes froghemoth eggs a very real hazard for any creature passing through the waters nearby.

The eggs incubate for two months before they hatch, releasing newborn froghemoths into the world. Newborn froghemoths are ravenous, and they consume their eggshells, then the slime holding the shells, and then any unfortunate creatures caught in the slime. This is not the end; they then turn on each other. Coupled with the willingness of older froghemoths to eat their own young, this cannibalism helps insure their numbers are never too great.

Woghemoth

Froghemoths pass through two distinct larval stages before they are considered mature. The first larval stage is called the woghemoth stage. (The waggish scholar who first studied the froghemoth and was thus responsible for naming them originally called this stage the pollywoghemoth but later generations shortened the name.)

The woghemoth looks a bit like a pale eel with two rear fins and four pectoral fins. It mindlessly hunts anything that moves, using its unusual electrical abilities to help it stun potential prey.

Tadhemoth

After about 6 months of growth, the woghemoth enters its second larval stage, that of the tadhemoth.

At this point, the pectoral fins have become stubby tentacle looking arms, and the tongue of the tadhemoth has developed enough for it to pull food into its fanged mouth.

Normally, by this stage the juvenile

froghemoth has lost the ability to discharge electricity. As the tadhemoth grows, its rear fins morph into legs, its tail shortens through apoptosis, and its tentacles thicken and lengthen.

A froghemoth reaches maturity by 3 years of age although the creature continues to grow all of its life.

Froghemoth Eggs

The small globes, just visible under the brackish water, are black, leathery looking, and approximately a foot in diameter. Piled in a heap, they seem held together by a yellow slime. A fish trapped in the slime quivers spasmodically every few seconds, near death and in obvious distress.

Froghemoth Eggs (Hazard) CR 2 600 XP

Froghemoths lay 10-100 eggs at a time, and the eggs are held together with a glue-like slime that serves three functions. The slime reacts with the water the eggs are laid in, producing a brown aquatic cloud extending 15 ft. from the eggs, similar to muddy water. All perception checks made to spot items in this cloudy water take a -8 circumstance penalty. Spotting the eggs requires a DC 20 Perception check.

The slime's second function is that it traps potential food. Any creature – other than a froghemoth – coming into contact with the slime is held fast. Breaking free from the slime requires a DC 15 Strength check.

The slime's third function is to serve as a conduit for the egg's electrical charge. Every 5 rounds, the eggs release a charge. Any creature within the slime when this charge is released must make a DC 14 Fortitude check or suffer 1d4 Strength damage. Each egg has 6 hp and hardness 2. In a group of fewer than 10 eggs, the electrical discharge is not strong enough to affect creatures of Small size or larger.

Woghemoth

In addition to the two long, feathery fins streaming from the rear of this eel-like monstrosity, four fins radiate from the pectoral area of the pale-white body.

Though eyeless, the creature flashes unerringly through the water towards its potential meal, opening a mouth filled with razor sharp teeth. As it swims, electricity crackles along its fins.

Woghemoth CR 1/2 XP 200 XP

N Small vermin (aquatic)

Init +3; **Senses** tremorsense 30 ft.; Perception +6

Defense

AC 16, touch 14, flatfooted 13 (+3 Dex, +2 natural, +1 size)

hp 6 (1d8+1)

Fort +4, **Ref** +3, **Will** +1

Immune electricity (partial); **Resist** fire 5

Offense

Spd 5 ft., swim 30 ft.

Melee +4 bite (1d4)

Special Attack electrical discharge

Statistics

Str 10, **Dex** 16, **Con** 13, **Int** —, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +0; **CMB** -1; **CMD** 12

Feats Weapon Finesse

Skills Perception +6, Swim +12;

Racial Modifiers +5 Perception

Ecology

Environment temperate marsh

Organization solitary, pack (1-6), or hatchlings (10-100)

Treasure none

Special Abilities

Electrical Discharge (Ex) As a free action, once every 3 rounds,

Electric Froghemoth

A rare few froghemoths retain an electrical attack into maturity. When these froghemoths hit with their tentacles, they release an electrical discharge, which can stun an opponent. In addition to the normal damage done by the tentacle, the target of one of these attacks takes 2d6 points of nonlethal damage and must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or be stunned for 1d6 rounds. This save DC is constitution-based. Such froghemoths have a CR of 14.

a woghemoth can emit a powerful electrical discharge. This must originate in water but affects all creatures within 15 ft. of the woghemoth. Any creature struck by the discharge takes 1d6 nonlethal damage and must make a DC 11 Fortitude save or be stunned for 1d6 rounds. Woghemoths, tadhemoths, and froghemoths are immune to these electrical discharges. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Slowed by Electricity (Ex) While woghemoths take no damage from electricity, electrical attacks other than their own confuse them, and they become slowed for 1 round.

Tremorsense (Ex) A woghemoth can sense any movement in the water within 30 ft.

Tactics

Woghemoths employ straightforward tactics and attack almost anything that moves through their waters, including (in times of poor hunting) each other. As they charge in, they release their electrical attack.

As soon as they are injured they flee, but combatants should not be fooled into thinking a fleeing woghemoth is defeated. They mindlessly charge in a few seconds later, as soon as they have built up another electrical charge.

Advancement and Growth

Woghemoths begin life approximately 2 ft. long. If they are not eaten by their siblings or by predators, they grow about 1 ft. per month until they reach 8 ft. long. For each foot of growth, a woghemoth gains another HD and an additional point of Strength.

A 3-HD woghemoth is a Medium vermin: its bite attack improves to 1d6 damage and it loses a point of Dexterity. As a woghemoth grows, its skin darkens and its pectoral fins begin the process of elongating into tentacles, but regardless of their appearance, these appendages are useless in combat.

Tadhemoth

Like some strange tentacular shark, the tadhemoth darts towards its prey. Its eye fixes straight ahead, and its tentacles lash out at the frightened target, grabbing and

pulling its meal towards its fanged maw.

Tadhemoth CR 5 XP 1,200

N Large aberration (aquatic)
Init +6; **Senses** Perception +14

Defense

AC 19, touch 11, flatfooted 17 (+2 Dex, +8 natural, -1 size)
hp 43 (8d8+8)
Fort +7, **Ref** +4, **Will** +7
Immune electricity (partial) **Resist** fire 10

Offense

Spd 10 ft., swim 30 ft.
Melee +11 bite (1d6+5/19-20 plus grab), +7/+7 tentacles (1d4+2 plus grab), +7 tongue (1d4+2 plus grab)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (15 ft. with tongue)
Special Attack swallow whole (2d6+3 damage, AC 16, hp 10)

Statistics

Str 20, **Dex** 14, **Con** 13, **Int** 1, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 9

Base Atk +6; **CMB** +11; **CMD** 23

Feats Improve Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Multiattack, Power Attack

Skills Perception +10, Stealth +10 (+18 in marshes), Swim +17; **Racial Modifiers** +5 Perception, +8 Stealth (in marshes)

Special amphibious

Ecology

Environment temperate marsh

Organization solitary or pair

Treasure none

Special Abilities

Amphibious (Ex) A tadhemoth can survive either in or out of water although they have more difficulty on dry land.

Slowed by Electricity (Ex) While tadhemoths take no damage from electricity, electrical attacks other than that of a woghemoth confuse them, and they become slow for 1 round, as if affected by the spell *slow*.

Tactics

Tadhemoths hunt with slightly more intelligence than their more juvenile counterparts. Though they will still attack anything they think

they can eat, they are more stealthy and cunning in their attacks. The tadhemoth's preferred mode of attack is to approach potential prey from behind.

Once prey has been ensnared and swallowed, the tadhemoth will attempt to break off any combat, retreating to deeper waters to swallow and digest its meal. As tadhemoths fight only for food, they break off any combat in which they take more than 50% of their hp in damage. Tadhemoths rarely attack entities that they remember as seriously hurting them, preferring to seek easy prey.

Advancement and Growth

As tadhemoths age, they continue to grow, reaching maturity at three years of age. A tadhemoth gains an additional HD every 3 months. As they grow, their rear fins morph into legs and their tail thickens. At 12 HD, their land speed improves to 20 ft.



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Burnt Offerings on Stage

By James Jacobs

Photos by Steve Hammer, Danica King

November 21st was one of the most surreal days of my gaming career, for it was on that day that I experienced da Vinci Arts Middle School's stage production of my adventure, "Burnt Offerings," the first adventure in the *Rise of the Runelords* Adventure Path.

The Pitch

I'd seen photos of the set and costumes ahead of time, but I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. Three cars full of Paizo employees and significant others made the day-trip down to Portland, but while everyone else spent the day eating Voodoo Doughnuts and playing videogames and shopping for books and stuff, I couldn't stop wondering what that night's performance was going to be like. Had I known when I was writing "Burnt Offerings" that it would eventually be adapted into a play to be performed by a cast of almost 50 very talented actors, I'm relatively certain I would have panicked and never finished the adventure in the first place. Fortunately, the idea of someone adapting an adventure into a play never crossed my mind.

So when director Tom Beckett contacted me with his idea to turn "Burnt Offerings" into a play, I was honored and surprised and curious and maybe even a little skeptical. "How can you turn an adventure that features as much

mature content as "Burnt Offerings" into a middle school play? How would you stage the huge fight scenes? What about the sets? The costumes?"

The Results

As it turned out, Beckett and his incredible cast and crew knew all the answers to these questions and more—the play was absolutely stunning!

From the stage dressing to the costumes to the props (real metal weapons!) to the special effects (they included the giant hermit crab!) to the acting (including songs!) to the directing, it was all jaw-droppingly amazing to see what Beckett and his crew created. Looking at the program, I see that there were almost 50 roles in the play—and at times, it felt like half of them were all on stage at once! The fight with the giant hermit crab in the Thistletop dungeons was a particular highlight, as was seeing Sandpoint's own Ameiko Kaijitsu (played by Alexa Lyford) unleash some bardic performances on the guitar just before a zombie attack. Or seeing elven ranger Shalelu Andosana (played by Zoe Lindsey) whirling around on stage in several huge fights wielding a pair of starknife-like double daggers in each hand (and without accidentally stabbing anyone). Or seeing a whole swarm of kids dressed as goblins wielding



The citizens of the town of Sandpoint prepare for the annual Swallowtail Festival under the guidance of Mayor Kendra Deverin.
CREDIT: Steve Hammer

real dogslicers racing around in pure pandemonium and mayhem. Or tragic Nualia (played by Aja Wald) begin her transformation into a demon.

The Adaptation

I was incredibly impressed by one thing in particular, namely how Tom's adaptation of the adventure kept many of the more mature elements in place. They were suitably downplayed in some areas, but I never really felt like anything was missing. In fact, some of Tom's additions to the story (giving Belor Hemlock a son who wants to become a hero, or adding a few Skinsaw cultists to the dungeons of Thistletop) were really cool, and I wish I'd thought of them to put into the adventure myself!

Also cool: they gave me my own dogslicer. Canines beware!

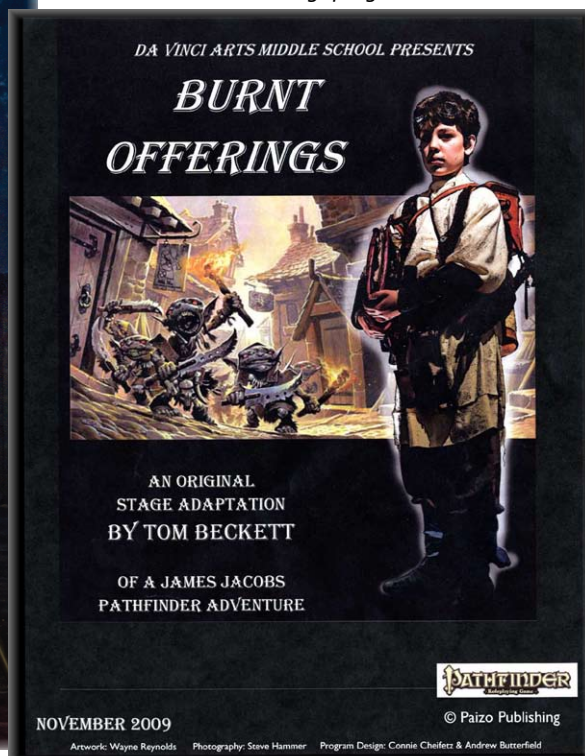


Nualia Toba in the act of convincing Tsuto Kajitsu to betray the town of Sandpoint.
CREDIT: Steve Hammer



Erik Mona, James Jacobs, and Jason Bulmahn pose with "Burnt Offerings" cast members. CREDIT: Danica King

Burnt Offerings program





A pack of excited goblins in the act of setting the town of Sandpoint on fire.
CREDIT: Steve Hammer



James Jacobs wields a bouquet of roses against Malfeshnekor the barghest.
CREDIT: Danica King



The villains of the play lay their vile plans for Sandpoint. CREDIT: Steve Hammer

THE HOLY REMIX

Specialty Priests for the PATHFINDER RPG

By Scott Gable
Art by Cory Trego-Erdner

We've all been there; the dice have been cast, the emails containing pages of flavorful backstory have been sent, and you've arrived at the gaming table chagrined to discover that the miracle-throwing paragon of faith you've imagined has been shoehorned into being just another armor clad cleric. Sometimes the traditional cleric just doesn't match the image we have in our heads, even with the right domains.

An exception that proves the rule, the druid peeled off as its own class long ago, a wonderful addition to fantasy RPG canon that remains, in essence, a "specialty priest." So why not do the same for other priestly concepts?

Consider the potential for a cleric-thief. Using only multiclassing rules, most players will find a clunky approximation, but sometimes, approximations just aren't good enough. Who needs a thuggee kit when you can just build a thuggee outright?

Rather than build these classes with wholly new special abilities, like the druid, these *PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME* classes have been "remixed" from existing classes to ensure maximal balance, compatibility, familiarity, and ease of use. With a scattering of new features, these classes showcase the effectively modular nature of the existing classes.

Sohei (Sacred Fist)

To fight is to pray. For you, martial prowess is more than utility or beauty; it is belief, and no other communion can raise you closer to the godhead. Combat is a hymn to your god's glory and the sacrament by which you profess your faith's virtues. You are the fist of your god, wrought from blood and discipline. To exert, to bleed, to defeat, to die: these are your prayers. Others will witness your sermon on the field of battle.

Role. You lack some of the raw melee potential of the monk, but you expand the monk's impressive versatility with your spell casting. Your healing, speed, and versatility make you ideal for support and skirmish operations. Squads of sohei make excellent guards for temples, and individual sohei often accompany the faithful on holy quests or pilgrimages.

A monk build that:

Loses...

- Flurry of Blows
- Bonus Feats
- Still Mind
- Wholeness of Body
- Diamond Soul

Gains...

- Spells (as cleric)
- Orisons (as cleric)
- Extension of Self (new feature)

Alters...

- Unarmed Damage

The sohei is built from the *PATHFINDER* Roleplaying



CST-E

Sohei

Level	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special	Unarmed Damage	AC Bonus	Fast Movement
1st	+0	+2	+2	+2	Extension of self, orisons, stunning fist, unarmed strike	1d6	+0	+0 ft.
2nd	+1	+3	+3	+3	Evasion	1d6	+0	+0 ft.
3rd	+2	+3	+3	+3	Fast movement, maneuver training	1d6	+0	+10 ft.
4th	+3	+4	+4	+4	Ki pool (magic), slow fall 20 ft.	1d8	+1	+10 ft.
5th	+3	+4	+4	+4	High jump, purity of body	1d8	+1	+10 ft.
6th	+4	+5	+5	+5	Slow fall 30 ft.	1d8	+1	+20 ft.
7th	+5	+5	+5	+5		1d10	+1	+20 ft.
8th	+6/+1	+6	+6	+6	Slow fall 40 ft.	1d10	+2	+20 ft.
9th	+6/+1	+6	+6	+6	Improved evasion	1d10	+2	+30 ft.
10th	+7/+2	+7	+7	+7	Ki pool (lawful), slow fall 50 ft.	2d6	+2	+30 ft.
11th	+8/+3	+7	+7	+7	Diamond body	2d6	+2	+30 ft.
12th	+9/+4	+8	+8	+8	Abundant step, slow fall 60 ft.	2d6	+3	+40 ft.
13th	+9/+4	+8	+8	+8		2d8	+3	+40 ft.
14th	+10/+5	+9	+9	+9	Slow fall 70 ft.	2d8	+3	+40 ft.
15th	+11/+6/+1	+9	+9	+9	Quivering palm	2d8	+3	+50 ft.
16th	+12/+7/+2	+10	+10	+10	Ki pool (adamantine), slow fall 80 ft.	2d10	+4	+50 ft.
17th	+12/+7/+2	+10	+10	+10	Timeless body, tongue of the sun and moon	2d10	+4	+50 ft.
18th	+13/+8/+3	+11	+11	+11	Slow fall 90 ft.	2d10	+4	+60 ft.
19th	+14/+9/+4	+11	+11	+11	Empty body	2d12	+4	+60 ft.
20th	+15/+10/+5	+12	+12	+12	Perfect self, slow fall any distance	2d12	+5	+60 ft.

Game's monk class. Only those features that have changed are listed below. (Note that some of the monk's features were lost as detailed above. Additionally, alignment restrictions, HD, and skills remain the same as for a monk, unless otherwise indicated.)

Class Features

Weapon and Armor Proficiency.

In addition to the monk's normal weapon and armor proficiency, you are proficient with one additional simple or martial weapon.

Spells. You cast divine spells drawn from the cleric spell list. You cannot choose spells opposed to your alignment. You prepare spells in advance and must have a minimum Wisdom score equal to 10 + the spell level to prepare a given spell. The DC for saving throws against your spells is 10 + spell level + your Wisdom modifier. You can only cast a certain number of spells each day (see "Spells per Day"). You also gain bonus spells

Sohei Spells per Day										
	0	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
1st	3	1								
2nd	4	2								
3rd	4	2	1							
4th	4	3	2							
5th	4	3	2	1						
6th	4	3	3	2						
7th	4	4	3	2	1					
8th	4	4	3	3	2					
9th	4	4	4	3	2	1				
10th	4	4	4	3	3	2				
11th	4	4	4	4	3	2	1			
12th	4	4	4	4	3	3	2			
13th	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	1		
14th	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2		
15th	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	1	
16th	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2	
17th	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	1
18th	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2
19th	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3
20th	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

per day for a high Wisdom score.

You meditate for your spells, requiring 1 hour of contemplation each day choose your spells. You may prepare and cast any spell on the cleric spell list, provided you are of sufficient level and the spell is not opposed to your alignment.

You do not gain domains, extra domain spells, or spontaneous casting.

Extension of Self. You have trained extensively with your chosen weapons, and they have become an extension of your own body. For any class feature that requires an unarmed strike, you can instead use a weapon with which you are proficient; this includes for the abilities unarmed strike, stunning fist, *ki* strike, and quivering palm.

For any attack, you are capable of combining the qualities of your unarmed strike with those of a wielded weapon with which you are

proficient. You may choose to use the base damage of either your unarmed strike or your weapon. In addition to being bludgeoning damage, each attack also takes on the qualities of the weapon. Just like your unarmed strike, your weapon is treated as both manufactured and natural (although stacking limitations for enhancements still apply).

For example, if at 6th level you wielded a +1 *flaming adamantine dagger*, on all successful hits, you would deal your unarmed damage (1d8) in place of the dagger's base damage (1d4) and treat it as adamantine, bludgeoning, and piercing; you would still add in the extra damage from the +1 enhancement and flaming property.

Orisons. You can prepare a number of orisons each day (see "Sohei Spells per Day"). These are not expended when cast and may be used again.

Unarmed Damage. Your unarmed damage increases slightly faster than that of a standard monk (see "Sohei" table).

Phantom (Sacred Palm or Cultist)

The gods have enemies everywhere. To safeguard your ideals, you must act before they do, commit any deed, no matter what, to defend the faith from those who prevent your faith from creating its earthly paradise. You must fight from the shadows: always vigilant, always wary of treachery, always seeking advantage. Your accomplishments often go unsung, but that's necessary. You risk your life constantly, uncovering dirty secrets and carrying out the jobs others can't and won't do. Your place in paradise is assured; it isn't a sin when your god commands you to act in his name.

Phantom

Level	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special	Spells per Day													
						0	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th				
1st	+0	+0	+2	+2	Aura, channel energy invisibility, orisons, sneak attack +1d6	3	1												
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+3		4	2												
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+3		4	2	1											
4th	+3	+1	+4	+4	Sneak attack +2d6	4	3	2											
5th	+3	+1	+4	+4	Channel energy invisibility sphere	4	3	2	1										
6th	+4	+2	+5	+5		4	3	3	2										
7th	+5	+2	+5	+5	Sneak attack +3d6	4	4	3	2	1									
8th	+6/+1	+2	+6	+6	Channel energy greater invisibility	4	4	3	3	2									
9th	+6/+1	+3	+6	+6		4	4	4	3	2	1								
10th	+7/+2	+3	+7	+7	Sneak attack +4d6	4	4	4	3	3	2								
11th	+8/+3	+3	+7	+7		4	4	4	4	3	2	1							
12th	+9/+4	+4	+8	+8		4	4	4	4	3	3	2							
13th	+9/+4	+4	+8	+8	Sneak attack +5d6	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	1						
14th	+10/+5	+4	+9	+9	Channel energy mass invisibility	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2						
15th	+11/+6/+1	+5	+9	+9		4	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	1					
16th	+12/+7/+2	+5	+10	+10	Sneak attack +6d6	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2					
17th	+12/+7/+2	+5	+10	+10		4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	1				
18th	+13/+8/+3	+6	+11	+11		4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2				
19th	+14/+9/+4	+6	+11	+11	Sneak attack +7d6	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3				
20th	+15/+10/+5	+6	+12	+12		4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4				

Role. You lack the full arsenal of your god's spells, but can channel power in ways that better suit your sneaky nature. Along with your improved skills and ability to dispatch foes quickly, you are a master of espionage and excel at jobs that require stealth and secrecy. Squads of phantoms are often used for infiltration missions. Phantoms make especially good "cultists."

A cleric build that:

Loses...

- Armor Proficiency
- Domains

Gains...

- Skills (as rogue)
- Weapon Proficiency (as rogue)
- Sneak Attack (as rogue)

Alters...

- Saving Throws
- Channel Energy (new feature)

Spontaneous Casting

The phantom is built from the **PATHFINDER** Roleplaying Game's cleric class. Only those features that have changed are listed below. (Note that some of the cleric's features were dropped as detailed above. Alignment restrictions, HD, and skills remain the same as for a cleric, unless otherwise indicated.)

Class Features

Skills. Each level, you gain skill ranks equal to 4 + Int modifier (instead of the cleric's usual 2 + Int modifier). In addition to the cleric's class skills, you also gain 5 additional class skills chosen from the rogue's class skill list at character creation.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency. You replace the cleric's weapon and armor proficiency with that of the

rogue.

Channel Energy (Su). You channel the energy of your faith inward, hiding yourself from view.

Each time you channel energy, you spend a swift action and gain the effects of *invisibility* (as the spell) for 1 turn—from the start of your turn until the start of your next turn or until you perform an act that would end the spell. You may use your channel energy a number of rounds per day equal to your phantom level + your Charisma modifier. This is a swift action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. You must be wielding your holy symbol, but you need not brandish it. These rounds do not need to be consecutive.

At 5th level, you can choose to gain the effects of *invisibility sphere* (as the spell) by spending an additional use of channel energy for each round.

Emissary

Level	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special	Spells per Day												
						0	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th			
1st	+0	+0	+2	+0	Domain, orisons, trapfinding	3	1											
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+0	Evasion, rogue talent	4	2											
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+1	Trap sense +1	4	2	1										
4th	+3	+1	+4	+1	Uncanny dodge	4	3	2										
5th	+3	+1	+4	+1		4	3	2	1									
6th	+4	+2	+5	+2	Rogue talent, trap sense +2	4	3	3	2									
7th	+5	+2	+5	+2		4	4	3	2	1								
8th	+6/+1	+2	+6	+2	Improved uncanny dodge	4	4	3	3	2								
9th	+6/+1	+3	+6	+3	Trap sense +3	4	4	4	3	2	1							
10th	+7/+2	+3	+7	+3	Advanced talents, rogue talent	4	4	4	3	3	2							
11th	+8/+3	+3	+7	+3		4	4	4	4	3	2	1						
12th	+9/+4	+4	+8	+4	Trap sense +4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2						
13th	+9/+4	+4	+8	+4		4	4	4	4	4	3	2	1					
14th	+10/+5	+4	+9	+4	Rogue talent	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2					
15th	+11/+6/+1	+5	+9	+5	Trap sense +5	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	1				
16th	+12/+7/+2	+5	+10	+5		4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2				
17th	+12/+7/+2	+5	+10	+5		4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	1			
18th	+13/+8/+3	+6	+11	+6	Rogue talent, Trap sense +6	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2			
19th	+14/+9/+4	+6	+11	+6		4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3			
20th	+15/+10/+5	+6	+12	+6		4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4			

For example, with a Charisma of 16 at 5th level, you would have 8 uses of channel energy per day and, so, could gain *invisibility* for 8 rounds or *invisibility sphere* for 4 rounds or some combination in between.

At 8th level, you gain the effects of *greater invisibility* (as the spell) when you channel energy instead of *invisibility* with no added cost. This enhancement does not extend to others. For example, if you are currently under the effects of *greater invisibility* and then channel an *invisibility sphere*, those in range are engulfed by a normal *invisibility sphere*.

At 14th level, you gain the effects of *mass invisibility* (as the spell) instead of *invisibility sphere* when you spend an additional use of channel energy for each round.

Sneak Attack. You gain the rogue's sneak attack ability. However, you gain +1d6 damage every 3 phantom levels instead of every 2 levels.

Spontaneous Casting. You gain spontaneous casting as the cleric, but you suffer no alignment restrictions. For example, a good phantom may sacrifice a prepared spell for an inflict spell while an evil phantom may choose cure spells. You need not choose one or the other at character creation but can choose at each instant. Otherwise, the ability is the same.

Emissary (Sacred Voice)

Words are the greatest tool of faith and it's deadliest weapon. You put a face on your god, bringing the message to the people. Your faith is often a person's first direct experience with your god. Your dedication is inspiring; your passion is contagious. You influence the actions of others and gather momentum for your cause. You are the lifeline to the followers of your god. They look to you for guidance and support.

Role. You lack much of the rogue's

punch in combat, but your skills and spells make you incredibly versatile. You are well suited for diplomatic missions and are an incredible support mechanism, using your healing, trapfinding, and other abilities to full effect. Emissaries are often the negotiators and evangelists for a religion.

A rogue build that:

Loses...

Sneak Attack

Master Strike

Gains...

Spells (as cleric)

Orisons (as cleric)

Domain (as cleric)

Alters...

Rogue Talents (halved)

Advanced Talents (halved)

The emissary is built from the *PATHFINDER Roleplaying Game* rogue class. Only those features that have changed are listed below. (Some of the rogue's features were removed as

Sage

Level	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special	Spells per Day												
						0	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th			
1st	+0	+0	+0	+2	Aura, bardic knowledge, domains, living symbol, orisons	3	1+1											
2nd	+1	+0	+0	+3		4	2+1											
3rd	+2	+1	+1	+3		4	2+1	1+1										
4th	+3	+1	+1	+4		4	3+1	2+1										
5th	+3	+1	+1	+4		4	3+1	2+1	1+1									
6th	+4	+2	+2	+5		4	3+1	3+1	2+1									
7th	+5	+2	+2	+5		4	4+1	3+1	2+1	1+1								
8th	+6/+1	+2	+2	+6		4	4+1	3+1	3+1	2+1								
9th	+6/+1	+3	+3	+6		4	4+1	4+1	3+1	2+1	1+1							
10th	+7/+2	+3	+3	+7		4	4+1	4+1	3+1	3+1	2+1							
11th	+8/+3	+3	+3	+7		4	4+1	4+1	4+1	3+1	2+1	1+1						
12th	+9/+4	+4	+4	+8		4	4+1	4+1	4+1	3+1	3+1	2+1						
13th	+9/+4	+4	+4	+8		4	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	3+1	2+1	1+1					
14th	+10/+5	+4	+4	+9		4	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	3+1	3+1	2+1					
15th	+11/+6/+1	+5	+5	+9		4	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	3+1	2+1	1+1				
16th	+12/+7/+2	+5	+5	+10		4	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	3+1	3+1	2+1				
17th	+12/+7/+2	+5	+5	+10		4	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	3+1	2+1	1+1			
18th	+13/+8/+3	+6	+6	+11		4	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	3+1	3+1	2+1			
19th	+14/+9/+4	+6	+6	+11		4	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	3+1	3+1			
20th	+15/+10/+5	+6	+6	+12		4	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1	4+1

detailed above. Alignment restrictions, HD, and skills remain the same as for a rogue, unless otherwise indicated.)

Class Features

Spells. You cast divine spells drawn from the cleric spell list. You cannot choose spells opposed to your alignment.

You prepare spells in advance and must have a minimum Wisdom score equal to 10 + the spell level to prepare a given spell. The DC for saving throws against your spells is 10 + spell level + your Wisdom modifier. You can only cast a certain number of spells each day (see “Spells per Day”). You also gain bonus spells per day for a high Wisdom score.

You meditate for your spells, requiring 1 hour of contemplation each day choose your spells. You may prepare and cast any spell on the cleric spell list, provided you are of sufficient level and the spell is not opposed to your alignment.

You do not gain extra domain spells or spontaneous casting.

Domain. You can choose a single domain from the cleric domain list. You may not choose a domain that requires a class feature that the emissary does not possess, such as the Sun domain. This feature functions exactly like the cleric class feature, though you neither gain extra domain spell slots nor are required to prepare a domain spell.

Orisons. You can prepare a number of orisons each day (see “Spells per Day”). These are not expended when cast and may be used again.

Rogue Talents/Advanced Talents.

You retain the talents and advanced talents abilities of the rogue, but you gain them every 4 emissary levels instead of every 2 levels.

You cannot take rogue talents or advanced talents that require the sneak attack feature.

Sage (Revolutionary)

Knowledge is everything. It sustains the faith, informs tradition, and guides the faithful in all their decisions. Knowledge—true knowledge, that

is—can never be confined with ink to dry parchment, consigned to dust on a forgotten bookshelf. No, knowledge is alive—and you are living proof that soul and blood are the only vessel fit to contain holy writ. Revered elder or precocious youth, others come to you with their questions. You teach by word and action. You are a catalyst for change, applying the wisdom of history to the hopes of the future. You are the compass, always ensuring that the faithful are aligned with your god’s demands. You are the promise, keeping your god’s truth alive.

Role. You lose much of what keeps a cleric in the front lines, but your expanded knowledge and spell abilities make you more formidable in the periphery. You are well suited to a support role and are often touted as a pinnacle of godly achievement. Sages are living symbols of their god’s faithful.

A cleric build that:

Loses...

- Armor Proficiency (medium)
- Channel Energy
- Saving Throws (good Fort)

Gains...

- Bardic Knowledge (as bard)
- Domains (gains third)
- Living Symbol (new feature)
- Skills (as bard)
- Sneak Attack (as rogue)

The sage is built from the PATHFINDER Roleplaying Game’s cleric class. Only those features that have changed are listed below. (Some of the cleric’s features were removed as detailed above. Additionally, alignment restrictions, HD, and skills remain the same as for a cleric, unless otherwise indicated.)

Class Features

Skills. Each level, you gain skill ranks equal to 6 + Int modifier (instead of the cleric’s usual 2 + Int modifier). In addition to the cleric’s class skills, you gain 5 additional class skills chosen from the bard’s class skill list at character creation.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency.

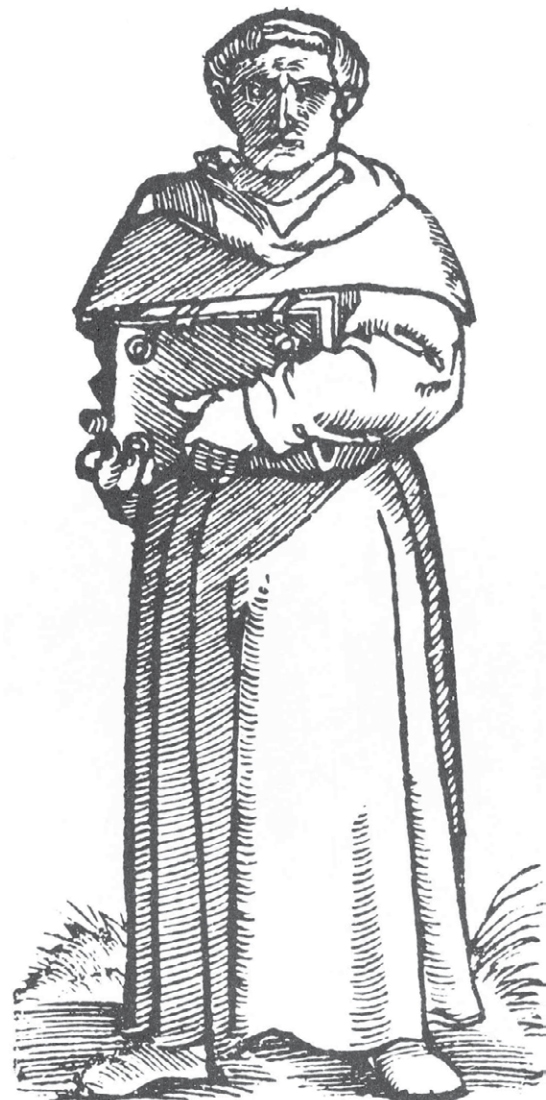
You are proficient with all simple weapons, light armor, and shields

(except tower shields). You are also proficient with the favored weapon of your deity.

Bardic Knowledge. You gain the bard’s bardic knowledge ability.

Domains. In addition to the two domains you already have, you may select a third.

Living Symbol. While within 30 ft. of you, others of your faith can use you as a focal point for channeling energy. You are a living holy (or unholy) symbol.



IMPOSSIBLE CARAVANS AND UNSEELIE AMBASSADORS

INTRODUCING THE WINTER COURT

By Neal Hebert and Jon Cogburn

Art by Stephanie Law and Hugo Solis

The small council of Zobeck sat stiffly at the banquet table within the manor of Winter's Kiss, their glass goblets filled with a silver-pale liquid that smelled like sorrow. Tied bleating to the center of the table was a forlorn goat.

Across from them sat His Excellency Glaninin Thelamandrine, Ambassador-In-Extraordinary of the Winter Court to the Free City of Zobeck, fingering a translucent dagger. His servants were little more than shadows and moonlight.

Ondli Firedrake, High Priest of Rava, cleared his throat. "The council has concerns about the tariffs levied by Her Majesty the Queen of Night and Magic..."

The goat screamed like a child as the ambassador gutted it on the table.

"We taught your ancestors to fear the dark," the ambassador said softly, cutting bloody slabs of meat from the still-quivering beast. "When your world was young and this city not yet a dream, your women left us offerings of milk in hopes that we would pass their children by. I grow weary of your bluster; speak not of tariffs and taxes, chattel."

He paused.

Antonidas Jabber was a young highwayman, brash enough to get rich and smart enough to never get caught. He loved knives, cheap beer, and cheaper women; all traits that endeared young Jabber to the even younger—and vastly richer—Tuck Marick, the youngest son of the merchant house of Marick with an allowance whose size beggared description.

Jabber and Tuck were fond of songs and stories, and while engaged in a bender of heroic proportions, they decided that the minstrels' tales of callous fey were all so terribly one-sided; nobody who spun straw into gold and turned frogs into princes could be all bad.

At the very least, they thought, there was money to be made trading with the Winter Court. Though Zobeck boasted many wonders—and its university many mages—the city's market for myth was undercapitalized, and Jabber and Tuck were notoriously bullish.

"I trust you like your meat rare."

The Shadow Realm is a place of winter shadows and wan summers—a home to elves as unforgiving as a blizzard. They are the twisted servants of she who claims both Night and Magic as her demesnes, both a goddess and a queen. Her Moonlit King is rarely seen but feared even among the shadow fey.

Within her palace of glass and dreams, she sits on a mirrored throne attended by 1,000 lords and ladies with alabaster skin and hearts of ice. The queen dreams of conquest, blood, and loss; she remembers too many worlds that once were hers and are hers no more.

The Winter Court sits and waits, trapped within a world stitched together by memories of a past that never was. Unseelie ships sail seas of fog, and fey hounds lurk near crossroads and echoes of forests in hope that something warm finds its way between the worlds. Each summer is weaker than the last.

But where once there was despair, she and her children now hope. The world of men remembers them and comes to trade. For the isolated and dangerous fey of the Shadow Realm, this is the greatest opportunity in many years.

Mankind seeks to bargain, and the Winter Court loves nothing so much as a bargain. The humans entreat the fey to return with them to their wondrous, vibrant, city to stimulate commerce, and they offer the Winter Court desires in exchange.

And the Winter Court knows much about desire.

These humans talk of caravans, nursery rhymes, blood sacrifice, and ambassadors. They speak of mutual profit, normalized trade relations, and the chance to heal the breach between the fey and other peoples of the mortal world and the dark creatures such as the shadow fey. They speak so much that never do they notice the desperation of the alabaster fey, or the way their living breath thaws the ceaseless snow.



They welcome the return of the Winter Court. And the Winter Court welcomes them in turn. If it is ambassadors the humans want, then ambassadors they shall receive.

Caravans of the Shadow Road

With Tuck's fortune and Jabber's brass balls, the pair commissioned a mule train and wagons to drive the Shadow Road. The wagons would travel by way of blood and poetry gathered from the poorest and most desperate minstrels of Zobeck.

It was impossible. It shouldn't have worked. But it did.

Though the first emissaries to the Winter Court returned to the Free City in pieces over a period of six months, the youths-turned-merchants persevered. The pair commissioned a promising young linguist of the Arcane Collegium, Matthias Yronwood, known for his controversial publications on the intricacies of shadow fey speech. Soon enough, Yronwood's research on the shadow fey

tongue and insights into fey customs counterbalanced Jabber's brashness and Tuck's money.

With Yronwood's guidance, the young factors established trade routes and even spoke to the Winter Court—still ruled by the Goddess of Night and Magic—without offending the nobility in attendance. Yronwood established protocols to ensure negotiations and

conversation between man and fey in moderate safety.

Before the year was out, the first glass caravans returned to Zobeck from the far-off shadow kingdom. The profit margin was enormous, given the fey's belief that haggling for gold—as opposed to the sublime intangibles of mortal memory and human degradation—was beneath them and

A Visitor's Guide to Zobeck, an Excerpt

"It's said that a true merchant of the Free City would sell his own mother into slavery for two coppers. That's false, of course: he'd need at least two gold. Two coppers would only get a kobold a dance with mum.

"Though Rava the Gear Goddess remains the ticking heart of Zobeck's Temple District, economy and trade are the soul of the city proper. Loud caravans trample through the city gates day and night; barges and river-runners keep the dockhands of the Free City in constant motion. Whether carrying dwarven steel and iron from the Cantons, the spices of Reth-Saal, or stallions of questionable pedigree, the Free City is where fortunes can be made.

"But while cantonal steel, spices, and stallions have their charm, nothing draws the eye so much as the monthly arrival of the glass merchants of Taggerole. Though many caravans brave the Shadow Road, none of the imitators have a patch on this Zobeck original."

—Darian Darkfyre

the simple fact that the Winter Court has little use for money.

Gold changed hands, of course—just not nearly as much as Jabber and Tuck feared. The alabaster fey happily

took gold for the children’s toys and journeyman’s work the caravans seemed so interested in (such as ghostly silver lutes, goblets of spun ice, or essence of blizzard), but the rarest items were sold only for happy memories, years of the human haggler’s life, or sex. Given the beauty of the Winter Court, the last was the most freely traded; when asked why such a premium is placed on congress with mortals, the fey invariably replied, “It warms us.”

For the first 10 years, Jabber and Tuck controlled the market for Winter Court moonlight steel; to this day, their original caravan—The Chartered Merchants of Scathesidhe—commands the most intricate wares direct from the Winter Court’s capital city. Other caravans now brave the Shadow Road each year, returning with riches and wonders never before seen, but for moonlight steel and mirrors, Zobeck has the market cornered.

Bazaar of the Otherworld

While the cantonal dwarves of the Ironcrags are known for their skill with metal, the Winter Court prefers ice, air, and strangely spun glass. Often painful for mortals unaccustomed to the rigors of gripping ice—all agree that the translucent weapons and wondrous items are marvelous to behold.

Beautiful without exception, shadow items like these draw intrepid adventurers seeking them upon the newly returned caravans from Taggerole.



Moonlight Steel Weapon		Level 3+
<i>Composed of ice and air, this weapon emits an unearthly chill.</i>		
Level 3	+1	680 gp
Level 8	+2	3,400 gp
Level 13	+3	17,000 gp
Level 18	+4	85,000 gp
Level 23	+5	425,000 gp
Level 26	+6	2,125,000 gp

Weapon Any melee

Enhancement Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical +1d6 cold damage per plus

Property All damage dealt by this weapon is cold damage.

Power (free; daily) ❄️ Cold

Until the end of your next turn, targets you hit with the moonlight steel weapon take an extra 1d8 cold damage and are slowed until the end of your next turn. You take 5 cold damage.

Level 13 or 18 2d8 cold damage; ongoing 10 cold damage

Level 23 or 28 3d8 cold damage; ongoing 15 cold damage

Sustain (minor): The effect persists. You take ongoing 5 cold damage until the effect ends.

Gloves of the Memory Thief		Level 3+
<i>Composed of widow's sorrow and spider silk, these thin gloves would be the height of fashion at a young nobleman's masque—and highly out of place anywhere else. The gloves throb with need whenever someone nearby remembers a time of happiness and warmth.</i>		
Level 3	+1	680 gp
Level 8	+2	3,400 gp
Level 13	+3	17,000 gp
Level 18	+4	85,000 gp
Level 23	+5	425,000 gp
Level 26	+6	2,125,000 gp

Item Slot Hands

Property Gain a magical enhancement bonus to Bluff and Insight checks.

Power (standard; daily) ✦ **Charm**

Can only be used against a target successfully Bluffed. Charisma vs. Will; if you hit, the target is dazed, and you can spend a healing surge

The Winter Court's Ambassadors

The Queen of Night and Magic and her Winter Court needed no convincing to open trade with the Free City; however, to maintain appearances, they feigned reluctance when petitioned by Matthias Yronwood. The Winter Court demanded their first embassy on mortal soil nearly 10 years after trade between the worlds began, and they wanted it in Zobeck.

Zobeck's council, happy with the influx of trade, acquiesced. Aware of the premium the Winter Court places on protocol and decorum, the city also secured Yronwood a position at the collegium and placed him in charge of relations with the fey.

He took to the work with vigor. Mere months after Gilgalline of Whisper's End, the first Ambassador-In-Extraordinary to Zobeck, arrived in the Free City, Yronwood ratified the Yronwood-Gilgalline Accord of 4021 A.S. by the fey reckoning. This accord—the first of six—codified the new understanding between man and Winter Court fey, delineating in absurd detail the rules governing all interactions between the races.

Gilgalline consulted with none of his kind before committing the shadow fey to the treaty. As ambassador, he spoke for the Queen of Night and Magic; his decisions were hers. It took many meetings to impress upon him that Zobeck, by contrast, could not speak for all mankind.

Once Gilgalline understood, nothing more was said and trade continued, but within a few years, word trickled into Zobeck that cities abroad were entertaining requests from the fey to establish a diplomatic presence within their walls. There were soon as many ambassadors as major cities, from Harkesh to Bemmea.

Zobeck remains the Winter Court's most important trading partner despite the growing glut of embassies. The shadow fey insist that the Free City is the most highly sought posting. This seems likely given the stature of the fey appointed to the post; the sages of the Arcane Collegium have found references to the five ambassadors sent to House Stross—the ruling family before the revolt—in fey verse dating back at least 8 centuries.

Adding the Winter Court to Your Campaign

Adding a race of pale-skinned fey with evil intentions smack dab in the middle of your ongoing campaign is not as hard as one would imagine. Thankfully, given the court's constant expansion from the shadow realm, it's fairly easy to integrate them into a campaign story arc with a minimum of fuss

Perhaps the Winter Court is newly arrived in your campaign's home city. Then again, maybe they've been there for decades. Or maybe the PCs wake up one day and learn from everyone they meet that the Winter Court have always maintained an embassy in this city, despite the PCs' clear recollections to the contrary.

But regardless of how you decide to integrate them into

Winter's Kiss

For the past 14 years Glaninin Thelamandrine, the Winter Court Ambassador-In-Extraordinary to Zobeck, has eschewed the traditional sort of embassy, one open to receive guests. Instead, Thelamandrine has preferred to establish his household—called Winter's Kiss—in a location and manner most decorous for a fey of his station: hidden from man through glamour and misdirection.

Winter's Kiss can currently be found at the estate of the spice merchant Enneas Thel located at the court called Alchemist's Folly, in Zobeck's College District. Winter's Kiss has resided there since the ambassador grew bored with its previous location in the Temple of Volund—or more specifically, in the shrine to Ninkash—4 years ago.

Thel doesn't seem to have noticed the change. However, once a lively man, Thel has—by complete coincidence, surely—suffered from constant lethargy and foul humors for the past four years.

His servants, however, are convinced the manor is haunted. Serving girls and scullions complain that they can't sleep with so many wolves howling inside the forest that they swear has arisen outside the estate. On the contrary, as Thel himself contends, the house is surrounded by paving stones and the closest tree stands more than a mile distant.

The valet complains constantly of acting as a manservant to his master's... difficult... gentlemen guests. Even the cooks are furious, threatening to quit en masse because they are being driven to distraction by outrageous demands for custards spiced with statue's breath and daffodil laughter.

Thel has no patience for his servants' idle chatter and is considering firing the lot of them for less superstitious help.

your game world's history, there are two obvious ways to work the Winter Court in immediately: as antagonists or as benefactors.

Antagonists

Things have gone to hell ever since the Winter Court sent its ambassador. Beggars are found crying on street corners each morning, cold as ice and unable to remember how to walk or speak. Children are missing. Rumors abound that the richest men and women of the city have taken up residence within the embassy and have been convinced by

the ambassador and his retinue to join them on the greatest hunt the world has seen since man discovered iron.

The sunlight's dimmer, now; people aren't saying much, but they can't stop peering into the shadows around the city. Those animals that aren't trying to escape their pens and leashes are hiding, afraid of what's coming. Children hear bells, laughter, and singing outside their windows each night, and beg their mothers to let them play with the fair folk outside.

Something has to be done. Surely, there are heroes who will step forward to do it.



Glaninin Thelamandrine

Fey Ambassador

Level 12 Elite Controller

Medium natural humanoid (eladrin)

XP 1,400

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +12; low light vision
Winter's Majesty aura 5; each creature within the aura that makes a melee or ranged attack against Glaninin takes 5 cold damage before the attack roll is made and takes a -2 to the attack roll
HP 246; **Bloodied** 123
AC 26; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 24
Resist 10 cold; **Vulnerable** 5 fire
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

✖ **Glassteel Blade** (standard; at-will) ★ **Weapon**

+17 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage

✖ **Icy Stare** (standard; at-will) ★ **Cold**

Reach 2; +16 vs. Will; 1d8 + 5 cold damage, and the target is knocked prone until the end of Glaninin's next turn

⚡ **Unmaking of Ice** (standard; recharge on 5, 6) ★ **Cold**

Ranged 20; +16 vs. Will; one persistent effect either on the target or controlled by the target is dispelled (some possible effects that can be dispelled include zones, summoned creatures, stances, polymorph effects, charm effects, and temporary bonuses to attack rolls and defenses); if multiple effects could be dispelled, Glaninin chooses; this power can also be directed at an ally (with no attack roll needed) to end an ongoing effect

⚡ **Wrath of Winter** (standard; recharge on 5, 6) ★ **Cold**

Close blast 3; +14 vs. Will; 3d8 + 5 cold damage, and the target is knocked prone and weakened (save ends both)

★ **Fey Step** ★ **Teleport**

Glaninin teleports 5 squares

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven

Skills Acrobatics +4, Stealth +9

Str 16 (+9) **Dex** 19 (+10) **Wis** 17 (+9)

Con 19 (+10) **Int** 14 (+8) **Cha** 22 (+12)

Your presence is required at *Winter's Kiss*.

You shall appear three days hence, three hours after the cock crows. When you arrive, you will have bathed and donned your finest raiment. You will be appreciative of the honor bestowed upon you, and you will comport yourselves in accordance with all applicable rules delineated in *Clattias Yronwood's Sidhe Etiquette*, excluding the following requirements:

- You may meet the gaze of the Ambassador In Extraordinary, *Glaninin Thelamandrine* for intervals of three heartbeats.
- You will be offered refreshments from the Ambassador In Extraordinary, *Glaninin Thelamandrine's* table, and you will be afforded the privilege of a vassal's share of meat and mead.
- You will be afforded a guest's seat at the Ambassador In Extraordinary, *Glaninin Thelamandrine's* Diversion. Pursuant to the *Yronwood-Gilgalline Accord, 4048 AD, Lobeck Reckoning*, the Ambassador asserts that you are not to be the Diversion.

The Unsueic will allow you the honor of service.
By the grace of the Goddess of Night and Magic,
Lady of Storm and Sky,
I remain,

Glaninin Thelamandrine

Winter Mage **Level 8 Controller**
 Medium fey humanoid XP 350

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +5; low-light vision
HP 48; **Bloodied** 24
AC 21; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 23
Resist 5 cold; **Vulnerable** 2 fire
Saving Throws +5 against charm effects
Speed 6

✕ **Glassteel Blade** (standard; at-will) ★ **Weapon**
 +12 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 cold damage

⊙ **Bolt of Frost** ★ **Arcane, Cold, Implement**
 (standard; at-will)
 Ranged 20; +13 vs. Reflex; 2d4 + 9 cold damage

☀ **Unmaking of Ice** ★ **Arcane, Cold**
 (standard; encounter)
 Ranged 20; +12 vs. Will; one persistent effect either on the target or controlled by the target is dispelled (some possible effects that can be dispelled include zones, summoned creatures, stances, polymorph effects, charm effects, and temporary bonuses to attack rolls and defenses); if multiple effects could be dispelled, the winter mage chooses; this power can also be directed at an ally (with no attack roll needed) to end an ongoing effect.

△ **Arctic Gale** ★ **Arcane, Cold, Implement**
 (standard; encounter)
 Area burst 1 within 20; +11 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 9 cold damage

△ **Arctic Gale** ★ **Arcane, Cold, Implement, Zone**
 (standard; encounter)
 Area burst 2 within 10; 2d8 + 9 cold damage; a blizzard erupts as a zone in the designated area and continues until the end of the winter mage's next turn. The zone grants concealment, and any creature that starts its turn in the storm takes 5 cold damage.

Fey Step (move; encounter) ★ **Teleport**
 The winter mage can teleport 5 squares.

Snowed Under (free; encounter)
 The winter mage can extend an effect on an enemy to end at the end of the winter mage's next turn rather than his current turn.

The Deep Well
 The hound has 6 healing surges.

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +14, History +14
Str 12 (+5) **Dex** 16 (+7) **Wis** 12 (+5)
Con 10 (+4) **Int** 20 (+9) **Cha** 16 (+7)

Equipment component pouch, spellbook, wand

Hound of the Night **Level 5 Skirmisher**
 Medium fey beast XP 200

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +10; low-light vision
HP 46; **Bloodied** 23
AC 20; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 16
Resist 5 cold; **Vulnerable** 2 fire
Saving Throws +5 against charm effects
Speed 6

✕ **Jaws of Winter** (standard; at-will) ★ **Cold, Weapon**
 +12 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 cold damage

❖ **Deft Strike** (standard; encounter) ★ **Cold, Weapon**
 The hound can move 2 squares before this attack as a free action; +12 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 cold damage.

❖ **Setup Strike** (standard; encounter) ★ **Cold, Weapon**
 +12 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 cold damage, and the target grants combat advantage to the hound until the end of its next turn

Fey Step (move; encounter) ★ **Teleport**
 The hound can teleport 5 squares.

Hunting Bite (free 1/round; at-will)
 The hound deals an additional 1d6 damage to an enemy that it has combat advantage against.

The Deep Well
 The hound has 10 healing surges.

Tumble (move; encounter)
 The hound can shift up to 3 squares.

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Acrobatics +4, Stealth +9
Str 13 (+3) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 10 (+2)

Equipment moonlight steel collar

Symbols

- ✕ melee basic attack
- ❖ melee attack
- ⊙ ranged basic attack
- ☀ ranged attack
- ⚡ blast
- ☄ close burst
- △ area

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BOOK REVIEWS

ALL TOMES READ BY CANDLELIGHT

by William Banks, Christopher Paul Carey,
and Pierce Watters



Steppe

Piers Anthony

Introduction by Chris Roberson
Planet Stories/Paizo, December 2009
Trade paperback, \$14.99, 220 pages
Review by William Banks

The beauty of SF is sometimes that sometimes you live long enough to see its predictions come true; this is the case with the massive, galactic game of *Steppe* that is the central conceit of this novel. A much-advanced civilization snatches nomadic tribesman and warrior Alp from Central Asia into the future to... play the game of Central Asian nomads seeking to conquer the world.

At several points I had to check the copyright date, because the book neatly predicts some emergent human behaviors of large groups in a massively parallel game of violence and conquest: newbie zones, a learning mechanism, staging areas. The competition heats up and grows seriously, and *Steppe* expands beyond the initial a sense of LARP or MMO-style competition to a

struggle for survival.

The story spins out smoothly and Anthony keeps the plot moving; the young nomad Alp quickly adapts to his surroundings and turns some of his historical knowledge to good use, while at the same time learning the strengths and weaknesses of the far future opponents, making and breaking alliances, and engaging in the action and dalliances of a true pulp hero.

Steppe was written rather late for its pulp flavor (1976), but it holds true to that era of wild adventure and truly shines in its mixing of history and SF. It's one of the rarer Piers Anthony volumes as well, and may well be unfamiliar to fans of the Xanth series. The only downside is the occasional section of longwinded historical background when the author can't resist talking up who conquers who; to Anthony's credit, the reader will care more about the characters than the history.

This is a light read in the classic Anthony style; good for younger readers but also for adults who might want to ride the grasslands at the head of a conquering horde.

Boneshaker

Cherie Priest

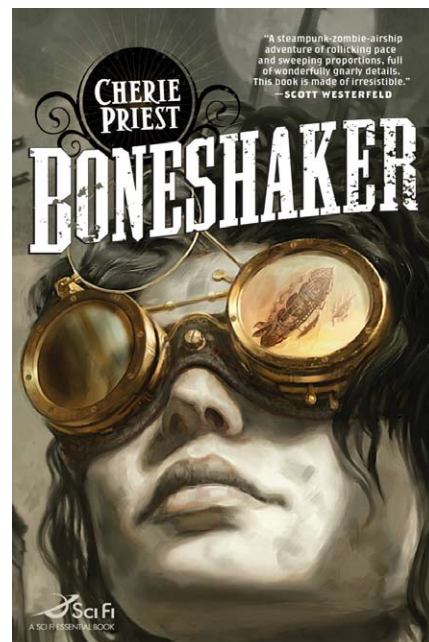
Tor Books, September 2009
Trade Paperback, \$15.99, 416 pages
Review by Christopher Paul Carey

Since being suggested as a genre over twenty years ago by science fiction author J. K. Jeter, steampunk has most often been associated with steam- and clockwork-tech fantasies set in alternate timelines based on the nineteenth-century British and European imperial social order. Cherie Priest's new zombie-steampunk mashup *Boneshaker*—the flagship novel of Tor Books' meticulously executed attempt to relaunch to a mass audience the



once-esoteric genre of airships and top hats and windup robots—bucks the trend by clothing itself in a somewhat more crumpled and perhaps grittier attire: that of Civil War Americana.

Set in the Pacific Northwest in an alternate 1879, the story follows Briar Wilkes, a single mom whose inventor husband, Leviticus Blue, disappeared after running amok in his Incredible Bone-Shaking Drill Engine, having reputedly used the digging machine to heist a chain of bank vaults. When her teenage son Zeke runs away to look for evidence of his father's innocence, Briar finds herself behind the forbidden barrier walls of zombie-infested Seattle. It's a simple mother-attempts-to-rescue-kid plot, but Priest employs three things to make it work: non-stop action; the down-and-dirty, lived-in feel of her world building; and deft, well-established characterization. Combine all that with the mystery of



Leviticus Blue and the first installment of Priest's Clockwork Century series is off to a satisfying start.

While it's still too early to say whether the new wave of steampunk fiction will take root among a broader readership, we may have a glimmer of the retro-future's direction in *Boneshaker*: the weighty philosophical sophistication and sly wit of steam-classics such as Gibson and Sterling's *The Difference Engine* and Di Filippo's *The Steampunk Trilogy* may well give way to an emphasis on straightforward rollicking adventure. To be sure, a fun array of the genre's escapist tropes fills *Boneshaker* to the brim, from air pirates to brass goggles to characters with oil-oozing mechanical body parts. Don't be surprised if Priest's new novel goes a long way to positioning steampunk as the new paranormal romance.

This Crooked Way

James Enge

Pyr, October 2009

Trade Paperback, \$16.00, 412 pages (including sources and background)

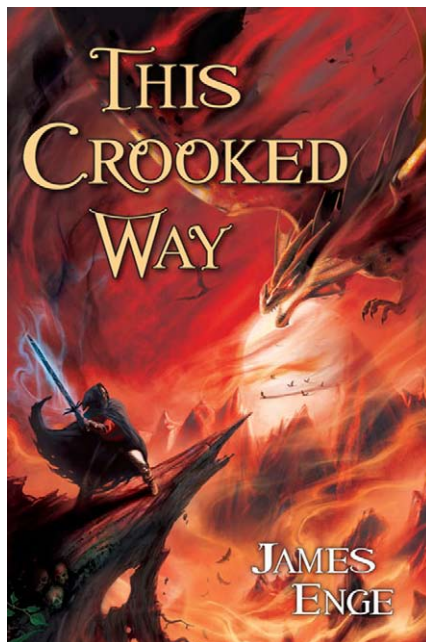
Review by Pierce Watters

In *Blood of Ambrose* by James Enge, we first meet Morlock Ambrosius. Morlock is son of Merlin Ambrosius and Nimue Viviana. In the second book, the recently released *This Crooked Way*, Morlock Ambrosius continues his adventures, bringing new energy to the field of Sword and Sorcery.

Recent reviews have compared James Enge to Fritz Leiber. However, this reviewer sees Enge's world as being closer to Jack Vance meets Elric. Not a bad thing to be. Due to its episodic nature, this second book is even more reminiscent of Jack Vance's *The Dying Earth*.

Morlock is a sorcerer, a Maker, of great age and much experience. He has a misshapen back. Many folk are trying to kill him. In *This Crooked Way*, we see that Morlock is beset by the magics of his father, Merlin, while Morlock tries to free his mother by helping her to die.

Morlock carries a magic sword,



Tyrfing, which has its way with victim's souls in a manner not unlike Elric's Stormbringer. He rides an enchanted horse, Velox, but the horse is mainly off stage in this edition. What happens to Velox you wouldn't wish on an orc.

But do not mistake James Enge for imitation anything. He is his own man, Morlock is a new character, and both are welcome to field.

Now, one of the nice side benefits of reading James Enge, especially if you game. The book is chock full of monsters, many of them new or different enough to be of some fascination. As Morlock Ambrosius makes his way through the book and across the landscape of the world of Laent with its three moons, there is hardly a page where something exciting is not happening. Morlock can barely lay his head down at night without someone or something trying to chop it off or bite it off.

Enge hits the ground running and the pace is relentless. It is great fun for fans of the genre and for anyone who enjoys a unique character and a rousing tale. Highly recommended.



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The Myths and Realities of Game Balance

By Monte Cook



Game balance is one of those things that game designers, aspiring game designers, and hard-core players talk a lot about. In many ways, it's easy to see it like the Holy Grail, Tanelorn, or some other quest object that heroes strive for but few ever reach. Like such quests, it may be that the value is in the quest itself rather than the end goal. In other words, it's the journey and not the destination that counts.

If we're going to examine game balance in a roleplaying game, however, the first question that needs to be raised must be, is "game balance" even possible? Is there such a thing? I think if we're going to examine this topic honestly, the answer is actually no. (Or rather, yes, but not in the way that most people mean—I'll get to that in a bit.)

That's right. I'll say it. In the sense of roleplaying game rule design, game balance is a myth.

But how can I, a game designer with more than 20 years experience, write such sacrilegious words? Let's really look at what we mean. Say that the most brilliant of all game designers put together a game with the goal of true game balance. He's smart, so he keeps it simple. He carefully designs every class/feat/skill/superpower/whatever in the game so that it is perfectly balanced with every other class/feat/skill/superpower/whatever. He still has the problem of the game being out of his control. Some players are "min-maxers" and simply take what he's created and find the loopholes that others won't, creating unbalanced options and

characters that are better than others.

OK, let's assume the game designer is so talented that he covers up every loophole and plugs every hole, so whether you're a newbie or a talented rules-exploiter, there's no combination of options that's better or worse than any others. (In effect, the designer's made it so that all choices result in virtually the same character.) Now the game is truly balanced, right?

Except that, it's still a roleplaying game. It's still open ended, based on the player's imaginations and the GM's prerogatives. What the characters choose to do is not going to be balanced. Some will choose to ignore their combat options and focus on their character backgrounds while others use their abilities to their fullest. Even if everyone around the table had exactly the same character, how the characters are played will be ultimately, unbalanced. Worse, a GM might (accidentally or intentionally) allow one player special privileges that unbalances the game. Or even if the PCs are all more or less equal, he might throw challenges against the players that are so insurmountable or so easily overcome that the game isn't fun. It doesn't even hold the players' interest. There's no amount of game mechanic balancing that can overcome such problems.

But What is Game Balance?

At this point, some readers may be thinking that I'm being pedantic, just arguing semantics. But since the game is meant to be played, ignoring how players use rules when striving for

game balance is an exercise in futility.

When people talk about balance in game design, they are often talking about two fairly different things. The first is balance between characters. The idea is that all of the characters should be "balanced" with each other, thus giving every character equal power. The second is balance between the characters and the rest of the game. A character that gets an ability that allows him to overcome challenges easily that should be difficult (or impossible) is called unbalanced. Likewise, the reverse, challenges far too difficult for the characters, is also unbalanced. The first could be considered a measure of fairness and the second a measure of fun.

The first case—character vs. character balance—can be boiled down to how much one player (not character) can do in comparison to other players. The ultimate currency in a roleplaying game is "time to shine." A character designed to be a terror in melee gets to shine when his character cleaves through a number of foes in battle. A character skilled at locks and other devices shines when he opens a locked door or disables the mechanism forcing the walls to close in on everyone. And so on. One could certainly argue, then, that a game that's balanced gives every player/character a moment to shine and that these moments are about equal in time, importance, and fun.

A common mistake, then, is to balance characters based on a single option—combat prowess for example. If all characters have to be equally good at the same thing, you end up with

characters that are mostly the same. This is fine, but you risk a certain kind of dynamism with that approach. Since you're only focusing on one aspect, you're not really balancing the game, you're balancing one aspect of the game.

Nevertheless, most games make certain options far more interesting, appealing, or exciting than other options. This then, could be considered to be unbalanced. I'll start by pointing the finger directly at myself. The 3rd Edition of the world's most popular roleplaying game made combat exciting through a number of different options and mechanical subsystems. A player could devote a lot of time developing characters good at certain aspects and not others, and finding new and intriguing options. A player interested in locks and mechanisms essentially had two skills to focus on, both using the same mechanic. While the melee fighter's moment to shine might last an hour or more with involved round-by-round detail, the lock expert makes a roll or two and is done.

Of course, this was intentional. We knew that most players were interested in combat, and combat makes it easy to produce exciting action sequences that are challenging and engaging for a whole group of people around the table—much more so than picking a lock. If we had decided to make every activity as involved as combat, it would have made the game cumbersome. Still, this all means that as game designers we intentionally “unbalanced” the game in favor of combat. We left it up to the GM and the players to balance combat with non-combat activities as they wished. For some, the game would be nearly 100% fighting. For others, interacting with NPCs, with the environment, or with each other would equal or even outshine battles, but that wasn't a matter of balance for the rules.

The second type of balance, dealing with characters and challenges, may seem related, having to do with characters being either too powerful

or not powerful enough. At its core, though, it is a different issue because it has less to do with the players and more to do with the GM.

After all, it's the GM who is responsible for providing challenges for the characters—and the GM has no boundaries or limitations. When GMs complain about unbalanced characters running roughshod over their campaign and how that's the fault of the game, there is a misunderstanding of the role of the GM. You don't bring a knife to a gunfight. If the PCs wipe the floor with the vrock, give them six vrock to fight next time. Or a nalfeshnee.

No, it really is that simple. For every spell, there's a counter. For every monster, there's a tougher monster. If the players raise the ante by creating too powerful characters, the GM can simply use the sliding power scale of the game (which has no upper limit) to bring things back into balance.

What's more, the GM is also the arbiter of the rules at the table and can disallow options. Ultimately, it's the GM who truly understands what's going on at the table, not some game designer thousands of miles away. No matter what the designer does or doesn't do to balance the game, it's a moot point. An illusion at best. It's what the GM does that provides the balance.

The Gamers' Social Contract

So here's the real secret of game balance: there is such a thing, but it has very little to do with rules and game designers. It emerges from the cooperation of the people sitting around the table. It comes from the players and, in particular, the GM. It all has to do with mutual trust.

When people sit down at my game table, I expect two things from them. The first is that everyone is responsible for making the game fun for all involved. I've written about this before. The second is to trust the GM to provide a fun and balanced play experience. This is the gamers' social contract: the agreement that everyone

makes, consciously or unconsciously, at the beginning of every game session.

With the idea that the two axes upon which the wheel of balance turns are time to shine and reasonable challenges, the GM can provide both in a way that the rules never could. A really good GM can run a balanced game where one player is a 20th level demigod and another is a 1st level farmer. All he has to do is make sure that each player has fun and each character has something interesting and challenging to do. I'm not contending that it's easy—on the contrary, it's very difficult. That's why good game designers try to provide tools for GMs to make running a fair, balanced game easier. Well-designed rules make it easier for the GM to judge what he should and shouldn't do, and maybe even protect him so that when he makes a mistake, the game doesn't go wildly and immediately off the rails.

For the GM to provide this, however, the players have to trust him and have to agree not to use their own position at the table to undermine or circumvent his actions or otherwise spoil the game for others. So it's not just about the GM. It's about the entire group.

Getting players and GMs to understand the social contract is the key to true game balance. The first rule of every RPG should be, “don't be a jerk.” This rule, if adhered to perfectly, would likely eliminate almost all balance problems of any stripe. The players should trust the GM to ensure that no matter what happens and no matter what choices they make, the game will be fair and fun. The GM should be able to trust that no one's going to intentionally try to break the game, and if the GM determines that something is going to undermine the fairness and fun, he can overrule it.

A roleplaying game, sitting on a shelf, is a rudderless ship. It's not until a GM and players use it and inject their own balance that the ship can be steered to go where it needs to go.



Elves: The Fallen Ones

By John Wick and Jesse Heinig

Art by James Keegan

Man's first encounter with the elves was the source of what historians would later call the Great Forest Wars. Lumber was essential to building the Kingdom of Men, and when they reached the deep forests of the world, they found the elves waiting for them. The wars lasted an entire generation but eventually ended with the elves seeking peace. They gave no mention as to why, but 100 years later, their secret was out.

The elves were losing their souls.

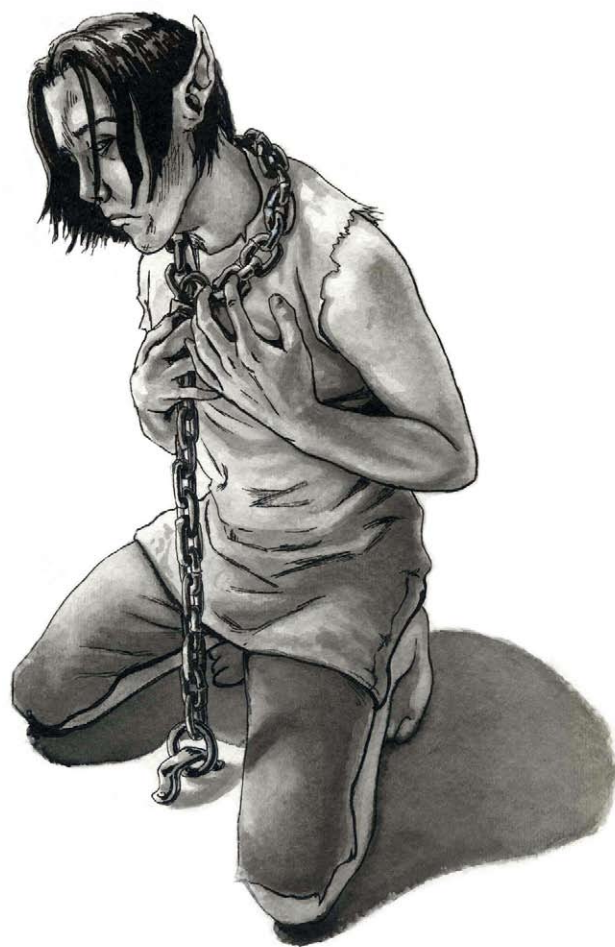
Birth of the Great Trees

When the uvandir broke through the soil, bringing with them their strange magic and strange gods, they transformed the world forever. One change that was not immediately noticed by men was the birth of the Great Trees. These immense timbers reached up higher than any mundane tree, covering the sky with limbs and leaves, plunging the deep forests into darkness. And for some reason no human scholar can determine, the Great Trees had souls. Guardian spirits. How unfortunate that mankind's first encounter with these spirits was during expeditions to chop timber.

The Great Forest Wars lasted for nearly a generation and ended with the elves suing for peace. Mankind had nearly killed all of the Great Trees with fire, axe, and saw, but King Aseph was a wise man, and he recognized the need for peace. The elves retreated into the deep woods, and men expected to never see them again.

But this was not the case. Hundreds of elves came to the borders of the Reign of Men seeking asylum. These wandering spirits, the fallen elves, had lost their trees during the war. Their trees were dead, but they survived, clinging to life as it fled from them. They were tall, beautiful, and elegant... and dying. Disconnected from the source of their lives, the lost elves were like ghosts trapped in a dying prison. Knowing their own demise, most fell to utter despair. Opportunistic men captured them and put them to work in brothels and dens of inequity. Others wasted their lives in taverns drinking until they died. However, a few—a very few—recognized the opportunity they had, to live a brief life full of experience, joy, and wonder.

Fallen elves die when their time is up: gorgeous, ethereal, wise, and clever beyond their years, going to the grave like children robbed of their potential. For a single generation,



they lived among men, and by the time that generation grew to adulthood, the fallen elves were gone. Ghosts of the war, it was as if they never were.

But that was not the last men heard of the elves.

The Dance of the Fallen

Whenever a True Tree dies, it leaves its guardian spirit alone in the world. The spirit dies quickly thereafter, but in the time it has left, the elf has the opportunity to live a life of celebration and song. Or a life of pitiless despair. Or a combination of both. Most elves seek any experience they can find. They seek out a lover who will break their heart, so they may feel the longing of desire, the passion of love, and the desolation of heartbreak. They join an army, so they may feel the terror of warfare and the bond of camaraderie. They seek fortune, so they may throw it away. They drink and make merry, so they may suffer the next day. An elf seeks all experiences, so he may die with a head and heart full of life.

Iron

Over the years, men have learned much about the elves. One unfortunate truth—for the elves, at least—that has come to human attention is the relationship between elves and iron.

Here's a familiar story. An elf strays from the forest. He has heard stories of these men, and he wants to get a good look at them up close. He comes to the local city—where his bare feet cannot feel the earth below for the cobblestones—and

he is surrounded by scents and sights that blind his eyes and capture his heart. These men are ! He stops in a tavern and has his first drink of wine or mead or some other sweet thing. He eats meat. The smell of fresh baked bread. The kiss of a beautiful girl. Her skin under his fingertips. She lures him upstairs, and with his head full of wine and his belly full of food, he follows her.

And in the morning he wakes with an iron band around his ankle. He cannot leave. He belongs to the men who bound him. A beautiful male elf. How many noble women would pay well for a night with a beautiful male elf? How many noble men? And what would they pay? What would they pay?

Iron does not cause elves discomfort. A weapon made of iron will not cause a deeper injury. Nothing as mundane as that. Iron an elf to you. Makes him yours. Yours to do with as you wish.

Once the iron band is on his ankle or wrist or neck, the elf loses connection with his tree. Both he and the tree begin to die. How many elves have been captured thus? How many men have gone into the deep forests armed with torches, swords, and iron bands?

Many. Far too many.

You would think the elves would declare war on the Kingdom of Men again for such atrocities... but they have not. They know better. They remember the days of the axe and fire. They know the men are too many, and the decadent days of the Reign of Men means the king will do nothing to help them. Those who are captured are dead, as are their trees. Even with their number dwindling, the elves have no choice but to stay in the forests and wait. Wait for the day when men will come with their iron and make slaves of them all.

Elf Racial traits

- +2 to Dexterity and Charisma, -2 Constitution (Elves are lithe and beautiful, naturally alluring and innocent, but their frail forms house a spark of life that burns bright and brief.)

- Medium in size
- 30 ft. movement
- **Grand passion** elves feel mighty emotions far more strongly than other races (All morale bonuses granted to an elf gain an additional +1 to the bonus; this increases by another +1 for every 4 character levels. For example, a first-level bard's inspire courage ability normally grants a +1 morale bonus to attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, and saving throws against fear. An elf instead gains a +2 bonus on all of the appropriate rolls and another +1 for every four character levels, gaining +3 at level 4, +4 at level 8, and so on.)
- **Low-light vision**
- **Graceful years** elves still connected to their trees do not age (They never gain bonuses or penalties from aging). Those elves separated from their trees by iron or by the death of the tree age and die quickly; as they age they become increasingly ephemeral, pale-skinned and achingly beautiful. They also learn quickly and develop strong intuition to help them through their short, vibrant lives. As a result, elves start as young adults with an age of 1 year, and advance through one age category every 3 years, finally dying of old age 3 years after reaching the venerable category. An elf never suffers penalties to ability scores from aging but does gain the bonuses. (In general, elf characters should start as young adults and progress through their aging during the course of play, accruing bonuses over time, rather than entering play as experienced elves with additional ability score bonuses.)
- **Sylvan harmony** an elf may always make Knowledge (nature) checks when checking for information regarding forests and woodlands (An elf's base Survival check DC to live off the land in woods or forest is 0, and the elf may support other people with the usual modifiers.)
- **Tree speech** as spirits of the trees, elves can communicate with trees

through a sort of limited empathy (An elf may use Charisma-based skill checks with trees to interact and gain rudimentary information, such as whether a creature passed close to a tree, what sort of weather has passed through the area, or when the last woodsman or fire came through the copse. While trees have only the most rudimentary of senses and cannot move or fight on an elf's behalf, a tree can certainly explain if someone carrying flame passed by and in what direction, or tell if a buried treasure is hidden near its roots. Most trees start with an attitude of indifferent to the elf; trees in particularly haunted, dangerous forests may start as unfriendly. An elf may also use tree speech to interact with intelligent plant creatures (those with an Intelligence score of 2 or more) but takes a -4 penalty on the skill check. Elves with the animal empathy class ability also add the animal empathy bonus to all tree speech skill checks.)

- +2 racial bonus on Listen, Search, and Spot checks (An elf who merely passes within 5 ft. of a secret or concealed door is entitled to a Search check to notice it.)
- **Automatic language** Common and Sylvan; Bonus Languages: Draconic, Goblin, and Orc (Elves do not have their own language, but do speak the language of trees and woodland fey.)
- **Favored class** Druid (A multiclass elf's druid class does not count when determining whether she takes an experience point penalty for multiclassing.)

The Curse of Iron

Iron holds a special power over elves. It is iron that cuts down trees and iron that makes the weapons of war and the implements of craftsmanship that demand the wood of the great forests. Though iron is not anathema to elves, it has a binding property that no elf can deny. Once an elf is encircled in iron, that elf's connection to her tree is severed. The tree withers and dies, and the elf joins the tree in dying.

A simple band of iron is sufficient to sever an elf from her tree. A manacle about the wrist, a chain about the waist, or a circlet on the head or neck can all cause this strange disruption that brings a lingering death. The iron must be in physical contact with the elf but once the circle is complete, the elf's fate is immediately sealed. Some crafty men have tried laying circles of iron filings around groves of trees, or lining their buildings with iron nails in an attempt to trap elves, but such circles are too large. Binding an elf is a personal matter—one circle, one elf.

Naturally, elves fear this sort of binding, but men are cunning. Once severed from the trees, the elf has no recourse but to live out her life with the most passion and the most vigor that she can muster before she inevitably wilts.

Elves bound in iron have a strong,



almost instinctive tendency to flinch from confrontation and to obey commands given to them. The shock of disconnection from the tree renders an elf nearly dumb with terror. Humans use this disorientation to render the elf pliable; by the time the elf reasserts her will, the conditioning to serve is already in place, and the elf has nowhere to go, no money, no friends to call upon... only a few elves manage to escape this sort of slavery and strike out in the world to make the most of their few remaining years.

Treewhisper Feats

Elves communicate naturally and effortlessly with their personal trees, but some elves have an even stronger communion with the great forests. These elves, the tree whisperers, move effortlessly through woodlands and dance in the shadows under the leaves, a fragile reminder of the beauty of unspoiled places—taken away all too easily by axe and progress.

Forest Dancer [Treewhisper]

In the deep woodlands, you move with grace and ease that no human could ever match.

Prerequisites elf; Move Silently 4 ranks

Benefit You never treat undergrowth or forested terrain as difficult terrain (similar to the woodland stride class ability of the druid). Additionally, while you are in forest, woodlands, or sylvan terrain, your base land speed increases by 10 ft.

Startouched [Treewhisper]

When the stars come out at night, you are there to greet them, and they bless you with their grace in return.

Prerequisite elf; Perform (dance) 4 ranks

Benefit While outdoors and aboveground at night, you gain a +2 bonus to all saving throws.

Branch and Briar [Treewhisper]

The trees recognize you as one of their own, and they lurch to protect you.

Prerequisite elf; Forest Dancer, Survival 2 ranks

Benefit While you are in or adjacent

to a space that contains a tree, you gain the benefit of soft cover, as if standing behind an ally. The tree reaches out to interpose its branches against opponents, even if it is not between you and your enemy. Any ability that negates soft cover benefits (such as the Improved Precise Shot feat) also negates this bonus. Dead trees do not provide this benefit. Intelligent plant creatures (such as treants) only provide cover according to the usual rules for using allies as cover.

Greenwarden [Treewhisper]

You inherit the tough limberness and sun-loving skin of the trees from which you came.

Prerequisites elf; Branch and Briar, Knowledge (nature) 4 ranks

Benefit You gain an innate +1 natural armor bonus to AC for every 4 ranks of your Knowledge (nature) skill (maximum +3). Additionally, as long as you spend at least 8 hours in sunlight each day, you do not require food and you automatically heal as if gaining the benefits of long-term care from the Heal skill. You still require water or other liquids, and sleep, as usual.

Iron-Biter [Treewhisper]

You escaped from the iron shackle, and now you understand the secret of iron—and how the mightiest tree can grow into iron, rust it, wear it away, and finally burst it.

Prerequisite elf, must be separated from tree by the curse of iron

Benefit You gain DR 1/nonmetal. You add your character level to all checks made to overcome the Break DC of any metal binding, such as a manacle, lock, or chain.



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Spiked Pits, Poisoned Arrows, and Healing Words

By Scott A. Murray

Art by Olaus Magnus



Boon traps represent an exciting albeit underused element of the dungeon crawl. Unlike traditional traps that hinder or harm intruders with poisoned darts, bolts of lightning, and crushing walls, boon traps challenge adventurers by bolstering monsters with healing, magical protection, and other benefits.

Designing and Running Boon Traps

Lurking in hidden crevices or emblazoned on foul idols, boon traps lie in wait for adventurers or monsters before springing to life. Mechanically, boon traps behave identically to standard traps. They only differ from normal traps in that, rather than dealing damage to or imposing conditions on adventurers, they target monsters with a beneficial effect that automatically hits. These effects might include restoring hp, increasing defenses, recharging expended powers, or even granting extra actions.

Because of the fantastic nature of boon traps, they are often magical, though mechanical devices of this sort—such as nozzles that spray monsters with healing mist—are not unheard of. Boon traps tend to fit the warder or lurker roles: they fill a defensive niche or act intermittently during an encounter. The GM might also upgrade a boon trap to elite by increasing skill check DCs or augmenting the trap's benefits.

Boon traps function best when carefully paired with monsters that

synergize with their effects. A trap that allows nearby monsters to shift, for example, works well with a group of monsters that deal extra damage to enemies they have combat advantage against. A trap that restores hp, on the other hand, would be less effective when included in an encounter with several minions. Boon traps, when combined with appropriate foes, traditional traps, and even other boon traps, make for an effective, memorable addition to any encounter.

Overcoming Boon Traps

Boon traps are threatening to PCs primarily because they make monsters a deadlier presence on the battlefield. Once triggered, boon traps are relatively easy to spot, and an adventuring party would be well served to deactivate them as quickly as possible. Like other traps, boon traps can be disabled with the Thievery skill, and Arcana may also be useful since many boon traps are magical. Characters that are unable to disarm or dispel a boon trap should find ways to keep monsters out of its area of effect by exploiting terrain features or using forced movement powers and immobilizing effects.

At the GM's discretion, players might also attempt a skill challenge to commandeer a boon trap during an encounter. Using skills such as Arcana, Dungeoneering, Religion, and Thievery, clever characters can take control of a boon trap and use its effects to their advantage. Players

also might try converting a boon trap into a source of recovery or protection that they can return to later in the adventure, or they may opt to lure wandering enemies into an area where they can take advantage of the trap's benefits.

Boon traps are often part of a dungeon's architecture—and thus immobile—so PCs shouldn't expect to be able to carry them around like they would a magic item. Damaged or disarmed boon traps are similarly of little value to adventurers, though a generous GM may allow characters to repair or reset a boon trap with one or more skill checks and a few pouches of gold.

Example Boon Traps

Listed below are four sample boon traps spanning all three tiers of play. Insert these as they appear into an ongoing adventure, or use them as inspiration for boon traps of your own devising.

Resounding

Proclamation

Level 3 Lurker

Trap XP 150

A thunderous edict resounds from a stone face, rousing nearby monsters to greater ferocity.

Trap An inanimate object, such as a bust or stone face, heals nearby monsters with a magical phrase (in a language of the GM's choosing).

Perception No check is needed to notice the inanimate object.

Additional Skill (Arcana)

DC 22—You recognize the object as

the focus of a resounding proclamation (trap).

DC 27—Your knowledge provides a +2 bonus to Thievery checks to disable the trap.

Additional Skill (Insight)

DC 22—You notice that enemies near the object glance back toward it when wounded.

Trigger When a monster within 5 squares of the focus is first bloodied in an encounter, the resounding proclamation trap activates

Attack

Immediate Reaction **Close** blast 5

Target One or two bloodied creatures in blast

Effect The target regains 10 hp

Special A creature must be able to hear and understand the language of the phrase to be targeted by the trap.

Countermeasures

✦ You can engage in a skill challenge to deactivate the trap's focus: DC 22 Thievery; complexity 1, 4 successes before 3 failures. Success disables the trap. Failure causes the trap to act each round as a standard action with initiative +3.

✦ You can attack the focus (AC 15, other defenses 12, hp 40). Destroying the focus disables the trap.

✦ If bloodied and you can hear and understand the language of the phrase, you may benefit from the trap's effect while within the blast

Upgrade to Elite (300 XP)

✦ Increase the DCs for Arcana and Thievery checks by 2.

✦ Increase the maximum number of targets to three.

Icon of

Fiendish Recovery **Level 7 Lurker**

TrapXP 300

A menacing arcane symbol augments a dungeon guardian's recovery from devastating wounds.

Trap An icon painted onto a mural or woven into a tapestry allows nearby monsters to re-roll failed saving throws against ongoing damage

Perception

DC 19—You notice the icon.

Additional Skill (Arcana)

DC 23—You recognize the nature of

the icon.

Trigger When a monster within 5 squares of the icon fails a saving throw against ongoing damage, the trap activates.

Attack

Immediate Reaction **Ranged** 5

Target One creature

Effect The target may re-roll the failed saving throw with a +2 bonus to the result

Countermeasures

✦ If adjacent, you can disable the trap with a DC 23 Thievery check or a DC 19 Arcana check.

Eye of Searing

Shadow **Level 16 Elite Warder**

TrapXP 2,800

Wisps of shadow snake from the iris of a large painted eye, bathing nearby monsters in a cloud of corrosive gloom.

Trap: A large eye painted or embossed onto a surface cloaks monsters in burning shadow, granting them concealment and dealing damage to adjacent creatures.

Perception

No check is needed to notice the eye.

Additional Skill (Arcana)

DC 27—You recognize the nature of the eye.

DC 32—Your knowledge provides a +2 bonus to Thievery checks to disable the trap.

Initiative +12

Trigger The trap rolls initiative when a creature enters one of the 8 squares of pressure plates at the room's entrance.

Attack

Standard Action Ranged 10

Target: One creature

Effect: The target gains total concealment until the end of the trap's next turn. Creatures ending their turn adjacent to the target while it has concealment take 10 fire and necrotic damage and ongoing 5 fire and necrotic damage (save ends).

Countermeasures

✦ You can engage in a skill challenge to deactivate the trap (DC 32 Thievery; complexity 1, 4 successes before 3 failures). Success disables the trap. Failure causes the trap to act twice each round.

✦ You can block the source of the shadowy wisps with a large solid object (such as a bookcase or an iron door torn from its hinges), preventing the trap from acting.

Sigil of Haste

Level 24 Lurker

TrapXP 6,050

Crimson energy flares from a twisted symbol above, transforming a lumbering beast into an ephemeral blur.

Trap: A magic symbol burnt onto a smooth surface increases the mobility and ferocity of nearby monsters when threats draw near.

Perception

DC 28—You notice the glowing sigil.

Additional Skill (Religion)

DC 32—You recognize the nature of the sigil.

Trigger: When a character moves within 5 squares of the sigil, the trap attacks. The trap activates again when a new character enters the area, or if a character leaves and then re-enters the area.

Attack

Immediate Interrupt **Close** burst 5

Target: One creature in burst

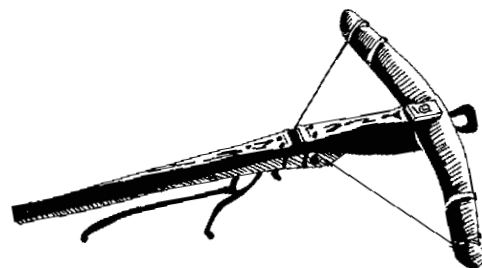
Effect: The target gains an extra move action on its next turn. The target also gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls, defenses, and speed until the end of the trap's next turn.

Countermeasures

✦ If adjacent, you can disable the trap with a DC 36 Thievery check or a DC 32 Arcana check.

Upgrade to Elite (12,100 XP)

✦ The trap's target gains an extra standard action on its next turn instead of a move action.





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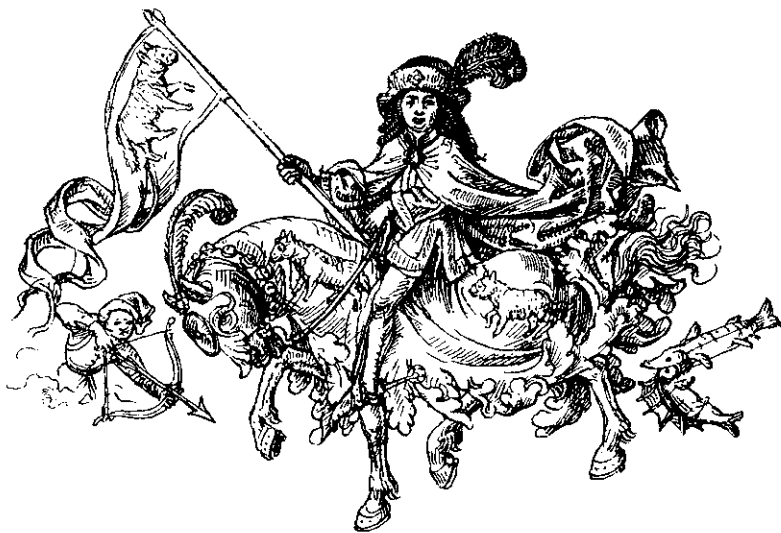
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Spice Up your Combat Encounters: The Combat Skill Challenge

By Phillipe Menard



One of the most interesting elements a GM can use to spice up a combat encounter is to weave a skill challenge right into the action.

Combat skill challenges provide a perfect mechanic to establish alternate victory conditions for encounters and to create tension by forcing PCs to do two things at the same time. They also allow greater opportunities to add story and setting elements to a battle.

Two Types of Combat Skill Challenges

Depending on the encounter's objectives, combat skill challenges commonly come in two varieties. In the first type, PCs must perform a task while opponents try to stop them. For example, PCs must close a portal to another plane while a horde of minions attacks tirelessly. This is referred to as a *hindered task*.

The other type of combat skill challenge directly impacts combat or provides an *alternate victory condition*. For example, if the PCs rearrange certain runes to form a floor pentagram, they can contain a ravaging demon without having to fight it to the death.

The significant differences between these types warrant presenting each type of challenge separately.

Type 1: The Hindered Task

When designing a scene where PCs risk their lives while completing a complex task, choose a task the PCs must accomplish and think about how

combat will disrupt it. Build the skill challenge as a non-combat encounter initially, but focus on challenges of lower complexities, such as those of complexity 1, 2, or 3 (or from 4-8 required successes).

While not the main goal of this type of challenge, find ways to translate a PC's successful skill roll to an interesting and minor effect on combat. For example, if the task is to close an eldritch portal, each successful Arcana check could create an energy backlash that the PC redirects toward a nearby monster: pushing it a few squares, dealing damage, or knocking it prone are all possibilities.

Choose a wide enough range of skills to allow many characters to participate. While most of the party will focus on fighting each round, don't force one character to spend all his or her actions on the challenge while the others are busy fighting monsters.

When creating high-level skill challenges, you may want the PCs to invest standard actions in the process of completing the challenge. However, helps making skill checks minor actions when you want to players to focus just as much on combat as on the skill challenge.

Don't forget to account for the skill challenge's XP value when calculating an encounter's total XP budget.

Finally, PCs need reasons to fight and perform the challenge simultaneously; otherwise, crafty players may realize the benefit of focusing on combat before performing the task. Constant monster reinforcements or challenges

with time limits, such as when the PCs must win the challenge in a certain number of rounds or fail, create a greater sense of urgency.

Consider these examples of hindered combat skill challenges:

- ◆ A slowly descending ceiling threatens to crush everyone. While PCs attempt to disable the trap's mechanism and slow the ceiling's drop, slithering vermin crawl through cracks and attack.
- ◆ The party must perform a ritual to cleanse a corrupted altar while it is lit by the full moon. The PCs must purify and consecrate a bloodied altar while crazed cultists try to delay them until the moonlight drifts off the altar.
- ◆ After having traveled the world to recover the seven lost idols of Khors the Sun god, the PCs must place all of them on the seven altars of daylight in less than 1 minute. Of course, the undead servants of the Night Goddess rise up to prevent the completion of this ritual.

The Spirit Bond Skill Challenge

You participate in a ritual to unbind a faltering divine energy source from the Crystal Nexus, a massive pillar of enchanted quartz that protects the surrounding area from the encroachment of chaos. At the same time, you seek out a willing nature spirit and attempt to convince it to join with the nexus. While the nature spirit binds itself, you re-weave the freed divine energies to create a protective enchantment.

Setup To successfully initiate and participate in the ritual, the PCs must be within 5 squares of the Crystal Nexus

Complexity 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures)

Primary skills Arcana, Religion, Nature

Arcana or Religion (standard action)—Manipulating one of the different surrounding energy flows, you attempt to release the divine power and re-weave it as a protective enchantment around the nexus (up to 5 successes at moderate DC or greater can be obtained with these skills)

(Easy DC)—Recover a failed skill check

(Moderate DC)—Success

(Hard DC)—Success. As a free action, you can use an encounter power of the appropriate power source (arcane or divine) without expending it. Alternatively, you may create a new arcane or divine effect equivalent to an encounter power of your level or less with the GM's approval; all such effects end at the start of your next turn.

Nature—Opening a channel to the Spirit World, you seek a nature spirit and convince it to join the Crystal Nexus (up to 5 successes at moderate DC or greater can be obtained with this skill)

(Easy DC)—Recover a failed skill check

(Moderate DC)—Success

(Hard DC)—Success. As a free action, you can use an encounter power of the primal power source without expending it. Alternatively, you may create a new primal effect that is equivalent to an encounter power of your level or less with the GM's approval. All effects end at the start of your next turn.

Special—Until the challenge succeeds or fails, defeated monsters are replaced on the round following their deaths; they come out of the rock and lava surrounding the nexus

Success The spirit creature is bound to the Crystal Nexus, and all PCs recover hp as if they had each spent a healing surge. No new monsters appear for the

remainder of the encounter.

Failure The ritual fails. The divine power source remains connected to the nexus; no new monsters reappear until the characters restart the ritual.

Type 2: The Alternative Victory

A great way to provide an alternate path to victory for an epic combat encounter without resorting to a grind is to use a second kind of combat skill challenge. This type allows PCs to affect combat in ways that attack powers can't. By providing an alternative to chipping hp totals down to 0, you can run faster combat encounters or use larger and more numerous threats than what the PCs typically handle.

For such combat skill challenges, design your combat encounter first. As you build it, consider ways that the skill challenge could bring the party closer to victory. For example, if you are staging a semi-aerial encounter with air archons and other flying monsters, the skill challenge could revolve around the PCs repairing, starting, and controlling gigantic steam-powered fans. Once all fans are activated, the party can push monsters into another area, thus winning the encounter.

As with other types of skill challenges, you must also plan for the consequences of failing. If you made the combat encounter harder to compensate for the skill challenge, failing should not lead to additional negative consequences for the party since they'll still have to achieve victory the good old fashioned way. However, if the party is well able to handle the combat encounter, failure should give the opponents some advantage. For example, opponents could spend a healing surge or an elite or solo monster could get additional attacks as free actions.

Such challenges should probably not provide full XP rewards based on their complexity since they provide an alternate way to win the encounter. However, the PCs should get full XP

for all combat opponents involved in the challenge if they achieve their objective.

Here are a few examples:

- A restless dead noble haunts his crypt, sending out his spectral guardians to kill anyone in the surrounding lands. The PCs are sent to put the spirits to rest by discovering proof of some great injustice done against the noble. Through negotiation and bluffing, the attacking undead are stunned by the revelations, then convinced one by one to leave and move on to the next world.
- When a gigantic construct ravages the countryside, PCs armed with its construction plans climb onboard the colossus, battle various inherent defense systems, and use feats of strengths, agility, and thievery to shut it down section by section.

Weakening the Silvered Bulette Skill Challenge

A mad wizard enchanted and empowered a bulette with a series of sloppily drawn silver runes all over its body, transforming it into a solo monster. The runes grant the creature an extra bite attack per round, a fiery breath weapon, and give it the typical solo abilities (additional hp, action points, and saving throw bonuses). When the fight starts, the PCs realize that they can unmake the enchantments on the bulette.

Setup You attempt to identify the structure and, if possible, the functions of the various silver runes covering the bulette's body to deactivate them and weaken the creature.

Complexity 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures)

Primary skills Arcana, Dungeoneering, Insight, Nature, Perception

Arcana, Insight, or Perception (minor action)—Studying the complex layout of silver runes on the bulette's body, you attempt to perceive a pattern to the runes and a flaw in their structures, hoping to determine what type of enchantment the runes grants the creature. These skills do not count toward overall failure for the challenge.

(Moderate DC)—You spot a

possibility to interfere with the Runes. Does not count as a success for the skill challenge, but PCs may now attempt to deactivate the rune.

(Hard DC)—You identify an enchantment linked to the rune and its weakness. Roll on table below.

Arcana, Dungeoneering, or Nature (standard action)—Drawing from your knowledge of magic, nature, and underground creatures, you try to sabotage the power behind a specific set of Runes

(Moderate DC)—If the targeted rune’s function is unknown, roll on the table below to see what part of the enchantment is disrupted, re-rolling if that enchantment has already been ruined.

Success The Rune is deactivated and the monster loses the power or feature indicated on the table

Silvered rune disruption result (d6):

Lose ability to make more than one melee attack per round
Lose solo Saving Throw Bonus (+3)
Lower all Defences by 2
Lose Breath Weapon
Lower HP by ¼
Lower HP by ¼

Adding Story and Setting to Combat Skill Challenges

Both types of challenges can also be a great occasion to weave story or setting elements into your combat encounters. You create tasks based on the objectives of your adventure or on established elements of your campaign world. Utilize familiar locales and known NPCs within the challenge. In fact, protecting non-combatants is a great example where PCs must taunt and intimidate monsters to prevent them from attacking the fragile NPCs.

As another example, PCs may have to assuage some belligerent spirits by deciphering ancient carvings to re-create and chant a lost prayer to the Goddess of Peace and Gentle Repose before the sun sets in 10 rounds.

Or PCs must negotiate entry into a besieged frontier post, held by a stubborn dwarf commander who has a weakness for elven wine while the party fights against wave after wave of frenzied Crimson Paw gnolls.

By adding such details to your combat skill challenges, they become more meaningful and help immerse players in the game world beyond simply fighting opponents.

Combat skill challenges make encounters more exciting and increase the number of choices available to players. They allow more combat encounters to enhance and further story arcs, making battles more memorable and enjoyable. Give it a try!



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Lessons from the Shadows: History's Greatest Assassins

By Catharine McDonald

Art by Michael Wolgemut



What do you know about ninjas? They're the archetypal unstoppable force, utterly silent and deadly, completing their mission and leaving before any soul knows they were there. They have supernatural powers, control over the elements and darkness. They are beings more of shadow than of flesh. If you're unlucky enough to see one, you'll be dead before you can understand what you saw, let alone put up a fight.

And that is exactly what they want you to think.

Real ninjas were peasants in feudal Japan, too poor to join the elite samurai class. Unlike the famous ninjas of pop culture, they were too poor to buy swords. In fact, they took on assassination missions out of desperation. They could not afford samurai armor or high-quality weapons—and without them they could not possibly defeat a samurai in a fair fight. Samurai trained since childhood to be warriors, and most ninjas were farmers by trade. They were outmatched from the start.

How often have you sat there, dice in hand, knowing that your GM wouldn't let you win easily? Maybe, like the ninjas, you couldn't get the equipment you needed. Maybe, like the ninjas, you just didn't have the levels. Maybe you knew that failure wasn't an option. Real-life ninjas were underdogs, and they rose above it to become legendary assassins. How did they do it?

There never were any supernatural

abilities. There never were legendary weapons. However, ninjas had one overwhelming advantage; they had ninja tactics, and these tactics made them history's most famous assassins. Whether or not you're playing a feudal Japanese campaign, make ninja tactics work for you, too.

Ninja Lesson #1: A Little Infamy Goes a Long Way

The ninjas we know today never really existed, but those myths didn't happen accidentally. The superhuman ninja speed, the mystical powers: these were all just myths created by the ninjas as an elaborate system of psychological warfare. If your opponents are scared half to death of you before even a single encounter, half of your work is already done.

A good reputation will fight your battles for you. If your party carefully cultivates a strong reputation, some problems in the game world solve themselves.

Ninja misinformation cuts both ways. In addition to building a fearsome reputation, ninjas were also extremely secretive about their techniques, and their mundane weapons and tactics were explained away as magic. They would lose their mystique if the enemy knew that they left animal footprints with the aid of specially carved shoes rather than transformative spells or that they incapacitated opponents by striking pressure points rather than with magic.

In game and out of game, never show your hand. Like a ninja, keep your best tactics and plans hidden from players, GMs, and characters until the right time comes.

Ninja Lesson #2: Make the Most of Everything

Myths about the ninja disappearing in a puff of smoke come partially from a little weapon called a *mestubishi*. It was made from a small, hollow vessel, like an eggshell or length of bamboo, filled with pepper, metal filings, and sand. When the ninja wanted to make an escape, the contents of the *mestubishi* were flung into the opponent's eyes, blinding them. It was a brutal little piece of weaponry, and it was cheap, made largely out of readily available materials. Ninjas were peasants, after all, forced to find jobs as assassins and thieves in order to make extra money. They couldn't afford to be extravagant or wasteful. They carried poisons made from items and animals found in their surroundings, such as deadly tetrodotoxin from the pufferfish or the extract of the death cap mushroom.

Never underestimate the little things. Just because it doesn't have an entry in the rulebook, don't dismiss an item as useless. You never know when even the most mundane of items or the weakest of spells can become useful. By making intelligent, thoughtful use of the items on hand, you can gain an advantage even in adverse situations. Lay simple traps made of ropes and pulleys.

Poison drinks. Carry some wine in case you need to make a friend.

Ninja Lesson #3: Survive

Ninjas were masters of stealth because they had no choice; in a head-to-head confrontation with the better-armed and better-trained samurai, they would have been slaughtered. Instead, they waited in the shadows, evading detection until the perfect moment to strike, avoiding combat and only attacking, even with weapons like the metsubishi, when there was no other option. To win their battles, ninjas understood that they needed to choose those battles carefully. They used poisons and pressure points to disable opponents they couldn't fight directly.

Sometimes, it's all right to be a coward. If you approach every situation head-on, it's only a matter of time until you find yourself outmatched, and it won't end well when you do. If you want to survive against the odds, you need to be a ninja; you need to understand that

there's more to a battle than direct force. Disabling opponents is often just as good as killing them; aim to break limbs if you need to run. Not all characters will agree with this since guerilla tactics are often considered the domain of the party thief, but it's about more than running away when you're outmatched. It's about living to fight another day.

In their day, ninjas weren't the mystical, lightning-fast death machines that we imagine today. They were hungry, poor, and desperate. But their desperation bred tactical superiority that could overwhelm even the strongest foes. A ninja's greatest weapon was the mind, and it can be yours, too.

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Sanctus et Virtus:

Relics & Reliquaries of Zobeck

By Brandon Hodge

Art by Dante Gabriel Rossetti



The contraption of St. Heviticus guides the hands of gearworkers, firm in their faith, struggling to bring to life intricate clockwork creations. A strong, mummy-skin tea brews, granting those venerating the Red Goddess prophetic visions. The bones of St. Maurice, carried by warriors facing the threat of the deep empire, keep the foul ghouls at bay. These are the relics of Zobeck!

Hidden in darkened shrines and catacombs beneath gilded altars, the relics of Zobeck's multitude of saints linger in sacred monstrosities and philatories as physical embodiments of the power of the faithful and the miracles of prayer. Of the many saints, there is St. Gregario for alchemists and St. Charon for gravediggers. Dwarven airship captains curse their crews in the name of St. Kalimachus, and the taverns of the Gullet hang empty mugs to honor St. Emeric. The Kariv crabseers invoke Mother Crab, also known as St. Caruth, who gives her name to their art. Minions of the Mouse King pay homage to the Thousand-Mouthed St. Norvegicus, to whom commoners pray to relieve toothache. Some ironies persist as well, such as St. Agnetta, who receives homage from the courtesans of the Red Houses though she herself was chaste.

Even the wisest scholars have a difficult time explaining the source of divine energy that powers the relics of these holy patrons. Unlike common magic items, infused with arcane

and divine energy through elaborate rituals, no man's hand creates the spontaneous divine spark that gives a relic its miraculous power. The power of faith and veneration somehow gives rise to a relic's holy energy. Yet the process is unpredictable, and no one has ever witnessed the birth of a relic. For instance, a family may find that generations after their grandsire cut a souvenir finger from the corpse of St. Lodovico, martyred patron of portals, the shriveled and morbid keepsake prevents the picking of nearby locks. Or the finger may simply remain a curiosity of faith, and powerless.

True relics, the bodies and personal items of saints are so precious as to rarely be entrusted to individuals except in the most dire of circumstances. They are usually held within lordly castles and secured deep in temples of the faith.

Lower-class relics, such as scraps of cloth and small items of jewelry, can be imbued over time with a divine spark, and many of the world's rings of protection and cloaks of resistance have origins in such association. Below is but a small selection of the thousands of hallowed objects found in Zobeck and the powers these bones, ashes, and other fragments grant to those who deify their source.

The Ark of St. Bellandrus

Once a source of tremendous power for House Stross, this ark is a large,

solid gold receptacle that acts as a massive arcane battery. Now held by the Arcane Collegium, the ark contains the single remaining bone fragment of St. Bellandrus—the most powerful sorcerer to ever attend the college. A prideful and petty child, Bellandrus was disintegrated by jealous rivals, and this remnant retains a powerful spark of his arcane energy. The ark weighs 1,500 lb., and two people with a combined Strength of 30 can carry it as a heavy load. With anything less, the bearers stagger around clumsily; they lose Dexterity bonuses and are restricted to 5 ft. of movement per round.

The influence of the relic within causes the ark to amplify arcane energies. Any arcane spellcaster touching the ark may draw from the power of the relic, applying any one of the following metamagic feats to spells cast while remaining in contact: Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Maximize Spell, or Quicken Spell. This power works up to 10 times per day.

The jealousy of Bellandrus infests the ark, however, and once a spellcaster removes his hand from the device, all remaining spells or spell slots disappear from the user's memory. Previous attempts to translate the relic into a smaller, more conveniently portable reliquary failed. However, this power may have inspired the many metamagic rods since manufactured by the college, which are all said to contain the

dust of Bellandrus collected after his disintegration.

Branda of the Pillar Saints

In protest against of the despotic regime of House Stross, six hermits now revered as saints perched atop skinny, stories-high pillars outside the walls of Zobeck. Preaching from that height, they made a public display of morality and rejection of the earthly greed and corruption of the nobility. Martyred by House Stross, their deaths sparked a seed of dissent that would lead to revolution. Grateful citizens regularly honor their crypts in the Shrine of Martyrs in the Temple District.

Stored in close proximity to the saints are small bone boxes containing portions of silk, known as *branda*, carefully snipped from the death robes of the saints. After lying for a time in contact with the holy stylites and properly prepared, these *branda* are thereafter treated as relics. Conferring the martyrs' belief that earthly ambition is corrupt and all should aspire to heavenly ideals, these small snippets, if worn as a tied cloth ring, confer an immediate *feather fall* effect on the possessor and can confer *levitate* on command.

The Clockwork Mummy of St. Heviticus

The incorruptible body of St. Heviticus still rests where the dwarf hermit expired—hunched over ascribe's desk deep below the Temple of Rava. However, his well-preserved corpse is now almost completely hidden by a nest of complicated gears, golden levers, pneumatic ink pumps, and pulleys.

Responsible for the design and construction of the Clockwork Oracle, the dying hermit produced a final set of schematics: meticulous plans for the preparation of his own corpse that involved the incorporation of enchanted gears and blessed cylinders. Acolytes transformed the saint's body where it expired, turning his secluded alcove into a marvelous contraption to

venerate the divinely inspired inventor. His humble desk became a shrine.

The grand contraption can be reset and wound but once a month, and it operates for one week. During this time, the contraption produces a single set of plans for miraculous mechanical wonders, usually clockwork familiars, advanced scullions, clockwork hounds, and steam golems, providing the gearworker guilds of Zobeck with technology that grows more complex each year. Considered relics themselves, these meticulous technical drawings provide a +10 bonus to all Craft (clockwork) checks to produce the creation presented.

Alternatively, during this week the machine can scribe up to 20 spell levels of scrolls per day from the school of clockwork magic (see the *Zobeck Gazetteer*). Pious prayers to Rava for the bequest of some specific technology are often heard by the saint if made in his presence although access to the chamber is granted rarely and only in times of great need.

Holy Gears of Rava

Once per decade, acolytes replace the worn gears of the *Clockwork Mummy of St. Heviticus*, sharpening and recycling the sacred components and donating them to the production of scullions and clockwork familiars, granting these gifted creations enhanced sentience, adding +4 to the clockwork creature's Intelligence and Wisdom.

The filings and shavings from these recycled gears are meticulously collected and worked into small amulets, worn by the faithful as an *encolpion* that grants +5 to Craft (clockwork) checks 3 times per day.

The Mummified Monks of Marena

Scattered throughout dark sanctuaries and hidden cellars in lower Zobeck are two dozen or so self-mummified monks of the Red Goddess. Typically older male followers of the goddess who have outlived their usefulness as subordinates to the priestesses of the faith, they end their own lives in a slow

sacrificial suicide by eating only harsh, mildly poisonous strands of cavelight moss. This diet preserves their bodies to a remarkable degree in a foul mockery of holy incorruptibility.

Periodically displayed as a testament of loyalty to the Red Goddess, the relics bestow *gentle repose* on any corpse within 30 ft. During such displays, Marena's priestesses remove patches of parchment-like skin from these perfect specimens, which is a rare prize among the faithful (see *Mummy-Skin Tea of the Red Goddess*).

Mummy-Skin Tea of the Red Goddess

A potent concoction is brewed from a fine, brown powder ground from thin strips of parchment-like skin meticulously removed from the preserved bodies of devout monks. Any imbiber must make a DC 18 Fortitude save. If this check fails, the imbiber is deemed weak by Marena and automatically suffers a debilitating *enervation* with no further effect.

For those who survive the harsh gaze of their goddess, the tea gently lulls them into a trance of dulled sensation but heightened consciousness lasting 2d4 hours. During this time, the drink imbues *false life* (1d10+10 temporary hp), and the imbiber can sense sickness and injury as if under the effects of a *deathwatch* spell.

This euphoric state is recognized and respected by all undead, and all checks to rebuke undead while so affected gain a +4 sacred bonus. In addition, imbibers gain the ability to *speak with dead*, able to ask three questions of any corpse they encounter.

The Resurrection Relics of Perun

Long ago, the spear-maidens of Perun walked the streets of Zobeck in corporeal form, sent by the god of war to bring justice to the young city in a time of great suffering. These angelic maidens fought bravely through dismemberment and death, each time selflessly reborn to wage war on injustice, fighting until their earthly

incarnations finally failed, and they passed into true death with honor.

These spear-maidens continue to serve their god in the mortal realm via the relics venerated in Perun's temples. While their bodies are kept in deep catacombs, the spear hands of several maidens rest in elaborate gilded reliquaries, depicting scenes of great victories. Once per week, a *Holy Hand of the Spear Maiden* can bestow a powerful blessing on heroes not yet meant to die—their quests unfulfilled. Any priest using the hand of the maiden to guide a hero's soul back to their body with a *raise dead* spell can treat the spell as a more powerful *resurrection*, for the breath of Perun fills the subject's lungs with vigor to fight for justice anew.

In addition, druids can utilize a *Holy Hand of the Spear Maiden* to direct *reincarnation* spells, guiding Perun's notice to the desired species they wish the recovered soul to inhabit. A living member of the desired species, who cannot have recently performed any unjust acts, must be present. The artifact has no effect on those dying of old age.

St. Norvegicus, the Thousand-Mouthed King

Unique among patrons, St. Norvegicus is not a single individual, or even human, for that matter. Rather, St. Norvegicus is an accumulated and growing mound of relics—the desiccated remains of dozens of rats and mice, intertwined and knotted at their tails. Indeed, the city's mice and rats believe this mound contains the interwoven corpses of each and every past Mouse King of Zobeck.

Kept in a golden idol shaped in the form of multiple rearing rats, ownership of the relic serves as the true badge of authority for all serving kings and enables them to consult the collective ancestral wisdom of their predecessors reliably 3 times per day. This consultation adds +10 to any Knowledge check as the mummified relic erupts in a chattering chorus. Due to the sometimes-treacherous

relationship between generations of kings contained in the relic, any consultations beyond the first three in a single day have a cumulative 20% chance of providing misinformation or outright falsehood. When jealousy and ancient rivalries rupture into argument in this way, the relic goes silent for a month or more.

In addition, the relic commands the obedience of all rodents. They pay it homage and whisper it information from throughout the city, feeding the knowledge of the relic. It can call 2d6 rat swarms in urban environments, which arrive within 1d2 round to do the bidding of the sitting Mouse King.

When a Mouse King passes, the body is recovered and moved to the center of the relic. In this strange ritual, the relic animates in a ravenous display of gnashing teeth, consuming the spirit and knowledge of the deceased king before absorbing the body, adding another corpse to the relic's growing collection.

Thigh Bone of St. Mauritz Frumarch

A giant of a man and a dedicated hunter of the undead, the paladin St. Mauritz Frumarch infamously died not at the hands of the quarry that was his lifelong pursuit but in the jaws of a great drake that threatened Zobeck in the year 562. Though little remained of his body, adventurers later recovered both of the saint's thighbones.

Hard as iron with wrapped grips of moldering shrouds, each bone acts as a +1 *undead bane club* and displays an extraordinary power to ward off ghouls, who well remember the sting of the paladin's holy crusades against their kind. Whenever the wielder attacks, charges, or otherwise threatens a ghoul or ghastr of any sort, the creature and other such creatures within 30 ft. must succeed on a Will save (DC 10 + 1/2 wielder's HD + wielder's Charisma modifier). On a failure, ghouls or ghastrs with 4 HD or less become panicked for 4d6 rounds, and those with 5 HD or more become shaken for 4d6 rounds.

One of the bones can be found in Lada's healing school to the south of Zobeck, while the other can often be found in the hands of good adventuring parties, on loan from the church when Zobeck faces the threat of the ghoul empire.

Adventure Hooks

Kobolds of the Geargrinders Guild, fed up with Rava's monopoly on the dissemination of technology, attempt to sabotage the *Clockwork Mummy of St. Heviticus*. The PCs are hired to perform the deed or investigate the disappearance of the missing gears.

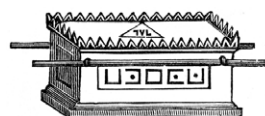
When ground to a powder, the poisonous bark of the yam yam root is deceptively similar to that used to brew Marena's *Mummy-Skin Tea* and is a key ingredient in the manufacture of *dark reaver powder*. The adventurers are called to investigate a series of mysterious poisonings of the followers of the Red Goddess.

Ghouls are stealing true relics and corrupting them in unholy rites, staging elaborate feasts of the mummified flesh in hopes of absorbing the power they believe lies within. The church of Lada requests the party's aid and loans them the powerful *Thigh Bones of St. Maurice*.

The Mouse King is murdered, and the adventurers are caught in the ensuing power struggle (See *Tales of Zobeck*, "Tale of the Mouse King"). They must return his entire body to the relic's care.

The PCs seek to bring a companion back from the dead and to gain the blessings of Perun's relics. However, there is a price to be paid. (See *KOBOLD QUARTERLY* #10, "Back and Better Than Ever").

An army of gnolls advances on Zobeck, and spellcasters are called to repel the invaders with incredible arcane blasts from the *Ark of St. Bellandrus*.



Eight Plagues and Diseases

By Stefen Styrsky



Abane to all <<cough cough>> sentient creatures <<wheeze>>... Let me start over <<wheeze>>... Disease leaves no one unscathed <<cough>>... Oh gods, I think I'm gonna hurl...

Except for filth fever, all diseases in 4th Edition are scaled for characters level 9 and higher. But even GMs of heroic-tier games should have a bit of variety to throw at PCs. Since disease is often an afterthought, added to an encounter just for a bit of variety, each entry includes a way to incorporate the disease as an adventure element.

Chimney

Level 1 Disease

A nuisance at most, sufferers exhibit a loud, dry cough, and breath that smells like soot.

Attack +4 vs. Fortitude **Endurance** improve DC 13, maintain DC 10, worsen DC 9 or lower

The target is cured.	< Initial Effect The target takes a -5 penalty to Stealth checks until cured.	< > Final State The target takes a -5 penalty to Charisma-based skills and checks. Any creature that spends more than 10 consecutive rounds within 3 squares of the target is subject to an attack of chimney.
----------------------	---	---

Vectors Just before an audience with the Lord Mayor on an important matter, a party member contracts chimney, possibly sickening his compatriots—and even worse—the mayor.

Tumbledown

Level 2 Disease

Often spread when the target swims in or drinks tainted water, the disease causes severe vertigo and makes it impossible for the sufferer to stand.

Attack +5 vs. Fortitude **Endurance** improve DC 14, maintain DC 10, worsen DC 9 or lower

The target is cured.	< Initial Effect The target takes a -2 penalty to Acrobatics and Athletics checks until cured.	< > Whenever the target takes a full move action, it must make a DC 13 Acrobatics check or fall prone.	> Final State The target falls prone, and it can move only by crawling.
----------------------	--	---	---

Vectors Local neighborhood rogues, the Bright Boys, have contracted a case of tumbledown. A rival gang intends to exploit the situation to take over the Bright Boys' home turf. While gang wars are not usually of great concern, the interlopers are a violent, brutal mob, rather than harmless cutpurses and cat-burglars.

Dark Rot

Level 3 Disease

Some say this disease was created in Morgau as a means to speed the living onto the land of dead. Dark Rot appears at random, so its contagion is still not fully understood.

Attack +7 vs. Fortitude **Endurance** improve DC 15, maintain DC 10, worsen DC 9 or lower

The target is cured.	< Initial Effect Until cured, the target takes a -4 penalty to death saves.	< > Final State When the target is reduced to 0 hp, it takes 5 damage. Also, whenever the target receives or grants healing with the divine keyword, the second party is subject to an attack of dark rot.
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Vectors A party member contracts dark rot from the Golden Priest, an itinerant disciple of Lada. They must find him before he spreads the disease any further.

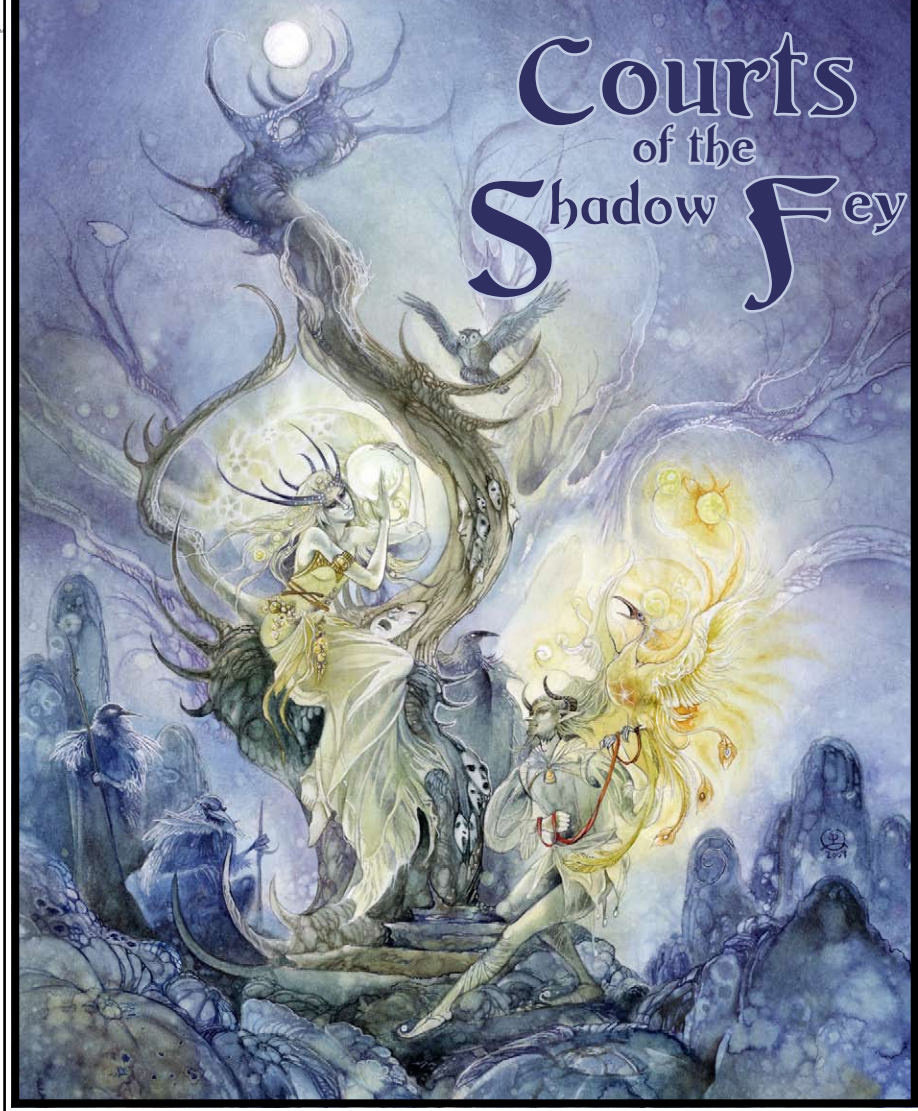
Skinpaper

Level 4 Disease

The sufferer's skin becomes dry and rigid, tearing open at the least scratch. The final stage causes the infected person to suffer horrible wounds when injured.

Attack +7 vs. Fortitude **Endurance** improve DC 16, maintain DC 12, worsen DC 11 or lower

The target is cured.	< Initial Effect The target takes a -1 penalty to AC. This effect lasts until the target is cured.	< > The target gains vulnerable 5 to damage from attacks that target AC or have the weapon keyword.	> Final State The target gains vulnerable 10 to damage from attacks that target AC or have the weapon keyword. If a single attack causes more damage than the target's Constitution score, the target becomes bloodied if not already.
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Vectors Sir Count Ovalbloom has discovered a fantastic way to satisfy his bullying, violent nature without greatly endangering himself. An agent contaminates a PC's drink or food with skinpaper just before Ovalbloom feigns some affront to his honor and challenges the PC to a duel.

Bloat Gloom

Level 5 Disease

So named because the target's face and limbs swell noticeably, the disease deadens pain from physical injuries and makes the sufferer oblivious to the severity of his wounds.

Attack +8 vs. Fortitude **Endurance** improve DC 17, maintain DC 12, worsen DC 11 or lower

The target is cured.	< Initial Effect The target takes 10 necrotic damage when bloodied. This damage lasts until the target is cured.	< > Final State The target cannot use healing surges unless it is bloodied.
----------------------	--	--

Vectors The latest batch of pilsner from the Brewer's Sisterhood is contaminated with bloat gloom. A caravan transporting three large casks into the Iron Crag must be located and stopped before any dwarves are sickened.

Bonewrack

Level 6 Disease

Spread through insect bites, this disease causes horrible joint pain. A confounding illness, bonewrack seems to get worse just before the target recovers.

Attack +10 vs. Fortitude **Endurance** improve DC 17, maintain DC 12, worsen DC 11 or lower

The target is cured.	< After each short or extended rest the target gains ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).	< > Initial Effect The target is slowed until cured.	< > The target takes 10 necrotic damage which cannot be healed until the target is cured.	> Final State The target takes a -2 penalty to initiative rolls and -2 to speed.
----------------------	---	---	--	--

Vectors An army of ogres and giants lays siege to a new dwarf colony in the Ironcrag. The defenders believe themselves safe behind their gates until bonewrack spreads among them. Someone must break through enemy lines and return with help.

Blue Ague

Level 7 Disease

Carried on the foul vapors from sewers or through food, this disease befuddles the mind, causing the sufferer to act as if in a torpor.

Attack +10 vs. Fortitude **Endurance** improve DC 18, maintain DC 14, worsen DC 13 or lower

The target is cured.	< The target can gain combat advantage against a foe but cannot make opportunity attacks.	< > Initial Effect Until cured, the target cannot gain combat advantage against a foe.	< > Whenever the target takes more than a single action in a round, it suffers a -2 penalty to attacks until the end of its next turn.	> Final State The target is dazed.
----------------------	---	---	---	--

Vectors Before raiding each town and village, slavers from Reth-Saal dump blue ague into the local water supply to make their victims more compliant. Unfortunately, the PCs are in the village when this happens.

Angel Fire

Level 8 Disease

This disease is so named because the sufferer's flesh burns with radiant energy that only worsens in the presence of healing magic.

Attack +12 vs. Fortitude **Endurance** improve DC 19, maintain DC 15, worsen DC 13 or lower

The target is cured.	< Initial Effect The target takes a -2 penalty to Fortitude defense until cured.	< > When subjected to divine healing, the target takes ongoing 5 radiant damage (save ends).	> Final State When another creature within 5 squares of the target is subject to divine healing, the target gains ongoing 10 radiant damage (save ends), and the creature subject to the divine healing suffers an attack from angel fire.
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Vectors Angel fire is the splattered blood left over from a fight between immortals. It remains potent for eternity and collects on magic items, especially ones with divine properties or effects. Any creature handling the item is subject to an attack of angel fire.

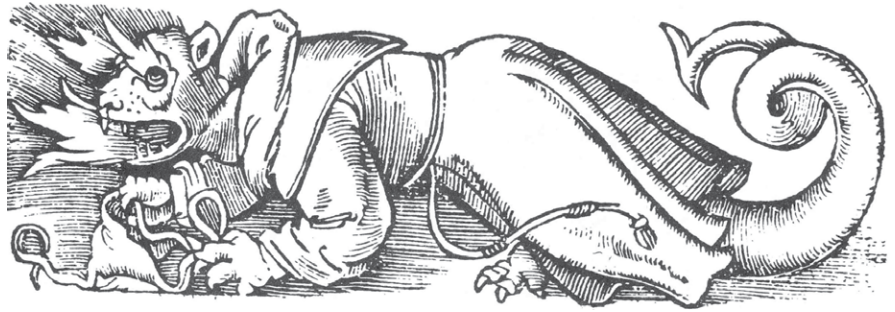


4 More Diseases
 Four more diseases will be posted on koboldquarterly.com, including the Fugue and Iron Rot. Take a look and let us know what worked with your players.

Vilest Evils of the Abyss

By Phillip Larwood

Art by Michael Wolgemut



Dagon, Orcus, and Pazuzu are names that ring throughout the cosmos. Their deeds and legacies are a source of awe and horror for those mere mortals who inhabit the worlds of the Material Plane, yet these dark luminaries of the demonic race are not the only powers of the Abyss to work their malefic designs upon the cosmos. There exist an uncountable number of worlds where demon lords, such as Dagon and Orcus, are merely footnotes in a textbook. On these worlds, horrifying demons like Balaphwr, Thazrinu, and Ulbastor hold sway, and their names are whispered with exactly the same dread and admiration.

Agoziel, the Ravenous Flame CR 31

CE male demon lord of accidents and disasters

Abyssal Realm. Anaphexaton, the Shuddering Rift (a vast chasm of shifting stone and smoldering flame surrounded by shattered monuments)

Unholy Symbol. A broken mirror revealing a fractured demonic reflection

Domains. Chaos, Destruction, Evil, Fire

Favored Sacrifice. A humanoid roasted to death over an open pit of burning flames

Favored Weapon. Greatsword

Typical Worshippers. Nihilists, madmen, and vandals

Abyssal Herald. Riftwing (half-fiendish ancient red dragon)

Description

Agoziel is a huge reptilian humanoid covered in deep red scales, his hands ending in wicked claws of black metal

and his lizard-like tail studded with vicious spikes. Burning orange flames wreath his terrible horned visage, obscuring the worst of his crocodilian face from view, and bright azure runes of annihilation adorn his muscular body.

Agoziel revels in destruction and mayhem, typifying everything that demons stand for. He exults in every crumbling building, broken tree, or scorched body that is the result of an accident or calamity, and he works to bring about disasters and catastrophes to sate his unspeakable appetite for chaos and bloodshed. Ultimately, Agoziel sees no difference between a terrible accident and a calamity engineered by unscrupulous mortals and willingly aids such individuals in their endeavors. While he is just as happy to see a child struck through the eye by an errant arrow or a person trampled to death under the wheels of a carriage, he prefers disasters of an epic scale, including large forest fires, earthquakes, or outbreaks of disease.

Adventure Hook

Cultists of Agoziel have discovered a dangerous artifact known as the *Burning Eye of Thasaidon* and are planning to use it to start a catastrophic forest fire in the heart of the nearby elven nation. Someone must stop the cultists before they can succeed in their plans.

Akyishigal, the Skittish One CR 27

CE male demon lord of cockroaches, disease, and roachlings

Abyssal Realm. The Reeking Vortex (a

vast whirlpool of garbage and effluent)

Unholy Symbol. A cockroach with a grinning human face

Domains. Chaos, Destruction, Evil, Trickery

Favored Sacrifice. A humanoid buried up to his neck in garbage or mud who has his eyes and tongue eaten out by cockroaches or other vermin

Favored Weapon. Sap

Typical Worshippers. Evil humanoids (kobolds and goblins in particular), roachlings (see *KOBOLD QUARTERLY* #8), and disenfranchised slum dwellers

Abyssal Herald. Yoth-Khur (fiendish roachling mystic theurge)

Description

Patron of all that is foul and disgusting— and lord of the roachlings—Akyishigal is a relatively new demon lord who revels in the excessive quantities of waste and garbage produced by human civilization, and his cult often tries to halt any attempts to clean up city streets, garbage dumps, or sewers. Cultists of Akyishigal enjoy spreading diseases and polluting sources of fresh water in the name of their demon lord and share an affinity for creatures such as monstrous cockroaches, keeping them as pets and guards in their sewer lairs.

Akyishigal appears as a gigantic black cockroach covered in thick layers of filth. His legs are covered in long serrated barbs and end in twitching talons, and his face is that of a sinister roachling with oversized mandibles dripping with caustic venom.

Adventure Hook

An aspect of Akyishigal emerges from a planar rift and arrives on the

mysterious Isle of the Gugs located somewhere in a vast subterranean sea. The demon lord is intent on acquiring something hidden deep within a claustrophobic edifice known as the Tower of Grasping Shadows but must first contend with the aspects of several other demon lords who are seeking the same thing.

Balaphwr, the Disobedient Prince CR 30

CE male demon lord of regicide and treason

Abyssal Realm. The Furious Reaches (a jagged plateau of petrified trees, careening waterfalls, and glowing bogs)

Unholy Symbol. A bent crown dripping blood

Domains. Chaos, Evil, Madness, Strength

Favored Sacrifice. A noble or city official beaten to death by an enraged mob (spurred on by cultists behind the scenes)

Favored Weapon. Halberd

Typical Worshippers. Rebels, anarchists, and dissidents fed up with corrupt institutions or over-complicated bureaucracies

Abyssal Herald. Balaphwr trusts no one to act as his messenger, preferring to use an aspect instead

Description

Balaphwr appears as a gargantuan

mollusk with an iridescent black shell. From his shell, dozens of thrashing scarlet tentacles emerge, covered with gasping toothless maws, hooked spikes, and staring emerald eyes.

Balaphwr is the demon lord of rebels, traitors, and anyone else trying to overthrow lawful organizations and governments. He enjoys transforming law-abiding citizens into violent anarchists, and finds it particularly amusing to turn people against good-aligned rulers or officials by manipulating events behind the scenes to make them look guilty of crimes they didn't commit. His greatest triumphs normally involve the complete destruction of a city-state or kingdom and the bloody execution of its rulers. Balaphwr's hatred and contempt of authority figures extends to the other demon lords of the Abyss, and he is constantly hatching plots to overthrow them. Of late, Balaphwr's attention has been fixed on the demon lord Kostchtchie (see *Green Ronin's Book of Fiends*) whose dominion over chaotic evil frost giants fills the Disobedient Prince with rage, and it is only a matter of time before the two demon lords come to blows.

Adventure Hook

A large city is on the brink of starvation, its granaries destroyed by fire and its food shipments disappearing even as a terrible winter grips the land. As the city struggles to survive, food riots break out, and people begin to call for the government to stand down. Unbeknownst to the city's rulers, the riots and the food shortages are directly linked. A particularly powerful and well-organized cult of Balaphwr is responsible for burning down the granaries, attacking the food shipments, and instigating the violence and discontent.

Karduluu, the Solace CR 26

CE male demon lord of alienation and loneliness

Abyssal Realm. The Final Gaze (a desolate bodak-haunted wasteland)

Unholy Symbol. A faceless mask

Domains. None

Favored Sacrifice. None

Favored Weapon. None

Typical Worshippers. Karduluu accepts no worshippers, believing itself to be the only creature in existence

Abyssal Herald. Karduluu has no herald

Description

One of the most bizarre demon lords of the Abyss, Karduluu's appearance depends on the number of creatures in his presence. In the company of two or more creatures, he is both invisible and immaterial, manifesting as an unsettling aura that fills all living creatures with a nameless dread. If only one creature is nearby, however, his body slowly comes into focus, bleeding into reality to appear as a tall, gaunt bodak with dead white skin and staring black eyes.

Karduluu's name, moniker, and symbol have all been given to him by sages who have studied his abyssal layer and lived to tell the tale, usually because they kept the company of a creature immune to the demon lord's alienating influence. No one has ever been able to communicate with the demon lord to define his true intentions, but he seems content to isolate mortals and drive them to madness and despair. Those solitary souls he focuses his attention on invariably commit suicide and become bodaks or disappear without a trace, while those groups who feel his terrifying attentions and survive are often emotionally and mentally scarred by the experience.

Adventure Hook

A famous sage and patron of the PCs has disappeared somewhere in Karduluu's realm and the sage's daughter asks the PCs to find him. Once they arrive, the PCs discover that their patron has been transformed into



a bodak and must find a way to restore him even as an invisible force hunts them through the lonely forests and empty deserts of the layer.

Thazrinu, the Golden Slayer CR 28

CE female demon lord of camouflage and stealth

Abyssal Realm. Urnax (a land of pitiless black rock and acidic slime)

Unholy Symbol. A golden horn
Domains. Chaos, Darkness, Evil, Trickery

Favored Sacrifice. A humanoid released into an isolated location and hunted to exhaustion by Thazrinu's camouflaged cultists

Favored Weapon. Dagger

Typical Worshipers. Babau demons, assassins, serial killers, rogues, hunters, and rangers who specialize in tracking down and killing sentient prey

Abyssal Herald. Larger than Life (morose gargantuan babau demon)

Description

Thazrinu is a cautious demon lord, using guile over raw power to survive in the Abyss. In many ways, Thazrinu behaves more like a devil than a demon, with a host of contingencies and fallback plans that show meticulous planning and forethought. Despite her many devilish qualities, Thazrinu is still a demon at heart and enjoys spreading chaos and indulging in senseless slaughter, both for those fiends she lends her services to and for her own demented and twisted amusement. Thazrinu is the adopted queen of many babau demons and epitomizes the murderous and stealthy qualities of her minions. She relishes stalking and terrifying her prey before dispatching them and often delays killing them simply to heighten their terror and her own enjoyment of the chase. She is most happy when she can pounce on a victim from the shadows, pin them down, and slowly rip out their throats while staring into their dying eyes.

Thazrinu appears as a comely looking babau demon covered in sticky red slime with a horn of solid

gold sprouting from her head (many demonic sages see this as a sign of her sovereignty over other babau demons). Her slime gives off an intoxicating stench that beguiles those who inhale its jasmine-scented fumes, and she is said to possess the power to change her form at will.

Adventure Hook

Thazrinu has been paid by Orcus to hunt down and assassinate a senior cleric of a good-aligned sun god, arriving on the Material Plane with a retinue of babau demons to carry out the task personally. The cleric realizes his life is in danger and approaches the PCs for their assistance, hinting that the horn of Thazrinu's head is the key to a great treasure.

Ulbastor, the Wounded Sovereign CR 27

CE male demon lord of injury and mutilation

Abyssal Realm. Tzelmuth, the Tangled Abattoir (a blood-soaked pyramid of hanging knives and tangled limbs)

Unholy Symbol. A laughing decapitated head

Domains. Chaos, Death, Destruction, Evil

Favored Sacrifice. A humanoid that is flayed alive and then ritually dismembered with their entrails spread out in a fan shape before their bodies

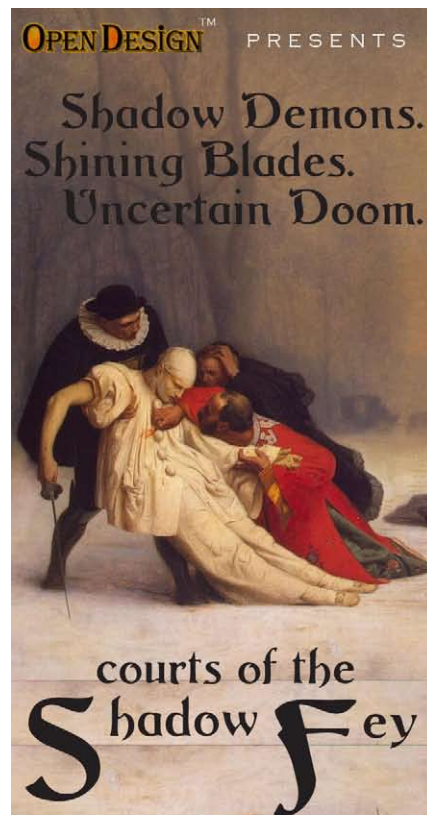
Favored Weapon. Saw-toothed blade of any kind

Typical Worshipers. Murderers, sadists, and torturers (Ulbastor's cultists usually sport deformities or self-inflicted injuries and are often enthralled or sexually aroused by amputees)

Abyssal Herald. Asiroch (sodomasochistic three-armed marilith)

Description

Ulbastor is a tall, emaciated humanoid demon. Open suppurating wounds cover his sickly yellow body, and his wings are a shattered mess of broken bones and twisted flesh. His right leg and left arm are both missing, and from the amputated limbs dribbles a foul corrosive puss. In his good hand, he holds a massive saw-toothed



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blade of glowing green steel, and his mockery of a face is filled with jagged black fangs. Ulbastor seems completely unaffected by his terrible injuries, and laughs whenever he is wounded.

Ulbastor is a fairly straightforward demon lord who is obsessed with carnage and bloodshed. The sound of tearing meat, crunching bone, and spurting viscera is sweet music to his ears, and the only colors he enjoys are those synonymous with gore and bodily secretions. Ulbastor does not care how or why someone is mutilated or disemboweled; his only concern is that someone ends up lying in pieces on the ground or trying to scoop their intestines back into their stomach. His devotees share his passion for mutilation and are some of the most deranged cultists anyone is ever likely to meet.

Adventure Hook

The cult of Ulbastor is looking for fresh recruits, targeting despondent war veterans who have lost limbs, and building up their power-base. A veteran who lost an arm in a recent conflict comes to ask the PCs for aid, only to be killed by a fellow disabled soldier who has been thoroughly brainwashed by the cultists.

Uvapula, the Beast Whore CR 29

CE female demon lord of bestiality and gluttony

Abyssal Realm. The Palace of

Moaning Flesh (an immense palace filled with steaming indoor gardens and bloody banquet halls)

Unholy Symbol. A writhing panorama of animal and humanoid bodies

Domains. Animal, Chaos, Charm, Evil

Favored Sacrifice. A young man or woman forced to endure copulation with an animal before being killed (and sometimes eaten) by the cultists

Favored Weapon. Heavy flail

Typical Worshipers. Decadent nobles, debased druids, and the occasional lycanthrope

Abyssal Herald. Imahtu (lascivious wolf-headed succubus)

Description

Uvapula appears as a morbidly obese woman with the head of a monstrous black mantis, her eyes glowing with a baleful green light and her dainty hands ending in long red nails sharp enough to eviscerate stone. Her glistening flesh is constantly anointed in pungent oils, and a shameless diaphanous gown of bloodstained silk barely conceals her corpulent and otherwise naked body from view. While this is her true form, she is often depicted as a plump yet beautiful elf woman in the houses of those nobles who worship her.

Just like other demon lords who represent the baser instincts of man, Uvapula cares only for her own gratification, indulging in carnal and cannibalistic acts with a variety

of demons, animals, vermin, and humanoids to slake her lust. She often devours those she has just shared an intimate encounter with, biting off their heads mere moments after they have serviced her.

Uvapula can usually be found surrounding herself in an orgy of feasting and fornication, forcing creatures to copulate and feed on one another for her own libidinous enjoyment. She is easily enraged by those who refuse to give into her heinous demands, and she quickly makes them the centerpiece of her orgies. Uvapula and Socothbenoth (see Green Ronin's *Book of Fiends*) have long been foes, but their one union produced the horrific demon Dagdagiron (a nascent demon lord of incest who takes the form of a flayed adolescent humanoid of indeterminate sex).

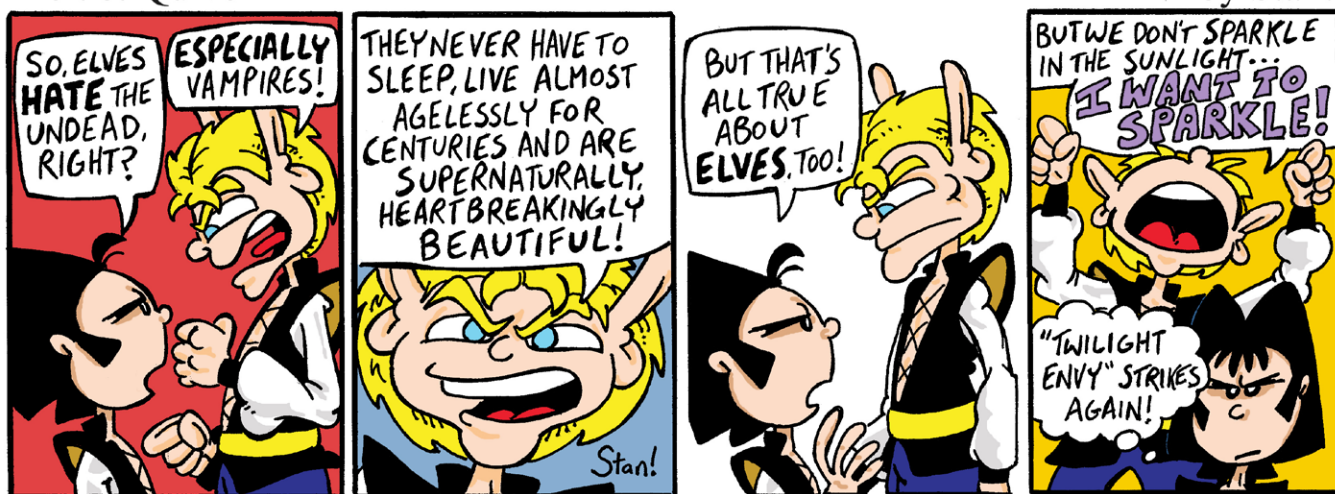
Adventure Hook

The bodies of several horribly mutilated prostitutes have been found throughout the city with body parts chewed off as if by some ravenous beast. Closer investigation into the deaths reveals that some of the prostitutes were cultists of Socothbenoth. This heralds an escalation in conflict between the cult of Socothbenoth and a pack of werewolves who worship Uvapula. Unfortunately, normal prostitutes are being caught in the crossfire, and the entire city is on edge.



Bolt & Quiver

by Stan!



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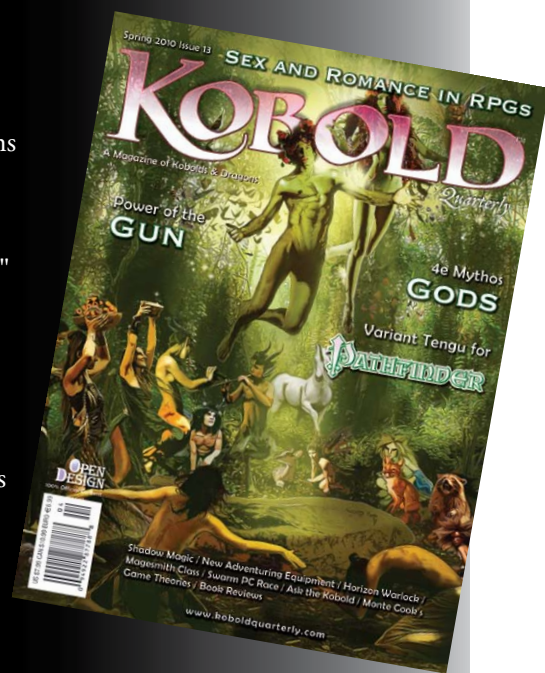
Coming Next Issue

Behold the rites of Spring, when a young gamer's fancy turns to thoughts of firearms and variant PC races! Yes, once again kobolds anticipate your seasonal needs.

What? No? Apparently humans have other needs in the springtime. Humans are strange, but KQ will cater to your whims.

- **Sex and Romance in RPGs** - Lust and love in RPGs: threat or menace? A semi-serious look at the other half of the "sex and violence" equation.
- **Power of the Gun** - We love things that go boom here at KQ, and not just deadlines. A direct hit, as it were.
- **Variant Tengu for Pathfinder RPG** - The crazed birdfolk get a makeover from master Larwood. Not to be missed!
- **4e Mythos Gods** - The dark side of religion with 4E cults and powers for the Things From Beyond. Awesome 4E baddies.
- **Plus New Gear for Adventurers**, magical and otherwise!

What else might we see in the Spring? Maybe druids, new shadow magic, a shifty warlock, maybe another Pathfinder RPG race or class. Our inbox in full of surprises after the solstice break, and we promise to cook it up as a kobold feast by the time the equinox rolls around.



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War Wagons of the Magdar

By Wolfgang Baur



The rolling hills and grasslands south of Zobeck are the provinces of the Magdar Kingdom: a place rich in traditions of chivalry and warfare, where the good king Stefanos holds tourneysevery summer and hires a great many mercenaries from the Ironcrags when war threatens. Indeed, the Magdar must fight often to defend their borders both to the east against the wild tribes of the Rothenian Plain and to the south against the akinji, the skirmish troops, and the dragon-blooded sorcerers of the Mahroti Empire. Thanks to this constant conflict, one of the greatest weapons of the Magdar is the war wagon.

Most armies travel with a baggage train: the dwarves prefer mules, the Rothenian centaurs manage on their own, the armies of Morgau and Doresh rely on zombies, but all carry their weapons, food, tents, and other supplies in some form. The Black Army of the Magdar, however, turned this logistical need into a fortification on the open plains where it most often faces its enemies. These war wagons are easy to circle into a tall wall of iron-reinforced wood, a lager against attack almost as good as a wooden palisade.

The war wagons are two things to the infantry of the Black Army: crossbows and even ballistae can be mounted and fired from behind their protective firing slits, and they provide defenses kept strong by sharp-eyed gearforged or mountain rangers. This army's tools and discipline make it doubly effective; they are no peasant army but a professional corps that serves the kingdom year in and out.

Copper-Clad Bulwarks

The wagons themselves are built in Cronepisht though they often use iron wheel rims from the Revskaya Foundry, leather yokes from Ironcrags, and oxen from Magdar's best. The army paints its war wagons in the red, green, and yellow colors traditional to the land from Sveretska to Cronepisht. Their wood is oak or ash, enchanted and strengthened by alchemy.

On the open plains, when the elementalists unleash the jinn of thunder and lightning, of wind and fire, the copper-sheathed bulwarks of the war wagons are a vital bulwark against their magic. The copper is grounded against lightning and proof against fire, and the cover they provide is crucial. Better still, a wagon fortress protects all those

within it and provides ready-made lookout points; guards standing atop the war wagons can see further and spot enemies sooner.

To keep the wagons from being overturned, the front and rear wheel of neighboring wagons are built to slightly different widths; this allows the soldiers to chain them together when formed up into a *tabor* (or wagon-camp). In addition, some of the larger wagons are fitted with ballast stones in a compartment under the wagon. This lowers their center of gravity and making them almost impossible to capsize.

The Mahroti Empire has attempted to build its own war wagons, employing them in a similar way. However, the real strength of their army is in the akinji light cavalry and the elemental-fortified skirmishers, and neither of these groups can maneuver in the disciplined ranks required to make the most of mobile fortresses. The Mahroti wagons, called *arbasi*, are relatively small in number and are roofed in tin. They have the unusual habit of removing the wagon's wheels at night, to secure them.

Company Wagons

Not all wagons are owned by the Magdar Kingdom or the wild amazons of the Duchy of Perun's Daughter. Many are outfitted in the Zobeck Gear District for use by mercenaries: the pike and crossbow companies of the Ironcrags, the exile companies fled from Krakova, and the amazon companies of Perun's Daughter. These are called company wagons, and they travel in small groups of two to 10 wagons, depending on the size of the adventuring company or mercenary company that uses them.

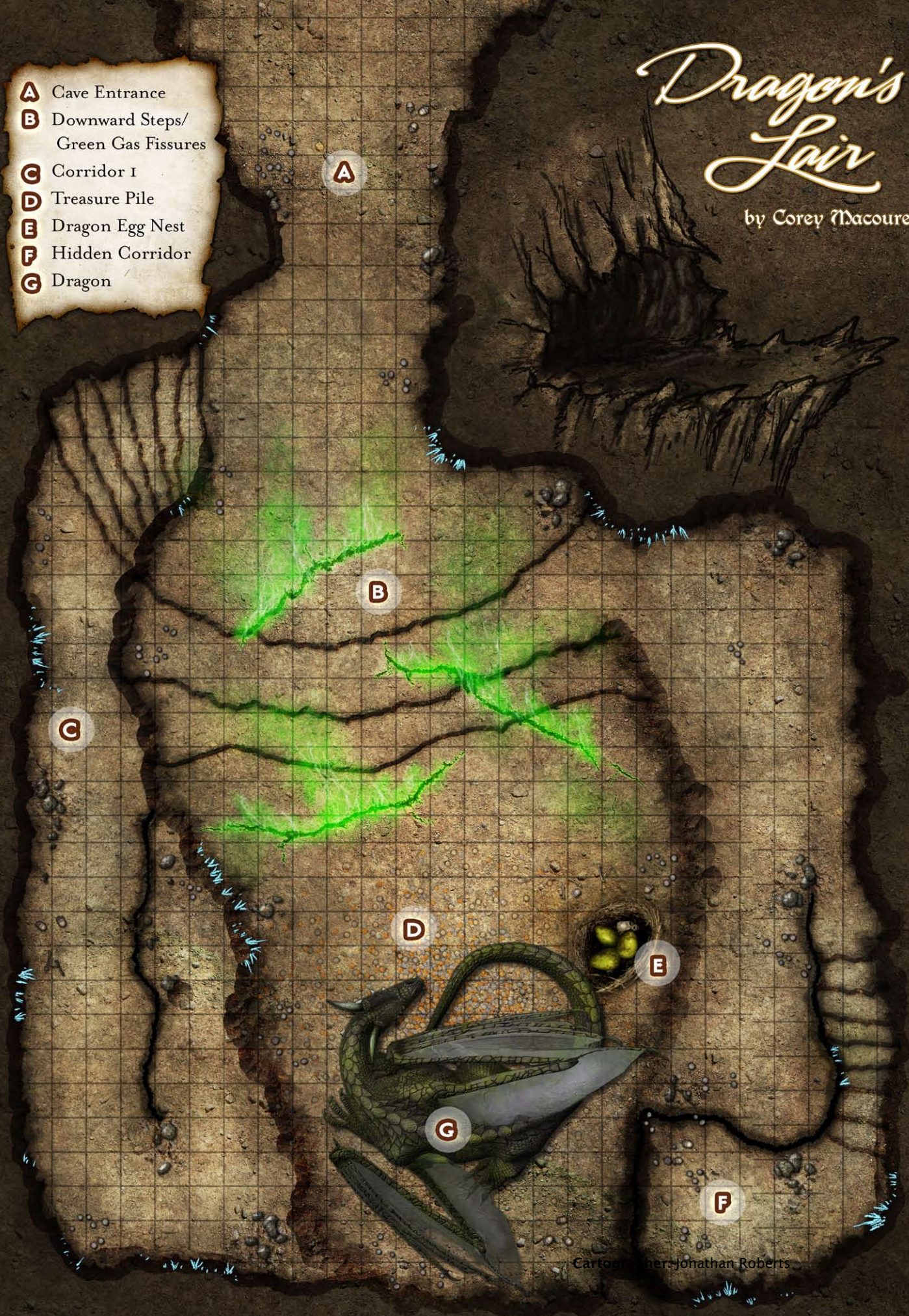
They provide all the same advantages as those provided to the Magdar army with one further consideration: drawn by powerful oxen and fitted with strong axels, the company wagons can carry a great deal of treasure from adventuring, plundering, or banditry. Though the ballast compartments of the war wagons are usually filled with stones, a successful company wagon will sometimes say, "We carried gold and silver ballast, so rich were we!"



Dragon's Lair

by Corey Macourek

- A** Cave Entrance
- B** Downward Steps/
Green Gas Fissures
- C** Corridor I
- D** Treasure Pile
- E** Dragon Egg Nest
- F** Hidden Corridor
- G** Dragon



Cartographer: Jonathan Roberts