

Spring 2010 Issue 13

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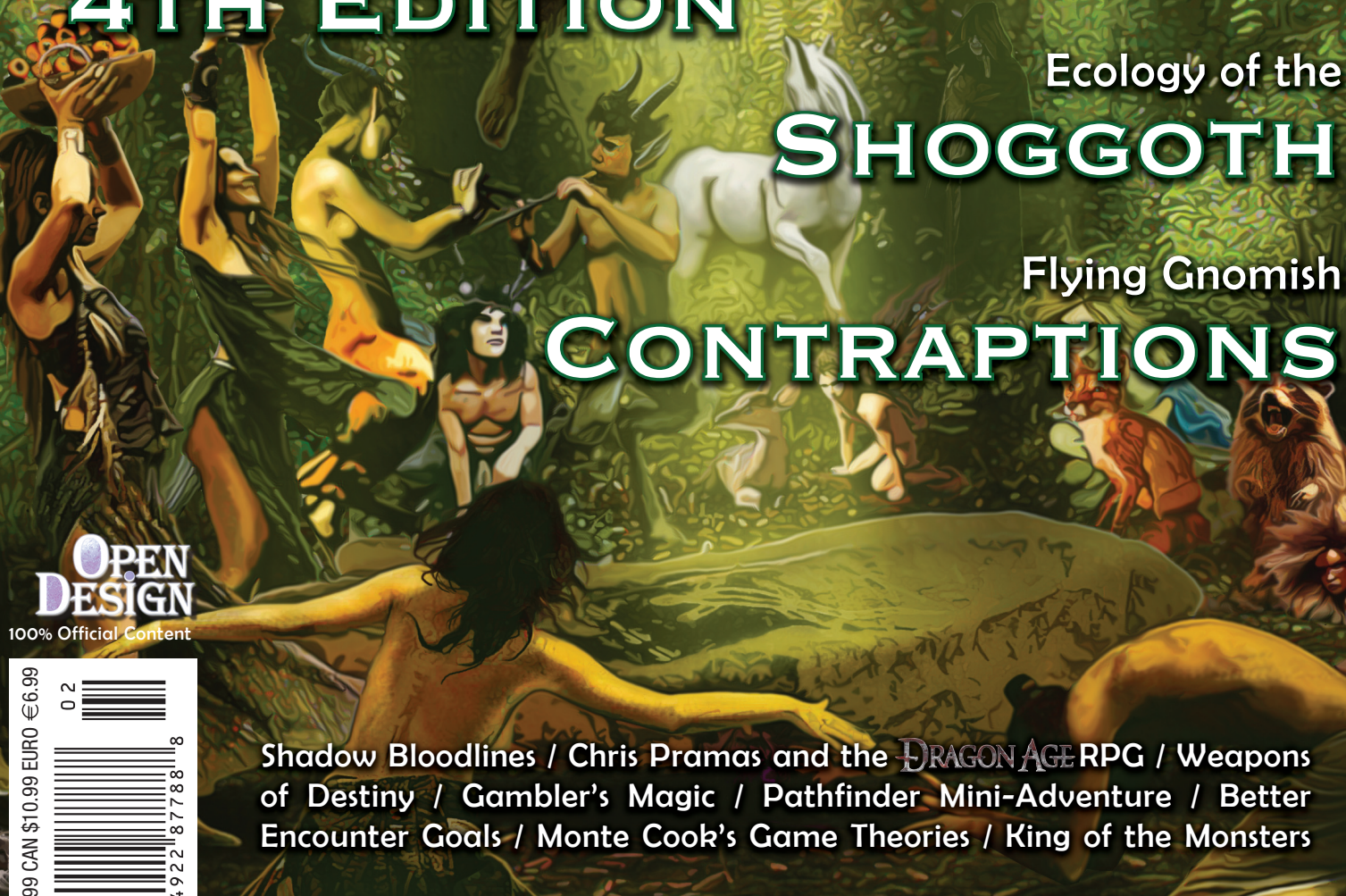
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On the Cover

The cover for Spring is the "Green Gods", in a rite of wild abandon.

This is Malcolm McClinton's third appearance on our cover, which is some kind of record.

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A Roleplaying Snob Reconsiders



As a younger man, I used to think that tinker gnomes, spelljammers, and wild mages were just dumb. If it wasn't about character and clever tactics and story, if it was ludicrously over-the-top powergaming or post-apocalyptic shoddy-science survivor fantasies, I couldn't take it seriously. I thought some gaming was just "not serious" or "not really hackworthy."

Oh, I was a huge roleplaying snob.

But somewhere along the way, I expanded my horizons. For this, I have two people to thank: Steve Kurtz, who was my GM for a spelljamming campaign, and Lester Smith, the GDW and TSR designer who introduced me to the joys of White Wolf and indie RPGs. That spelljamming I was sure I'd hate? I loved that, and learned how to run a long story arc from it. All those indie games and angsty White Wolf settings? Well, I was shocked to learn that TSR designers played non-TSR gamers, but I realized it made sense. Those WW games were ultimately not my thing, but they made me at least willing to look around and adopt the best elements of games not published in Lake Geneva or Renton.

In both cases, they were cracks in the wall; almost all of my gaming was still d20 and fantasy-focussed. In the end, it took me years to learn that just because something wasn't for me, that didn't mean it wasn't worthwhile. And just because something seems foolish at first glance, doesn't mean I should dismiss it out of hand. I learned to withhold judgment and try things out before getting too negative about them.

That attitude brought some good games my way: *Pendragon*, *Houses of the Blooded*, and others that I might not have bought in my TSR fanboy days. I learned to see the strengths of any given system. I started to think about games professionally, in other words.

Yes, I was a huge roleplaying snob and sometimes I still am, but I keep it down to the occasional snotty remark. Far better to take pleasure in the huge range of games and gamers within our hobby, to celebrate *Mouseguard*, the *Dragon Age* RPG (see our article on page 54), *My Life With Master*, and so on than to rely on a single setting or mechanic. It's what I call the "second system" in any given group. That is, the game that everyone likes well enough when you aren't playing the world's most popular RPG, your preferred change of pace. Heck, even WotC is re-releasing *Gamma World*, which fits that "second tier" category to a T.

It's worth branching out just as a change-up between campaigns of *Dungeons & Kobolds*. I'm learning to appreciate others, and who knows, maybe I'll even run some oddball games soon. There's no lack of options.

Sword-and-sorcery fantasy remains my first love. But games aren't like marriages; there's no need to be mono-gamist, and there's a lot we can learn from branching out to a new system or a new genre once in a while. What about you? Have you always been loyal to a certain, single d20-based system, or have you tinkered with Jedi, vampires, or mice among the dice?

Wolfgang Baur
Kobold in Chief



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From the Mines

Dispatches and Complaints



SSG Joshua Goss and Kobold Quarterly overseas. Photo Credit: SSG Jeffry Swann.

Far and Away

I just wanted to send a picture of me with your great magazine as a thank you for the Adopt-a-Soldier program. I am stationed at Camp Taji, Iraq, and will probably be home when the next issue hits the shelves. (I haven't met the other reader whose letter was published in the Fall issue.) I can't wait to get home and roll some dice! Thank you for producing a great magazine with a wide variety of articles.

—SSG Joshua Goss
Camp Taji, Iraq

Our pleasure, Joshua. Thanks for reading!

Where in the World is the Free City of Zobeck?

I recently picked up one of your gazetteers, and I will probably get a couple more. I'm curious, though, is there a map of the region or regions these various gazetteers are set in? I skimmed through the one I have and was only

able to find the city map. Is that an intentional deal, to allow DMs the space required to develop their campaign world, or am I just missing it?

—David Reeder

You're right, most of the gazetteers include only a regional map, not a world map. That's mostly deliberate (since we're building things out slowly, and it's meant to be as compatible with people's homebrew settings as we can make).

At some point, I might release a bigger map putting the regions together, but that's a ways off.

Better than Deodorant

You guys rock! I only wish you had this contest earlier this year while I was still deployed to Baghdad! I coordinated 2008 and 2009 Game Days for FOBs all across Iraq (Forward Operating Bases, many of which are now closing). I know that out of the five tables that we had playing “the world's most popular tabletop RPG” in Saddam Hussein's former palace, a lot of the guys were 3.5E veterans, and more than one of them had the Pathfinder beta.

Unfortunately, I've been back for 6 months; and couldn't tell you where all those guys are stationed now, probably back in the US doing workups to deploy back to Afghanistan this time.

If you send a KQ issue overseas, it will get read multiple times if some soldier doesn't hoard it first. It was the highlight of a dreary month last year to make a rare trip to the “big” BX (military store) in Camp Victory last year, and although they were out of deodorant that day (not kidding), I was able to buy the latest issue of KQ (#5). Thanks for all your support!

—CDR Colin Sullivan, USN
Los Angeles, CA



Thanks for reading Colin! It's warming to hear that each issue is so well loved—and that our favorite game is played in some properly palatial settings.

The Map is the Key

I like to see that we're coming up in the world. As the issues fall under my door, I see more color and quality in the magazine that compliments the writing.

My favorite section is the “Maps of Fantasy” section. Keep up the great work.

—Kenneth Beck

We love those maps too, Kenneth, and plan to provide them again and again and again. You'll notice that this issue, we have an undersea mini-adventure with more specific stats than usual. If people like this approach, we'll try more of them in future.

Corrections

The sage in the “The Holy Remix” article (KQ #12, p. 29) should not have the sneak attack ability. The line “Sneak Attack (as rogue)” from the sage's “Gains...” section is a typo. The “Sage” summary table is accurate.



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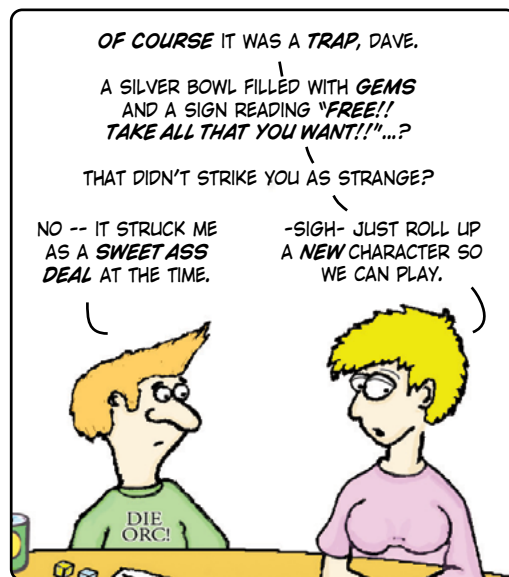
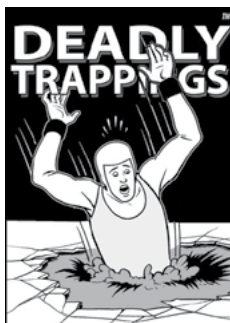


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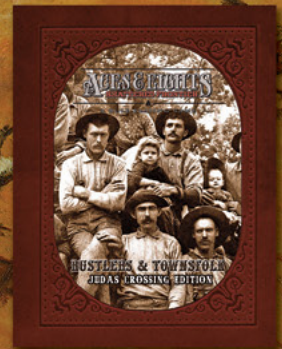
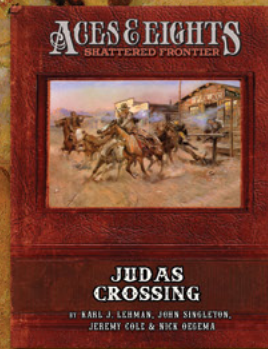
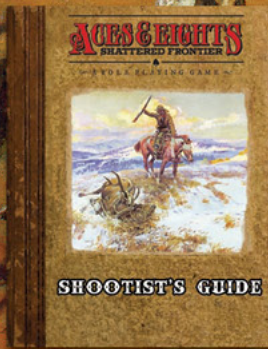
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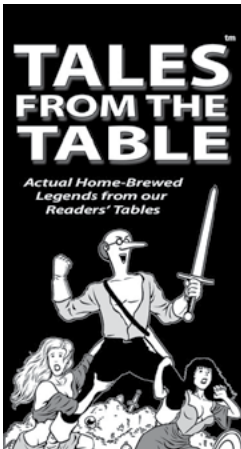
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Ecology of the Shoggoth

By Phillip Larwood

Art by Rhiannon Rasmussen-Silverstein

The midnight mist thinned as the creature approached... an indescribable terror that seized my already overtaxed mind and left me shuddering with equal parts abject horror and breathtaking awe.

The creature before me was no ordinary fiend of the night, no simple ogre or demon emerging from the wafting miasma to rend my flesh or steal away my soul. No, this vast and ancient protoplasm seethed and roiled as if moved by otherworldly tides — it was the end of sanity and the beginning of madness.

When I screamed, it matched my cries with a voice that was my own.

Few creatures in the world inspire more dread than the shoggoth, a monster whose appearance causes rational minds to wither. Few can describe its demented inconceivable visage or the maddening cacophony that pipes from its many orifices. Despite the legendary horror of these creatures, few know their far-flung origins or the terrible connection that they share with all other life forms on the planet.

The Beginning

In ancient prehistory, a race of planar-spanning alien creatures known simply as the elder things ruled many worlds. Their power was akin to that of the ancient titans themselves. They stole the secrets of creation from the primordial gods to seed otherwise barren worlds with the first whispers of life, a grand experiment that would have far-reaching implications. On many worlds, this experiment was ultimately doomed to failure, yet occasionally, life did indeed take hold, and entirely new species rose up out of the primordial soup of creation to take over the land, sea, and air.

While life flourished on these worlds, not all of the organic material was used up in the act of creation. The elder things cast aside the leftover dross or slag, and it quietly sank into the lightless oceanic depths or was left festering in cyclopean caverns. Soon forgotten by those on the surface, this oozing afterbirth did not die but instead found a life of its own and flourished in the stygian darkness, becoming the first proto-shoggoths and oozes.

The Masters of the Shoggoths

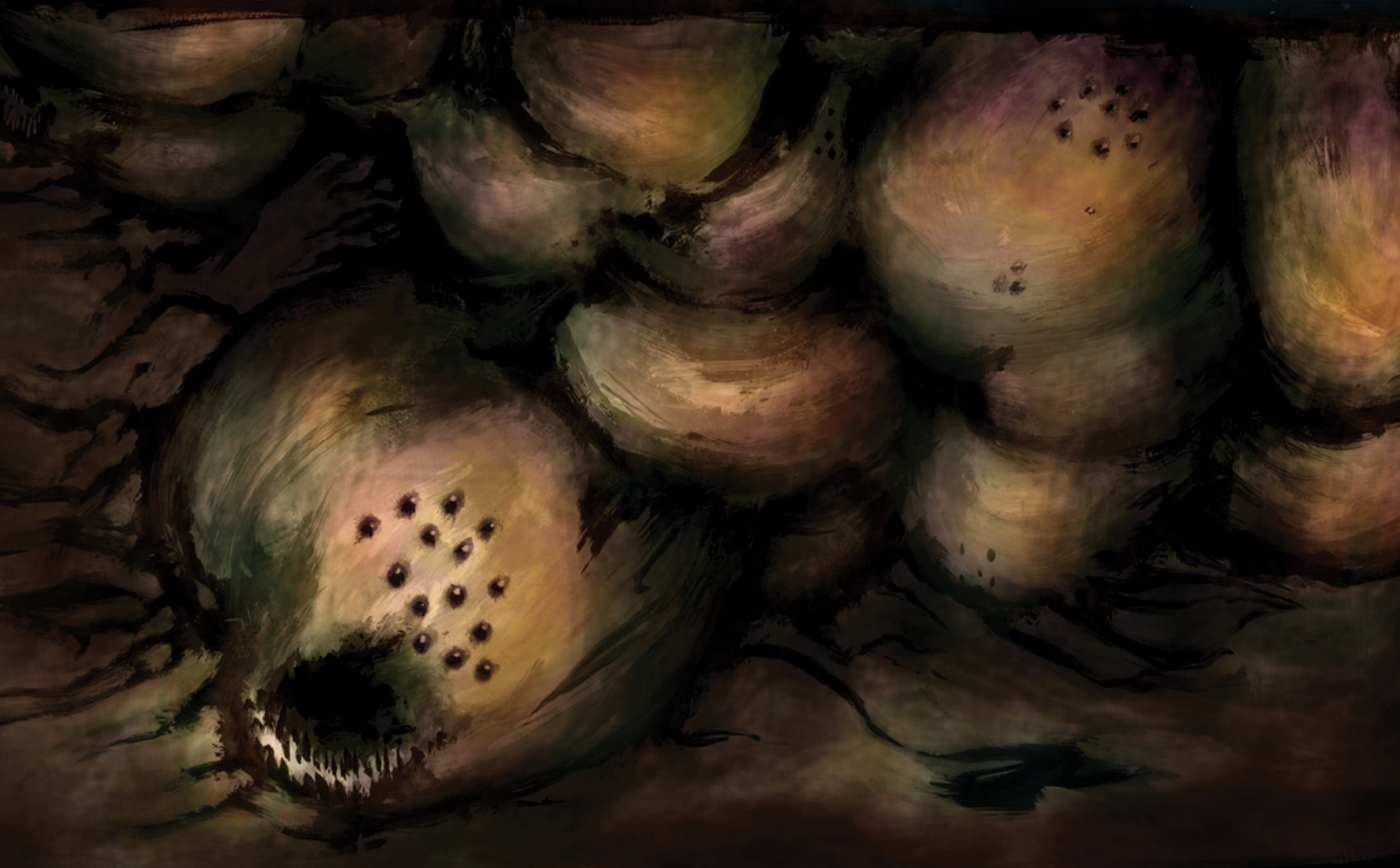
One of the first races to rise out of the stinking mire as a result of the grand experiment of the elder things were the aboleth, an evil ichthyoid race obsessed with enslaving other life forms. [Editor: see *Sunken Empires* for more details on the aboleth's plans and magic.] The aboleth inhabited many of the same environments as the proto-shoggoths and saw in the creatures a way of conquering the other races of the depths without endangering themselves. All they needed to do was bend the race to their demands. Given the great mental powers of the aboleth and the weak minds of the shoggoths, this task was no more difficult than drawing water over your gills—for an aboleth.

For countless millennia, the aboleth used the proto-shoggoths as their most powerful slaves, living siege engines capable of destroying anything in their path. Over that time, they continued to mold the shoggoths to their whims, transforming them into their current abominable shapes and increasing their size and power. However, this evolution also created a glimmer of intelligence in the shoggoth race, and the servitors began to resent the aboleth for their cruel and tyrannical ways.

When the drow and sahuagin arose to contest the aboleth for dominion over the oceans and underground depths, the shoggoths saw a chance to rebel against their terrible masters. The resulting slave rebellion unleashed such unmitigated destruction that the aboleth were almost wiped out; most fled into the Underdeep, the darkest ocean trenches. After it was over, the surviving shoggoths were free, so they slithered off into the darkness where they would never be controlled again.

Physiology

Few words can coherently describe a shoggoth's anatomy without falling well short of the mark, for the creature's form is so completely mutable that it changes almost by the second. While fundamentally an ooze like a black pudding or ochre jelly, a shoggoth can form mushy organs, throbbing sacks, eye-studded pseudopods, and weird toothless mouths from its central bulk, something beyond the grasp of most oozes. In addition, while most oozes have no Intelligence, shoggoths can think and even reason, allowing the creature to use simple



tactics and even long-term plans, a task likewise beyond most oozes.

The typical shoggoth is as large as a small cottage but can squeeze or expand its body into a variety of shapes depending on its needs. While a shoggoth does not have the fluidity of most other oozes, its body is plastic enough to move through spaces up to two sizes smaller without having to squeeze, and it can move through apertures up to three sizes smaller while squeezing. This allows the shoggoth to reach creatures that might otherwise think they are safe from the creature's hunger.

Like other oozes, shoggoths must constantly feed to power their immense bodies, engulfing and absorbing any organic matter they can catch. While most shoggoths have no particular preference when it comes to what they consume, some acquire specific tastes, including a taste for particular humanoid races, certain varieties of trees, or monsters such as chuuls and krakens. Like most other oozes, shoggoths produce little waste material and anything devoured by the creature is

almost completely consumed and added to the creature's bulk.

Despite the shoggoth's strange physical features, the most startling aspect of its physiology has nothing to do with its appearance but is, rather, its ability to produce a startling array of sounds. Its vocal structure seems deceptively simple yet hides much complexity because of the way it can reshape itself. The shoggoth uses the strange piping orifices dotting its body to create its maddening cacophony and to reproduce virtually any sound they have heard. Indeed, shoggoths can learn to speak any language, given enough time and patience, and many ancient shoggoth specimens have been heard to speak a passable Abyssal, Draconic, or Undercommon.

Shoggoths are asexual and reproduce by budding, creating tiny shoggoths that are ejected from the main body in a frenzy of activity and obscene, almost orgiastic piping. Adult shoggoths quickly consume most of the young, but the fleetest and luckiest offspring survive to continue the species and pass on the collective memories of their ancestors.

Psychology

Many creatures are surprised to discover that shoggoths are thinking creatures capable of both speech and the ability to learn. Despite this, one should never mistake a shoggoth's intelligence or thought patterns with anything that can be interpreted or understood by humanoids, for the shoggoth's mind is a fractured and warped creation of terrible longing and rage—a mind that is completely insane.

While not evil, shoggoths are random and unpredictable in their actions. The only thing that can be predicted to a reasonable certainty is that they will try to eat anything they encounter. They are driven not only by an endless hunger but also by an abject loneliness resulting from their forced separation from the rest of creation, so they try to fill that void as best they can—by assimilating all organic matter. The greater tragedy, perhaps, is their futile attempts at communication: their maddening cries are simply poorly conceived attempts to make whatever is consumed understand the reason for its inevitable liquefaction.

One of the strangest aspects of

shoggoth psychology is the rare lucidity that their minds enter after they consume a creature with an Intelligence score of 13 or greater. This lucidity can last anywhere from a few hours to a few days (roughly 3d20 hours), but while it persists the shoggoth can communicate fluently with any creature that can understand the secret language Aklo and make rational and reasonable decisions. During these rare moments shoggoths converse with the cultists who revere them, and they have the wherewithal to create gibbering mouthers.

When the shoggoth's lucidity passes, it returns to its more typical behavior and, once again, consumes the cultists and others near it.

Gibbering Mouthers and Shoggoths

Sages have long postulated a connection between gibbering mouthers and shoggoths, hinting at a similarity in body shape and the maddening qualities of their incoherent murmuring. While weird curses and magical accidents have been known to create gibbering mouthers, the truth is shoggoths have a much closer connection to them than sages suspect they do. Most gibbering mouthers are literally shoggoth children; they are created during moments of shoggoth lucidity. At those times, the shoggoths have enough control over their powers to transform living creatures they have engulfed into smaller versions of themselves.

The process that transforms a living humanoid into a gibbering mouser is little understood, but it involves infusing massive amounts of living humanoid tissue with the chaotic essence of the shoggoth's own misbegotten creation. This attempt at creating life can only be achieved by a lucid shoggoth (see above), and seems to be driven by the shoggoth's need to share in the joys of creation. However, the results are never what the shoggoth wants: who knows what perfection it is striving for?

The shoggoth just as quickly slays most gibbering mouthers it has created, but a few of them serve the mad cults

dedicated to the shoggoths or escape to terrorize the land. Often these gibbering mouthers possess abilities superior to those created through other means, such as increased size or power (giving the gibbering mouser the advanced or giant templates), immunities, or special attacks.

Shoggoth Cults

Very few creatures would ever willingly serve a shoggoth let alone worship one. However, several cults dedicated to these horrible oozes exist and may be found in places one would not normally expect them. Their names tend to the florid, such as the Cult of Evanescent Purity or the Mystic Order of the Primordial Star.

Most shoggoth cults spring up when a group of primitive and chaotic humanoids such as gnolls, orcs, or trolls discover a shoggoth and manage to placate the creature's incredible hunger. This usually involves feeding a shoggoth at least 300 day's rations to start (or 20 Medium-size creatures), and at least 20 day's rations (or 2 Medium-size creatures) each day thereafter. Cultists refer to this as the Great Feeding or the Great Feast.

The humanoids who know the secret of the Great Feast equate shoggoths with other powerful natural forces, such as hurricanes and volcanoes, and worship them for their destructive capabilities as living gods. Usually, the humanoids feed the shoggoth enough to keep it docile, but inevitably, the shoggoth destroys the tribe once the food runs out.

The more dangerous shoggoth cults occur when a group of degenerate humans, elves, or derro turns to the worship of a shoggoth, seeing them as living embodiments of some divine being, force, or principal.

These cults normally keep the shoggoth locked away in a great cavern or dungeon and feed it sacrifices taken from the local populace, slaves, or from other sources. Many of the cults also hunt down intelligent sacrifices (such as scholars, teachers, and wizards) to create lucid shoggoths,

thus enabling them to breed gibbering mouthers or even take some of the shoggoth's bubbling protoplasm to infect themselves with its chaotic otherworldly taint. The most successful shoggoth cults actually worship a chaotic evil entity like Marbas (from Green Ronin's *Book of Fiends*) rather than the shoggoth itself, seeing in the massive ooze some aspect of their god.

Mouths of Madness

Usually a shoggoth's protoplasm is completely indigestible, but it can be imbibed if properly prepared by a skilled spellcaster. Those who survive the consumption of *shoggoth brew* form an empathic link with the shoggoth. From then on, these "mouths of madness" can withstand the maddening cacophony of the shoggoth and gibbering of any created mouthers and can communicate with the shoggoth without risk of being consumed.

This ability does not come without a price. Most mouths gain one or more physical or mental characteristics that mark them as aberrant creatures. These marks can include an extra lidless eye growing on a palm, an irrational fear of open spaces, bouts of homicidal rage, a small tentacle growing from an ear, or the like.

Shoggoth Brew

Aura faint transmutation; **CL** 7th
Slot —; **Price** 750 gp; **Weight** —

Description

Anyone drinking this foul-smelling black brew must make a DC 16 Fortitude save or become nauseated for 1d6 rounds and take 1d2 Strength damage. Those who fail the saving throw vomit up the mixture, rendering it useless.

Anyone who succeeds on the saving throw metabolizes the brew and forms an empathic link with the shoggoth the brew is concocted from. This empathic link has a radius of 1 mile and allows the creature to sense the shoggoth's presence and its general physical condition. The link also makes the creature immune to all *confusion* spells and effects, and it eliminates the risk

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of the creature being attacked by the shoggoth the brew is concocted from or any gibbering mouters it has spawned. Those who successfully drink shoggoth brew gain 1d4 random physical or mental changes and cannot directly harm the shoggoth the concoction comes from. Indeed, some become even more fanatical in their devotion to the terrible beast.

The effects of *shoggoth brew* are non-magical and cannot be dispelled. A *remove disease* spell cast on the victim breaks its effects, though any marks remain.

Construction

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item;

Cost 375 gp

Variant Shoggoths

Despite their physical mutability, most shoggoths are identical in power and abilities, their reproductive cycle leading to physically identical children. Some variations in form and shape exist, and the most common variants are neo-shoggoths and proto-shoggoths.

Neo-Shoggoths: A new breed of shoggoth created by the derro (see “Ecology of the Derro” in *Kobold Ecologies*), neo-shoggoths have greater control over their bodies and can form slashing blades or piercing spines with their pseudopods. In addition, neo-shoggoths are more intelligent (with Intelligence scores of 10 or more) and can use their maddening cacophony in other, more dreadful ways such as demonic summonings, black rituals that warp space, and luring, hypnotic strains of baleful music that cause fear or insanity. Neo-shoggoths are still relatively rare and can only be found in the largest derro communities.

Proto-Shoggoths: Before the aboleths turned their arcane arts toward the shoggoths, they were little more than massive mounds of unthinking ooze driven by the basest destructive impulses. Some proto-shoggoths still roam the deepest and most inaccessible ocean depths or subterranean reaches, but most have been replaced by the far more dangerous true shoggoths.

Proto-shoggoths possess the powers

of 15 HD black puddings but without the black pudding’s highly concentrated acid, or the maddening cacophony power of regular shoggoths. Like shoggoths, they can constrict, engulf, and trample creatures, and random physical features in their otherwise amorphous pudding-like bulks include eyes, mouths, and strange malformed organs such as beating hearts or weeping bile ducts.

New Shoggoth Abilities

Neo-shoggoths, as well as ancient shoggoths, or those found on other worlds or planes sometimes possess abilities different from the norm. Some of these variant abilities are listed below.

Blood Drain (Ex) To make a shoggoth more like a gibbering mouter, a GM might want a shoggoth to drain blood from a victim instead of dealing acid damage. A blood-draining shoggoth does not deal acid damage with its engulf ability but instead deals 6 Constitution damage per round. As with the gibbering mouter’s blood drain ability, the shoggoth does not affect creatures without blood such as constructs and elementals. This ability increases the shoggoth’s CR by +1.

Breath Weapon (Ex) The shoggoth can breath out a 30-ft.-cone of acidic vapor once every 1d4 rounds as a standard action, dealing 15d6 acid damage to all creatures struck (Reflex save for half). The DC for the breath weapon is Constitution-based (Reflex DC 31 for an average shoggoth). This ability increases the shoggoth’s CR by +1.

Spell-like Abilities (Sp) The shoggoth possesses 20 spell levels’ worth of 1st-3rd level spells useable 3/day, and 20 spell levels’ worth of 4th-7th level spells useable once/day. This ability increases the shoggoth’s CR by +1.

Terrifying Cacophony (Su) Instead of the normal confusion effect, the shoggoth’s cries frighten those who fail their save. This effect lasts 1d6 rounds. Those who succeed on the saving throw are shaken for the same number of rounds but cannot be affected by the terrifying cacophony again for 24 hours. This ability does not increase the

shoggoth’s CR.

Whispers from Beyond (Su) The shoggoth can direct its maddening cacophony at a single target within 60 ft. as a standard action. Any creature affected by the maddening cacophony (Will save DC 22 negates) is treated as if under the effects of an *insanity* spell and remains confused indefinitely until cured. A shoggoth that uses its maddening cacophony this way cannot use it against other creatures in the same round. This ability does not increase the shoggoth’s CR.

Shoggoth Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (dungeoneering) can learn more about shoggoths. When a character makes a successful skill check, reveal the following lore, including the information for lower DCs. Since shoggoths are extremely rare creatures, the baseline Knowledge DC to discover anything about them is 34 (15 + the shoggoth’s CR of 19).

Table: Shoggoth Lore

DC	Result
34	Shoggoths are monstrous oozes that live in inaccessible regions of the world, particularly polar oceans and underground caverns. Shoggoths are vaguely intelligent and can constrict, engulf, and trample their prey. They can also produce a maddening array of sounds that drive creatures insane.
39	Gibbering mouters and shoggoths are distantly related. Bizarre cults dedicated to shoggoths exist, and they are usually made up of primitive humanoids, humans, or derro. Shoggoths speak the secret language Aklo and were once slaves of the aboleth.
44	Shoggoths were created several eons ago by a race known as the elder things. Shoggoths can create gibbering mouters under the right conditions, usually immediately after devouring sentient creatures. Derro cults breed powerful and closely related creatures known as neo-shoggoths.



Coming Next Issue

Yes, the biggest issue of the year is the Summer GenCon Indy special issue! It will be huge! It will be packed with greatness for Pathfinder RPG and much more 4th Edition content than this issue! It will feature sparkling wit and incisive, madly amazing game design! You cannot resist it!

Ok, we really have no idea what's in it yet. Here's our best guess based on what we are holding in the slush pits right now.

- **The Battle Mage.** A new Pathfinder RPG base class that combines pointy bits with exploidy bits. Already a kobold fan favorite.
- **An Ecology of some kind of Monster or Animal.** Details? Look, six of these things are prowling the slush pile right now, and any one of them could tear a kobold beastmaster limb from limb. So unless you are volunteering to sort them out... Ask again later.
- **Loot!** Lots of articles on magic items, treasures, wealth, and shiny, shiny things. We're very pleased with the variety of treasure articles on hand and are reluctant to part with any of them.
- Plus as much more great content as possible, including an **interview with a WotC designer.**

What else might we see in the Summer issue? Maybe traps, a shifty warlock, maybe a preview of the Griffon Towers from the Tales of the Margreve adventure, or another racial variant in John Wick's Wicked Fantasy series. Or more traps. Or something completely different.

Whatever it is, we'll be bring it to you in Indianapolis at our insanely great booth. You should visit!



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Lovecraftian Gods

By Aeryn Rudel

Art by Cory Trego-Erdner

The Old Ones were, the Old Ones are, and the Old Ones shall be. Not in the spaces we know, but between them, they walk serene and primal, undimensioned and to us unseen... As a foulness shall ye know Them. Their hand is at your throats, yet ye see Them not; and Their habitation is even one with your guarded threshold... Man rules now where They ruled once; They shall soon rule where man rules now. After summer is winter, after winter summer. They wait patient and potent, for here shall They reign again.

—H.P. Lovecraft, “The Dunwich Horror”

Evil deities are plentiful in fantasy RPGs. They are as much a staple of the genre as dragons, dungeons, dwarves, and elves. Sometimes, however, the standard array of evils just isn't *evil* enough. Sure, gods with dominion over socially unacceptable things like murder and the undead have their place, but sometimes, you need the kind of cosmic, nearly omnipotent, evil that only the bizarre and awesomely powerful entities of H.P. Lovecraft can provide. In fact, the very word “evil” is just too small to describe entities like Azathoth, Nyarlathotep, and Yog-Sothoth, who encompass a brand of wickedness that is almost beyond mortal comprehension.

If that's the kind of bad that your 4th Edition game has been missing, then this article provides you with all you need to bring three Lovecraftian elder gods into your campaign—as gods for PCs and NPCs alike.

Azathoth

Unaligned

Azathoth is chaos incarnate; a blind, idiot god embodying the state of disorder that all things—both living and unliving—are inexorably drawn toward. Azathoth is primarily worshipped by solitary madmen and deranged cultists who seek to spread chaos and destruction in the god's name. Azathoth's few sane worshippers revere it as the master of entropy, believing that the mindless deity represents the universe in its perfect state: utter disarray. Azathoth is not aware of its worshippers, so it has no teachings to impart to its faithful. However, those that



do worship it in any organized fashion often cleave to the following tenets:

- All things decay and deteriorate; it is your sacred duty to hasten all you meet toward the inevitable state of disorder.
- Strike down those that seek to renew and repair the world; they work against the will of Azathoth and defy the perfect state of chaos.
- Create nothing. Put nothing new into the world. Creation only delays the world's glorious descent into dissolution.

Worshippers of Azathoth

Worshippers of Azathoth are most often cultists who revere the god's role as chaos personified, delighting in the simple destruction and mindless aggression that typifies this aspect of the deity. These cultists are often so deranged that they lack the faculties to channel Azathoth's divine power. However, a few crazed savants can tap into the god's essence and wield terrible power in its name. These savants often lead the larger and more active cults; their powerful derangements acting as a psychotic glue that unites the

wildly dissident cultists in a singular purpose.

Organized worship of Azathoth is exceedingly rare. So reviled is the god's worship that most civilized races do not tolerate it. However, a few clandestine sects revere Azathoth in secret. Invariably, these sects worship Azathoth as a force of nature, the tendency that all things have toward chaos and dissolution. In this way, they outwardly resemble death cults but differ in their belief that all things, both living and unliving, must ultimately return to a state of pure chaos.

The Knights of Dissolution is one such sect, and its members strive to undermine all attempts to restore, repair, or renew anything, even their own bodies. Most Knights of Dissolution are clerics or paladins, but their naturalistic view of chaos is attractive to a small number of druids as well.

Azathoth in Your Game

Despite almost universal rejection by civilized races, Azathoth is not technically evil; malignity requires intellect. Because Azathoth is both blind and mindless, its actions—however destructive—are no more evil than an earthquake, a hurricane, or any natural disaster.

As a result, unaligned PC clerics and paladins may receive their prayers and divine powers from the dread deity without having to worship an “evil” god. PCs who worship Azathoth could belong to a secret order such as the Knights of Dissolution, keeping their devotion secret from society and even their companions. However, such a PC need not even be aware of his involvement in a secret cult; you can give an organization like the Knights of Dissolution a public face, letting them masquerade as just another minor faith devoted to a deity with dominion over chaos, death, or entropy.

If you and your PCs don't want to hide the worship of Azathoth, it's easy to make the god's entropic aspect a rare but accepted faith. In this way,

Azathoth worshippers need fear no recrimination for announcing their faith openly. However, you can still keep Azathoth's more malignant aspects as the specialty of deranged cults and solitary madmen.

In addition, Azathoth makes a wonderful patron for star pact warlocks and even sorcerers with the Wild Magic class feature.

Azathoth's Dissolution

[Divinity]

Prerequisites Channel Divinity class feature, must worship Azathoth

Benefit You can invoke the power of your deity to use *Azathoth's dissolution*.

Channel Divinity: Azathoth's Dissolution

Feat Power

The influence of Azathoth hastens all things toward entropy.

Encounter ★ Divine

Standard Action

Close burst 5

Effect Until the end of your next turn, you or one ally in the burst can reroll any natural 1s or 2s that come up when rolling damage

Special You must take the Azathoth's Dissolution feat to use this power

Void Flute

Level 19

This bizarre musical instrument resembles a flute with numerous knobby protrusions and far too many holes. The shrill, piping melody it plays is simultaneously calming and utterly disturbing.

Wondrous Item 105,000 gp

Power (standard; daily) ★ **Charm**

Close burst 5; +22 vs. Will; target is dazed until the end of your next turn. Creature with the aberrant origin are stunned instead of dazed.

Void flutes are lesser copies of the flutes played by the insane flutists that dance around Azathoth and keep the blind, idiot god placated with their eerie piping. Nyarlathotep and others of Azathoth's powerful servants have

been known to reward Azathoth's cult leaders with a gift of a *void flute*.

Nyarlathotep

Evil

Nyarlathotep is an elusive deity who can take a thousand different forms, each representing one or more aspects of a terrible whole. Behind one of his “masks,” Nyarlathotep can represent nearly any divine concept, from arcane study to war. However, his façades always contain a sinister element designed to draw unwitting worshippers into a spiral of death and madness.

Nyarlathotep's purpose in the cosmos is the corruption and eventual destruction of mortals, although he prefers to work his evil in the most subtle ways possible. In addition, Nyarlathotep is the servant of Azathoth—and perhaps other elder deities such as Yog-Sothoth—and he interprets and acts upon the blind, idiot god's wishes.

The few mortals who know and worship Nyarlathotep in his true form seek to spread the god's evil by subtly corrupting all they encounter. They are often purveyors of those vices that tempt mortals into damnation, be it lusts of the flesh or the pursuit of power. Nyarlathotep teaches his few true worshippers to:

- Learn all you can about everyone. This information is vital if you are to tempt all you encounter into darkness.
- Never reveal your true self or motives. Cultivate masks and personas that conceal your true faith and purpose.
- Use deception, fear, and temptation as your weapons. Though subtle, they strike truer than any blade and leave wounds that do not readily heal.

Worshippers of Nyarlathotep

Most mortal creatures that draw divine power from Nyarlathotep do so through one of the god's many façades or masks. Nyarlathotep masquerades as hundreds of different deities and powerful entities, gathering a wide range of worshippers and servants. He is known as the Haunter of the Dark among the drow, the Crawling Chaos among goblins and orcs, and is called the Black Man by many sorcerers and warlocks. To work his evil in more civilized circles, Nyarlathotep often disguises himself as a deity of knowledge or magic, tempting his followers with forbidden lore to twist their minds and souls to his purposes.

Nyarlathotep's few cultists—those that worship him in his true form—adopt innocuous personas to tempt the unwary into evil and vice. Nyarlathotep's cults also seek forbidden texts that hold spells, rituals, and information pertaining to horrific elder deities, primarily Azathoth and Yog-Sothoth. The cults do not hoard these blasphemous texts; instead, they make sure that their dire knowledge finds its way into the hands of the curious and unwary.

Nyarlathotep in Your Game

Nyarlathotep is irrevocably evil and, in his true form, is best suited to serving as a great, cosmic evil in your campaign. However, his various guises allow you to install a cult of Nyarlathotep nearly anywhere.

- As the Haunter in the Dark, he could control a vast network of drow cultists bent on spreading eternal night to the surface world.
- An influential shaman in an orc tribe could worship the Crawling Chaos, learning dark wisdom that transforms his tribe into something much worse than a mob of savages.
- A temple devoted to a strange deity of magic known only as the Dark Pharaoh could appear in any major city in your campaign, prompting your PCs to take a closer look at this strange, new god and his clergy.

For your PCs, Nyarlathotep works

well as the patron of a warlock or sorcerer, especially in his guise as the Black Man. In this role, Nyarlathotep's influence on a PC is minor, but it could easily grow into something more sinister if you decide that the Black Man expects something in return for his patronage.

However, if a player wants his cleric or paladin character to worship Nyarlathotep, such a character could follow an obscure deity of darkness, knowledge, or magic that is, in truth, simply one of Nyarlathotep's many disguises. The character could be an unwitting servant of Nyarlathotep, allowing you to work in elements of the god's cult—even obvious ones—that need never alert the character to the truth. Of course, a character who knows the truth yet keeps up the façade even in front of companions can lead to many intriguing inter-party scenarios, especially if your group has a fondness for unaligned and even evil characters.

Guise of Nyarlathotep

[Divinity]

Prerequisites: Channel Divinity class feature, must worship Nyarlathotep

Benefit: You can invoke the power of your deity to use *guise of Nyarlathotep*.

Channel

Divinity: Guise of Nyarlathotep **Feat Power**

You briefly assume the appearance of one of Nyarlathotep's more horrifying forms.

Encounter ★

Divine, Fear, Psychic

Minor Action Personal Effect

Until the end of your next turn, any creature that begins its turn adjacent to you takes 1d6 psychic damage

Special You must take the Guise of Nyarlathotep feat to use this power

Mask of Nyarlathotep

Level 13

This blank, featureless mask suddenly sprouts a long, spiked tentacle that is both terrifying and terrifyingly effective in combat.

Lvl 13 17,000 gp

Lvl 23 425,000 gp

Item Slot Head

Property Gain a +2 item bonus to Bluff and Intimidate checks.

Power (standard; at-will)

Reach 2; Strength +2 or Dexterity +2 vs. AC; target takes 1d10 + Strength or Dexterity modifier damage

Level 23—Strength +4 or Dexterity +4 vs. AC; 2d10 + Strength or Dexterity modifier damage



Only the favored servants of Nyarlathotep are likely to own a *mask of Nyarlathotep*, and it is said that the tentacle-faced fiend that its wearer becomes resembles one of the god's more terrifying forms.

Yog-Sothoth/ 'Umr at-Tawil

Evil/Unaligned

Yog-Sothoth is an immensely powerful deity with dominion over time and space. However, Yog-Sothoth can only influence the world in a very limited fashion, as it is somehow trapped in a strange empty universe beyond the reality inhabited by mortals. The dread deity seeks to break free from its prison so that it may devour all life in the natural world.

Yog-Sothoth's primary influence among mortals is through an avatar known as 'Umr at-Tawil, a fairly innocuous, unaligned deity of knowledge, time, and travel. Cultists who worship Yog-Sothoth by its true name and nature are few, but they are driven by what they call "The Great Purpose," which is to work tirelessly toward freeing Yog-Sothoth from its prison. Yog-Sothoth is also served to a limited degree by Nyarlathotep, whose cultists often work with Yog-Sothoth's toward common goals.

Because Yog-Sothoth is a dual-aspect deity, its demands on its followers differ depending on whether they worship it as 'Umr at-Tawil or Yog-Sothoth:

'Umr at-Tawil

- Plumb the depths of planar magic and seek to unlock new realities.
- Focus only on those things that increase your knowledge of time and space.
- Associate only with those who can add to your knowledge and erudition.

Yog-Sothoth

- Delve deeply into planar magic; it is there that you will find the solution to the Great Purpose.
- Let nothing keep you from the Great Purpose; destroy those who will not bend to your will or who seek to hinder you.
- The faithful of Nyarlathotep are your allies. All others cannot know of your true faith, lest they keep you from the Great Purpose.

Worshippers of Yog-Sothoth

Yog-Sothoth is primarily worshipped through its avatar, 'Umr at-Tawil, through which the deity can transmit divine power to clerics, paladins, and others able to channel such energy. The church of 'Umr at-Tawil is a small one, and it is primarily focused on expanding its knowledge of planar magic and exploring alternate realities. Only a select few in the church of 'Umr at-Tawil know who it is they truly worship, and these elite members keep this knowledge secret. Most who worship 'Umr at-Tawil work unwittingly toward a dire and apocalyptic goal, for each new discovery in the realms of planar magic moves Yog-Sothoth one step closer to freedom.

Those who draw power from Yog-Sothoth's true aspect are even rarer than the followers of 'Umr at-Tawil. Unlike the worshippers of Yog-Sothoth's avatar, cultists who embrace the cosmic evil of the dread deity's true nature have no illusions regarding what it is they work toward. These cultists believe that once Yog-Sothoth is freed to devour and destroy reality, they will dwell eternally with their master in an empty, dead universe.

Yog-Sothoth in Your Game

Of all the elder deities presented here, Yog-Sothoth is perhaps easiest to insert into an existing campaign. Through its avatar, 'Umr at-Tawil, Yog-Sothoth has a completely legitimate

way to influence mortals. Since most worshippers of 'Umr at-Tawil are unaware that the god is simply a veil for a blasphemous elder god, even PCs could take up the avatar's worship without the need to keep their faith a secret. Of course, Yog-Sothoth in its true form works just fine as a patron for star pact warlocks and even sorcerers with the Wild Magic class feature.

Another way to work Yog-Sothoth into your campaign is to make 'Umr at-Tawil a separate deity, replacing a minor unaligned deity of knowledge, time, or travel in your campaign. In this scenario, 'Umr at-Tawil was an avatar of Yog-Sothoth that became a completely independent minor deity, and it seeks more worshippers to avoid being reabsorbed by its parent deity. If Yog-Sothoth were to reabsorb 'Umr at-Tawil, it could increase the god's power to a point where it might break free from its prison. This setup makes the church of 'Umr at-Tawil and the cult of Yog-Sothoth dire enemies, giving you plenty of excuses to introduce cultists as antagonists in your campaign, especially if one of your PCs is a cleric or paladin of 'Umr at-Tawil.

10'x10' Toon by Stan!



Yog-Sothoth's / 'Umr at-Tawil's Coterminous Attack

[Divinity]

Prerequisites Channel divinity class feature, must worship Yog-Sothoth or 'Umr at-Tawil

Benefit You can invoke the power of your deity to use *Yog-Sothoth's/'Umr at-Tawil's coterminous attack*.

Channel Divinity: Yog-Sothoth's/'Umr at-Tawil's Coterminous Attack

Feat Power

Your god's power over time and space lets you be everywhere at once for a brief moment.

**Encounter ★
Divine**

Free Action

Personal Effect Until the end of your turn, you can affect a single target within 10 squares as if you

were in an unoccupied square adjacent to it; you gain all the benefits of being adjacent to your target, such as flanking, but you can only be attacked by or draw opportunity attacks from enemies that are adjacent to your true position.

Special You must take Yog-Sothoth's/'Umr at-Tawil's Coterminous Attack feat to use this power

Veil of 'Umr at-Tawil

Level 18

Peering through this blue, silk veil lets you see all possible actions a single enemy might take and plan accordingly.

Lvl 18 85,000 gp

Item Slot Head

Power (minor; daily)

Ranged 5; until the end of the encounter, whenever the target makes an attack, you can use any of your at-will powers against the target as an immediate interrupt.

Ranking clerics in the church of 'Umr at-Tawil often cover their faces with *veils of 'Umr at-Tawil*. The veils act as both a badge of rank and a potent offensive weapon.





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THE ARQUEBUSIER

A GUN-TOTING BASE CLASS FOR THE PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME

By David Mallon

Art by R.K. Post

Marko had seen the orcish scouts making their way up the mountainside for nearly an hour. More than enough time to find a proper vantage point. Sighting down the barrel of his long rifle, Marko aimed carefully and pulled the trigger, watching in satisfaction as the leading orc fell backwards down the slope. One down, four to go. If he was lucky, they wouldn't even get close enough for him to have to use his revolver. Easy.

A paragon of bravado and gunplay, the arquebusier is unmatched in his ability to craft and wield firearms of all types. These warriors, hailing from across the land, embody precision, discipline, and the path of the gunslinger.

Role Arquebusiers are experts at ranged combat, capable of using firearms with more skill than any other combatant. Their abilities allow them to reach targets unreachable by archers and melee combatants and to alter the scene of battle with precisely placed shots. An arquebusier may serve as the party's main combatant, or in a secondary combat role.

Alignment any

HD d10

Class skills Craft (Int), Disable Device (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (engineering)(Int), Knowledge (dungeoneering)(Int), Perception (Wis), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Stealth (Dex), Use Magic Device (Cha)

Skill Ranks per Level 2 + Int modifier

Class features

Weapon and Armor Proficiency. You are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, all firearms, and with light and medium armor.

Bonus Feats. At 1st level, and every 3 levels thereafter, you may select a bonus feat. Bonus feats must be taken from the following list: Agile Maneuvers, Deadly Aim, Dodge, Far Shot, Gunslinger, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Quick Draw, and Rapid Reload.

At 10th level, the following feats are added to the list: Critical Focus, Manyshot, Mobility, Rapid Shot, Shot on the Run, and Vital Strike.

Bulletcrafting. From 1st level onwards, you may make a

DC 10 Craft (firearms) check to create up to 10 bullets or 2 cartridges once per day after 1 hour's work. The Craft DC increases by 5 for every additional 5 bullets or 1 cartridge crafted.

Called Shot. Beginning at 2nd level, you may attempt to hit a target in a specific area or location with a ranged attack. This attack takes a -4 penalty to hit, but if successful, it deals an additional 1d6 hp damage.

In addition, calling a shot may be used to manipulate the environment, such as shooting a switch, shooting out a window, or shooting an object out of a character's hand. In these instances, the required AC of the attack is equal to the target's AC plus half the range increment between you and the target. Calling a shot constitutes a full-round action.

Enhanced Ammunition. Starting at 3rd level, any ammunition you make is considered masterwork, granting a +1 bonus to attack rolls. In addition, this bonus increases by 1 every 3 levels past 6th level, to a maximum of +5. Bonuses granted by masterwork firearms apply as normal to enhanced ammunition and do not stack (only the higher enhancement bonus applies).

Craft Firearm. At 5th level, you are experienced enough to repair and craft firearms and gain 1 rank in the Craft (Firearms) skill. In addition to the cost of materials (approximately 100 gp), repairing a damaged firearm requires at least 2 hours and adequate facilities to be completed. For most damage, a blacksmith's forge and workshop are required to repair the weapon. See "Misfires" section.

Creating a firearm takes 2 weeks, half the cost of a completed firearm (see Table ####), and a DC 25 Craft (firearms) check. If the check fails by 5 or less, an inferior firearm is created. These inferior products fail to fire 25% of the time and are destroyed on a roll of 1, dealing 4d6 hp damage to the wielder. If the check fails by more than 5, the funds and effort are wasted, and work must begin again with fresh materials.

Penetrating Ammunition. Starting at 6th level, ammunition you create gains a +1 bonus to damage. This bonus increases every 3 levels past 9th level, to a maximum of +4.

Double Tap. Starting at 8th level, you may choose to make

one additional attack with your ready, loaded firearm on the same target at your full attack bonus as a full-round action. In the case of single-shot firearms, this requires dropping one firearm and picking up the second for a shot. This provokes an additional attack of opportunity from any enemies other than the target.

The Bow Vs. The Gun

From a design perspective, the hardest part of balancing this class comes from comparing how an arquebusier stacks up against a ranger or a fighter who specializes in archery. Firearms should be on a roughly equal footing with archery, but bows have the huge advantage of iterative attacks. In addition, archers gain Strength bonuses to damage at levels where they have a compound bow which is most of the time.

To partially offset that, the double tap and triple tap allows for multiple attacks (though less of them than rangers and fighters have), firearms base damage is higher to start than bow damage, and the rate of fire is much lower. Overall, the class is on par with archers, and has the potential for more powerful single hits, even if the overall damage output from a flurry of arrows is higher.

Seeking Ammunition. Starting at 9th level, ammunition you make gains the *seeking* weapon quality. (Firearm ammunition curves toward its target, negating any miss chances that would otherwise apply.)

Improved Called Shot. At 11th level and beyond, your called shots take a standard action rather than a full-round action. Instead of 1d6 additional hp damage, an improved called shot instead deals 2d6 additional hp damage.

Distance Ammunition. Starting at 12th level, ammunition you make gains the *distance* weapon quality.

(The range increment for firearm ammunition is doubled.)

Crippling Shot. At 14th level, you may use your improved called shot ability to deal 1d6 Strength damage or 1d6 Constitution damage instead of 2d6 additional damage.

Aligned Ammunition. Starting at 15th level, any ammunition you make gains one of the following aligned weapon qualities: *anarchic*, *axiomatic*, *holy*, or *unholy*. You must choose the granted ability while crafting the ammunition and cannot choose an ability that is the opposite of your alignment.

Improved Double Tap. Starting at 17th level, you may make a third attack with a ready, loaded firearm at your full attack bonus. Additional attacks of opportunity are no longer

provoked with a double tap.

Brilliant Energy Ammunition.

Starting at 18th level, you may modify your firearm so that any ammunition gains the *brilliant energy* weapon quality when fired. (This ammunition gives off light in a 10-ft. radius, ignores nonliving matter, and bypasses armor and shield bonuses to AC. *Brilliant energy* ammunition cannot harm undead, constructs, and objects.)

Deadly Shot. Starting at 20th level, any confirmed critical hits you make automatically kill your target unless that target makes a Fortitude save with a DC equal to 10 + your total character level. If the saving throw is made, the target takes normal critical damage.

The Arquebusier



Level	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
1	+1	+0	+2	+0	Bonus feat, bulletcrafting
2	+2	+0	+3	+0	Called shot
3	+3	+1	+3	+1	Enhanced ammunition
4	+4	+1	+4	+1	Bonus feat
5	+5	+1	+4	+1	Craft firearm
6	+6/+1	+2	+5	+2	Penetrating ammunition
7	+7/+2	+2	+5	+2	Bonus feat
8	+8/+3	+2	+6	+2	Double tap
9	+9/+4	+3	+6	+3	Seeking ammunition
10	+10/+5	+3	+7	+3	Bonus feat
11	+11/+6/+1	+3	+7	+3	Improved called shot
12	+12/+7/+2	+4	+8	+4	Distance ammunition
13	+13/+8/+3	+4	+8	+4	Bonus feat
14	+14/+9/+4	+4	+9	+4	Crippling shot
15	+15/+10/+5	+5	+9	+5	Aligned ammunition
16	+16/+11/+6/+1	+5	+10	+5	Bonus feat
17	+17/+12/+7/+2	+5	+10	+5	Improved double tap
18	+18/+13/+8/+3	+6	+11	+6	Brilliant energy ammunition
19	+19/+14/+9/+4	+6	+11	+6	Bonus feat
20	+20/+15/+10/+5	+6	+12	+6	Deadly shot

Using Firearms

The use of firearms requires the Exotic Weapons Proficiency (firearms) feat, which all arquebusiers gain as a bonus feat at first level. A non-proficient character using a firearm takes the standard -4 penalty to attack rolls. Attacking with a firearm provokes attacks of opportunity. (Firearms are considered equivalent to crossbows for the purpose of feat selection, such as for Rapid Reload.)

Misfires. Whenever a natural 1 is rolled on an attack roll using a firearm, the weapon may misfire. Immediately roll 1d20. On a second natural 1, the firearm is irreparably damaged, and the powder explodes out the breech, dealing the weapon's damage to its wielder. On a 2-7, the weapon is damaged, and on an 8-20, the firearm jams. A damaged firearm requires proper facilities, a DC 20 Craft (firearms) check, and 2 hours to repair. A jammed firearm requires 1 round to clear before it can be fired again.

Reloading. A standard firearm requires one standard action to reload (much like a crossbow) with shot and powder. For firearms with multiple chambers or barrels, each takes an additional standard action to reload.

Firearms Blunderbuss. This firearm fires lead shot from its bell-shaped muzzle, making it effective as a fowling-piece or as a personal defense weapon. However, the blunderbuss loses its effectiveness with distance.

Carbine. A carbine is a rifled-bore longarm that fires smaller caliber shot than a rifle. Carbines are more effective at close range than standard long rifles and weigh much less, but they are less effective over long distances due to their smaller size.

Hand-cannon. The simplest type of firearm, a hand-cannon is simply a small cannon-barrel surrounded by a wooden sheath. To fire, one must load the barrel with powder and shot and then light a fuse (taking a full-round action, as well as an additional full-round action to attack). While heavy and slow, hand-cannons pack a massive punch and are easier to procure than other firearms.

Musket. A step up from the hand-cannon, a musket is a smooth-bore longarm that fires large-caliber balls or bullets. Muskets are inaccurate but lighter and easier to fire than the hand-cannon.

Musketoon. This variety of musket trades size and the ability to fire

larger caliber ammunition for greater accuracy over a shorter distance.

Pistol. The single-shot pistol is much easier to conceal than larger firearms, and as a result, wielders gain a +2 bonus on Sleight-of-Hand checks made to conceal them.

Pistol, Howdah. Designed for fending off large animals, howdah pistols are larger and heavier than a standard handgun. Their larger barrels allow for larger caliber ammunition to be used, granting higher damage-dealing potential, but reducing the concealment bonus to +1.

Pistol, Pepperbox. A pepperbox pistol consists of four small-caliber barrels tied to one trigger that, when pulled, fires all barrels simultaneously. While less accurate than a regular pistol, the pepperbox has an increased potential to deal deadly wounds.

Pistol, Revolver. The most advanced firearm available, revolvers generally contain four chambers, each holding one round of ammunition. Cocking the hammer spins the chambers to align the next bullet from the barrel. Revolvers with up to nine chambers can be found, but at a higher cost.

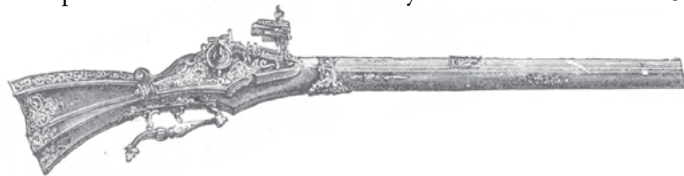
Ribauldequin. Also known as a pipe-organ gun due to its unique construction, the ribauldequin is a potent antipersonnel weapon. Consisting of five barrels splayed in a ninety-degree array from the stock assembly, a ribauldequin fires a series of projectiles in a spray in front of its wielder. Due to its nature, a ribauldequin is impossible to aim. Instead, up to five targets within a 20-ft. cone must make a reflex save, with a DC equal to the attack roll. If the save is failed, the target takes 1d6 damage.

Rifle. Rifles are longarms with small grooves (known as rifling) along the inside of the barrel which make the ammunition spin, making the rifle an exceedingly accurate weapon. A rifle is usually smaller and lighter than a musket, reducing its damage-dealing potential somewhat but increasing its range.

Scattergun. A larger version of the blunderbuss, a scattergun fires a

massive blast of shot that can be devastating at close range, but that drops off rapidly in effectiveness beyond the first range increment.

Volley Gun. Closely related to both the pepperbox pistol and the musket, a volley gun fires five medium-caliber slugs at the same time, giving the wielder the potential to deal a



tremendous amount of damage. However, while powerful, a volley gun also has a very short range and is incredibly heavy.

Weapon

Firearms are expensive compared to bows and crossbows, but depending on the campaign, they may not be wildly out of reach for a 1st to 3rd level

arquebusier. This is why two prices are listed; the Exotic column shows pricing in games where firearms are simply unknown outside a few specialist regions. The Normal column shows pricing for a campaign where both PCs and NPCs will have access to at least a few firearms in any major city. If firearms are wildly exotic, the 1st level arquebusier may choose a blunderbuss, pistol or hand-cannon as a starting weapon at a price of 100 gp rather than the listed Exotic price.

	Cost (Normal)	Cost (Exotic)	Dmg (M)	Critical	Range	Capacity	Weight	Type
Blunderbuss ^{2,3}	200 gp	1,400 gp	2d8	x2	20 ft.	1	8 lb.	P
Carbine ¹	400 gp	2,800 gp	1d8	19-20/x2	90 ft.	1	7 lb.	P
Hand-Cannon ^{1,2}	200 gp	1,400 gp	1d12	x2	30 ft.	1	15 lb.	P
Musket ¹	250 gp	1,800 gp	1d10	x3	90 ft.	1	10 lb.	P
Musketoon ¹	230 gp	1,600 gp	2d6	x2	70 ft.	1	7 lb.	P
Pistol	200 gp	1,400 gp	1d8	x2	60 ft.	1	4 lb.	P
Pistol, Howdah	210 gp	1,500 gp	2d6	x3	40 ft.	1	6 lb.	P
Pistol, Pepperbox	225 gp	1,600 gp	1d8	x3	20 ft.	4	5 lb.	P
Pistol, Revolver	375 gp	2,600 gp	1d8	x2	60 ft.	4-9	4 lb.	P
Ribauldequin ^{1,2}	1,150 gp	2,300 gp	1d8 (see text)	x2	20-ft. cone	5	15 lb.	P
Rifle ^{1,2}	500 gp	3,000 gp	1d12	19-20/x3	150 ft.	1	10 lb.	P
Scattergun ^{1,2,3}	300 gp	2,200 gp	3d8	x2	30 ft.	1	10 lb.	P
Volley gun ^{1,2}	350 gp	2,400 gp	2d10	x2	30 ft.	5	20 lb.	P

1 This firearm requires two hands to use.

2 Small creatures take a -2 penalty to attack rolls when using this firearm.

3 This firearm deals 1 die less damage per range increment beyond the first. It cannot deal precision-based damage, such as from a sneak attack or from attacking a favored enemy

Ammunition Bullets. The de facto firearm ammunition, bullets must be crafted to the specific caliber of the firearm with which they are being used. In areas where firearms are common, certain standardized calibers may be found and their costs are outlined in the table below. In the instance of nonstandard caliber bullets, they may be specially crafted, but the price increases by 1 gp per container.

Cartridges. A cartridge consists of a paper packet containing bullet, wad, and powder. One simply has to rip open the packet and ram the contents into the barrel of the firearm to reload, thereby reducing reload time to a move action. (Rapid Reload would further reduce reload to a free action.)

Shells. A new, uncommon type of

ammunition, shells combine primer, powder, and bullet into a single copper casing. After firing, the copper casing of the shells may be reused and filled with new primers, powder, and bullets. Due to their easy load-and-fire method, using shells reduces reload to a move action.

Due to their rarity and complex nature, shells require a DC 20 Craft (weapons) check to create 2 in 1 day and carry a cost of 1 gp apiece. Shells may only be used with rifles, pistols, and revolvers. (Rapid Reload would further reduce reload to a free action.)

Cost	Time to Craft	Weight
Cartridge	1 sp each	4/hour 10/lb.
Lead bullets	1 cp each	20/hour 20/lb.
Loose powder	20 gp	N/A 1/lb.
Shell	1 gp each	2/hour 40/lb.

When using Craft (firearms), 1 lb. of loose gunpowder is enough for 40 shots with a musket or other rifle.

Materials required to make the bullets cost roughly 1 gp/bullet, including gunpowder. Cartridges require shells as well, doubling the cost to 2 gp each.

Arquebusiers in Golarion

The Gunworks of Alkenstar produces nearly of Golarion's gunpowder weapons. Those proven to be particularly skilled in their use may go on to become one of the legendary arquebusiers, gunslinger-warriors trained in the arts of combat, smithing, and tactics.

Through years of life in the

magic-dead Mana Wastes, the gun-crafters of Alkenstar have learned to imbue their arms and ammunition with a small piece of their will, allowing a properly trained arquebusier to change and direct their shots like no other. While many arquebusiers take to the defense of their city-state, some become adventurers, wandering

the known world, performing great deeds with the aid of their trusty sidearms.

In addition to, or instead of the modified firearms rules presented in this article, players using the world of Golarion can use the rules and stats presented in the *Pathfinder Chronicles Campaign Setting*.

Arquebusiers in Zobeck

The races of Zobeck use gunpowder sparingly; only the dwarves seem to have any real fondness for it, and even then, they prefer it simply as a substitute for crossbows in certain types of mercenary work. Most elves, humans, kobolds, and others lack the patience to mill gunpowder and to forge the precision barrels needed — but there are exceptions.

The mercenaries of the Seven Cities use muskets and shot when they can buy them from the dwarves of Melano and Hammerfell, and some say the arsenals of Remulus and Triolo have learned the secrets of its manufacture.

In addition, the dragons and humans of the Mharoti Empire also use gunpowder, though only in massed fire, and most often

when the Sultan is personally accompanying an army. The idea of cartridges and repeaters do not exist; only smooth-bore muskets and blunderbusses, and rather few of those outside the Ironcrags. Though the organ gun or ribauldequin is extremely popular, siege cannons are entirely unknown.



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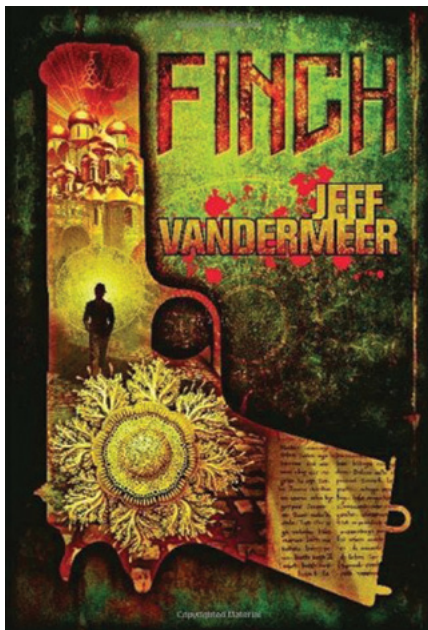
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BOOK REVIEWS

ALL TOMES READ BY CANDLELIGHT

by William Banks, Janna Silverstein, and Pierce Watters



Finch

Jeff VanderMeer

Underland Press, November 2009

339 pages, US \$14.95

Review by Janna Silverstein

Award-winning author Jeff VanderMeer has already written a great deal about the city-state of Ambergris in his short story collection *City of Saints and Madmen* and the subsequent novel *Shriek: An Afterword*. It's a wonder VanderMeer has more to say about his city, but Ambergris—in all its moldy, glowing decay—is as much a character in the novel as detective John Finch is. Readers may be surprised at how well *Finch* stands on its own, but VanderMeer's a pro and ready to take his readers on a long, strange trip.

The gray caps—the city's fungus-based overlords—send Finch to investigate a double murder in a crumbling apartment building where he finds a human victim crushed in a fall and a gray cap cut in half at the

waist. The peculiar assignment becomes a trap because of who the dead man is, how the gray cap died, and Finch's own abandoned identity.

John Finch is straight out of Hammett: troubled, loyal, determined to do right even when it hurts. And boy, does it hurt.

Everyone in Finch's world has secrets. His partner Wyte is infected with spores that are turning him into something Other. His lover Sintra won't even tell him what she does for a living. The gray caps won't tell Finch why they're so interested in the human murder victim, but they're busy with an enigmatic construction project that hovers over Ambergris like an executioner's axe. The leader of the human rebel movement against the gray cap tyranny won't tell Finch why he's central to her plans. Finch even keeps secrets from himself until it's all stripped away by paranoia, death, and a dogged, exhausting search for the truth. It's compelling stuff, with great depth and heart along with a punchy narrative style.

As for punches, VanderMeer doesn't pull a single one. Just when you think he can't lay one more burden on his protagonist, the story opens up almost exponentially, so that what starts as a classic mystery ends as a world-altering odyssey. This gritty, surreal novel thrives on the tropes of noir while portraying one of the weirdest, most original settings in fantasy fiction.

Black Blade Blues

J.A. Pitts

Tor, April 2010

400 pages, US \$25.99

Review by Janna Silverstein

In the suburbs of Seattle, Sarah Beauhall is an apprentice blacksmith by day and the propmaster for a local movie company by night. Luckily, she's



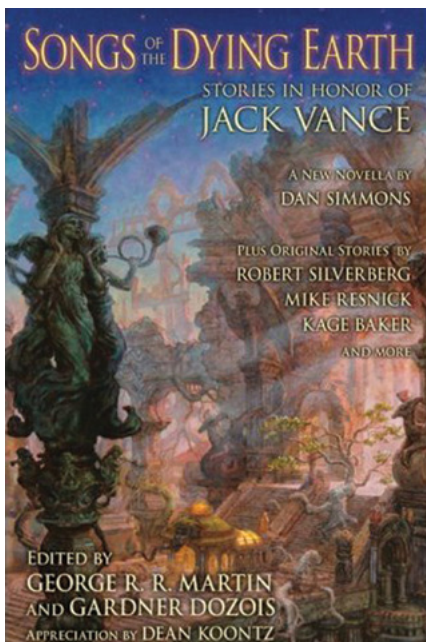
handy with a hammer because when the star of *Elvis vs. the Goblins* breaks the special black sword she loaned to the movie production, the blade must be mended to complete the scene the next evening. And that's when everything gets weird.

One of the extras shows up at her forge anxious to watch her repair the sword, convinced it's a legendary weapon out of Norse mythology. Sarah's girlfriend Katie has no problem buying into the stranger's ideas, accepting it when he tells them he's a dwarf and has been searching for the sword for a very long time.

In Portland, philanthropist Frederick Sawyer is dealing with changes, too. His superior is watching his activities more closely than usual. A rival from British Columbia, Jean-Paul Duchamp, is moving in on his territory. Sawyer and Duchamp, both older than they look with hoards of money to spare, sense a change in the air, as if a new influence were rising in the Pacific Northwest. J.A. Pitts mines Seattle's Scandinavian heritage and the dedication of the

Society for Creative Anachronism's proudest warriors to build the first novel of his suburban high fantasy trilogy. For all the fantasy—and readers will find all the giants, dwarves, and witches they could want, each in very effective disguise—Pitts also mines his heroine's heart. As she navigates the transformation that the sword works upon her—those berserker rages get in the way of building a relationship even if they're handy for fighting dragons—she also has to come to terms with her sexuality, something her redneck father has made difficult for her. It is adolescence come late, with an awkwardness and a sweetness that are poignant and familiar.

Don't be scared off by the delicate flowering of adulthood here; it's all part of the journey. There's plenty of intrigue and smiting in *Black Blade Blues*, dressed up in SCA leather and led by Sarah's very ancient, very special sword. The book's a great deal of fun. Pitts plays with familiar fantasy characters, throwing them into the contemporary world with abandon. They land, as it happens, in a lively and satisfying adventure.



Songs of the Dying Earth

Edited by George R.R. Martin and Gardner Dozois

Subterranean Press, September 2009
Hardcover, 670 pages, \$15.99
Review by William Banks

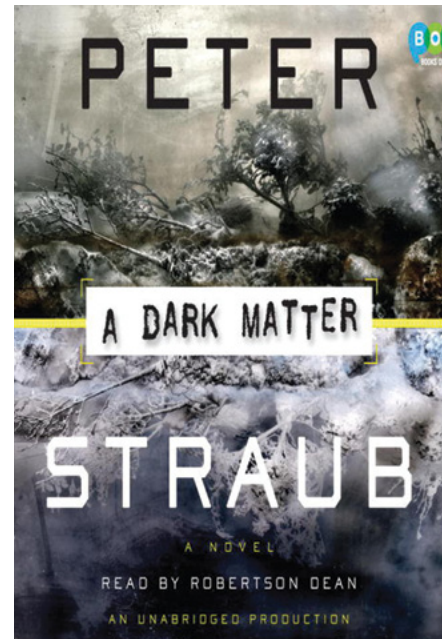
It's fair to say that without Jack Vance, we would all be playing a very different game. After all, the magic system of the world's first roleplaying game is called "Vancian" after the magic introduced in Vance's classics, *The Dying Earth*, *The Eyes of the Overworld*, *Cugel's Saga*, and *Rhialto the Marvellous*. His work stands up perfectly well against Tolkien, Le Guin, or Miéville.

Yet there's something faintly blasphemous about even attempting an anthology like this: Jack Vance is a legendary grand master of SF and fantasy, and here we have Neil Gaiman, Robert Silverberg, Kage Baker, and Dan Simmons, among many others, doing their level best to write in his world and his style. The Excellent Prismatic Spray makes several appearances. Insolent demons and picaresque betrayals abound.

For any fan of D&D, this anthology is a treasure and a joy: the book is filled with new rogues and wizards a-plenty, with grues and Deodands in great numbers, and with the humor, sly style, sharp dialogue, and extended vocabulary that we expect from a Vancian story. Of the 21 stories and 1 novella in this volume, maybe half really nail it, but that's no reflection on the authors: the bar to write in Vance's style is set impossibly high. That's what I mean by blasphemy; would anyone create an anthology called *Songs of Middle Earth?*

About that high bar: Martin and Silverberg and many others hit it, without a doubt, because—as they tell us in the short notes to Mr. Vance at the end of each story—this is a world and a story cycle that affected them deeply. However, even the failures to channel Mr. Vance entirely are wonderful stories, rich with wild asides, rampant imagination, and a world that functions at its own pace.

The limited edition is sold out, but if you find a copy or if it ever goes to paperback, grab it. Highly recommended to all gamers.



A Dark Matter

Peter Straub

Doubleday, February 2010
Hardcover, 397 pages, \$26.95
Review by Pierce Watters

This is a tale of the 1960's, a time of great change both historic and intellectual. And in Straub's America, borders both intellectual and physical are transgressed as creatures from beyond begin to use America's sea change as a ticket to the land of opportunity.

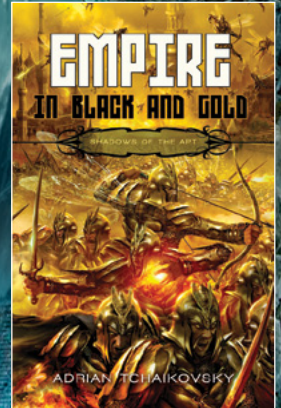
Spencer Mallon is part con man, part messiah. He slides along the edges of normal life, charming what he wants from others. In 1966, in Madison, Wisconsin, Mallon gathered a small group of followers—four high school students and three college students—to join him in an arcane rite.

The one who wasn't there, the one who never fell under Mallon's spell, Lee Harwell, married his high school sweetheart, Lee "Eel" Truax, and went on to become a successful writer. Eel had been one of Mallon's adherents on that night in the meadow when everything went wrong.

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THE WAR IS COMING.

ADRIAN TCHAIKOVSKY'S SHADOWS OF THE APT



"Full of colourful drama and non-stop action involving mass warfare and personal combat." —**Fantasy Book Critic**



BEGINNING IN MARCH 2010

A Dark Matter is a mesmerizing look at a handful of people who meddled with the supernatural and a thoughtful study of how they were changed. Eel could never discuss what had happened in the meadow with her husband; in fact, all the participants were scattered and forever damaged in the aftermath. Something horrible and toothy had

torn Keith Hayward to bits. Howard “Hootie” Bly had been driven mad and was confined to a sanitarium. The others suffered diverse fates but reappear 4 decades later to share their stories with Harwell.

Lee Harwell is driven to investigate, to find out what happened on that fateful night. As this book progresses

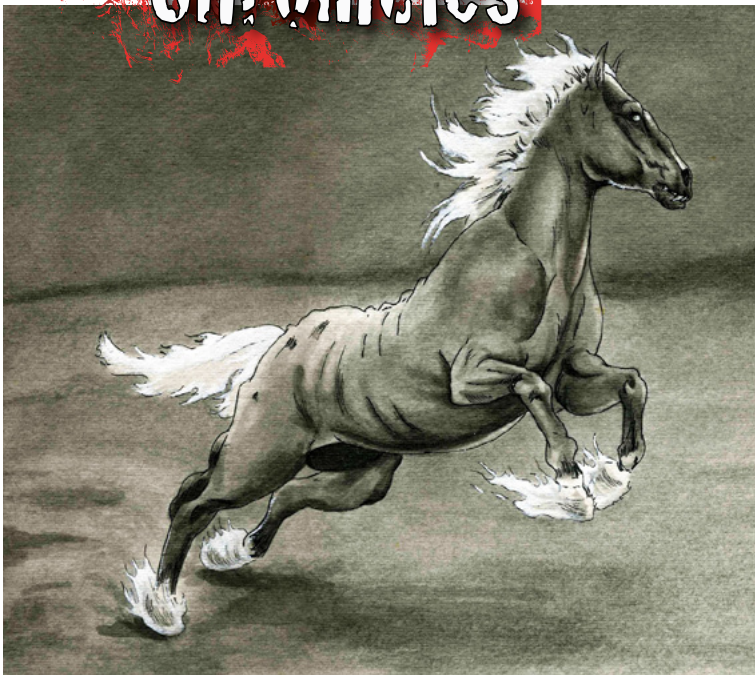
we are shown the events of one fey evening in 1966 from the eyes of each participant, as each speaks to Harwell and looks back—and remembers the fateful events differently.

A Dark Matter is a challenging book, heady and thought provoking, but well worth the effort. Recommended. Ω

Peter Straub says:

“The people I remembered were the wandering philosopher-freeloaders who began to appear on college campuses and in places like Haight-Ashbury in the mid-sixties. They attracted circles of admirers, followers, stooges, who supported them and listened to their endless explanations of everything under the sun. These guys were usually aged from 30 to 35, still young, but enough older than their victims to possess a kind of authority. They had sex with the good-looking girls, they were fed, they clothed themselves with the shirts and trousers of their male admirers. They lifted your jazz records and gave them to someone else. They talked and talked about The Tibetan Book of the Dead, Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, conspiracies, Buddhism, the apocalypse, drugs, politics. The 60s were filled with these phonies, rancid with them. Any account of the 60s that does not include them is incomplete.”

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Alternate Objectives: Capture the Flag

By Matthew Hanson

Cartography and Art by Jonathan Roberts

Slaying monsters and taking their stuff is certainly a time-honored part of fantasy RPG, but sometimes, you might want to shake up the “defeat-all-enemies” routine with an alternate way for PCs to “win”—by capturing the flag.

Capture-the-flag encounters take their name from the children’s game where two teams each try to literally capture the other team’s flag and bring it back to their own side. In your adventure, the “flag” can be nearly any portable object: a powerful weapon, the second half of an ancient map, or a crystal used to focus the dark wizard’s terrible spells.

Whatever the flag might be, it is the key to the encounter and, possibly, the adventure. The heroes’ goal is to

get the flag and get out. It must be something important enough to make the heroes risk life and limb to retrieve it. You should grant the PCs full XP for completing the encounter, even if they do not slay every foe.

Building a capture-the-flag encounter is similar in many ways to most encounters, but you have a few additional factors to consider.

Encourage High Turnover

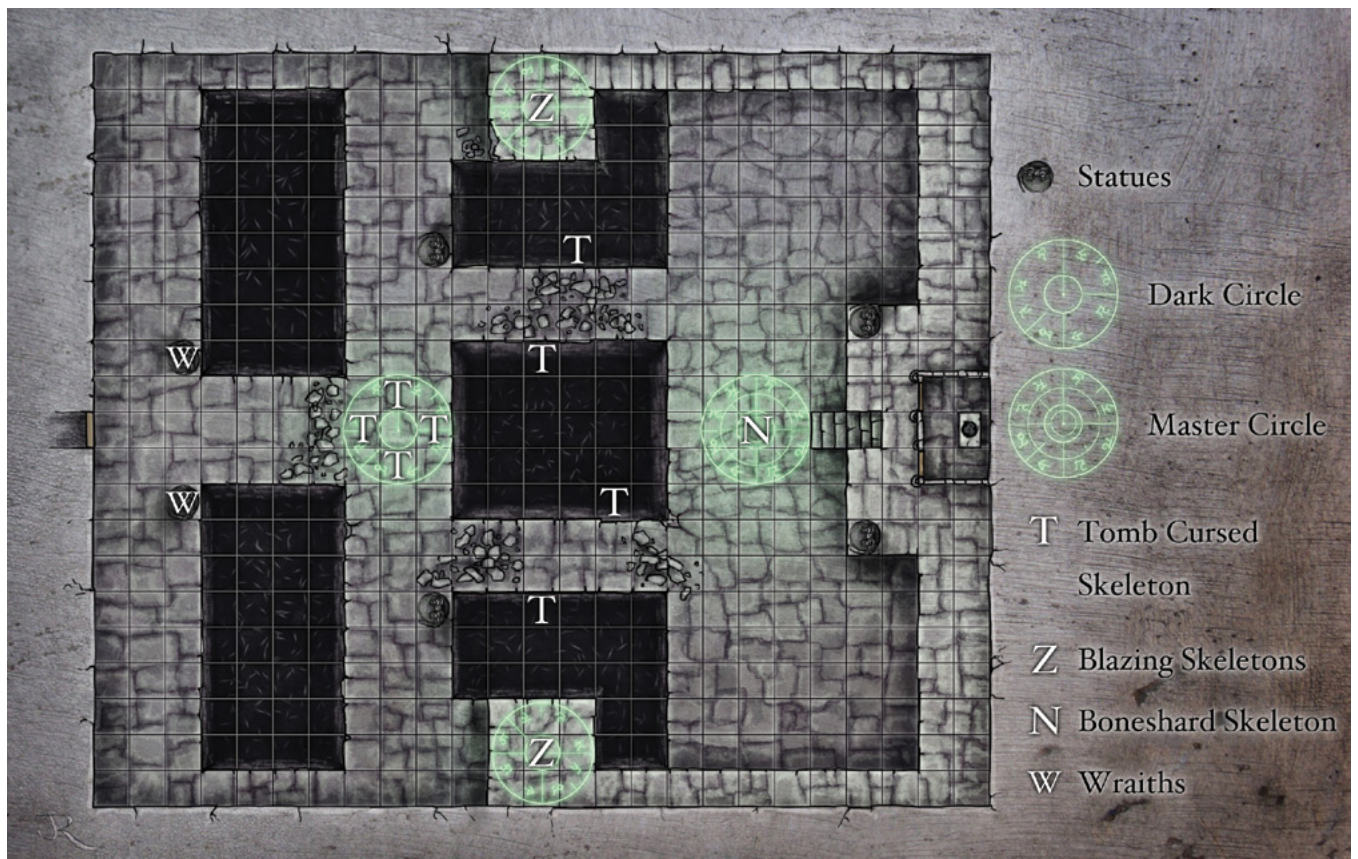
Some of the joys of a capture-the-flag encounter are passing the flag between PCs and the danger of opponents intercepting it, but there needs to be incentive for PCs to pass the flag to each other. The flag might be dangerous to carry, or the encounter area might feature different types of

terrain that some PCs can transverse more easily than others, such as water for those with Athletics and narrow ledges for those with Acrobatics. There might even be barriers, such as iron grates, that a PC cannot pass through but that the flag could.

There must also be danger of the enemy retrieving the flag. The enemies could wrestle it away in a grapple, the players might risk dropping the flag each time they are damaged, or the flag might possess a life of its own and attempt to escape from a PC’s grasp.

Avoid the Quick Get Away

Just as it’s anticlimactic for a massive red dragon to fall after a single hit, if the PCs grab the flag and get away in a round or two, that capture-the-



flag battle fails to live up to its full potential.

The first and easiest way to counter a quick getaway is by increasing the size of the encounter area. Areas should be at least 20 squares long and can be as large as you can fit on your battle map.

Terrain can also slow down PCs, and there are several broad categories. Rubble and mud directly slow PCs by costing extra movement. Blocking terrain, such as high walls and massive trees, can force them to zigzag, using more movement. Low walls, pools of water, and narrow ledges might slow the characters down while requiring them to make skill checks. Beds of hot coals, thorny briars, and clouds of acid force PCs to choose a safer, longer route or suffer damage by taking the short cut.

Be careful when using slowing terrain that you do not make the entire map a pain to navigate. Instead, create islands of normal terrain where fights are likely to take place, and surround them with difficult or dangerous terrain. This allows PCs with movement-based powers to do their shtick in battle while slowing down the race to the flag.

The final way to slow down the PCs is with monsters. The monsters might slow them down by applying conditions like slow, immobilize, daze, or stun. They might also use pull, push, and slide effects to force PCs away from their objective or into difficult terrain. The monsters can also slow down the party by just being in the way, especially if you place them at a choke point, so the PCs must push the monsters away, slay them, or suffer opportunity attacks.

Make it Hard to Kill Everybody

A capture-the-flag encounter can easily turn into the standard defeat-all-enemies battle if the players believe that it is easier to capture the flag after all of the enemies are dead. To encourage the PCs to grab the flag and run, you should make the monsters harder to kill than normal.

One way to do this is to simply

choose monsters that are hard to kill. Regenerating, insubstantial, elite and solo monsters are all tough, especially brutes and soldiers. Be careful when using higher-level monsters since this also increases the risk of PC death, which might not be the intended goal.

You might also use more than the standard five monsters per encounter. If you do, you should keep monsters at or below the level of the PCs to keep the encounters from being too deadly.

You can also use terrain to help monsters survive. The terrain might provide cover or concealment, heal nearby enemies, or grant magical bonuses to defenses. Terrain can also be used to isolate enemies. By placing them on a high tower or across a raging river, you can keep artillery or ranged controllers alive for longer.

Just like you do not want to cover the battle mat with difficult terrain, you also do not want every enemy to be impossible to kill. Include at least a few enemies that are easy to destroy so that the players can feel a sense of progress and the half-orc barbarian can let off some steam.

Sample Encounter

The Shadow Orb Level 8 (1,400 XP)

In this encounter, the PCs are tasked with recovering the *Shadow Orb* from an ancient crypt. The orb's exact purpose is left up to the GM. It might be the key to stopping an undead blight, it might contain the soul of a fallen hero, or it might just be worth a lot of coin.

Set Up:

- **2 blazing skeletons** (*Monster Manual*) (Z)
- **1 boneshard skeleton** (*Monster Manual*) (N)
- **8 tomb-cursed skeleton (New!)** (T)
- **2 wraiths** (*Monster Manual*) (W)

The wraiths each begin the battle inside a statue, and they should not be placed on the board until the heroes obtain the *Shadow Orb*. (Place statues in the squares marked with W). Do

not roll initiative for the wraiths; instead, they act directly after a PC first touches the orb. Also, do not place the tomb cursed skeletons that begin in the pits until the PCs peer down or the skeletons climb up.

When the PCs first enter the crypt, read or paraphrase the following:

Four circles of sickly green light illuminate skeletal humanoids. Demonic statues flank bridges over treacherous pits. At the far end of the crypt, a steep staircase leads to an upper level where a stone mausoleum beckons.

Tactics

The undead within this chamber are tasked with protecting the *Shadow Orb*. The blazing skeletons rain fire on whoever currently holds the orb or stands closest to it. The boneshard skeleton remains at the base of the stairs until a creature gets to the stairs or finds another way to the upper level. The wraiths lurk inside their statues until the PCs first touch the orb, at which point they attack the orb holder. The tomb-cursed skeletons attack whoever is closest to them, whether the PC holds the orb or not. However, once the PCs have the orb, they grapple the orb bearer and steal the orb if the bearer is nearby.

Features of the Area

Ceiling—The ceiling of the crypt is 20 ft. above the main floor (10 ft. above the upper level).

Illumination—The dark circles give off an eerie glow, and the squares containing them have dim illumination. The rest of the crypt is pitch-black.

Dark Circles—Undead gain a +2 bonus to all defenses while standing inside a dark circle while living creatures suffer a -2 penalty to all defenses.

Master Circle—The dark circle at the base of stairs has all the powers of a dark circle. In addition, it serves as a focus for the dark energies within the room, for the PCs to exploit. Any PC standing within the circle may attempt to use the *disrupt darkness* terrain power.

Pits—The pits are 20 ft. deep and

covered with spikes. In addition to falling damage (2d10 from main floor or 3d10 from upper level), any creature that falls into the pit is attacked: +10 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage.

Rubble—The rubble is difficult terrain.

Stairs—The stairs are difficult terrain.

Statues—Statues are difficult terrain and provide cover.

Upper Level—The upper level (where the *Shadow Orb* is housed) is 10 ft. above the main level.

Disrupt Darkness

Terrain Power

Minor Action (once per turn)

Personal

Special: You must be within the master circle to use this power.

Effect: Make a DC 20 Arcana or Religion check to either suppress the effects of all the dark circles until the end of your next turn or prevent the tomb-cursed skeletons from using or recharging their *reanimate* power until the end of your next turn. With a 30 or higher on your check you activate both these benefits.

Tomb Cursed Skeleton

Level 5 Minion

Medium natural animate (undead)
XP 50

Initiative: +6

Senses Perception +2; darkvision
hp 1; a miss never damages a tomb cursed skeleton (see also *reanimate* and *pile of bones*)

Immune disease, poison

Speed 6; **Climb** 6

AC 17 **Fortitude** 16 **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13
[m] Claw (standard; at will)
+10 vs. AC; 5 damage

Pile of Bones

When the skeleton is reduced to 0 hp, it is not destroyed. It collapses into a pile of bones that is treated as difficult terrain until it uses *reanimate*. As a pile of bones, it cannot take any actions except for *reanimate*.

Reanimate (standard; recharge on 6; must recharge before first use)
The skeleton regains all hp and begins turn prone.

Reanimate Shadow Charge

(standard, when PCs have the *Shadow Orb*; recharge on 5 or 6; must recharge before first use)

The skeleton's *reanimate* power accelerates when the PCs hold the orb.

Str 16 (+5) **Dex** 15 (+4)

Wis 10 (+2) **Con** 13 (+3)

Int 3 (-2) **Cha** 3 (-2)

Rules for the Shadow Orb

Holding the Shadow Orb—You must have a free hand to hold the *Shadow Orb*. Living creatures are slowed and gain vulnerable 5 necrotic while holding the orb. The only way to remove these conditions is to drop or give away the Orb.

Throwing the Shadow Orb—You may throw the *Shadow Orb* as a minor action, making either an Acrobatics or Athletics check. You throw it a number of feet equal to your skill check (or a number of squares equal to your check divided by 5). You may choose to throw the orb a shorter distance. If you throw the orb into an occupied square, a creature in the square may attempt to catch it.

Catching the Shadow Orb—If the *Shadow Orb* is thrown into your space, you may attempt to catch it as an immediate reaction. To catch the orb, make an Acrobatics or Athletics check with a DC equal to the number of feet it was thrown (or the number of squares times 5). If you fail, the orb falls to the ground in your square.

Picking up the Shadow Orb—You may pick up the *Shadow Orb* from your square or an adjacent square as a minor action. If the *Shadow Orb* is in the same square as a hostile creature, you provoke an opportunity attack from that creature.

Stealing the Shadow Orb—You may attempt to pry the *Shadow Orb* from another creature's grasp. You or your ally must first grab the creature. Once the target has been grabbed, you may attempt either a Dexterity vs. Reflex or a Strength vs. Fortitude attack. If successful, you gain possession of the orb.



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The Thrill of the Unknown

By Monte Cook

Art by Olaus Magnus



The first episode of the *Twilight Zone* I ever saw was the one where Roddy McDowell is put in a zoo on Mars. (It's called "People are Alike All Over", if you care.) While the whole thing was scary to an 8-year old, the scariest thing wasn't in the show at all. It was in the title sequence: the brief view you get of a dark cave on a hillside. There's creepy music playing, and some guy (Rod Serling, of course) is saying strange things, and you just see this dark cave for a moment, and you never get to see what's in there. But you definitely feel that *something's* in there. It was terrifying because it wasn't defined.

Invisible Horrors

There's an adage regarding horror that the stuff you don't see is more horrifying than what you do see, but what I'm describing here is even a step beyond that. There's *nothing* given to us about the cave except that it's dark and creepy. We only see it for a moment. All the horror is *entirely* in our imaginations, and we're not even really encouraged or given time to fully explore even that. We know something's really scary there, but we don't formulate any details. It's realization without contemplation. A gut reaction, not a logical thought. It remains forever terrifying because, without any details, it's always unknown, undefined, and nothing to which we can ever become accustomed or inured.

Similarly, I can remember the first time I ever saw a *Star Trek* episode. Again, I was very young and had heard the words "Star Trek," and probably "Spock." I saw only the last 10 minutes of an episode and had no idea what was going on.

Which made it absolutely brilliant.

All I knew was that something

exciting was going on. It seemed complex but comprehensible and believable. I didn't have enough context or experience to even speculate what it was, so I assumed that it was amazing. I don't know what episode that was, but I'm certain I've seen it since. However, no matter how great it may have been, I'm also certain that I didn't enjoy it as much once I was familiar with the pretext, the characters, and the context of the story. That's not a slam on *Star Trek* but just a realistic understanding, decades later, that likely nothing could live up to the assumptions that I formed.

RPGs Require Definitions

The point here, of course, is that sometimes it's what someone doesn't know, doesn't understand, and doesn't have explained to them that is the scariest, the most amazing, or simply the most interesting. That's terrible news for RPG designers and even GMs, because RPGs at their heart are all about definition.

The service that an RPG designer provides, unlike a novelist or a screenwriter, is that everything is dutifully described in incredible detail. An RPG setting isn't like a setting in a novel because the novelist only gives you what he or she believes you need for that one story. An RPG setting has to be able to accommodate many stories. More importantly, it needs to empower you to set *your* stories there, and the designer has no idea where you might want the characters to go, what you want them to see, or who you want them to meet, so that designer has to detail all of it.

But such strict definition can be stifling.

Over the years, for example, people

have complained about settings like the *Forgotten Realms* because it is too well detailed. They bemoan that every building in every hamlet in every land is described down to what's in the third drawer down in the dresser by the bed.

Likewise, a GM running a homebrew game describes what the players see and hear and know, answers their questions, and provides historical and geographical details that they need. He does so happily because he has lovingly crafted the world in question. And ultimately, that's what he's supposed to do.

How to Not Define Game Elements

So how does one mesh the idea that concepts can be far more intriguing if left undefined in a medium in which it must be defined? It would seem to be impossible by its very definition. Perhaps, to some extent, it is. But there are lessons to be learned here nonetheless for all involved.

When I worked at TSR, I wrote a lot of *Planescape* supplements. One of the things we used to do in the setting material was leave questions unanswered. "No one knows for sure" was a phrase often employed, as in "Some believe that there are an infinite number of layers of the Abyss, but no one knows for sure." Other times, we might offer multiple (even contradictory) explanations for things. We would write, "Some say that the castle's guarded by an impregnable ward while others say that a powerful fiend watches from a high tower and attacks anyone that comes too close." I think of it as the "some say" method of setting design. It gives the flavor and presents ideas; it just keeps things from getting too precise and concrete.

This worked well for that particular

setting because the planes were infinite and mysterious. But even so, occasionally the game designer in me would say, “But the GM and the players need to know the answer to some of these questions.” I was never entirely comfortable with the approach.

From a “dark cave” point of view, however, it worked pretty well. It maintained the mystique and perhaps the unsettling nature of the unknown and the undefined. From that point of view, “no one knows” works better than “some say” because the latter still puts ideas in the readers’ heads, and to truly capture the “dark cave” feeling, you need to have nothing concrete. RPGs obviously need something to hang one’s hat upon, however, so “some say” is a decent compromise.

Practical Applications of “Dark Cave” Design

That, however, is game designer stuff. Interesting, but academic. On a practical level, what’s a GM to do to utilize some of the power of the unknown in the game? You can put a “dark cave” in your adventure, but you have to be prepared for the eventuality that, unlike showing a brief image in a TV show, in a RPG the players might decide to go in and find out what’s in the cave. In fact, one could argue that that’s at the very heart—the core essence even—of what an RPG is.

One approach could be called “there’s always a darker cave.” In other words, even when the PCs explore the unknown, there’s always more unknown. For every question they answer, there’s always a new question. In other words, the GM doesn’t just present one instance of the mysterious, but many. You can do this up front with many dark caves, or you can do this like a trail of breadcrumbs with each exploration of a dark cave leading to another.

Remember, however, that the power of the truly unknown is that, because it is entirely undefined, we can never grow accustomed to it. That cave at the beginning of *Twilight Zone* is still creepy to me because I can’t know what’s

in it. Some things in the campaign world should just always remain mysterious. Perhaps while the PCs can learn to combat the undead spirits that haunt the tombs and gravesites in their world, the land beyond the veil from which they hail remains entirely unknowable throughout the campaign. The PCs only know that it’s out there, somewhere.

But we can also learn from the *Star Trek* example. Say, for example, that the PCs are about to go have an audience in front of the king. When they walk into the throne room, someone that they don’t know is speaking with the king ahead of them. The PCs come in late to the conversation. They hear some interesting things, but not enough to know what’s going on. They’re forced to simply assume that intriguing events happen around them that they’re not aware of. They can choose to investigate further, but theoretically, they have their own fish to fry. And even if they do get involved in this new intriguing plot — or discover that it’s not so intriguing after all — the GM throws two or three more such instances in front of them in the meantime. Soon the players get the idea that they can’t explore it all, and that the fictional world is a really interesting place they can’t fully understand (like the real world).

Another technique that takes the mystique of the unknown over the known and turns it on its head is the surprise twist. As the PCs explore the unknown and learn what is in the dark cave, they suddenly realize that it’s not what they thought at all. The giants were really working for the drow all along. The kobold king was really a dragon. The alien invasion was really a hoax staged by an all-too-human super villain. This works so well because once something is known and understood, we take it for granted. We become less interested. Then suddenly, the rug is pulled out from beneath us and we’re intrigued again. (Obviously, you can’t use this technique often. If someone’s looking for a twist, the twist loses much of its power.)

The Twist for Players

There’s something from all of this that we can take as players as well. It’s the idea that as players we need to occasionally give GMs (and, dare I say it, game designers) a break. When you’re standing at the entrance to the dungeon, or outside the purportedly haunted house, or you land on an unexplored planet, your imagination flares with the anticipation. You might discover anything. And so, you go explore. You find out what’s in there, or out there. And no matter how cool it is, it might be somewhat of a letdown because *something* is almost always less interesting than *anything*. It’s a matter, then, of managing one’s expectations and being aware of your own perception of what might be there as opposed to what is there.

It took me a long time to both understand and accept these ideas. For most of my gaming life, I craved the solid details that RPGs provide. I didn’t want, for example, for the *Twilight Zone* to be a concept or state of mind; I wanted it to be a place characters could visit. More specifically, I wanted to know the rules for casting a *fireball* spell there and how many HD the inhabitants would have. This is the mindset that RPGs developed within me. Only years later did I realize that not only was that mindset not good for fiction, it wasn’t always good for RPGs.

It’s always valuable to examine what we find is cool, scary, fun, exciting, or interesting, and why. Learn what fascinates or terrifies others and dissect what it really all means. Using this information makes us better in our roles as designers, GMs, and players.

And beware that dark cave. You can never know what’s in there. That’s the point.



Spark

By Adam Daigle
Art by James Keegan

For a moment, this mote of electrical energy floats menacingly nearby, erupting in a shower of sparks and tendrils of electrical discharge. The creature charges headstrong into its enemies, and then disappears in an instant, leaving only the whiff of ozone.

Spark CR 6

XP 1,600

N Tiny outsider (air, elemental, extraplanar)

Init +9; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +12

Defense

AC 22, touch 17, flat-footed 17 (+5 Dex, +5 natural, +2 size)

hp 39 (6d10+6)

Fort +3, Ref +10, Will +6

DR 5/—; Immune electricity, elemental traits

Offense

Spd 10 ft., fly 60 ft. (perfect)

Melee shocking grasp +13 (5d6 electricity)

Space 2 ½ ft.; Reach 0 ft.

Special Attacks inhabit

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th)

At will—shocking grasp

3/day—lightning bolt (DC 16)

1/day—call lightning (DC 16)

Tactics

Before Combat A spark lies in wait for an appropriate victim, controlling its light output or inhabiting a mundane metallic object.

During Combat A spark sizes up its foes and chooses the strongest victim to inhabit. Once inside a victim, it uses the new vessel to deliver *shocking grasp* attacks or to cast *lightning bolt* or *call lightning* against distant enemies. If ejected from a creature, a spark immediately tries to inhabit another victim.

Morale Clever enough to know when the fight is lost, a spark stays in a victim long enough to feel them perish but flees combat if unable to inhabit other enemies.

WE'VE CROWNED OUR KING!
The first King of the Monsters contest brought us a menagerie of entries, and three judges chose the top 10 for your votes. The readers of KoboldQuarterly.com declared the Spark the winner, and so Adam Daigle wins the prize package, the glory, and the original artwork by James Keegan. Oh, and we promised him we'd publish the winning monster and share it with the world; it is, indeed, a work of mad genius.

Bravo Adam, and we look forward to the next King of the Monsters contest; watch koboldquarterly.com for details.

Statistics

Str 4, Dex 20, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 17

Base Atk +6; CMB +9; CMD 16

Feats Ability Focus (inhabit), Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse

Skills Fly +27, Knowledge (planes) +10, Perception +12, Spellcraft +10, Stealth +23

Languages Auran, Common



Ecology

Environment any

Organization solitary or pair

Treasure none

Special Abilities

Inhabit (Ex) As a standard action, a spark can attempt to possess a Large or smaller mortal host. The spark must make a successful touch attack, and this can be combined with the touch attack from its *shocking grasp* spell-like ability. This action draws no attack of opportunity. The target must succeed on a DC 18 Will save or become inhabited by the elemental.

Once merged with the victim, the spark can choose to lurk just beneath the surface or use its spell-like abilities through the host. Each time the spark uses a spell-like ability, the victim can attempt a new saving throw to expel the creature. While inhabiting a creature, a spark takes no damage from physical attacks, quarter damage from energy effects, and half damage from force effects.

The victim of this symbiosis receives a +4 bonus to Dexterity and Charisma but, otherwise, keeps all normal statistics. A spark can control the victim's actions beyond spellcasting, but usually the speech and actions seem jerky and erratic to the victim's peers. Associates notice this symbiosis with a successful DC 17 Perception or Sense Motive check. Victims that succeed a DC 18 Will save resist the spark's domination and expel the creature.

In addition, the spark's short lifespan carries over to the inhabited host, for the creature slowly burns out its victim. Each day the spark inhabits a host, the victim must succeed on a DC 18 Fortitude save or suffer 1d3 Constitution drain. This ability is equivalent to a 5th-level spell and is Charisma-based.

Origin

When a great storm rips across a world in the Material Plane, it sometimes tears loose the fabric of reality and

releases sentient creatures composed entirely of elemental energy. A spark does not intend to understand other creatures; it only wishes to use them as a conduit for its own unbridled energy.

Ecology

Fueled by its frenetic thought patterns and erratic actions, a spark jolts through its new world to find a physical body, drawn by an urge to know form.

Some accomplished spellcasters deliberately seek out sparks for symbiosis. Sorcerers with elemental bloodlines or clerics devoted to deities with elemental domains often reach an agreement with these strange creatures and allow them to ride within their bodies for their entire lifetime. (Consider any NPC having a voluntary, symbiotic relationship with a spark to be CR +2.)

Sages studying this phenomenon postulate that other elemental forces similar to sparks exist, embodying the other elemental energies, perhaps even sonic and force energy. They have not been observed to date.

Habitat and Society

Exotic and single-minded, these creatures rarely encounter one another. Sometimes, though, when these creatures form an alternately charged mate is created at the same time. When this happens, the two never travel separately—always staying within 300 ft. of one another. Crackling with energy too quickly used up, sparks rarely survive longer than a year, even within a symbiotic relationship with a mortal form. When they expire, they simply wink out, and sages hypothesize the creatures return to the Elemental Planes.



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The poster features a stylized illustration of a woman with long white hair and a red beret, holding a glowing red gun. Behind her are two men in military-style clothing. At the bottom, a man with a white beard and a blue coat is shown. The background is a yellow and blue pattern with stars and stripes, reminiscent of the American flag.

Scions of Shadow

By Maurice de Mare

Shadow, the dark promise of unlimited power, lures many into its sinister embrace. Pursuit of this power has corrupted entire bloodlines and founded a formidable school of magic.

Delve into the mysteries of shadow, and discover true power.

Shadow Bloodline (for Sorcerers)

Slivers of shadow taint your bloodline: perhaps a powerful shade was one of your ancestors, or frequent exposure to *materia umbra* (or shadowstuff) transformed you or your family forever. Either way, the cold caress of shadow feels like a warm embrace to you.

Class Skill: Stealth

Bonus Spells: *color spray* (3rd), *darkvision* (5th), *deeper darkness* (7th), *shadow conjuration* (9th), *shadow evocation* (11th), *shadow walk* (13th), *project image* (15th), *greater shadow evocation* (17th), *shades* (19th)

Bonus Feats: Blind Fight, Dodge, Empower Spell, Fleet, Great Fortitude, Mobility, Skill Focus (Stealth), Spell Focus

Bloodline Arcana: Whenever you cast a spell of the shadow subschool, increase the spell's DC by +1.

Bloodline Powers: Shadows twitch and swirl at your bidding. As you grow in power, they cling to you in ever-increasing volumes.

Lash of Shadows (Sp): Starting at 1st level, you can summon a shadowy whip for one round to attack your enemies as a standard action, targeting any foe within 30 ft. as a ranged touch attack. The lash deals 1d6 hp cold damage +1 for every 2 sorcerer levels you possess. You can use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + your Charisma modifier.

Cloak of Shadows (Ex): At 3rd level, you gain resist cold 5 and a +2 bonus on initiative checks. At 9th level, your resistance to cold increases to 10, and your bonus on initiative checks increases to +4.

Swirling Shadows (Sp): At 9th level, you can summon a swirling storm of shadows to engulf your enemies. The swirling shadows cover a 20-ft. radius burst. Anyone in this area takes 1d6 cold damage per sorcerer level. This power has a range of 60 ft.

Those caught in the area can make a Reflex save for half damage. Those who fail the save are blinded for 1 round. The DC of this save is equal to 10 + 1/2 your sorcerer level + your Charisma modifier. The swirling shadows disappear after 1 round. At 9th level, you can use this ability once per day, then twice per day at 17th level and three times per day at 20th level.

Shadowwalking (Su): At 15th level, you gain the ability to travel between shadows as if by means of a *dimension door* spell. This magical transport cannot begin or end in an area filled with bright light. You can walk between shadows for up to a total of 3,000 ft. each day in this way. This amount can be split among many jumps, but each one, no matter how small, counts as a 10-ft. increment.

Living Shadow (Su): At 20th level, shadows suffuse your form. You gain immunity to cold, low-light vision and darkvision to a range of 90 ft., and DR 10/— whenever you are in an area of dim light or darker. Once per day, you can cast *plane shift* (to or from the Shadow Plane only) as a spell-like ability using your sorcerer level as your caster level.

The School of Shadow (for Wizards)

“There is light, there is darkness, and where both meet shadow reigns.”

—Eirvain Thaelun (*shadowmancer*)

While most schools focus on a single aspect of magic, the focus of the school of shadow is threefold, and more philosophical in nature. Shadowmancers, as the adherents of the school of shadow are known, believe that where light and darkness meet, true power is found. Thus, shadowmancers focus their attention on the schools of conjuration, necromancy, and illusion, which signify light (life), darkness (death), and shadow (illusion). A shadowmancer cannot select conjuration, necromancy, or illusion as opposition schools.

Shadowmancers operate in the grey area between light and darkness, using both as it suits them.

Shadow Infusion (Su): Any illusion (figment) spell that you cast, such as *silent image*, can receive an infusion of shadow. Figments designed to mimic force effects cannot receive a shadow infusion, but objects or creatures can. You can only infuse one spell at a time with shadow, and this has to be done during casting. (See below for shadow infusions.)

Shadow Sanctuary (Su): As a standard action, you can summon a churning mass of shadows to aid you. These shadows fill a 10-ft. radius centered on you, lasting for a number of rounds equal to your Intelligence modifier. All allies in this area (including you) gain concealment (20% miss chance) for as long as they remain in the area. For every 5 wizard levels you possess, the miss chance increases by 10%. You

can use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + your Intelligence modifier.

Shadow Sight (Su): At 8th level, you gain the ability to see in darkness. Treat darkness as dim light and dim light as normal light.

Shadow Infusions

Shadow Puppet. The figment of a creature can receive an infusion of shadow, resulting in a shadow puppet that is under your control. The shadow puppet functions as a druid's animal companion, using your level as your effective druid level.

Treat a shadow puppet as a construct: do not recalculate HD, BAB, or saves. A shadow puppet has no skills or feats of its own, but it can use the shadowmancer's skill ranks and combat feats. A shadow puppet receives no bonus tricks. It does not receive the link, share spells, or devotion special abilities.

A shadow puppet can take the form of any animal companion, but as a construct, the animal companion loses its Constitution and Intelligence scores, and its Charisma score is reduced to 1. The animal companion also loses any special qualities it might have. For example, an ape animal companion receives the following shadow puppet starting statistics:

Shadow Puppet (Ape)

Starting Statistics: **Size** Medium; **Speed** 30 ft., Climb 30 ft.; **AC** +1 natural armor; **Attack** bite (1d4), 2 claws (1d4); **Ability Scores** Str 13, Dex 17, Con —, Int —, Wis 12, Cha 1

4th-Level Advancement: **Size** Large; **AC** +2 natural armor; **Attack** bite (1d6), 2 claws (1d6); **Ability Scores** Str +8, Dex -2

Shadow Object. The figment of an object can receive a shadow infusion, resulting in a shadow object.

A shadow object has a number of hp equal to a druid's animal companion, using your level as your effective druid level. A shadow object has no hardness. If a shadow object is larger than a 10-

ft. cube, its hp are divided between the number of 10-ft. cubes it covers. For example, a 30-ft.-long shadow wall created by a 6th level shadowmancer would have 9 hp per 10-ft. section (average result of 6d8 is 27, 27 divided by 3=9).

Determining the weight bearing capacity of a shadow object is based upon its hp per 10-ft. cube. The hp is treated as a Strength score with a maximum of Strength 25. Each 10-ft. cube can support a weight equal to a heavy load.

For example, if a 9th level shadowmancer creates a bridge to span a 60-ft. gorge, each 10-ft. section has 6 hp (average result of 8d8 is 36, 36/6=6)—and that means Strength 6. A heavy load for Strength 6 amounts to 60 lb., so this particular shadow bridge can support one gnome or halfling per 10-ft. section. Any weight in excess of the maximum weight bearing capacity instantly destroys a section.

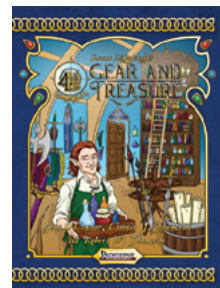
General rules

A shadow puppet or shadow object cannot exist outside (or reach beyond) the shadow infused spell's area of effect. If the shadow infused spell that spawned a shadow puppet or shadow object ends, the shadow puppet or shadow object disappears. Concentration, a standard action, is required to direct a shadow puppet, unless the spell used to spawn a shadow puppet utilizes a script. A shadow object cannot be used as a weapon. Dismissing a shadow puppet or shadow object is a swift action that does not end the spell. Destruction of a shadow puppet or shadow object does not end the shadow infused spell, but enemies receive a +2 bonus on Will saves to disbelieve the illusion once a shadow puppet or shadow object is destroyed.

Disbelief versus Shadow Infusions

Successfully disbelieving shadow infused illusions reveals them as transparent images superimposed on a dark, churning mass of smoke-like shadowstuff.

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The Heart of a Hero:

A Guide to Sex and Romantic Subplots in Fantasy Adventure Gaming

By Mario Podeschi

Art by Darren Calvert

Though romance abounds in fantasy fiction, it remains exceedingly rare in fantasy gaming. There are real reasons for this: adventuring parties are often inseparable, GMs recognize that adding in stories of this sort often change a PC in more ways than some players would wish, and, of course, romance can be awkward and difficult to address tastefully and intelligently.

In the hands of a mature gaming group, however, romance can be a subplot as viable as building a stronghold or trying to earn the respect of an overbearing father. This article provides willing GMs and players the signs necessary to help groups incorporate romance into their stories.

The Hook

For fantasy gaming romances, a GM must keep two things in mind. The first is “the hook,” which, much like an adventure hook, involves seizing player interest and pulling your group into your storyline. Secondly, a GM should always consider the romance’s relevance to the plot and look for ways to make it serve the needs of the adventuring campaign.

Some characters include romance as part of their backstory: PCs sometimes hand you a pre-packaged adventure hook to use at your leisure. This topic can make for a good question on an initial character survey—ask your players if their character has ever been in love and how it turned out. If they design a rich, tragic love story, they are giving you permission to use that aspect of their character in the campaign.

Offers and Interests

Romances can also appear over the

Chaser thumbed her sword as she watched the heavily guarded procession below. Even with Aladar’s magic, rescuing General Roland would be no easy task, but at least, it was less suicidal than breaking into the castle dungeons.

Her eyes fell on the caged man, nude, except for shackles and a dusty loincloth. His body was crisscrossed with the scars of the land’s most notorious torturer. Though thin for want of food, once-powerful muscles still lurked beneath his form.

And his eyes. They stared forward with a martyr’s stoicism, approaching the gallows with the dignity of a courtier bowing before his king.

One year later, this man would be her husband.

course of a game. These cannot be forced but should instead be offered to test player interest. Any NPC, from mentors to shopkeepers to patrons, can be a potential love interest by sculpting them to appeal to a certain PC. In this way, romances become “double-duty details” that both advance the storyline and enrich the roleplaying experience.

More mundane NPCs can be presented as love interests as well. When the party’s dwarf fighter visits the local weapon’s shop, you can introduce him to the female dwarven weaponsmith eager to hear his tales of giant slaying and treasure hunting.

In some cases, the love interest is a pivotal aspect of the plot. As the PCs perform great deeds for their local kingdom, they may find themselves working for a competent, unmarried

prince who admires them as genuine heroes in a time when too many fail to live up to his royal expectations. When the party discovers that his father, the King, is the villain they have been seeking, the prince smuggles them out of the kingdom, perhaps becoming a pariah himself. Though your female PC is not required to pair up with the brave prince, the option is there if she is interested.

You can even cast a love interest among your villains. These affairs rarely end well, but they can provide an excellent excuse for PCs escaping from a dungeon, being spared after losing a battle, or finding a way to infiltrate an otherwise impregnable lair. Treat a love interest like any other major NPC. Give them secrets, quirks, and agendas that don’t always coincide with your party’s goals. This way, their presence becomes interwoven with the other elements of the campaign, and if the romantic subplot doesn’t stick, you still have a well-developed character for your PCs to interact with.

“The Signals”

Note that each of these examples is described as “love interest,” not “love story.” This is because you are presenting your PCs with an option. Though PCs may tolerate railroading in your dungeon, they will not stand for it in a romantic subplot.

Once you’ve introduced the love interest, check the pulse of the player involved. Casually ask, away from the gaming table, what they thought about the NPC. If they seem bored, disinterested, or uncomfortable, abandon the subplot and use the NPC as you would any other. But if the player seems intrigued or enthusiastic, take that as permission to test the

waters a little more.

In the next encounter, drop a signal. Have the rescued general talk about his former wife. Have the blacksmith invite the fighter out for a dwarves' night out with some of her clansmen. Have the prince turn away a pampered suitor while comparing her to the mighty sorceress at his table.

Then, check the pulse again. See if they picked up your clue. Within a few encounters, you'll know whether they've taken your hook.

Making NPCs Attractive

This is among the more delicate tasks a GM faces with a love interest—how to translate “this character is attractive” into a description.

Avoid erogenous zones. Saying that the princess is beautiful due to her “overflowing bodice” can quickly erode the atmosphere you've created. Instead, go for a subtler, classier way to explain how an NPC might be considered attractive. One or two solid quirks should be all you need to express their possible appeal, and none of these need to stretch the PG-13 rating. Here are a few tricks to get you started:

- When meeting the prince, the party finds him training shirtless in his central courtyard.
- The guildmaster only puts on her crooked smile when in the presence of her protégé. The rest of the time, her poker face is unreadable and a bit unnerving.
- The dragon-in-disguise openly licks her teeth when she finds a potential mate attractive.

Of course, beauty is only skin deep. To make a character psychologically attractive, you must present them as someone the character in question would admire. This goes for NPCs, too: an NPC should admire the PC for traits that they pride themselves in, whether their skill with a sword or their generosity toward those in need.

The Episodic Lover

“My lady,” said Aladar, fishing for the most appropriate way to break the news. “I’m afraid the Windsmere line ended a

Shallow PCs and NPCs

As a counterexample, sometimes “skin deep” does matter. For certain characters—barbarians, half-orcs, and other wild or brutish PCs—romance could begin with pure physical lust, overflowing bodices, and a fade to black as the other PCs see the pair wander off together. Sure, it's shallow, but it is just a start.

For those encounters, as the GM, you may want to ask the player whether the character ever comes back to the one-night-romance. Otherwise, you might make that barmaid or courtier an NPC in a future adventure: as a spurned enemy, a victim carried away by slavers, or a young mother concerned about her missing child, replaced by a changeling. The shallow PC may care more deeply than was thought, or may not. In time, of course, a shady reputation will accrue to the character who never loves deeply, becoming more an object of pity than lust.

thousand years ago. This is a wild land now, and it knows no queen.

“Surely you are joking.”

Aladar shook his head sadly as he watched her smile fade. “I wish I were.”

“Thank you... for your honesty.”

Many lovers are as temporary as one-shot villains, defining but a single adventure. Such romances provide a deeply personal motivation to a hero, often revealing aspects of their personality that are rarely explored in standard adventures.

As with longer-lived romances, episodic love interests should function as double-duty details. Their introduction should be swift, certain, and relevant to the plotline. Like a detective who meets the femme fatale only to have her disappear in the next scene, the PC should continue with the adventure as soon as the interest is established. Similarly, the love interest should be in genuine danger: if he's a double agent for an enemy nation, assassins should be hot on his heels; if she's a wild-spirited adventuress, the cult should already know where she's hiding their artifact.



As the adventure continues, maintain the PC's interest by pointing out how the episodic lover is still counting on them. Calls for help, secret messages, back-to-back battles—anything that establishes a brief interaction to communicate that the character is still needed to set things straight. If you're feeling particularly sassy, you might even consider a parting kiss: a bold, willful expression of hope before the final danger approaches. Eventually, the episodic lover must be worked out of the story. Sometimes the amnesia is cured only to reveal a family to return to. Sometimes the lover walks away from the relationship, resuming an old life of crime, chastity, or rulership. Sometimes, a tragic death provides the most dramatic—and indeed, best known—end to this story arc.

Just make sure you are prepared for the inevitable drama—theft of *raise dead*.

The Power of Love

The power of love is one of the oldest motifs in storytelling. Faced with the loss of something as important as a loved one, people have channeled their rage into writing, painting, and, of course, battle. The power jump rarely lasts long; it is usually just long enough to rescue/avenge the lover.

The bonus you offer should reinforce the character's emotional state. A damage bonus suggests a wild-eyed rage, while temporary hit points could represent the pain the lover no longer feels in light of the loss. Many systems include a renewable “hero fuel”—action points in 3rd & 4th Edition D&D, willpower in White Wolf games, karma points in the *Shadowrun* RPG—that lends itself to passing moments of character greatness.

No matter what type of bonus you choose, keep it temporary. The short-term benefit spotlights the mourning lover, making their mechanical presence as significant as their roleplaying presence. Giving a permanent benefit would be a mistake, as it suggests that getting a lover killed is an achievement.

Depending on the needs of the

Advance Warning

For a major scene like the Tragic Ending, the GM may want to consider giving the player some advance notice of what's coming. They may have picked it up from the story arc, but they may not. A note that “the next session is going to be pretty tough, and the long-term lover might not make it through; is your character going to be ready with last words if that happens?” can give the player a chance to shine, rather than a chance to flub a major roleplaying opportunity.

encounter and your views on love, the sky could be the limit. In this way, you can orchestrate the defeat of a seemingly invincible villain, a moment long remembered by both your PCs and the bards who tell their legends.

Tragic Endings

All good things end. The death of a long-term lover should be one of

“Boot Scenes”

In the annotated reprinting of the core *Dragonlance* novels, Weis and Hickman refer to a staple of romantic subplots that they call “the boot scene.” In this context, it is a reference to how Tanis takes off Kitiaara's boots toward the end of one chapter and how she is putting her boots back on later in the novel. In practice, the technique suggests that characters are about to be sexual without explicitly portraying it.

Keep sex off-camera. If two characters are about to indulge themselves carnally, announce that the players have a pretty good idea of what happens next. In my own campaigns, I simply say “and... boot scene,” which more often than not results in a relieved chuckle and a fast-forward to the next day in the campaign.

the great milestones in a campaign, marking the arrival of the ultimate villain or a final sacrifice at the end of a long adventure. Unlike the episodic lover, whose death is rarely a surprise, the demise of a long-term lover creates a dramatic change in the survivor's personality.

Such an end should never feel random. A PC may feel cheated if their defining character trait succumbs to a minor encounter. Though such deaths might fit with the real world, they are anticlimactic, and they disrespect the roleplaying investment players put into romantic plots.

Make these deaths as valiant as possible. Even if the lover is not a combatant, they should die with dignity, drawing on reserves of strength, until finally succumbing to their wounds. A noble sacrifice can help create an eternal pride in the fallen NPC, a sense of commitment to the quest at hand so that their death is not in vain.

Provide a moment for parting words, even if you are in the middle of a battle sequence. Freeze time if you must, letting the fight fade into the background while the player acts out the final dialogue of the love story. Tell the rest of the party that they are fighting off-camera and that while time is technically passing, the next round won't begin until the scene has ended.

Do not let them interrupt.

Though all romantic subplots require a certain amount of maturity, this one can be particularly challenging. People often react poorly to loss, and human nature might make the player/character resent the GM/god that took the lover away. Encourage the PC to channel his or her distress into roleplaying, exploring how a hero copes with loss. Let the player find consolation in swordplay or embrace a darker version of the hero, who then becomes an agent of destruction hell-bent on revenge.

Conclusion

Romance is a narrative tool. It drives the storyline and adds an all-too-

“The Talk” and Gamer Maturity

Some groups treat romantic subplots as just another aspect of the game, as well they should—these are *subplots*, after all. Other groups, however, might react to the idea of roleplayed romances with anxiety, annoyance, or hostility. If your group opposes the idea, then let it go, in the same way that you would let go of any other failed narrative experiment. If your group seems divided on the issue of romantic subplots, though, it's time to have the Talk.

The Talk is an open discussion, preferably away from the gaming table in a relaxed atmosphere.

During the Talk, give everyone—not just the romantically minded PCs—a chance to voice their opinions. Address their objections, explaining how you'll keep sexuality off-camera, or how you plan on juggling the subplot with the other, more significant events of the campaign. Set ground rules. Write them down. Stand by them.

Don't take a vote, either; reach a decision. It's not worth making one person feel uncomfortable at the expense of the rest. Proclaim fun as your ultimate goal, and see if romantic subplots are a viable method to achieve it.

human vulnerability to PCs. It is a fine plot hook, capable of spurring characters to actions they would normally not consider. Though some gaming groups may scoff at the idea, a skilled GM and an open-minded group can use romantic subplots to heighten the drama of their campaigns and write stories as memorable as the tales which made us start gaming in the first place.

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Gambler's Magic

Wondrous Items of Chance

By John Flemming
Art by Gerhard Munthe



Throughout history, games of chance have attracted those seeking an easy fortune. Even magic has been prone to gambler's luck, especially when young and foolish mages have grafted randomness and wild magic to the foundations and the traditions of their elders. It is not clear who developed the first magical dice, but they were quickly imitated, and soon, other games of skill and luck were made into magical devices to aid adventurers.

Dice Pouch

These wondrous items appear as a small bag or pouch containing a number of 6-sided dice. Using these dice constitutes an attack and is a standard action that requires tossing the dice at the target area. The dice (or die) do not have to land on an even surface but must land on a solid surface. Dice from a dice pouch always have a random effect associated with them.

These dice create zones of magical effects that persist for 5 minutes or until the end of the encounter, but you may dismiss them early as a standard action. Unless otherwise stated, any die from a dice pouch vanishes when used and reappears in the bag after a long rest.

Demon's Dice

Item Attack Level 14

This black silk bag contains a pair of black ivory dice studded with red ruby pips.

Wondrous Item 22,000 gp

Power (standard; daily) ★ **Zone**

Area burst 3 within 5 squares; when tossed, a demonic figure of ash and smoke arises, occupying 1 square within the zone. The demon immediately attacks an adjacent creature of your choice (your Charisma vs. AC; 2d8 + your Charisma modifier damage).

The demon uses your own allotment of actions and can attack an adjacent creature as a minor action (once per round). You can move the demon 3 squares as a move action, but it must remain within the zone.

Special: You must roll 2d6 to determine the initial effect, designating which die is for which result before rolling: the demon's attack receives a keyword determined by the first die (1—force, 2—poison, 3—acid, 4—cold, 5—fire, 6—psychic), and receives a bonus to attack and damage equal to the second die. If the roll results in doubles, this item can be used a second time after a short rest.

Iced Die

Item Attack Level 15

This spotless white linen pouch contains a single crystalline die marked with mother of pearl pips.

Wondrous Item 25,000 gp

Power (standard; daily) ★ **Cold, Zone**

Area burst 3 within 5 squares; when you toss this die, a zone of ice spreads out from where it lands, and any creature entering or beginning their turn in the zone suffers its effects

Special: When the zone is created, roll 1d6 to determine the effect of the



zone (once decided this effect does not change until the die is used again):

1, 2, or 3—Target is slowed until the beginning of its next turn

4 or 5—Target is dazed until the beginning of its next turn

6—Target is immobilized (save ends)

Jackstones

Item Attack Level 15

This rough burlap pouch contains a handful of metal or stone objects bearing six blunted points.

Wondrous Item 25,000 gp

Power (standard; daily) ★ **Zone**

Area burst 5 within 10; you scatter the jackstones, creating a zone where they remain until triggered. Whenever a creature enters or begins its turn within the zone (including creatures flying 1 square above the ground), the stones activate, bursting upward and dealing 2d6 damage. The zone ends at the end of any turn in which the damage roll for the effect results in doubles.

Knucklebones

Item Attack Level 12

This stained leather or woolen pouch contains a set of five lacquered and stained animal knucklebones, laced with metallic filigree and etched with ancient sigils.

Wondrous Item 12,500 gp

Power (standard; daily) ★ **Necrotic, Zone**

Close blast 3; when you toss these bones, they scatter outward creating a small zone of concealing clouds of necrotic energy. Any damage suffered by a creature within the zone is treated as necrotic damage, regardless of its original type; in addition, a creature so damaged is slowed until the end of their next turn.

Special: When the zone is created, roll 1d6 to determine the degree of

concealment granted (this effect does not change until the dice are used again):

1, 2, or 3—Zone is lightly obscured (-2 penalty to attack)

4 or 5—Zone is heavily obscured (-2 penalty to attack if adjacent or -5 if non-adjacent)

6—Zone is totally obscured (-5 penalty to attack)

Coins of Luck

These coins come in various denominations and are inscribed with divine or occult symbols. They are found within pouches of differing materials bearing similar symbols. To charge a coin of luck, you must remove the coin from the pouch at the end of a long rest and toss it into the air, at which time the coin disappears.

The coin is now charged, but the pouch must remain in your possession; if out of your possession for 5 minutes or more, the coin reappears in the pouch with no effect. Otherwise, you can invoke the power of the coin as a free action—and the coin reappears in the pouch.

Protector's Pence

Item Level 15

This copper piece is decorated with a shield or other symbols of a protective deity in a tattered leather pouch.

Wondrous Item 25,000 gp

Power (free; daily)

When an adjacent ally is struck by a melee or ranged attack, you may redirect the attack to yourself, and the attacker must reroll the attack, keeping the result of the second roll.

Silversmith's Crown

Item Level 12

This silver piece is engraved with an image of a hammer and anvil or other symbols of a deity of craft and creation.

Wondrous Item 15,000 gp

Power (free; daily)

On your next skill check before the end of your turn, you may roll twice and keep the higher of the two rolls.

Assassin's Coin

Item Level 13

This gold coin bears an engraved image of an arrow, dagger, or other symbols of a deity of thievery or assassins.

Wondrous Item 17,000 gp

Power (free; daily)

After rolling damage for an attack, you may choose to re-roll the damage, but you must keep the second result.

Wealth of the Woodsman

Item Level 17

This platinum coin is etched with the symbol of an eye or other symbols of a deity of hunters.

Wondrous Item 65,000 gp

Power (free; daily)

After missing an attack, you may invoke the coin's power and re-roll the triggering attack, keeping the result of the second roll. However, you incur a -2 penalty on all attack rolls until the beginning of your next turn.

Tokens

Tokens are small disc-shaped objects of stone or wood often bearing symbols or sigils and granting powers that assist in the movement of the user.

Activating a token requires a move action: the token must be squeezed tightly in one hand while willing it to activate. Once its power has been expended, a token crumbles to dust.

Escalating: Two of the same color token can be stacked together and activated at the same time (as a single move action), an act called escalating. The description of each token details the effects of escalating.

Token Case

Level 12+

This hinged case is decorated with inlaid patterns of two different colors.

Lvl 12 15,000 gp

Lvl 14 21,000 gp

Lvl 13 17,000 gp

Lvl 15 25,000 gp

Wondrous Item

A token generated by the case and stored within it can be summoned to your hand as a free action as long as you retain the case.

Power (long rest; daily)

At the end of a long rest, the case automatically generates two magical tokens (any previously generated tokens that are still unused vanish when this occurs). Each time a token is generated, determine the color randomly, but it will always be one of the two colors inlaid on the case:

Level 12—Azure and pale

Level 13—Ebon and azure, or azure and scarlet

Level 14—Scarlet and pale, or ebon and pale

Level 15—Ebon and scarlet

Azure Token

You touch the deep blue disc of stone or wood, and your body is briefly covered with a shimmering field.

Power (move; consumable)

Immediately, move up to your normal speed, ignoring difficult or challenging terrain.

Escalating: You may move across non solid surfaces or move vertically as part of your movement. The effect ends at the end of your movement.

Ebon Token

You touch this small disc of polished black stone or wood and become a living shadow for an instant.

Power (move; consumable)

Swap places with an adjacent creature.

Escalating: The creature grants you combat advantage until the end of your turn.

Pale Token

You toss the pale disk and briefly become shrouded in mist.

Power (move; consumable)

Immediately shift a number of squares equal to half of your movement.

Escalating: You may shift a number of squares equal to your movement.

Scarlet Token

This rich red wood token flips over, and you flicker briefly with a red glow.

Power (move; consumable)

You may move up to twice your speed, or shift 2 squares.

Escalating: Teleport 3 squares.



Destined Weapons

By Hank Woon

Art by Olaus Magnus

Justin and Shannon are creating characters for a new campaign. They decide to create a brother and sister whose sailor father was framed by a rival merchant lord for smuggling. After watching their father hang from the gallows, the two fled, plotting their revenge. Justin's character, a fighter, took his father's rapier. Shannon's character, a rogue, took his starknife.

The GM quickly realizes that this may

be problematic: since he does not want to give them free masterwork weapons at the start of his campaign. He knows that the two players will be forced to abandon their father's weapons—and an important part of their characters' backgrounds—for the first +1 *weapon* they scrounge off a slain foe. He decides that their story warrants giving the players the option of three new feats:

Destined Weapon (Combat)

You and your weapon are destined for greatness.

Benefit Choose one weapon that is significant to your character. You may spend destiny points on this weapon to increase its potency. You gain 1 destiny point per character level, up to a maximum of 6.

Power Name	Prerequisites	Destiny Point Cost
Bane	25 hits against designated foe type (chosen from the <i>bane weapon's</i> designated foe list in Chapter 15 of the <i>Pathfinder Roleplaying Game</i>)	2
Dancing	Perform as class skill, successfully used Perform 30 times	8
Defending	Avoided being hit 20 times while fighting defensively with the weapon	2
Disruption	Bludgeoning melee weapon, 25 hits against undead creatures	4
Distance	Ranged weapon, 20 hits against foes	2
Flaming	20 hits against foes with the fire subtype	2
Flaming Burst	40 hits against foes with the fire subtype	4 (2 if the weapon already has flaming)
Frost	20 hits against foes with the cold subtype	2
Ghost Touch	10 hits against foes with the incorporeal subtype	2
Holy	20 hits against foes with the evil subtype, wielder is good aligned	4
Icy Burst	40 hits against foes with the cold subtype	4 (2 if the weapon already has frost)
Keen	Piercing or slashing melee weapon, 10 confirmed critical hits	2
Ki Focus	Melee weapon, wielder has access to ki powers, weapon used 50 times in combat	2
Merciful	The weapon has dealt 100 points of nonlethal damage	2
Mighty Cleaving	Melee weapon, used 25 times to Cleave	2
Returning	Throwing weapon, hit 10 foes with ranged attacks	2
Seeking	Ranged weapon, hit 20 foes with ranged attacks	2
Shock	20 hits against foes with natural electrical attacks	2
Shocking Burst	40 hits against foes with natural electrical attacks	4 (2 if the weapon already has shock)
Speed	Used the weapon while under <i>haste</i> or similar effect 25 times	6
Spell Storing	Spellcaster, cast at least 25 spells against foes	2
Thundering	Melee weapon, 20 hits against foes with natural sonic attacks	2
Throwing	Melee weapon, hit 10 foes with ranged attacks	2
Unholy	20 hits against foes with the good subtype wielder is evil aligned	4
Vicious	Melee weapon, hit 20 foes with attacks of opportunity	2
Vorpal	Slashing melee weapon, 50 confirmed critical hits	10
Wounding	Bleeding Critical feat, caused 15 foes to gain the bleed condition	4

Improved Destined Weapon (Combat)

Prerequisites Destined Weapon

Benefit As Destined Weapon, but your maximum destiny points are now 12. Legendary Destined Weapon (Combat)

Prerequisites Destined Weapon, Improved Destined Weapon

Benefit As Destined Weapon, but your maximum destiny points are now 20.

Destiny points gained are retroactive, so if Destined Weapon is not chosen until 3rd level, the player immediately gains 3 destiny points then. For example, if Justin were to pick Destined Weapon at 3rd level, he would immediately have 3 points. By 6th level, he would be maxed out at his 6 points. If he decided at 14th level to choose the second feat, Improved Destined Weapon, he would retroactively gain points from levels 7-12 but max out there since the second feat allows a maximum of 12 points.

The GM explains to his players that, although this requires a little more bookkeeping on their part, they can purchase weapon powers with these destiny points that will better reflect their deeds and their character concepts, representing their characters' exploits and adventures. These powers do have prerequisites and are purchased with destiny points equal to the power's cost. Once chosen, these powers cannot be changed.

All *destined weapons* share the same first power—*destined*—which gives these weapons their name. A weapon cannot gain any other powers without first having at least the +1 enhancement bonus from being destined.

Destined Weapon Special Ability

Prerequisites The weapon was used to make 25 attacks.

Cost 2 destiny points

Benefit The weapon gains a +1 enhancement bonus and becomes a +1 *destined weapon*. This special ability can be purchased multiple times (always with a cost of 2 destiny points), but a *destined weapon* cannot have more than a +5 enhancement.

Specific Destiny Powers: The following powers work in the same fashion as standard destiny powers but with added abilities.

Power Name: Assassin's Weapon

Prerequisites: Used by an assassin for a death attack 25 times

Destiny Point Cost: 2

Ability: +1 enhancement bonus; +1 bonus to the DC of Fortitude saves forced by the death attack of an assassin.

Power Name: Cleaving

Prerequisites: Melee weapon, used 50 times to Cleave

Destiny Point Cost: 6

Ability: +2 enhancement bonus; The weapon grants an extra attack when using the Cleave feat (as mighty cleaving special ability) and deals an extra 1d6 damage on each hit.

Power Name: Flame Tongue

Prerequisites: Melee weapon, confirmed critical hit against 10 creatures with the fire subtype

Destiny Point Cost: 4 (2 if it already has the flaming burst power)

Ability: Gains flaming burst special ability 1/day; the weapon can release a fiery ray at any target within 30 ft. as a ranged touch attack (the ray deals 4d6 fire damage on a successful hit).

Power Name: Frost Brand

Prerequisites: Melee weapon, confirmed critical hit against 10 creatures with the cold subtype

Destiny Point Cost: 6 (4 if it already has the frost power)

Ability: +2 enhancement bonus; Gains frost special ability Absorbs the first 10 fire damage each round that you would otherwise take Extinguishes all nonmagical fires in a 20-ft. radius. As a standard action, the weapon can dispel lasting fire spells but not instantaneous effects: you must succeed on a dispel check (1d20+14) against each spell to dispel it (DC 11 + caster level of the fire spell).

Power Name: Puncturing

Prerequisites: Melee piercing weapon, confirmed critical 20 times

Destiny Point Cost: 4

Ability: 3/day, the weapon can make a touch attack that deals 1d6 Constitution damage.

Power Name: Shatterspike

Prerequisites: Melee weapon, Improved Sunder feat, used for 25 sunder attacks against foes' weapons.

Destiny Point Cost: 2

Ability: +4 enhancement bonus; whenever used to sunder an opponent's weapon .

Power Name: Smiting

Prerequisites: Bludgeoning melee weapon, 50 confirmed critical hits against constructs and creatures with the outsider subtype

Destiny Point Cost: 10

Ability: +2 enhancement bonus (+4 against constructs);

On a successful critical hit against a construct, the construct is completely destroyed (no saving throw).

On a critical hit against an outsider, damage is ×4 .

Power Name: (Race Name) Thrower

Prerequisites: Melee weapon, used to make 20 ranged attacks

Destiny Point Cost: 8 (6 if it already has the returning power)

Ability: +1 enhancement bonus (+2 when used by the designated race)

Gains returning special ability . When hurled, the weapon deals an extra 1d8 hp damage (or an extra 2d8 damage against a racial enemy).

Power Name: Shifter's Sorrow

Prerequisites: Melee weapon, 20 hits against creatures with the shapechanger subtype

Destiny Point Cost: 2

Ability: Deals extra 2d6 hp damage against creatures with the shapechanger subtype Any shapechanger or creature in an alternate form (such as a druid using wild shape) struck by the weapon must make a DC 15 Will save or return to its natural form

Stealthy Melee weapon, 20 hits against foes using sneak attacks 2 +4 bonus on attack and damage when making sneak attack rolls



Standard Destiny Powers

The following power descriptions can be found in Chapter 15 of the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game*.

Unique Destiny Powers

As an optional rule, you can allow players to add powers to their weapons based on the unique powers of foes they defeat in memorable ways. (Memorable can be anything from a well-timed critical hit to the final, lengthy battle with the main boss of an adventure.) If allowed, the player can add a power that emulates any spell-like or supernatural ability of the defeated foe as a once-per-day ability to the weapon. The emulated power must have an instant effect rather than a long duration.

The destiny point cost for this power depends on the creature's CR:

CR 4 or less	2
CR 5–8	4
CR 9–12	6
CR 13–16	8
CR 17+	10

In addition, a player can choose any class skill used successfully at least 50 times and receive a +5 bonus to its use (up to three times per day). This ability costs 2 destiny points. Finally, a player can choose a class ability that can be used X times per day, increasing the times it can be used per day by 1. This also costs 2 destiny points.

Example Weapons

Reading over the rules, both Justin and Shannon decide to take the Destined

Weapon feat. Their characters each swear by their weapons to one day avenge their father. At this moment, their weapons fuse with their spirits and become an extension of who and what they are.

The campaign begins. After watching their father executed, the siblings flee the hired swords of the hated merchant lord. Stowing away on a ship, they end up in the Vanishing Isles, a haven for pirates, scoundrels, and others who do not wish to be found. They spend their lower levels ingratiating themselves with the local pirates, participating in local feuds, and pirating on the high seas.

They eventually get involved in the effort to destroy a tribe of lizardfolk that have long plagued the isle. Their adventures take them across the entire chain of islands, facing down the lizardfolk and finally confronting their secret master, the medusa necromancer Gorga in lost city deep within the crawling jungles.

By 6th level, they have both spent all their destiny points (6). They both purchased *destined*, increasing their respective weapons to +1. Shannon used her weapon almost exclusively as a ranged weapon, and spent her other 4 points on *seeking* (2 points) and *returning* (2 points). Justin slew Gorga with a critical hit and decided to add a unique power of the medusa's to his blade. Since a medusa is CR 7, this cost him his remaining 4 points, but once per day, his rapier emulates the medusa's petrifying gaze ability. At this point, both players decide to spend a feat on Improved Destined Weapon, increasing their maximum destiny points to 12...



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Gnomish Flying Contraptions

By Ryan Costello, Jr.

All gnomes have one thing in common: an obsessive personality. As individuals or a society, gnomes narrow in on minutia and do not stop until they know everything there is to know. They may be best known as a race of illusionists, but this reputation is based on a mix of fact and false assumption. Many gnomes dedicate their lives to recreating the believable. Others devote their every thought and breath to creating the unbelievable. Humans that see gnomes propelled through the air by back-cannons do not believe their eyes, chalking up what they see as just another gnome illusion.

There is not a gnome who believes their race was born to fly. As a mountain race, gnomes spend their formative years underground. Once they step outside and lay their eyes on the great infinite sky, however, many resolve to mimic the birds, fairies, and dragons by conquering flight.

Between prototypes and complete failures, there have been thousands of gnome flying contraptions over the centuries. Only four designs, however, have proven effective enough to see any regular use: the back-cannon, the gyrofan, the ratchet glider, and wing-sleeves. Each of the four functions differently and with mixed success, but all serve the same purpose: they can take an earthbound gnome skyward.

Flying by Unnatural Means

The Fly skill indicates that a character cannot take this skill without a natural means of flight or a reliable means of flying every day (through either a spell or other magical manner, such as a druid's wild shape ability). Any character that owns a gnomish flying contraption or has access to a store or

community that sells or rents them out is considered to have a reliable means of flying every day (however unreliable that flight may be).

Flying Contraptions, Combat, and Spellcasting

All gnomish flying contraptions were designed for the single purpose of flight. The wearer's, or pilot's, ability to defend itself was not even a secondary consideration. While combat and spellcasting is possible while using a flying contraption, it is severely hampered.

A character using a flying contraption that allows combat during flight takes a -2 penalty on attacks and damage. A character casting a spell while flying must make a Concentration check to contend with vigorous—and sometimes violent—motion. This requires DC 10 + spell level check for the gyrofan, ratchet glider, and wing-sleeves and a DC 15 + spell level check for the back-cannon.

Crafting Flying Contraptions

Even to gnomes that tinker all their lives, flying contraptions are complex items. A gnome or anyone else trying to build a flying contraption must take extra care to follow the exact specifications of the design or risk the lives of those using their inventions. To build a flying contraption, a character must make a successful Craft (device) DC 30 check and provide raw materials worth 1/3 the cost of the item. Crafting a pouch of pow requires a successful Craft (alchemy) DC 20 check. Finally, crafting a reinforced harness requires a successful Craft (leather) DC 20 check.

Item	Cost	Weight
Back-cannon (large)	1,500 gp	640 lb.
Back-canno (medium)	750 gp	160 lb.
Back-cannon (small)	500 gp	40 lb.
Gyrofan	8,000 gp	2,000 lb.
Pow pouch	50 gp	1 lb.
Ratchet Glider (medium)	2,000 gp	80 lb.
Ratchet Glider (small)	2,000 gp	20 lb.
Reinforced Harness	50 gp	5 lb.
Wing-sleeves (large)	20,000 gp	32 lb.
Wing-sleeves (medium)	10,000 gp	8 lb.
Wing-sleeves (small)	10,000 gp	2 lb.

The Back-Cannon

When gnomes on boats see 2 tons of cast iron propelled backwards several feet by explosive momentum, their minds scatter to every other function this could possibly serve:

Too destructive for the kitchen. Too unpredictable for mining. Gushing with potential as a mode of transportation.

More portable than a giant sling shot and easier to master than a pet roc, the back-cannon is good for short, fast flights. Subject to catastrophic crashes, the back-cannon was tested using volunteers and charmed hill giants with actual naval cannons strapped to their backs. Prototypes were modified based on results (and casualties) until the final winged cauldron design was settled on.

Back-cannons are made of an iron

alloy designed by gnome and dwarf alchemists. It is lighter than iron, just as durable, and—as with all items of gnomish or dwarven craft—has a touch of magic to it. Its exterior design is aerodynamic and portable. Its interior focuses a blast from a combustible powder gnomes call *pow*.

Detonating one pouch of *pow* fuels a single flight that lasts 1+1d3 rounds. Two pouches detonated simultaneously fuel a single flight that lasts 3 + 1d3 rounds. The GM should make these rolls secretly. The wearer gains a fly speed of 40 ft. with poor maneuverability for the duration of the flight.

No more than two pouches can be detonated simultaneously without destroying the device and sending the user into headlong, uncontrolled flight up to a quarter mile away.

Loading a pouch of *pow* is a full round action that provokes attacks of opportunity. A pouch is detonated by pulling a pin as a standard action, which strikes tinder inside the pouch. Attempting to pull another creature's pin against their will is treated as a disarm combat maneuver. If a creature wearing a back-cannon loaded with *pow* takes energy damage, roll a Fortitude save for the pouch or pouches (DC=damage dealt). A failed save indicates that the *pow* detonates prematurely, sending the creature wearing the back-cannon on an involuntary flight.

Pow cannot be used effectively as a weapon. It is the unique design—contact of *pow* with the iron alloy and the shape of the back-cannon—that contains and amplifies the explosion expressly for flight. Detonating *pow* on any other iron alloy surface merely creates light equivalent to a standard torch for 1 round.

As the name indicates, detonating *pow* in a back-cannon is a spectacle. Any creature wearing a back-cannon suffers a -20 penalty to Stealth skill checks for the duration of its flight.

The wearer must be able to stand upright to use a back-cannon effectively. Any creature carrying a load greater than medium (including the

weight of the back-cannon) does not gain a fly speed when detonating *pow*. They still suffer a penalty to Stealth skill checks. A creature can purchase a reinforced harness to support the weight of the back-cannon. Any creature wearing a reinforced harness treats the back-cannon it is wearing as half its listed weight.

The Gyrofan

Sometimes called the chasm climber, the gyrofan represents the peak of gnomish flight engineering. Its origins are simple and the necessity was clear. As gnomes often find themselves at the bottom of chasms in the mountains in which they lair, and the falls that put them there are known to break arms and legs. Broken limbs make climbing out difficult, even with the assistance of rope. Thus, the invention of the gyrofan was inevitable. The gyrofan was designed to be peddled by hand, by feet, or a combination of the two. It is the most agile of all gnomish flying contraptions, able to navigate tight passages as deftly as a hummingbird.

A gyrofan is a vehicle the size of a Large creature. Its rotor, tail, pivoting stabilizer wings are the moving elements that control it. The pilot's secure seat is within reach of all piloting mechanisms, and a compartment built into the pilot seat can store as much as a backpack. The gyrofan is of wooden construction bound with steel, and so it has hardness 5 and 50 hp. A creature is no longer considered piloting as soon as its gyrofan is destroyed.

Any small or medium humanoid can pilot a gyrofan, with the creature's strength determining its load (not counting the gyrofan's weight). A creature piloting a gyrofan gains a fly speed of 10 with perfect maneuverability but loses all other forms of movement. Taking off in a gyrofan is a full round action, but flying is a move action. While piloting a gyrofan, a creature is considered to have cover (+4 bonus to AC) but suffers a -4 penalty to Dexterity-based skills (except for the Fly skill). A creature can

pilot a gyrofan for a number of rounds equal to its Constitution score without needing to rest.

Combat is possible while piloting a gyrofan, but difficult. Because a gyrofan can be peddled by feet, a creature piloting a gyrofan can cast spells and use two-handed weapons. A creature can charge while piloting a gyrofan. The gyrofan's rotor is completely ineffective as a weapon, and any pilot that attempts to use it as one must make a DC 20 Fly check or crash land, dealing 1d6 damage to himself and the gyrofan per 10 ft. fallen.

A creature piloting a gyrofan can be unseated by a trip attack just like a mounted creature. Although a creature piloting a gyrofan takes up the space of a Large creature, it still counts as a creature of its size for the purposes of modifiers in combat and spell effects.

The Ratchet Glider

The ratchet glider uses a mechanic called climb and glide where the wearer flies straight up and then flies forward. It is operated by a series of gears, cranks, and pulleys, the backbones of gnomish engineering.

The ratchet glider is worn like a backpack and controlled by a rope across the wearer's torso. Pulling on the rope flaps the ratchet glider's wings, making it climb vertically as much as 30 ft. in a round. When at the desired height, the wearer switches to the glide setting by leaning forward, gaining a horizontal fly speed of 30 ft. with average mobility and descending at a rate of 10 ft. per round.

The climb mode requires a great deal more physical labor than the glide mode. Climbing any distance is a full round action that requires both hands. Gliding is a move action that only requires one hand. A character can attempt a Fly skill check (DC 11 + 1 per previous consecutive check) as a swift action to glide with no hands, freeing it to attack and attempt to cast spells. Switching between the climb mode and the glide mode is a swift action.

Wing-Sleeves

The most rudimentary gnomish flying contraption is designed organically, mechanically based on the muscle and bone structure of bats. The gnome designers stayed up many late nights speaking with bats about the intricacies of their flight. Although the style of flying may be different, the gnomes were able to apply the knowledge they gained to create the clumsy but reliable wing-sleeves. They are not good for anything but giving a flightless creature flight, but they do this very well.

Although simpler, the name does not do justice to the design. Ball joints are fastened to a creature's back like a bat's shoulders. Silk fins attached to the ball joints can be strapped to a creature's wrists and biceps, allowing it to fly.

Between flights, the wings collapse out of the wearer's way until needed again.

Strapping and unstrapping a single wing is a standard action. When strapped in, the wearer gains a fly speed of 20 ft. with poor maneuverability. Balance is important in keeping aloft. If a creature wearing two wing-sleeves has an item or items in its hands with more than a pound of difference to a side, it suffers a penalty on Fly skill checks equal to the amount of weight throwing off its balance. A creature wearing wing-sleeves can fly for as long as it can walk without tiring.

Taking flight while strapped to wing-sleeves is a move action. A creature wearing wing-sleeves cannot cast spells or attack while flying.



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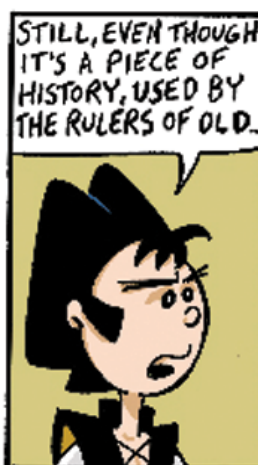
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New Blood, Raw Power, and Capturing the Creative Spirit: *A Conversation with Green Ronin's Chris Pramas*

By Jeremy L. C. Jones & Christopher L. Dinkins

Photo by Nicole Lindroos

Chris Pramas left Wizards of the Coast 10 years ago to found Green Ronin PUBLISHING. As Green Ronin's president, Pramas has been involved to varying degrees in the development of such industry-shaking products as the *Mutants & Masterminds* line, the *Blue Rose* RPG, and the TRUE20 system.

His design philosophy is simple: "Give GMs and players a robust set of tools they can use, and keep things straight forward and easy to understand."

Most recently, Pramas designed the *Dragon Age* RPG based on the video game from BioWare. The boxed set includes a player's guide, GM's guide, poster map, and dice. The whole package harkens back to the earliest days of roleplaying. The lean core rules more than deliver on the

promise that the *Dragon Age* RPG takes fantasy roleplaying "back to its dark and gritty roots."

Outside of his work for Green Ronin, Pramas is perhaps best known for his work on the third edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* and for reviving the *Warhammer* universe as an RPG setting.

His designs prove that there is depth in simplicity.

"When I was teenager, I went through a phase in which I sought out ever more complicated games because I thought they'd be more realistic," said Pramas. "I played games like *Advanced Squad Leader* and tried to make sense of *Chivalry and Sorcery*. Now I still like and play wargames, and I'm a big miniatures gamer as well, but I generally prefer "less is more" designs.

"I love Richard Borg's *Commands & Colors* system, for example, which powers *Memoir '44*, *Battle Lore*, and *C&C: Ancients*. Those games are not painstakingly accurate simulations, but they are really fun and quick to play. That's where my head is at these days."

We spoke with Pramas not long after he'd completed the *Dragon Age* RPG, right on the brink of Green Ronin's 10th year.

Kobold Diplomats: The tagline for Green Ronin Publishing is "Be Your Own Master." How do your business model and the products you create exemplify this motto?

Pramas: I learned the value of doing it yourself long ago in the punk scene, and I apply that to Green Ronin. We are a DIY company. This doesn't mean we won't work with other companies—we can and do—but we are stubbornly independent and do the games we want to do.

In what other ways does Green Ronin have a punk sensibility?

Punk was a reaction to the state of rock music in the early 70s, when you saw out-of-touch bands writing longer and more complicated songs and doing stuff like recording with symphonies. Punk wanted to get back to the raw power of rock and roll and to recapture its original attitude.

I see a parallel in roleplaying. Many games have become bloated and overly complicated, and I don't think that's good for the hobby in the long run.



Particularly with *Dragon Age*, I wanted to strip that cruft away and get back to the creative spirit of roleplaying.

As publisher at Green Ronin, what do you do?

Basically, I make the major strategic decisions for the company. What products do we do and when? What partnerships and licenses should we pursue? What conventions should we attend? That sort of thing.

While I make the final call, the process is pretty democratic. Green Ronin has seven employees, so we talk over all the big decisions. In fact, every year in October, we gather everyone in Seattle and do a big summit to discuss how things went the previous year and our plans for the next one.

Other than that, my job is a real grab bag. I do still get to do some design work, but I also do things like sales text and advertising copy, business negotiations, freelancer recruitment, and game development.

The best and worst things are actually the flip sides of the same coin. When the buck stops with you, you are lauded for the successes and blamed for the failures. So when I decide to take a gamble and it pays off (like the launch and continued success of *Mutants & Masterminds*), it's really satisfying. When something goes poorly and you know it was your call, though, it's all on you.

The *Dragon Age* RPG was mostly you, right?

I designed the *Dragon Age* RPG. It was a great opportunity, and I hadn't gotten to roll up my sleeves and do design work since the *Pirate's Guide to Freeport*. Steve Kenson, T.S. Luikart, and Owen K.C. Stephens have contributed to *Dragon Age*, but it's been my big project of the last year.

I designed a new system for the game. I wanted something easy to learn and play because I hope that *Dragon Age* can bring some new blood into the roleplaying hobby. That was also the thinking behind the format of a classic boxed set.



The TRUE20 system seems to meet similar goals.

The design goal of True20 was to take the d20 System and strip it down to make it less complicated and more flexible. We also wanted it to be able to handle more genres than fantasy. The most current version, the Revised Edition, achieves both goals rather well I think. Basically, we took the rules of the original edition and combined them with the entirety of the *True20 Companion*. That book provided resources for handling four big genres: fantasy, horror, modern action, and sci-fi. Now all that info is in the core game, so with just one book, you can run a huge variety of setting and genres.

You designed the second edition of *Warhammer* FRPG and ran the line for a while. What is the coolest part about it? What was your biggest mark on its universe?

My biggest mark was bringing the *Warhammer* world back to roleplaying after an absence of many years. When I fell in love with the game back in college in the late 80s, it was the world that hooked me. I'm sure it won't be a surprise to anyone to learn that I prefer dark and gritty games to bright and shiny ones, and WFRP delivers in that department. I always loved the career system of WFRP, so I'd call that my favorite bit of the system. Of the mechanics stuff I designed, I'm most proud of the magic system.

Green Ronin has had great success converting fiction to RPGs. Does converting a video game present any new challenges?

Any license can be challenging in that you have to ensure you and your licensor are both happy with the result. BioWare has been great to work with,

though, and they've been quite willing to share resources with us.

It's honestly a real advantage that we are adapting a game from another genre. It means the concept requires no shoehorning or adaptation. *Dragon Age* was designed to be a property for great gaming, and that applies equally to the computer game and the tabletop game.

We'd be remiss if we didn't ask you about comics. What are your favorites overall, and what are your favorites of those being published today?

I'm pretty much a sucker for Alan Moore, so many of my all time favorites (*Watchmen*, *V for Vendetta*, *Swamp Thing*) come from him. I generally like DC's Vertigo line and enjoyed titles like *Hellblazer* and *Preacher*. When I was younger, I went through a big X-Men phase.

Today my favorite comic is probably *Fables*. Bill Willingham (an ex-TSR employee by the way) has done such an amazing job with that title. It's genius. Much to my surprise, I also find myself enjoying *Punisher MAX*. I was never much of a Punisher fan, but Garth Ennis has hooked me. His *The Boys* is also fun.

A little more off the beaten path are *Age of Bronze*, a brilliant retelling of the Trojan War by Eric Shanower, and *Rex Mundi*, an intriguing alternate history using Templar/Grail mythology by Arvid Nelson. I also love *Artesia*, Mark Smylie's fantasy epic. You can tell he's a deep student of mythology, and he uses it to great effect in *Artesia*.

Lastly, I must give a shout out to my old friend Cecil Castellucci for *The Plain Janes*. She's a former punk singer who became a young adult author, and when she turned her talents to comics, the results were terrific.

Does Green Ronin have plans to pursue any new comic book licenses in the future?

We've done two such deals before: the *Red Star* and the *Nocturnals*. Great comics both.

We have looked at other options, and this may bear fruit next year. Ω

Freeport Backgrounds for DRAGON AGE™

By Chris Pramas

Art by Danilo Guida

Green Ronin recently launched *Dragon Age*, a roleplaying game based on the *Dragon Age: Origins* computer game by BioWare. Rather than try to take the mechanics of the computer game and adapt them to the tabletop version, I chose to design a new system from the ground up that would capture the flavor of *Dragon Age: Origins* while providing a game optimized for tabletop play. The results, I hope, speak for themselves.

Now, those of you who have the *Dragon Age* RPG may have noticed a logo on the box that read *AGE: Adventure Game Engine*. This is the name of the underlying game system. I was not long into its design before I realized that the *Dragon Age* system is flexible enough to be adapted to other settings and genres. In the future, Green Ronin will be doing other AGE games; however, we'll be concentrating most of our efforts on *Dragon Age* for 2010. Still, I thought it would be fun to provide an example of how you can adapt the game to other settings with just a bit of work.

Details like classes and equipment are easy to use in most fantasy settings. It's the backgrounds that are a bit trickier. In *Dragon Age*, a background is a mix of culture, race, and upbringing, and it provides benefits like ability increases and focuses to help individualize your character. *Set 1* of the *Dragon Age* RPG features seven backgrounds suitable for starting characters in Ferelden: Apostate, Avvar, Circle Mage, City Elf, Dalish Elf, Fereldan Freeman, and Surface Dwarf. There will be more in subsequent sets.

This article provides nine new backgrounds for use with Freeport, Green Ronin's signature city setting. Freeport was designed to provide a city that could be dropped into any fantasy campaign setting, and it combines common tropes of the genre with pirates and Lovecraftian horror. The essential source on Freeport, the "City of Adventure," is the *Pirate's Guide to Freeport*. This is a systemless sourcebook all about the city, and you can use it with any RPG you like. If you aren't familiar with Freeport, that's not a problem. These backgrounds can work easily in other fantasy campaign settings as well, and they provide a starting point for people who want to use some of the classic fantasy races with the *Dragon Age* RPG.

The format of the Freeport backgrounds is the same as

those in the *Dragon Age Player's Guide*, but bear two things in mind. First, Freeport draws a distinction between arcane and divine magic, but the *Dragon Age* RPG has only one spell casting class: the mage. You will need to use the mage class to represent both arcane and divine spell casters. The easiest way to handle the differences is through spell choice. A classic cleric would take spells like heal and heroic offense, while a wizard would take spells like arcane bolt and flame blast.

The second thing to note is that half races like half-elves and half-orcs do not have separate backgrounds. If you want to play one of those races, simply use the background that best represents the character's upbringing. This is usually the background of the dominant parent. For example, a half-orc brought up by orc pirates would use the Orc Raider background, while one brought up in Freeport would use the Human Burgher background.

Azhar Wanderer

The azhar are a mysterious race that first appeared in the waters around Freeport only a century ago, and they claim descent from the efreet of the fabled City of Brass. Although they look human on first inspection, their eyes are fiery red, and most have tempers to match.

The azhar founded a sultanate on the Continent and have expanded their power aggressively. They are great travelers and many become merchants, explorers, and pirates. That makes them frequent guests in Freeport, though very few have made a home in the city. Azhar mages claim that they tap into their efreet blood when they perform magic.

Playing an Azhar Wanderer

If you choose to play an Azhar wanderer, modify your character as follows:

- Add 1 to your Constitution ability.
- Pick one of the following ability focuses: Communication (Bargaining) or Constitution (Rowing).
- You have Dark Sight, which allows you to see up to 20 yards in darkness without a light source.
- You can speak and read Azharan and the Common Tongue.
- Your Speed is equal to 10 + Dexterity (minus armor

penalty if applicable).

- Choose a class. You can play mage, rogue, or warrior.

Roll twice on the following table for additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, re-roll until you get something different.

Azhar Wanderer

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Cunning
3-4	Focus: Cunning (Cultural Lore)
5	Focus: Communication (Seduction)
6	Focus: Strength (Climbing)
7-8	+1 Magic
9	Focus: Constitution (Swimming)
10-11	Focus: Cunning (Navigation)
12	+1 Strength

Dwarf Tradesman

Freeport is a nautical city but even that hasn't made dwarves into sailors. Instead, the dwarves stick to what they know, most settling in Freeport as tradesmen. They become smiths, brewers, masons, carpenters, or anything else they happen to be good at. Traders and mercenaries are also common among their ranks. Dwarf mages tend to be priests rather than wizards. Dwarves who were not brought up in Freeport must get used to the idea that orcs and goblins walk the streets. To many, this seems dangerous and unnatural.

Playing a Dwarf Tradesman

If you choose to play a dwarf tradesman, modify your character as follows:

- Add 1 to your Constitution ability.
- Pick one of the following ability focuses: Constitution (Drinking) or Cunning (Evaluation).
- You have Dark Sight, which allows you see up to 20 yards in darkness without a light source.
- You can speak and read Dwarven and the Common Tongue.
- Choose a class. You can play mage, rogue, or warrior.

Roll twice on the following table for additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, re-roll until you get something different.

Dwarf Tradesman

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Communication
3-4	Focus: Communication (Bargaining)
5	Weapon Group: Axes ¹
6	Focus: Constitution (Stamina)
7-8	+1 Cunning
9	Focus: Cunning (Engineering)
10-11	Focus: Strength (Smithing ²)
12	+1 Strength

1 If the class you choose provides this already, you can take the focus Strength (Axes) instead.

2 This is a new ability focus covering the blacksmith's art.



DRAGON AGE™

Gnome Artisan

Freeport is home to a small community of gnomes, one of which is even on the Captains' Council. Their small and nimble hands are well suited to fine detail work, leading many to find work as jewelers, sculptors, and silversmiths. Gnomes are also well-known tricksters, and some find success in less noble pursuits. Gnome mages tend to be wizards, and they prefer less flashy magic than many spell casters.

Playing a Gnome Artisan

If you choose to play a gnome artisan, modify your character as follows:

- Add 1 to your Dexterity ability.
- Pick one of the following ability focuses: Constitution (Stamina) or Cunning (Dexterity) (Legerdemain).
- You have Dark Sight, which allows you see up to 20 yards in darkness without a light source.
- You can speak and read Gnomish and the Common Tongue.
- Your Speed is equal to 8 + Dexterity (minus armor penalty if applicable).
- Choose a class. You can play mage, rogue, or warrior.

Roll twice on the following table for additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, re-roll until you get something different.

Gnome Artisan

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Constitution
3-4	Focus: Dexterity (Traps)
5	Focus: Cunning (Evaluation)
6	Focus: Perception (Hearing)
7-8	+1 Cunning
9	Focus: Cunning (Cartography)
10-11	Focus: Dexterity (Calligraphy)
12	+1 Magic

Halfling Entrepreneur

Wherever humanity goes, halflings follow, so it is no surprise that the small folk are a presence in Freeport. The city attracts halflings with big ideas, and they protect their own through the Halfling Benevolent Association. Finn, the leader of the HBA and a notorious crime lord, encourages and profits from halfling ingenuity. Finn runs the Eastern District, which is home to most of Freeport's halflings. Very few halflings become mages of any type.

Playing a Halfling Entrepreneur

If you choose to play a halfling entrepreneur, modify your character as follows:

- Add 1 to your Dexterity ability.
- Pick one of the following ability focuses: Dexterity (Stealth) or Strength (Jumping).
- You can speak and read Halfling and the Common Tongue.
- Your Speed is equal to 8 + Dexterity (minus armor penalty if applicable).
- Choose a class. You can play mage, rogue, or warrior.

Roll twice on the following table for additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, re-roll until you get something different.

Halfling Entrepreneur

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Cunning
3-4	Focus: Communication (Persuasion)
5	Focus: Dexterity (Initiative)
6	Focus: Willpower (Courage)
7-8	+1 Communication
9	Focus: Perception (Hearing)
10-11	Focus: Strength (Climbing)
12	+1 Perception



High Elf

The dominant elves on the Continent, high elves, are few in number in Freeport. They are proud of their magic and their intellect, and they see themselves as carrying the torch of civilization. Most high elves view Freeport as a cesspit, and they would rather remain in the great elven cities of the Continent. Some do travel to Freeport, though, and a small number of them have settled down. They find value in places like the Freeport Opera House, the Temple of the God of Knowledge, and the Wizards' Guild. High elves have a long tradition of arcane magic and their mages tend to be wizards.

Playing a High Elf

If you choose to play a high elf, modify your character as follows:

- Add 1 to your Magic ability.
- Pick one of the following ability focuses: • Communication (Etiquette) or Perception (Seeing).
- You can speak and read Elven and the Common Tongue.
- Choose a class. You can play mage, rogue, or warrior.

Roll twice on the following table for additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, re-roll until you get something different.

High Elf

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Cunning
3-4	Focus: Dexterity (Calligraphy)
5	Focus: Cunning (Historical Lore)
6	Focus: Perception (Hearing)
7-8	+1 Dexterity
9	Focus: Dexterity (Stealth)
10-11	Focus: Perception (Searching)
12	+1 Perception

Human Burgher

Most Freeporters are human, but they come from an astonishing array of cultures. Freeport is called the crossroads of the world for good reason, and humans from all over have settled in the city. The mix of influences and the city's rich history have given Freeport a culture all its own. Since the mariners are often away for months at a time, the burghers are the heart of the city. They are shopkeepers, laborers, bodyguards, traders, publicans, cooks, actors, stevedores, students, musicians, priests—all the hardworking people who make Freeport what it is. Human mages in Freeport are usually either priests in the Temple Quarter or wizards in the Wizards' Guild.

Playing a Human Burgher

If you choose to play a human burgher, modify your character as follows:

- Add 1 to your Communication ability.
- Pick one of the following ability focuses: Communication (Bargaining) or Constitution (Drinking).
- You can speak and read the Common Tongue.
- Choose a class. You can play mage, rogue, or warrior.

Roll twice on the following table for additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, re-roll until you get something different.

Human Burgher

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Perception
3-4	Focus: Constitution (Stamina)
5	Focus: Perception (Searching)
6	Focus: Communication (Persuasion)
7-8	+1 Constitution
9	Focus: Communication (Deception)
10-11	Focus: Dexterity (Brawling)
12	+1 Magic

Human Mariner

Pirates founded Freeport, so it's been a nautical city from the start. In theory, the city became "legitimate" a long time ago, but in reality, that just means the piracy has become more organized. Freeport hires out its privateers every year to the highest bidder. It is legalized piracy, and quite profitable at that. There are also many merchants, fishermen, traders, and explorers who call Freeport home. All of these mariners keep the nautical traditions of Freeport alive. Few mariners become mages, but those that do concentrate on spells to enhance the abilities or fighting prowess of their ships.

Playing a Human Mariner

If you choose to play a human mariner, modify your character as follows:

- Add 1 to your Strength ability.
- Pick one of the following ability focuses: Constitution (Drinking) or Strength (Might).
- You can speak and read the Common Tongue.
- Choose a class. You can play mage, rogue, or warrior.

Roll twice on the following table for additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, re-roll until you get something different.

Human Mariner

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Constitution
3-4	Focus: Perception (Seeing)
5	Focus: Strength (Climbing)
6	Focus: Constitution (Swimming)
7-8	+1 Dexterity
9	Weapon Group: Light Blades ¹
10-11	Focus: Cunning (Navigation)
12	+1 Perception

¹ If the class you choose provides this already, you can take the focus Dexterity (Light Blades) instead.

Orc Raider

It's a surprise to many that orcs can sail at all, but it's true. Orcs simply adapted their usual raiding tactics to the sea and, as a result, have produced some fearsome pirate captains. Orc pirates can still be found in the waters near Freeport, and some even use the city as a base.

Freeport also brought landlubber orcs over from the Continent to provide cheap labor for various construction projects. This caused as many problems as it solved, and now most of the orcs live in the notorious district known as Bloodsalt. The orcs in Freeport do not have it easy and are considered second-class citizens at best. Orc mages tend to be shamans, and such "uncivilized magic" is considered dangerous by the Wizards' Guild.

Playing an Orc Raider

If you choose to play an orc raider, modify your character as follows:

- Add 1 to your Strength ability.
- Pick one of the following ability focuses:
 - Constitution (Stamina) or Strength (Might).
 - You can speak and read Orcish and the Common Tongue.
 - Choose a class. You can play mage, rogue, or warrior.

Roll twice on the following table for

additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, re-roll until you get something different.

Orc Raider

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Perception
3-4	Focus: Perception (Smelling)
5	Focus: Constitution (Swimming)
6	Focus: Strength (Intimidation)
7-8	+1 Constitution
9	Weapon Group: Bludgeons ¹
10-11	Focus: Dexterity (Brawling)
12	+1 Willpower

¹ If the class you choose provides this already, you can take the focus Strength (Bludgeons) instead.

Sea Elf

Of all the elves, the sea elves are the most frequent visitors to Freeport, and for obvious reasons. The high elves rule the great cities of the interior, but the sea elves dominate the coast of the elven kingdom. They are born travelers who

love adventure, and as such, they fit in well with the mariners of Freeport. In Freeport's earliest days, there were sea elves amongst the pirate captains, and that continues today amongst the city's privateers. The high elves look down on their kin, but despite their superiority complex, they rely on sea elf merchants to bring in exotic goods from foreign lands. Sea elf mages are not terribly common, but those that choose this path often become priests of the God of the Sea.

Playing a Sea Elf

If you choose to play a sea elf, modify your character as follows:

- Add 1 to your Dexterity ability.
- Pick one of the following ability focuses: Communication (Bargaining) or Perception (Seeing).
- You can speak and read Elven and the Common Tongue.
- Choose a class. You can play mage, rogue, or warrior.

Roll twice on the following table for additional benefits. Roll 2d6 and add the dice together. If you get the same result twice, re-roll until you get something different.

Sea Elf

2d6 Roll	Benefit
2	+1 Strength
3-4	Focus: Strength (Might)
5	Focus: Perception (Hearing)
6	Weapon Group: Bows ¹
7-8	+1 Perception
9	Focus: Strength (Climbing)
10-11	Focus: Constitution (Swimming)
12	+1 Communication

¹ If the class you choose provides this already, you can take the focus Dexterity (Bows) instead.

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GREEN RONIN PUBLISHING

The Wreck of the Goodwife

By Jonathan McAnulty with Brandon Hodge

Cartography by Jonathan Roberts

MAP OF THE SHIPWRECK

The wreck of the Goodwife map can be found on the inside back cover in full glorious color, and is available at higher resolution for use as a battlemat at KoboldQuarterly.com.

Much has been lost to the ocean: ships, men, treasures, even empires. The sea floor is an incredible realm of wondrous creatures, dangerous fauna, and ancient civilizations both living and dead. It requires unique skills to pry the secrets from the waves. Those who succeed can achieve fame and fortune, but failure often means death in the dark depths.

Sunken Empires details underwater adventuring and the horrors that lurk in the ruined Underdeep—the lightless depths of the sea floor. New equipment, feats, spells, hazards, creatures, and more drift between the covers of this sourcebook.

Adventure Synopsis

The Wreck of the Goodwife is an adventure for 6th-level characters, using material from the upcoming *Sunken Empires* sourcebook. A dwarven salvager hires the PCs to recover treasure from the recently wrecked galleon *Goodwife*. Now in competition with the dead captain's widow, they must beat her organization to the wreck and secure a valuable magical treasure. They can use a new combat maneuver to capsize their competition and explore the *Goodwife's* wreckage using two new magic items. Once underwater, the adventurers encounter undersea hazards, terrain, and a new monster that guards the wreck—the dreaded coral drake!

A Job Opportunity

Junip Deepstone (LN male dwarf expert 4) needs assistance in an undersea investigation. Deepstone's operation is one of several legal salvage-houses in the city, but recent labor disputes have left him shorthanded, just as rumors of the potentially rich haul from the *Goodwife* emerge. Deepstone needs aid as he evaluates the wreck's salvage potential and searches for Captain Locke's famous *captain's ring*. His offer includes 5% of treasure salvaged during the excursion. Deepstone will supply the equipment necessary for making the dive and guide PCs to the wreck.

The Widow

Maybelle Locke is a wealthy heiress who was recently initiated into the Widow's Watch (see sidebar) when her husband died with his ship, the *Goodwife*. When she learned of possible excursions to the wreck, she immediately used her considerable wealth to hire all available divers in the region, forcing Deepstone's generous offer to the PCs. She appeals to popular decency to allow her husband's remains to lay undisturbed, and she falsely claims his famous *captain's ring* was her wedding ring. Indeed, she intends to salvage the *Goodwife's* treasure for herself.

New Organization The Widow's Watch

A “benevolent” society for women who have lost their husbands at sea, this sorority wields considerable financial influence. Some members own their own ships, some operate nautical shops, and some have turned their homes into inns or hostels. Certain members are rumored to have made illicit arrangements to qualify for the entry requirements.

Sinking the Opposition

As the PCs load Deepstone's rowboat with supplies, the dwarf notices his former crew equipping their own small vessel. When they leave their rowboat unguarded and enter a nearby warehouse, the dwarf tells his new employees he wants to capsize the boat. He quickly passes out *diving helms* and iron boots and orders them to sneak through the 7-ft. shallow water of the docks and attempt to capsize their rowboat. Deepstone is certain dumping the competition's equipment overboard will delay their competition considerably, and he's right.

The PCs can overturn the rowboat using the new capsize combat maneuver. (More details on this maneuver can be found in the “Underwater Combat” chapter of *Sunken Empires*.) In this case, the rowboat's Large size and the PCs firm footing at the bottom of the shallow bay allow the PCs to dump the competition's equipment overboard with a successful CMB check against the boat's CMD of 21, based on the boat's size and lack of crew. A successful attempt rocks the vessel, knocking the heavy air pump and diving gear into the bay and delaying the competing expedition by a full day while they recover and repair the pump.

Weighing Anchor

Deepstone has correctly guessed that the wreck of the *Goodwife* is located in water 120-ft. deep on a dangerous reef,

for Captain Locke was well known for trading safety for speed. After an hour of rowing, Deepstone produces a *wreckfinder* to locate the site.

The dwarf can properly equip PCs for the dive by loaning them sunrods, *diving helms*, and heavy iron boots that will allow them to breathe underwater and walk on the ocean floor. He also owns six spears and six daggers—weapons appropriate to underwater combat, if needed. Each PC receives a waxed leather bag (30-lb. capacity) for the collection of treasure. The dwarf then drops a long, weighted rope overboard to facilitate their return and plunges overboard behind the PCs. (The adventure begins in the lower right-hand corner of the map.)

Once below, Deepstone follows his *wreckfinder*, guiding the PCs through an overgrown valley (see Area 1) rather than over the steeply sloped and dangerous coral outcroppings, which is rough terrain, on either side.

New Magic Items Diving Helmet

Aura moderate transmutation; **CL** 7th **Slot** head; **Price** 4,500 gp; **Weight** 5 lb.

Description

A heavy helmet of glass and copper that seals around the user's shoulders, this device allows you to breathe freely underwater or in other environments lacking good air. Spellcasters wearing a *diving helmet* incurs a 10% chance of spell-failure when casting spells with a verbal component. Moreover, wearing the helmet imparts a -4 penalty to all Perception checks.

Construction

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *water breathing*;
Cost 2,250 gp

Wreckfinder

Aura moderate divination; **CL** 5th **Slot** —; **Price** 20,000 gp; **Weight** 5 lb.

Description

This compass-like device contains a numerical counter, adjustment dials, and three hands of varying lengths. Once per day, when immersed in seawater, the *wreckfinder* will locate the closest submerged cache of treasure within a 5-mile radius. Adjusting the counter will allow the user to eliminate treasures worth less than a given amount in 100 gp increments. If a treasure cache is located, the hands of the *wreckfinder* indicate the direction, distance, and depth of the treasure. If within 60 ft. of the treasure, the device sheds light in a 30-ft. radius.

Construction

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *locate object*; **Cost** 10,000 gp

The Wreck of the Goodwife

The broken *Goodwife* lies surrounded by the scattered bones of drowned sailors in an underwater glade largely deforested by sea urchins. A considerable amount of cargo lies in and around the vessel, although much of it is now buried. Deepstone instructs the PCs to only gather easily secured wealth and guard against hidden dangers in the wreckage.

1. Horse & Monkey (CR 6; 2,400 XP)

The glint of gold beckons from within the swaying fronds of kelp and brine-washed bones scattered nearby.

To reach the *Goodwife*, the PCs must pass through a narrow, overgrown chasm. A DC 14 Perception check reveals the reflection of treasure from within this kelp bed. These patches of anchored kelp cost 2 squares of movement and provide concealment: the DC of Acrobatic, Stealth, and Swim checks increase by 2. Within, the

large skeleton of a horse lies partially buried in the sand. Nearby lies a small humanoid skeleton that a DC 12 Knowledge (nature) check reveals is a primate. Clutched in the primate's skeletal fist is a golden chalice. Those disturbing the remains or attempting to salvage the cup find themselves in a disguised bed of blood kelp.

Creatures These thick fronds, known as blood kelp (CR 3), have sharp barbs and instinctively wrap around creatures moving through them unless they succeed on a DC 13 Reflex save. Failure results in the creature becoming entangled; it can escape with a DC 15 Escape Artist check or a DC 20 Strength check (both are full-round actions). Creatures can cut themselves free by dealing 10 points of damage to the weeds with a slashing weapon. Hitting the kelp is automatic, but the fronds exude a blood-like substance when cut that attracts predators. In this case, three hungry sharks appear in 2 rounds to feed.

Blood Kelp (hazard) CR 3

Shark (3) CR 2

hp 22 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*)

Treasure The golden chalice is worth 100 gp.

2. Floating Chest

The wreck's forecabin appears through the murk, showing the ship was heavily broken up by its impact with the reef. The bones of sailors protrude from the sand nearby.

Within this ruined section of hull, knocking against a corner of the ceiling 15 ft. above, floats a watertight sea chest. Urchins congregate here and provide a barrier to reaching the chest for seabed-walkers. All PCs wearing weighted iron boots receive a +4 bonus against this nuisance.

Creatures Urchins are spiny echinoderms that subsist on kelp. Considered a pest due to their voracious decimation of kelp forests, the spines of these tiny creatures cause a painful wound when stepped on. For adventurers walking the sea floor, they can be quite a nuisance, and areas containing the creatures are considered

to be covered in caltrops.

Urchin Aggregation (hazard)

Treasure Opening the chest underwater destroys the papers within, but a thin copper scroll stays intact, etched with a useful new spell from *Sunken Empire's* school of water magic called *mark of Thalassos*.

3. Haunted Grave

A deep sinkhole appears in the reef. Its eerie, oppressive darkness seems to drag the teetering remains of the Goodwife into its depths.

This 50-ft. deep sinkhole is considered a steep slope. The area is tainted with a massive loss of life, and characters in the area must succeed on a DC 12 Will save or become shaken by the pervasive gloom.

Mark of Thalassos

School water (abjuration/enchantment); **Level** bard 2, sorcerer/wizard 1

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S

Range touch

Target one creature/2 caster levels

Duration 1 hour/level

Saving Throw Will negates (harmless); **Spell Resistance** yes (harmless)

You inscribe the touched creature with a magic rune recognizable to all sea creatures as the mark of the Drowned King. This rune grants the spell's recipient a +4 bonus on Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate checks made against creatures with the aquatic subtype. Such creatures take a -2 penalty on attack and damage rolls against the targeted creature while the spell is in effect.

Treasure Characters exploring the bottom suffer 1d6 nonlethal damage per minute from the depth pressure but also discover a bronze masterwork breastplate, ornately worked to depict two krakens, worth 300 gp.

4. Cargo Hold (CR 8; 4,800 XP)

Teetering over the edge of the sinkhole is the shattered hold of the ship, the promise of treasure beckoning from within.

The PCs must struggle against the steep embankment and the rough terrain to reach the midsection of the ship.

Creatures A coral drake nests within the wreck.

Coral Drake CR 8
hp 115 (see below)

Tactics

Before Combat The drake uses her camouflage to surprise the PCs with her breath weapon.

During Combat The coral drake uses hit-and-run tactics to wear down PCs, only making full-round attacks if opponents are near death.

Morale The drake flees if reduced to 12 hp.

True to her kind, the drake gathered all nearby valuables to make a small bed. There is approximately 20,000 gp worth of collected coins and ingots in the immediate vicinity, but PCs are limited to what they can gather in their bags (approximately 1,500 gp per bag) and on their person, all done under the careful scrutiny of their seasoned boss (Perception +10).

In addition, a DC 10 Perception check uncovers an item from the customized treasure list, which

includes a small sampling of aquatic-themed treasure found within *Sunken Empires*.

5. Captain's Quarters (CR 5; 1,600 XP)

The stern of the ship hovers precariously over the sinkhole, its dark interior refusing to give up its secrets.

The skeletal body of Captain Locke rests here (identified with a DC 14 Knowledge (local) check) with his glass eye, missing foot, and distinctive ring (the *captain's ring*) being the most obvious evidence. If the PCs wish to recover his body, his bones can be gathered in a single sack, sacrificing any gold therein.

Creatures The approach of the PCs, however, disturbs the nest of a new undersea creature variant—an aquatic cloaker. *Sunken Empires* introduces rules for simple, convenient conversions of monsters to water-borne variations. Here, the new aquatic simple template is applied to a cloaker, which receives a bonus to Stealth (+16 total) to appear like a bed of harmless, floating seaweed rather than a cloak.

Aquatic Cloaker CR 5
hp 51 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*)

Tactics

Before Combat The cloaker uses its unnerving moan as a standard action to warn the party away.

During Combat The cloaker swims beyond melee range and moans, engaging only if pressed.

Morale The cloaker fights until destroyed.

Concluding

Once the PCs salvage as much treasure

Treasures of Sunken Empires

Perception DC Result

10	Trilobite-shaped purple sugilite broach (10 gp)
15	A conch horn, lined with gold (20 gp)
20	Statuette of an emerald-eyed mermaid sculpted in pink coral (70 gp)
25	Statue of an obsidian sperm whale fighting a giant squid (100 gp)
30	A buzzing amber amulet enclosing a prehistoric insect, which is quite alive (200 gp)
35	Platinum-handled masterwork dagger with an octopus-shaped hilt (300 gp)

as they can carry and secure the *captain's ring*, they can return to the docks. Deepstone gives them the scroll as a bonus and awards the PCs 5% of the entire excavation. The party haul can be as much as 4,000 gp or more, depending on their resourcefulness in stuffing their bags and gathering valuables.

If the PCs fail to return the body of Captain Locke, his widow considers them little better than thieves and will seek their ruin at some later date.

New Simple Template Aquatic Creature (CR +0)

Aquatic creatures dwell within seas and lakes, mainly along coastal regions. If the creature dwells exclusively underwater, it gains the aquatic subtype and replaces its land or fly speed with an identical swim speed. If the creature is able to also travel on land, it gains the amphibious special quality, reduces its land speed by 10 ft., loses any fly speed, and acquires a swim speed equal to its original speed. An aquatic creature also gains low light vision 60 ft.

New Magic Item Captain's Ring

Aura moderate enchantment and transmutation; **CL** 9th

Slot hand; **Price** 63,000 gp;

Weight —

Description

This gold ring is set with two small pearls, one black and one white. The wearer of the ring gains a +10 competence bonus to Acrobatics and Swim checks. Twice per day, the user can use the ring to command others, as per the *greater command* spell (DC 17).

Construction

Requirements Forge Ring, *greater command*, crafter must have 10 ranks in both Acrobatics and Swimming; **Cost** 31,500 gp

New Creature

Like a piece of moving landscape, this drake's coloration and scale patterns match the nearby anemones and corals, allowing considerable stealth in its natural habitat. Long serrated spines stretch from the coral drake's body, waving brilliant colors against a blue sea. The creature's narrow snout is crowned with an array of spikes and slender protrusions. Inside the mouth, sharp teeth form multiple ringed ridges and needle-thin claws spring from finned appendages.

Coral Drake CR 8

XP 4,800

NE Medium dragon (aquatic)

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +15

Defense

AC 22, touch 13, flat-footed 19; (+2 Dex, +1 dodge, +9 natural)

hp 115 (11d12+44)

Fort +11, **Ref** +9, **Will** +8

Defensive abilities camouflage;

Immune paralysis, poison, sleep; **Resist** cold 10

Offense

Spd 30 ft., swim 60 ft.

Melee bite +15 (1d6+4), 2 claws +15 (1d4+4), sting +15 (1d4+4 plus poison)

Special Attacks breath weapon, poison

Statistics

Str 19, **Dex** 15, **Con** 18, **Int** 10, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +11; **CMB** +15; **CMD** 27

Feats Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Lunge, Power Attack, Swim-By Attack

Skills Bluff +14, Diplomacy +9, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (nature) +8, Perception +15, Stealth +16, Survival +9, Swim +21; **Racial Modifier** +12 Stealth (underwater)

Languages Aquan, Common, Draconic

SQ camouflage

Ecology

Environment tropical aquatic

Organization solitary

Treasure double

Special Abilities

Breath Weapon (Su) A coral drake can spew a 15-ft. cone of its spawn. Any creatures in this area take 6d4 hp damage from thousands of tiny bites. In addition, any creatures in the area must make a DC 19 Fortitude save or become nauseated for 1 round. A coral drake can use its breath weapon every 1d4 rounds since the creature must siphon its young back into its throat sack before expelling them again. **Camouflage (Su)** A coral drake's coloration and shape lends to its stealth. For 10 rounds per day, a coral drake can shift its coloration, granting the benefit of 20% concealment. These rounds need not be consecutive. **Poison (Ex)** Sting—injury; *save* DC 19; *frequency* 1/round for 4 rounds; *effect* 1d4 Str and 1d4 Wis damage; *cure* 2 consecutive saves. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Typical Physical Characteristics

Thin and agile, the beast weighs less than 100 lb. and measures 7 ft. from the tip of its snout to its barbed stinging tail.

Both male and female coral drakes gestate their delicate eggs in sacks inside their mouths. This oral incubation protects the vulnerable eggs, but only a handful of these creatures ever reach maturity, as their parents use their ravenous spawn for their defense when faced with dangerous enemies.

Additional design by project patrons Adam Daigle, Richard Flanagan, Mike Franke, Jim Groves, Jan Rodewald, Stefan Styrsky, and Mike Welham

New Feat Swim-by-Attack

Nimble in the water, this creature can attack while swimming and continue its movement.

Prerequisite swim speed

Benefit This feat is identical to the Flyby Attack feat except that it works underwater instead of in the air.

Daughters of Perun

By Wolfgang Baur

Art by Hartmann Schedel



deep and slow. Barges and ships ply this waterway, connecting east to west. Its towpath provides a roadway for both farmers and oxen. Most of the time, the patrols of Zobeck's Order of the Griffon keep robber barons, fey maidens, and ogres away from the riverbanks.

But where does the river lead? The Grand Duchy of Dornig and the Ironcrag Cantons dominate the western trade. Who trades from the East?

Maidens of the East

The answer is a direct one: a nation of beautiful women lives at the river's mouth. Several days downriver from the Free City is the Duchy of Perun's Daughter, a land of some interest to the people of Zobeck for two reasons: 1) it controls the River Argent's connection to so much land and so many trade venues on the shores of the Ruby Sea and 2) its matriarchy is ruled by a demi-goddess, Vasilka Soulay, more often called Perun's Daughter.

Perun himself is, of course, the god of war and thunder, sometimes called Thor in the north or Mavros in the south. He is a titan of destruction, chaos, and blood—a fitting mate to Marena, the Red Goddess (see “Cults and Heresies of Zobeck” in KQ #8). However, this child is nothing like her father and seems to take more after her human mother, a woman named Mother Illyena. Vasilka is a woman of wisdom and learning, and a goddess of courage, teaching, and stern mercy.

Ruled by a Divine Hand

The duchy itself is small but well ruled: rich in the trade of the fish and oysters from the river mouth and in the crafts of timber, fine jewel-work, and divine magic. None of these trades will ever raise the land to glory, but they keep its people happy, healthy, and give them time for reflection, trade, and the pursuit of art. The duchy is, by far, the land most given to education, literacy, and the keeping of lore from ancient times, aside from the Magocracy of Allain—and the duchy's learning is not focused on the arcane but

on mathematics, botany, agronomy, and architecture. The library in the capitol city is a wing of the royal palace; it is open to the public 1 day each week.

Oddly, worship and theology are relatively neglected. Her Divine Transcendence, the Duchess Vasilka grants boons and answers prayers to a small priesthood, though most of her people also follow the Green Gods and the worship of Lada. Most importantly, Vasilka's power provides a bulwark against the centaurs and bandits of the Ruby Despotate, against the dragonborn legions of the Mharoti Empire, and against the cunning cavalry of the Magdar Kingdom.

The most powerful of her defenders are the amazons of Perunalia.

Amazons and Guardians

With raiding centaurs, dragon legions, and the Ruby Despotate all willing to carry away the “shameless women” of Perun, the people of the duchy feel somewhat besieged merely because of their female ruler. In times of trouble, though, they have a friend in the Free City of Zobeck; their mutual alliance dates back 80 years and remains firm. More importantly, Perun's Daughter is entirely capable of defending her people. The Perunalian warrior tradition is primarily a female one: visitors always remark on how strange it is to see female city guards at the gates and are often struck dumb when they see the duchess's horse guards riding by—every one of them a woman of skill and daring. The typical Perunalian response is a somewhat wry “We have no idea why you trust men with swords and fire, given how they usually act with it.”

Women who flee the Despotate or the Magdar Kingdom to the duchy's borders are welcomed and soon put to work as soldiers, weavers, and farmers. The Perunalian generals and marshals of the Order of the White Lions—a society of female paladins—are canny enough to raise levies from both men and women alike in times of war. The men, it is said, are shamed to greater courage by the bravery of the amazons who lead them.

Lest it be misunderstood, the duchy is not entirely gloriously enlightened, selfless, and wise; the merchants of Zobeck consider Perunalians an especially sharp set of traders who sometimes take goods by force to feed their troops or negotiate contracts at sword point. Certainly the duchy is a realm like no other, and its people would have it no other way.



The wreck of the Goodwife

1 square = 5 feet



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