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Editorial:

# A Love of Villainy

I really can't stand the good guys, sometimes. The villains are always more interesting, charming, sly. Villains are certainly a lot of fun to play, and I think we can agree that in both films and RPGs, a well-played villain is... compelling, even seductive. Yes, bad boys and bad girls are sexy. I mean really, would you rather hang out at the convention with Severus Snape, or with Ron Weasley? Willow, or evil Willow? Thought so.

This issue we celebrate the bad guys, not to mention the hideous ends that they often inflict on player characters. I know that most Dungeon Masters enjoy the chance to twirl a moustache and snarl at the heroes; so let's take a good look at what makes a great villain. And let's be clear on one thing: "insanity" is a boring reason for villainy.

Why is the bad guy role so appealing? I think it is basic biology: the selfish, destructive instincts that characterize villains are bad for us, for our families, for the people we love—but they promise to be so very good *in the short term*. In my book, the bad guys are the selfish, narcissistic, greedy, power-hungry, controlling NPCs—and the best ones don't know they're evil.

Those qualities can be seen an excess and a perversion of a heroic trait: Taking care of oneself, having self-confidence and self-esteem, having the resources and authority to get things done, making the world a better place. A villain wants the same things as others, but lacks the self-control and sense of proportion that makes normal people know when something is too much.

This is why mere insanity is a weak motivation for villains. If they're insane, they are to be pitied instead of reviled. They're not really good foils for a hero, because defeating a drooling madman is hardly as heroic as defeating a criminal mastermind. A good villain is sane—but he's ruthless about some cause. He might be overly patriotic, madly in love, obsessed with greed, or just so full of himself that he can't understand why the world doesn't worship him already. (For more on this mindset, give the Jonathan Coulton song "Skullcrusher Mountain" a listen.)

What do you think makes a great villain? Write to [letters@koboldquarterly.com](mailto:letters@koboldquarterly.com) and let me know!

## Wolfgang Baur

Kobold in Chief



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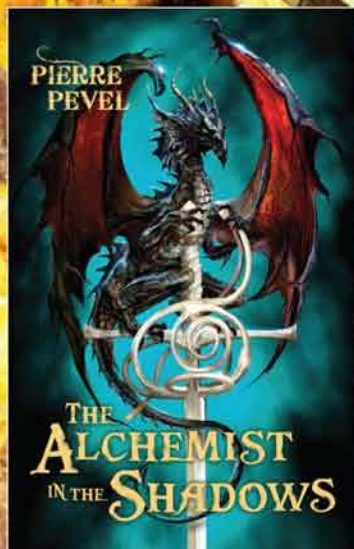
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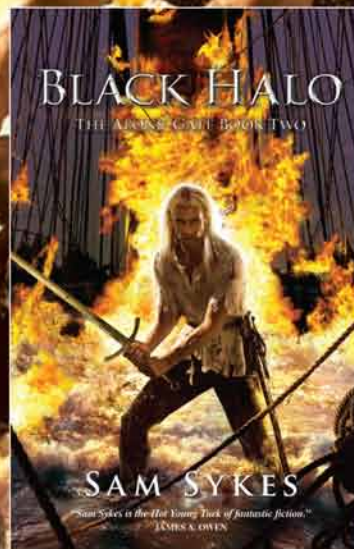


# DRAGONMEN, WEREWOLVES, AND WIZARDS ... OH MY!



Welcome to Paris, in 1633, where dragons menace the realm. Follows The Cardinal's Blades—"A fast-moving story, full of action, intrigue, and swashbuckling adventures."

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—Andy Remic, author of *Kell's Legend and War Machine*





# “SO WE MEET AGAIN!”

## *New Mechanics for Arch-Nemeses*

By Michael Kortez

Art by Emile Denis

*Seconds later the rushing water separated the two foes. For a moment, De'Han simply glared at his old adversary across the rising water. He found his footing and shouted, “You may have evaded me once again, but next time I will be ready.”*

*“No, De'Han, it is you who has escaped. But you are right – there will be a next time.”*

In long-running campaigns, GM's often strive to introduce memorable, recurring villains. Tried and true techniques for this include arranging for a villain to slay a beloved NPC, and stoking a special hatred for the ‘old friend turned traitor’. Whatever machinations a GM employs, the best master-villains deserve a special treatment to make each of their returns memorable. When the PCs meet someone they have defeated before, escaped from, or (best

of all!) endured a standoff with now returned with new tricks, that's when their blood really boils.

The reoccurring villain requires far more in a roleplaying game than in fiction. Most players work hard to ensure their foes never pose a threat again. GMs must plan a villain's mechanical and narrative escape well in advance to make it both plausible and satisfying. Yet the effort rapidly pays off in the joy of seeing players motivated for more than just XP. The PCs (and their players) thirst for justice or simple revenge, and therein lie great stories.

The following optional mechanic of adversary abilities adds a measure of spice to recurring foes through in-game benefits to both PCs and villains to support their narrative relationship with clear mechanics. These abilities represent that special grudge that both

sides nourish, their extra motivation to prepare for their next encounter, and the willingness dig down deep and fight harder than ever before.

### ADVERSARY ABILITIES

Adversary abilities do not come into play until *after* the PC have survived an encounter with a significant campaign foe, whether a pitched battle, a non-lethal contest of sport, a scathing battle of wits across a dinner table, or any another scenario where the PCs and villain square off against one another. The encounter must simply create a sufficiently intense animosity that the two groups have the potential to actively work against each other.

The players have a say in this. When an appropriate situation arises, the GM should ask the player or players involved if they wish to declare



the particular NPC (or NPCs) a “nemesis”—and gain a corresponding ability. If they agree, they choose a special ability from the appropriate list below that they can invoke only when in conflict with their new nemesis. Note that the designated nemesis *also* gains an ability from the same list. GMs need not choose the same ability, nor do the players get to know which ability the GM chooses. Both player and GM must agree that each side harbors the required motivation to create this relationship; players cannot simply acquire nemeses willy-nilly.

The GM might decide that only some of the PCs earn the villain’s ire and vice versa. For example, the major villain—an arrogant wizard—counts only the party’s mage Naraen as his true nemesis and considers the rest of the PCs merely fodder. In this case, only the wizards may choose adversary abilities.

Alternatively, the party battles a young green dragon known as Wastelayer and drives him from his lair only with great effort and after losing a few beloved NPCs. The dragon swears revenge, and the GM decides all five PCs may choose to declare the dragon their nemesis. If they agree, each player selects an adversary ability (choices may, but need not, overlap). Wastelayer chooses from the list five times, though each choice applies against a single, designated PC. GMs may thus simplify by taking the same ability against each PC, or customize by selecting different abilities for each PC.

Remember that adversary abilities are optional. In the above example the party’s druid might decide that driving Wastelayer from his lair was simply necessary to restore balance in the moorlands, but she bears him no particular ill will. Her player declines to select an adversary ability, and the GM notes that Wastelayer does not gain an ability that affects her either. He hates the druid, but the other PCs come first.

Adversary abilities are free actions that can be used only once. If the two adversaries survive subsequent encounters, and if both sides choose to continue the relationship, the players and GM again choose abilities from

the list. Depending on the intensity of the grudge after a few encounters, the GM might permit everyone to choose from a list of more powerful abilities, representing the maturing of their hatred and an even greater desire to train and prepare for their next meeting.

Adversary abilities have three levels: (Minor) a Returned Foe, (Standard) a Reoccurring Rival, and (Major) an Arch-Nemesis. In each case, the GM determines the appropriate list. I recommend using the minor list when the foes face off for the second or third time, the standard list for third and fourth encounters, and reserve the arch-nemesis for at least the fifth meeting and beyond. The lists have no level requirements.

### **(MINOR) RETURNED FOE ABILITIES**

#### **1. EARS TO THE GROUND**

*No matter where he flees, he operates the same way – we can find him.*

You gain a +2 bonus on Diplomacy checks to gather information specifically related to your nemesis (i.e. his location, current activities and allies, his weaknesses, etc.). The bonus may apply to multiple searches over one day per level or HD.

#### **2. FOE TRACKER**

*I know those tracks. Follow me.*

You gain a +2 bonus on Survival checks made to track your nemesis. The bonus lasts for one complete attempt to track your foe, potentially minutes or days, and may apply to multiple Survival checks. The bonus lasts until the foe is found or clearly escapes (takes ship, plane shifts, etc.).

#### **3. FOOL ME ONCE. . .**

*This time, I’m on to your tricks.*

You gain a +2 bonus on Sense Motive checks when opposing your nemesis’ Bluff checks, including feints, for one full encounter. Alternatively, you may designate this ability for use as a one time +4 bonus on a Perception check to oppose your nemesis’ Disguise check.

#### **4. I HAVE YOU NOW!**

*At last! Right where I want you.*

You pick your moment and maneuver into position just as your foe least expects it. You may take an extra 5-foot step, even if you have already taken one on your turn.

#### **5. MOMENT OF EXIT**

*We shall meet again!*

When you double move away from your rival or use the withdraw action, you gain a +10 bonus to Speed for one round.

#### **6. NOT GOING OUT LIKE THAT**

*I’m just too stubborn to die.*

When your nemesis drops your hit points between zero and your negative Con, you automatically succeed on a single stabilization check.

### **(STANDARD) REOCCURRING RIVAL ABILITIES**

Choose two benefits from the Returned Foe list or one from the following list:

#### **1. FAMILIARITY BREEDS CONTEMPT**

*I warned you never to try that again.*

Record a specific action that your foe has done before, such as casting a specific spell or using a specific weapon. Once during an encounter, if your nemesis attempts this action, reveal your record of it and gain an immediate attack of opportunity with any ready weapon. You need not be adjacent to your foe to use this ability. You must choose the specific action when you select this ability.

#### **2. I HATE YOU, HATE YOU, HATE YOU!**

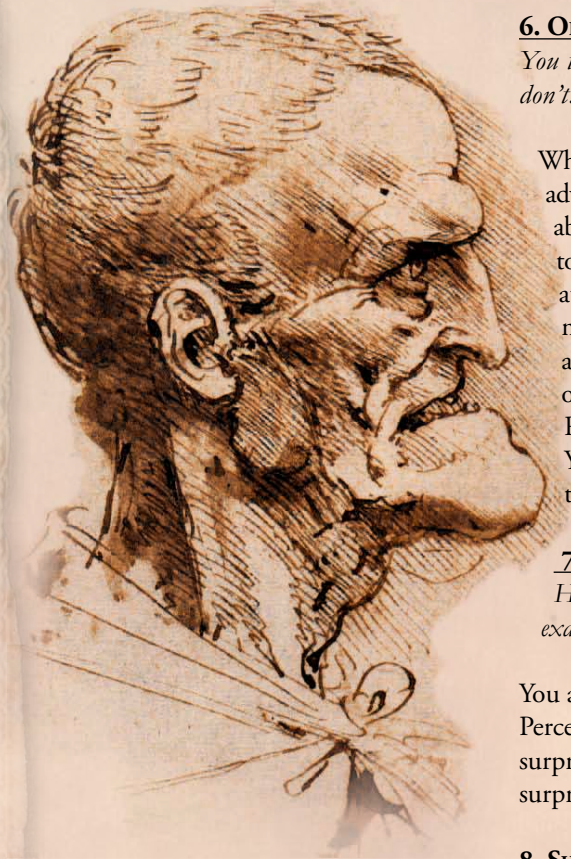
*This ends here!*

When you use this ability, you do an extra point of damage per level or Hit Die. You may use this ability even after you have rolled to hit and know the success or failure of your attack.

#### **3. IMPROVED ‘NOT GOING OUT LIKE THAT’**

*Like I said before, I’m just too stubborn to die.*

When your nemesis drops your hit



points between zero and your negative Con, this ability re-sets your hit points to zero.

#### 4. LIKE THE BACK OF MY HAND

*If he's here, I know what he'll do first. We must move quickly.*

This ability duplicates the spell *divination* with an effective caster level equal to your character level or Hit Dice. You receive a short, useful piece of information in response to a specific question about your foe, arising from you matchless experience of him. Sample permissible questions include: "Where is my foe", "What is he up to", or "How can I best prepare for my foe".

#### 5. NOT IN MY LEAGUE

*You're out of your depth.*

Choose a skill or ability. When you make a single opposed roll of that skill or ability against your nemesis, you gain a +8 bonus. You must choose the skill or ability at the time you select this adversary ability.

#### 6. OH NO YOU DON'T!

*You think that you know me, but you don't.*

When your nemesis invokes an adversary ability, you may use this ability as an immediate action to negate its effect. If the ability augmented a normal action, the normal action still occurs without augmentation. This ability can only negate a Returned Foe or Reoccurring Rival adversary ability. You must be able to see your nemesis to use this adversary ability.

#### 7. PREMONITION

*Hold a second. If it were me, this is exactly where I would set the amb—*

You automatically succeed on your Perception check to participate in a surprise round following an ambush or surprise assault set by your nemesis.

#### 8. SHRUG-OFF

*Nice try, but I don't think so!*

The first time your nemesis inflicts one of the following conditions on you, ignore that condition: dazed, dazzled, deafened, entangled, fascinated, fatigued, shaken, sickened, or stunned.

#### 9. THIS EXACT OCCASION

*I've been saving a little something for just this moment.*

When facing your adversary, use this ability to produce a single *potion*, *scroll*, or alchemical item of your choice, costing no more than your level x 50 gp, from the *Core Rulebook*. You may choose the item when you use this ability, though it represents an item you have secretly carried all this time. The item appears in a free hand, and you must use the associated actions to use or consume the item.

### (MAJOR) ARCH-NEMESIS ABILITIES

Arch-Nemesis abilities are even more significant, bordering on fantastical. Choose two benefits from the Reoccurring Rival list, or one from the following list:

#### 1. MOMENT OF TRUTH

*Now, my old foe, this finally ends.*

Use this ability at the end of a round to replay the entire round with the identical initiative order. You and your adversary may choose the same or different actions. After replaying the round, you gain the staggered condition for the following round. You may use this ability even if you died in the original round. This ability cannot be used if any entities outside the adversary relationship are participating in the combat.

This ability does not actually turn back time. The retracted round simply never happened, a plan in your adversary's mind that never came to pass.

#### 2. SUDDEN RETURN

*You think this is over. Think again.*

Regain 2 hit points per level. You may use this ability even if your hit points fall below zero, but not if they pass your negative Con score.

#### 3. TRICK UP YOUR SLEEVE

*I knew you'd come back. And I prepared a little something just for you!*

You gain an extra standard action.

#### 4. UNSEEN ESCAPE

*A thousand curses! He was right there!*

This ability enables mimics the spell *dimension door* with an effective caster level equal to your level or Hit Dice. Rather than magic, this represents an uncanny talent for escaping your perennial foe, and you cannot appear closer to your foe than your location when you used this ability. This ability functions only when no sentient entity can see you; ducking around a corner or into a mist usually works. This limitation includes enhanced sight, such as infravision, but not abilities that mimic sight, such as tremor sense.

## 5. WITH ENOUGH TIME TO PREPARE

*This time, I was ready for that.*

You are immune to a one instance of one spell or spell-like ability used by your nemesis. You are not protected from a second such attack. When you select this ability, chose the spell or spell-like ability it affects from those spells or abilities you have witnessed your nemesis actually employ. This ability does not protect you from a second use of the spell or ability.

## 6. DEATH TRAP

*You seek to challenge me in my own home?  
You dare?*

If you are in your own home base or lair and within 50 ft. of your target, you may immobilize your foe, as a standard action, until the end of your next round. If you take this against multiple enemies that meet these requirements, you may immobilize all of them.

## 7. STUNNING REVELATION

*I am your brother, fool! Search your heart,  
you know it is true!*

As a free action, you may daze your opponent until the end of your next round. You may only affect one target in a round in this fashion.

## KEEPING ARCH-NEMESSES ALIVE

As mentioned above, part of the challenge in introducing an archrival is keeping him alive. Veteran players often burn the bodies of particularly nasty foes and scatter the ashes or employ spells like *soul bind* to ensure an enemy's destruction. Using adversary abilities, such as Improved Not Going Out Like That and Sudden Comeback, can keep your villain alive while Moment of Exit and Unseen Escape might provide the mechanics for a successful getaway.

However, other mechanical and narrative techniques can also introduce potential recurring enemies, add tension to encounters, and prolong satisfying grudges.

Try introducing encounters where combat is impossible. For example, the party discovers their old foe attending the same royal ball at the invitation of the Queen and under the protection of her paladin guard. Both sides must remain on their best behavior. This doesn't mean the PCs and the villain won't attempt to show each other up, but it should mean that everyone walks away alive at the end of the night.

Another classic scenario involves archrivals uniting in the face of an even greater threat, such as invasion, natural disaster, or escape from a prison. Because everyone knows such an alliance is only temporary, these brief spats of cooperation can raise the tension of a rivalry to a fevered pitch as everyone starts looking for the sudden but inevitable betrayal.

Lastly, a caution: all rivalries must end eventually. Players will become frustrated if they feel their foe's escape to be a foregone conclusion. If your player's truly earn it, let them vanquish their foe. It only clears the way for a new villain. Ω



*The*  
**Weeping Rose**

*Primo*

*Fresh as can be - 20*  
*A small shot of newborn blood from a baby less than an hour old - ask about availability.*

*Scab chips - 2*  
*Made from scratch daily!*

*Secondo*

*Freshly whipped virgin - 13*  
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*Hot, restrained for consumption.*

*Whole mystic - 20*  
*Herbally enhanced.*

*Baradume serial killer - 15*  
*Seventeen confirmed kills of women and children.*

*Your race on demand - 10-40*  
*No blood is as good as that of your own kind.*

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*A three-course dining wonder. Each elf a full 1,000 years older than the previous but in the same family line.*

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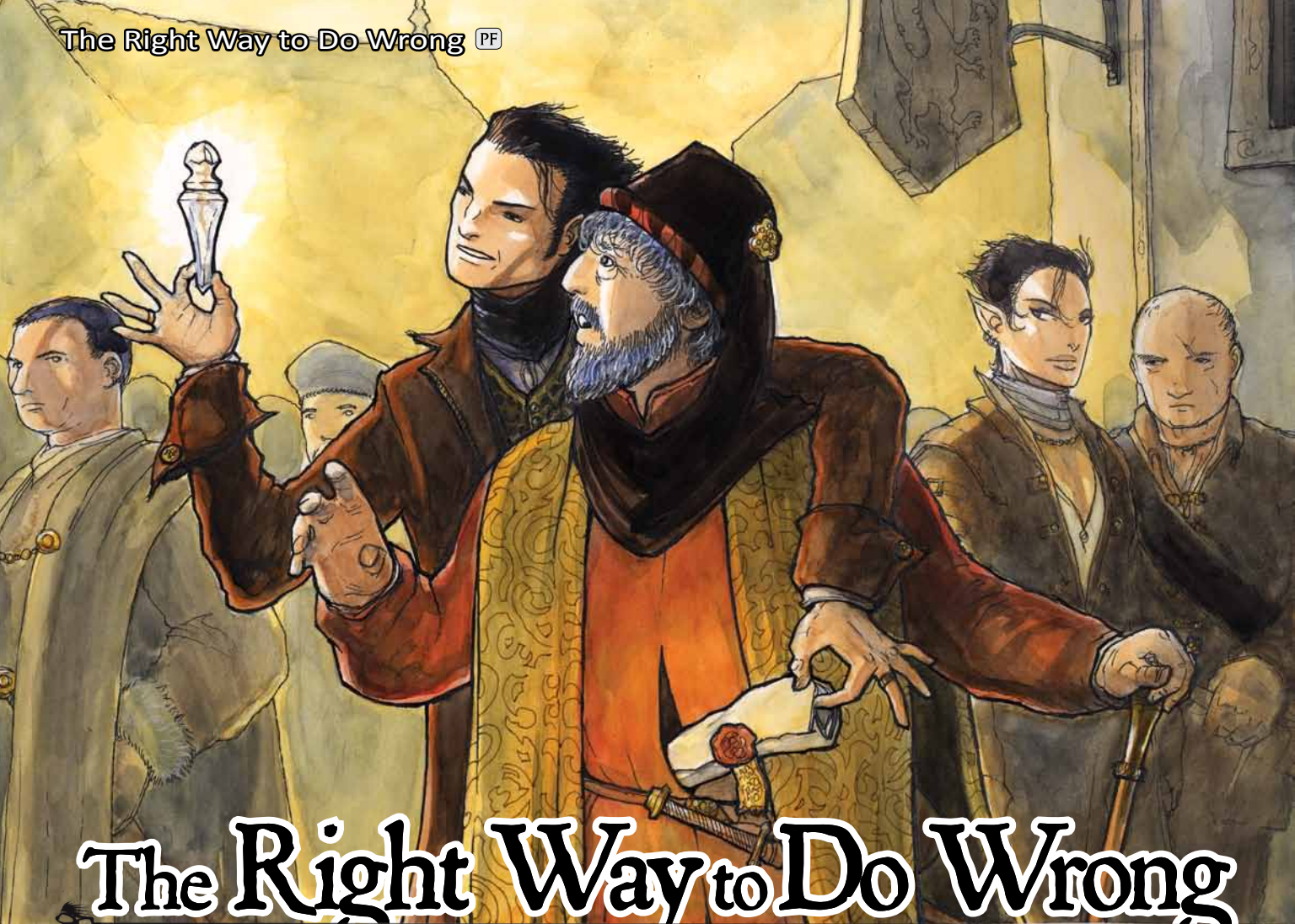
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# The Right Way to Do Wrong

*9 Clever Cons and Classic Swindles for GM and PC Alike!*

By Brandon Hodge

Art by Mark Smylie

Loaded dice, lock picks, and thumb razors are well-known tricks of the roguish trade, but truly clever scoundrels rely on fast tongues and quick wits. A clever grifter can use the inherent greed of his mark to turn a sucker bet into a sure thing or an innocent wager into a hot meal. Here are nine short swindles players and GMs can integrate seamlessly into common social interactions at taverns, markets, and inns, or anywhere someone attempts to separate an honest man from his well-earned gold.

Some require a few props or accessories, but for the most part, rogues can perform these tricks without confederates, magical aids, or special tools.

These classic scams and swindles work for rogues of all levels and inclinations. In some, the payoff is small but worth it. In others, the risk is substantially greater but so is the reward. In keeping with the good-natured rascality intended, even good-aligned rogues should be able to justify some of these confidence tricks. After all, some people need to learn not to take wagers that seem too good to be true! In the following scams, the dishonest manipulator is referred to as the grifter or swindler, while the target is known as the mark.

So after sneak attacks are resolved, Stealth checks made, and the dungeon's traps are disarmed, don't forget that at the end of the day and over a tall mug

of ale, rogues are still rogues, and there is a right way to do wrong...

## THE BOTTLE DROP

A popular scam for scoundrels in cities hosting arcane colleges, the bottle drop relies on the mark's guilt over an "accident". The rogue fills a sack with broken glass—stolen from glassworks or picked up near a warehouse—then loiters near wizardly academies or alchemical laboratories. A DC 15 Knowledge (local) or gather information check using the Diplomacy skill arms an unscrupulous rogue with all the information he needs to play a convincing scribe, and spending 5 gp on humble scholar's robes or the attire of the academy completes the swindler's disguise as a student.

Bag of broken glass in hand, the rogue positions himself near a boulevard heavily-trafficked by scholars and waits for his chance. With a careful Bluff check, opposed by the mark's Sense Motive, the rogue forces a pedestrian collision, drops the sack so the crucial sound of shattering glass makes clear what happened, and makes the mark seem responsible for the accident.

Educated students know the value of the alchemical beakers and decanters. The distraught rogue demands between 20 and 40 gp for the destroyed items, perhaps mentioning that the glassware belonged to some strict alchemical professor – and the student at fault will most certainly be caned or humiliated. Clever rogues have learned to vary the contents of the bag, from broken glass, to sand and discarded wooden spindles (to claim the contents were a 25 gp hourglass), to a dozen normal broken bottles (valued at 2 gp each), or even adding colored water among the pieces to resemble a broken potion.

Smart swindlers rarely claim damages of more than 50 gp. Much more raises suspicion and can lead to magical investigation that would expose their ruse. Some rogues, sensing their ruse failing, will “accept half the blame” and offer to split the loss with the mark, thus assuring them at least 10 gp for their trouble.

### THE PRICELESS VIOLIN

Often the professional grifter will let a mark's inherent greed play against them. This scam is particularly popular among pairs of itinerant bards; single bards who command an *alter self* or *disguise self* spell can easily play both roles. Either way, the scam dupes some greedy bartender out of his life's savings, though the single-grifter version has the added benefit of not sharing the take.

The grifters target an expensive drinking establishment, preferably an owner-operated venue. The first bard enters as a disheveled traveler, eats a decent meal, and consumes his fair share of drink. When his bill is

due, he discovers he has left his coin pouch at a nearby inn, but he offers to retrieve it and pay the proprietor if he can leave his valuable violin as collateral. Once he departs, the second—or newly-disguised—bard walks casually into the tavern.

Greeting the barkeep, the bard spies the violin and feigns immediate excitement. The swindler claims it is a highly valuable masterpiece instrument, and offers the barkeep 100 gp for it after playing an entrancing melody on its strings! An opposed Bluff check (DC 17) convinces the bartender of the bard's sincerity and the item's value, although few bartenders of respectable establishments will agree to such a transaction while holding the collateral. The bard prods the barkeep to acquire the violin at whatever cost, and he agrees to gather the funds and return the following evening to purchase it.

The scam relies on the mark's greed to buy the violin from the “poor” bard in hopes of turning a profit on the “rich” bard's offer. With some careful bargaining, the disguised “poor” bard may haggle as much as 80 gp for the violin, which is actually a common instrument worth only 5 gp. Of course, once this transaction is completed, the “rich” bard never returns, and the pair (or magically-adept solo grifter) nets upwards of 75 gp by playing on the greed of an ignorant merchant.

In a clever variation, the swindler tells the proprietor he has lost an expensive ring, describing it in detail and offering a reward of up to 500 gp for the heirloom's return. A second swindler later finds a ring matching the description on the premises and tries to identify the owner so that they might return it. The proprietor, if dishonest, offers a smaller reward for the ring in hopes of turning a profit when the “real” owner returns. Of course, the “real” owner never arrives to claim the cheap costume jewelry worth only a few silver.

### CHANGE RAISING SCAMS

Dishonest rogues have various techniques for acquiring more than what is owed. Some variations involve distraction and guile while others require misdirection and clever sleight of hand.

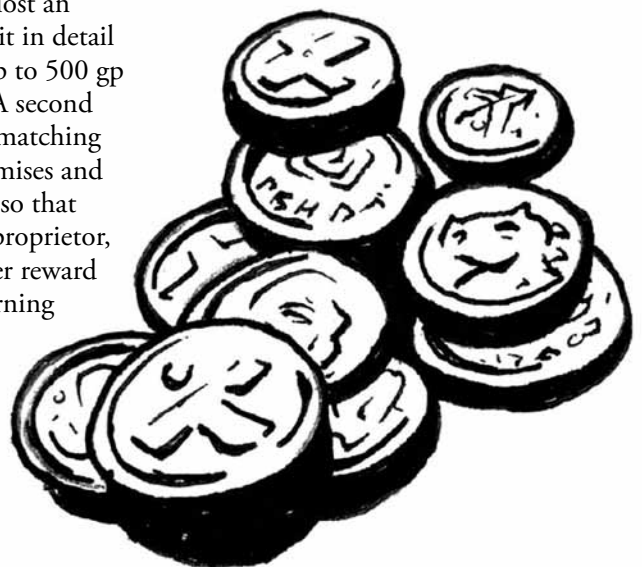
### THE PALM SWITCH

One of the oldest tricks in a prestidigitator's book, palming involves concealing a small object—such as a coin—in the palm of an otherwise empty-looking hand. This simple distraction allows for a wide variety of misdirections, including switching coins of lesser value for those of higher value.

For example, a swindler purchases a fine dagger for 2 gp. The swindler pays with a platinum piece, and while the blacksmith is counting out 8 gold change, the swindler hides a single copper in his right palm.

After he accepts the 8 gp from the blacksmith in his left hand, the rogue dumps all but one of the coins on top of the concealed copper in his right hand, retaining one of the gold pieces in his left palm. Closing his left hand, he fingers through the blacksmith's change, and points out incredulously that the blacksmith has shortchanged him, handing back only 7 gold and a copper! The blacksmith apologizes and trades the copper for a gold, effectively netting the skillful rogue 9 silver, 9 copper!

Palm switches are as popular with merchants as with thieves, and canny GMs can use such tactics to add a



seedy atmosphere to urban encounters. The trick requires an opposed Sleight of Hand check against the mark's Perception or the switch is detected. Additionally, the GM may require an opposed Bluff check versus the mark's Sense Motive to convince them of their mistake before they hand over the misbegotten funds.

## THE SHORT COUNT

This technique relies not on skillful prestidigitation, but rather on quick, confusing dialogue during a coin exchange that distracts the mark from just how much money is involved. While paying for his ale (4 cp) at a popular pub, the swindler gives the bartender 1 silver and receives 6 cp as change. Putting his coins away in his belt pouch, the swindler suddenly discovers 4 copper therein! He turns back to the busy bartender, slaps down 4 copper pieces, and says "I have 4 coppers after all. Now I can keep that silver." The distracted bartender agrees and hands back the original silver piece. After all, 4 copper pays for the drink, correct?

Unfortunately for the busy bartender, he has changed the same coin twice. The net gain for our sly swindler is only a free ale and 2 copper pieces, but few rogues can help themselves. Moreover, by applying this same principle toward the purchase of expensive weapons or armor, dishonest but quick-witted thieves stand to gain much more with hardly an ounce of effort.

A simple opposed Bluff check should pull this scam off in most ordinary circumstances. The GM may impose a -5 penalty to the mark's Sense Motive check for particularly heavy distractions.

## CAN'T LOSE BETS & SWINDLES

More innocuous than the carefully-prepared scams outlined above, clever rogues always have a trick or two up their sleeve, if for no other reason than to avoid paying for their food and drink.

**Drinks on Me:** The swindler waits for a nearby mark to order a fresh mug of ale (worth at least 4 cp), and before they tip back the glass, the trickster bets the mark a copper that he can consume the ale without so much as touching the mug. When the amused mark agrees, the swindler simply grabs the mug, consumes the drink, and tosses the mark meager wager, far less than the value of the drink itself!

**Flipping Coins:** The clever swindler is always a few silver richer for becoming intimate with his coinage, and few tavern patrons can resist simple wagers based on something as seemingly random and assured of honesty as a coin toss. Swindlers may carry a "lucky gold piece" roughed on one side, so that when the coin is caught, the swindler feels which side is which, and either opens his palm or flips the coin onto the back of his other hand, thus assuring the desired outcome.

Another coin may even have a beveled edge, so that when spun (to keep all participants honest) the owners can rest assured knowing it will always land with the non-beveled edge upward. More skillful rogues might even toss a coin with a DC 25 Sleight of Hand check, opposed by the opponent's Perception. In any case, coin flip bets rarely exceed a few gold, but with only a little trouble, they can make the thin swindler fat with good food and copious drink.

**One Shot, Two Ales:** The rogue bets a nearby mark that with the head start of a single ale, he can drink two ales before the mark can finish a single shot of liquor. The grifter explains that neither drinker may touch the other's glasses, and that the mark cannot begin drinking until the glass from the first ale has been set down. The loser buys the round.

If the mark accepts this "can't lose" bet, the rogue consumes his first ale in normal fashion, but places the empty mug *upside down* over the mark's shot glass. By the rules, the mark cannot touch the mug, and the rogue gleefully consumes his second ale,

taking his time at the mark's expense.

**Twenty Coin Short Shift:** A classic bar con that always assures a payoff for the swindler, the grifter proposes to the mark that each contribute 10 coins to a pile and explains the rules of the game. Each player will take turns freely removing between 1 and 3 coins from the pile, with the person claiming the last set of coins winning the game as well as the entire pile, effectively doubling the winner's money.

The secret is for the grifter to always allow the mark to go first (out of courtesy, of course), and to always remove enough coins that the amount he removes, plus the amount the mark removed on his turn, equals 4. If the mark takes 3 coins, the swindler takes 1. If the mark takes 2, the swindler takes 2, as long as the sum between their turns always equals 4. As the pile dwindles down, the mark will always be facing a pile of at least 4 coins on his last turn, leaving the swindler to take the game and his winnings.

The take, of course, varies by the denomination of coins in the pile, but this scam returns at minimum 1 silver or at most 10 platinum. A truly daring rogue might try the same stunt using potions or scrolls instead of coins.

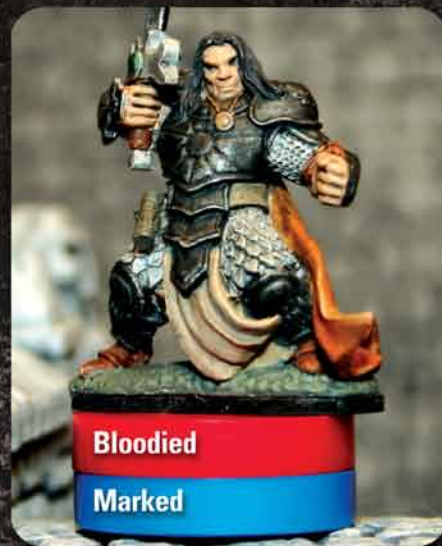
**Twists of Phrase:** The wily rogue who wishes to profit from well-meaning companions can generally win some small wagers. Cleverly phrased wagers that seem to require answers the rogue could not possibly know or actions he could not possibly perform are most common:

*"I bet two silver I can guess the day you were born within 3 days!"*: The key word here is "day" of birth, not "date" of birth. The swindler names *any* day of the week, for in calendars with 7-day weeks, everyone is born within 3 days of any other day of the week.

*"I wager a gold crown I can tell you where you got your boots!"*: Typically wagered against weary adventurers and the well-traveled, who might have purchased their footwear in far-off lands, the rogue can never lose, by saying: "You've got them on your feet!"

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### Grifting Tools

Item	Cost	Weight
Bigmouth Bag	15 gp	2 lbs.
Poacher's Pouch	5 sp	—
Poacher's Pouch, lead lined	1 gp	1 lb.

"We've never met, yet I wager 6 silver dinar I can spell your name": Again, odds that seem too good to be true usually are, and the scamp's well-rehearsed reply of "Y-O-U-R-N-A-M-E" might be worth the price of a lesson well learned.

"I bet you an ale I can drink it without touching this hat":

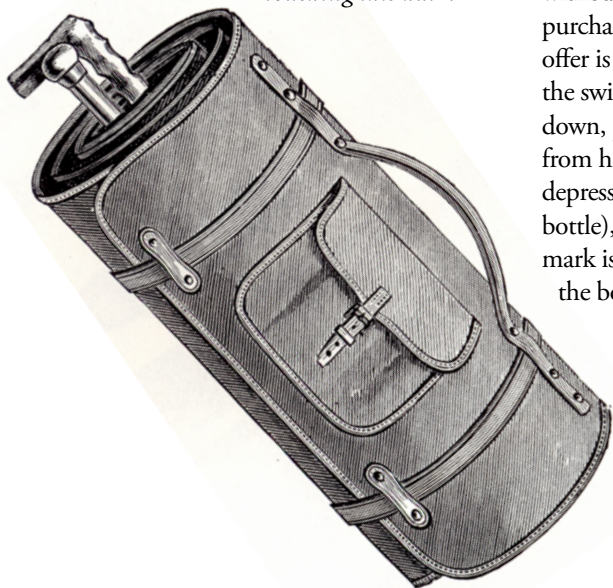
A popular con for headgear-sporting thieves, the swindler orders an ale, tosses his hat over it, and bets the mark he can drink the ale without touching the hat. When the wager is accepted, the swindler plunges his head under the bar and pretends to gulp down the beverage right through the bar! Sitting upright, he wipes his mouth with a satisfied grin and tells the mark to check the drink. When the mark incredulously lifts the hat, the rogue grabs the still-full mug and drinks it, for the mark lifted the hat, not he!

"I bet you I can drink from an unopened wine bottle": The swindler bets a nearby mark that he can drink from an unopened bottle of expensive wine without removing the cork, wagering the purchase of the 10 gp bottle. When the offer is accepted and the bottle retrieved, the swindler turns the bottle upside down, pours a small amount of ale from his nearby mug into the punt (the depression on the underside of a wine bottle), and "drinks from the bottle." The mark is surely un-amused as he purchases the bottle for the canny rogue.

catch-all pocket sewn into the inside of the thief's jacket or cloak and positioned to allow the quick and easy disposal of small items with natural movements. The wearer gains a +2 bonus to Sleight of Hand checks to conceal a small item, and the poacher's pouch negates the +4 Perception check bonus searchers gain to find such items concealed on the rogue's body.

More expensive variations on these secret pockets are lined with a thin sheet of lead to negate magical detection of concealed items. This increases the cost to 5 gp, as such thin lead must be carefully worked to avoid either heavy weight or tears in the lead surface.

**Bigmouth Bag:** This large leather satchel resembles a healer's kit or doctor's bag, but it serves as a clever container for stealthy pilfering. The bag has no bottom at all; instead, a set of spring-loaded barbs along the empty bag's entirely-open underside make it easy to place the satchel directly on top of unattended backpacks, books, sacks, saddlebags, and even small chests. The spring-loaded jaws snatch up the other containers with their contents, and the deceitful rogue can continue his journey with the stolen property immediately concealed. The bag can envelope objects up to 1 ft. x 2 ft. by 1 ft., and the jaws can safely support up to 30 lbs. Ω



### THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

A variety of objects can aid the enterprising grifter.

**Poacher's Pouch:** Also called a topit, this is a secret

### D20 MONKEY

THE COWARD



THE TRAITOR



THE FROGUE (FIGHTER/ROGUE)  
HE DOESN'T "DO TRAPS"







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# THE SCOURGES OF VAEL TUROG

By Stefen Styrsky  
Art by Pat Loboyko

## MIDGARD

CAMPAIGN SETTING

In the waning days of the black Empire of Caermalrath, the tiefling masters of the city of Vael Turog hit upon an ingenious plan that wedded their race's preference for subtly to their nation's casual cruelty: destroy their enemies through magical disease. Long months of labor in secret laboratories and tests on hapless animals, slaves and captured foes finally yielded results: controlled magical plagues tailored to their needs and focused to wreak particular havoc on arcane spellcasters.

Shortsighted infighting doomed the project, if not the product, before the weapons could see proper use. The diseases escaped the laboratories and devastated the sorcerous city. House leaders and arch-mages fell within the day, crippled or consumed. Feuds and opportunity attacks followed. Within a week, Vael Turog's magical infrastructure collapsed and the city fell into anarchy.

After a single cycle of the moon, the home of over three hundred thousand souls lay deserted, broken, and burned.

The chaos of Caermalrath's collapse overshadowed Vael Turog's destruction and obscured the city's location. The diseases remained, however, and spread slowly throughout the world. Some say a clever student of arcana or history could track the paths of the contagions back to the fabled city of Vael Turog. Many Seekers have vanished trying.

The hazards, diseases, and monsters presented below offer new threats to surprise jaded players and can start a new direction for your game. As part of another adventure, the PCs might first encounter the Warp and Wrack hazard or succumb to Mage's Bane, but then discover a death phage in league with their demon antagonists. As a stand-alone option, the party may discover a town falling victim to

a black phage, requiring the PCs to investigate and eradicate the growing threat. Ultimately, as a campaign direction, the PCs could trace the source of these maladies and eventually find the mysterious—and deadly—lost metropolis of Vael Turog.

### THE THREE INFECTIONS

The experiments in Vael Turog ultimately produced three contagious agents, all meant to kill arcane spellcasters. In the centuries since, each has received a colloquial name based on its effects.

Though contaminated air and water constantly expose Vael Turog's explorers to infection, birds, animals, the wind, even infected objects have spread the diseases far and wide. Because these of pestilences' magical nature, they often lurk in potions, on the surfaces of magic items (particularly weapon hilts),

and even in ritual scrolls. Handling the items, taking damage from a disease-carrying weapon, or drinking the contaminated potion opens a creature to possible infection.

### MAGE'S BANE LEVEL 3 DISEASE

*This disease is believed to be the remnant of a final war between wizard nations. The only symptom is excruciating pain in the sufferer's head whenever he casts a spell.*

**Attack:** +5 vs. Fortitude

**Endurance:** Improve DC 15, Maintain DC 10, Worsen DC 9 or lower

The target is cured.

**Initial Effect:** Until the target is cured, it takes ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends) whenever it makes an Intelligence-based attack.

**Final Stage:** The target must succeed on a saving throw with a -2 penalty to make an Intelligence-based attack, otherwise the action is lost.

### STAFF SCAR LEVEL 12 DISEASE

*Sufferers report contracting this ailment after using a newly acquired implement, so many believe it travels from host to host through sorcery's accoutrements. The disease alters the victim's ability to channel arcane power through an implement.*

**Attack:** +14 vs. Fortitude

**Endurance:** Improve DC 21, Maintain DC 16, Worsen DC 15 or lower

The target is cured.

**Initial Effect:** The target cannot use powers with the arcane keyword without wielding an implement even if that power does not have the implement keyword.

The target cannot use arcane powers that do not have the implement keyword. In addition, all enemies the target attacks with powers that have the arcane or implement keywords are considered to have concealment.

The target takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends) each time it uses an implement with an attack power.

**Final Stage:** The target cannot use powers with the arcane or implement keywords.

### SPELL WARP LEVEL 23 DISEASE

*This disease destroys an arcane caster's ability to control his own magic, resulting in harm to himself and his allies.*

**Attack:** +24 vs. Fortitude

**Endurance:** Improve DC 30, Maintain DC 25, Worsen DC 24 or lower

The target is cured.

Reduce the initial damage. All creatures within 5 squares of the target take 5 radiant when the target uses an encounter or daily power with the arcane keyword.

**Initial Effect:** Until cured, the target and all creatures within 5 squares of it take 10 radiant damage whenever it uses an encounter or daily power with the arcane keyword.

As for initial, plus whenever the target uses an encounter or daily attack power with the arcane keyword it gains a second use of the power which it must use against the closest ally on the same round (blasts or bursts that usually target only enemies can also target allies under the influence of spell warp). If the target has no allies, the target makes the second attack against itself.

**Final Stage:** Whenever the target uses a daily attack power with the arcane keyword, it gains ongoing 30 psychic and radiant damage (save ends). If the character reaches 0 hp while the ongoing damage is in effect, the target explodes dealing 6d10 radiant and fire damage to all creatures in a blast 5 area.

**Special: Feedback.** While infected with Spell Warp, if the target scores a critical hit with an arcane attack power, the target also takes 10 damage of the power's damage type.

## FANTASTIC TERRAIN AND HAZARDS

The diseases of Vael Turog also spawned strange effects wherever they lingered for a time, creating new hazards.

### SEEPING MAGIC LEVEL 5 LURKER

**Hazard** XP 200

*A slight shimmering in the air reveals to observant creatures the location of this hazard.*

**Hazard:** Five squares in any configuration or placed randomly in a room, hallway, or other area contain this hazard. When a character enters an infected square the hazard attacks.

#### Perception

DC 17: The character notices the shimmering air in the tainted area.

**Additional Skill:** Arcana

A DC 20 check notices a magical aura in the affected squares.

#### Trigger

The hazard attacks when a creature enters or starts its turn in one of the squares.

#### Attack

**Opportunity Action** Melee 0

**Target:** Creature in the hazard

**Attack:** +8 vs. Fortitude

**Hit:** 2 radiant damage for each magic item the creature carries, and ongoing 1 radiant damage for each magic item the creature carries (save ends).

**Miss:** Half damage and no ongoing damage.

**Special:** Discarding magic items after infection does not halt the ongoing damage. If a creature is bloodied or killed by this ongoing damage, the square it occupies when this occurs also becomes infected with seeping magic.

#### Countermeasures

A creature with no magic items can safely pass through an infected square without triggering an attack.

#### UPGRADE TO LEVEL 11 (XP 600)

+14 vs. Fortitude, 4 radiant damage and ongoing 2 radiant damage (save ends).

#### UPGRADE TO LEVEL 21 (XP 3,200)

+23 vs. Fortitude, 6 radiant damage, and ongoing 4 radiant damage (save ends).

### WARP AND WRACK LEVEL 10 LURKER

**Hazard** XP 500

*The scent of spices—clove, cinnamon and anise—permeates the air around this invisible hazard.*

**Hazard:** The hazard begins the encounter as a zone of four contiguous squares. When a character enters or starts its turn in the zone, the hazard attacks. This hazard is not fixed and moves in a random direction each round. At the start of a round roll 1d8 to determine the direction and 1d4 to determine the number of squares it moves. It is not subject to squeezing rules and can move through any porous object.

**Perception**

DC 21: The character smells a pleasant but strong odor of nutmeg or similar spices.

**Additional Skill:** Arcana  
A DC 25 check recognizes the odor as the smell of lingering magic.

**Trigger**

The hazard attacks when a creature enters or starts its turn in one of the squares.

**Attack**

**Opportunity Action** **Melee 0**

**Target:** Creature in the hazard

**Attack:** +12 vs. Fortitude

**Hit:** 2d6+6 damage.

**Effect:** The target suffers painful, debilitating mutations as its body parts bend and shape into strange forms. The target is slowed and takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends both).

**Countermeasures**

- A strong breeze moves this hazard. If a character can generate wind, he can push the hazard in the direction of the gust.
- The hazard cannot move through zones that cause damage.

**UPGRADE TO LEVEL 21 (XP 3,200)**

**Perception**

DC 27: The character smells a pleasant but strong odor of spices.

**Additional Skill:** Arcana

A DC 30 check recognizes the odor as the smell of lingering magic.

**Attack:**

+ 23 vs. Fortitude

**Hit:** 3d8+6 damage

**Effect:** Target is slowed and takes ongoing 15 damage (save ends both).

**Alternate Effect**

If you want to simulate the random nature of the mutations in the Warp and Wrack hazard substitute the effect below.

**Effect:** The mutations take on specific forms. Until a save is made the target takes ongoing damage, and roll on the chart below:



- 1 **Fused Legs:** Target falls prone and can only move by crawling (save ends)
- 2 **Faceless:** The target is blinded and dazed. (save ends)
- 3 **Exposed Organs:** The target gains vulnerable 10 to all damage except ongoing damage. (save ends)
- 4 **Soft Bones:** The target is slowed and weakened (save ends).

**RITUAL DISEASE**

The ritual disease rendered ritual scrolls dangerous to a user. It lingers in the stale air of unopened tombs, abandoned

towers, and dank dungeons. Whenever a ritual scroll is exposed to the disease, the disease makes an attack roll with a +10 bonus against the scroll. If the attack roll is greater than the ritual's level, the ritual is infected.

A ritual using an infected scroll automatically fails, and the user must roll the appropriate skill check for using the scroll with a penalty of -5 per tier. The roll determines the disease's effect:

Check Result	Effect on Ritual Caster
0 or lower	Death
1-9	Damage equal to the target's maximum hit points
10-19	Damage equal to one-half of the target's maximum hit points
20-29	Damage equal to one-quarter of the target's maximum hit points
30 or higher	No damage

Ritual disease is particularly hazardous to those exploring Vael Turog or areas nearby if it destroys a party's cure disease scrolls.

**SENTIENT DISEASES**

The experiments in Vael Turog had one major unintended consequence. During the final battles in the city, the chaotic mixing of arcane energies and mortal blood gave rise to living diseases called phages. Some of these creatures took up residence in Vael Turog's ruins while others swarmed across the

countryside, infecting and killing all they came across. Now, centuries later, these monsters lurk in remote areas of magical strength or easy prey.

**BLACK PHAGE**

*The shadow on the chamber wall detaches from the stone and moves across the room. What you thought was a trick of the lantern light becomes a rushing black cloud. An overwhelming stench envelops you, and your bones ache to their very core.*

**BLACK PHAGE LEVEL 10 LURKER**

Medium natural magical beast XP 500  
**HP 65; Bloodied 32 Initiative +13 AC 22; Fortitude 23, Reflex 22, Will 21 Perception +6**

**Speed 0, fly 8 (hover);** see also *contagious shift* blindsight 10, blind Immune blinded, disease, gaze, knocked prone; **Resist** insubstantial

**TRAITS**

**Foul Air (disease)\*Aura 1**

Any creature that starts its turn within the aura takes 5 necrotic damage.

**Gaseous Form**

A black phage can enter and move through a porous obstacle that would otherwise prevent movement (such as a door or cracked window).

**Vapor**

A black phage is invisible until seen (Stealth vs. passive Perception) or until it attacks. Creatures that fail to notice the black phage might walk into its aura.

**STANDARD ACTIONS**

**Choking Consumption (disease, necrotic) \*At-Will**

**Attack:** Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. Fortitude

**Hit:** 2d8+5 necrotic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to Fortitude defense until the end of the black phage's next turn.

**Plague Lash (disease, necrotic) \* Encounter**

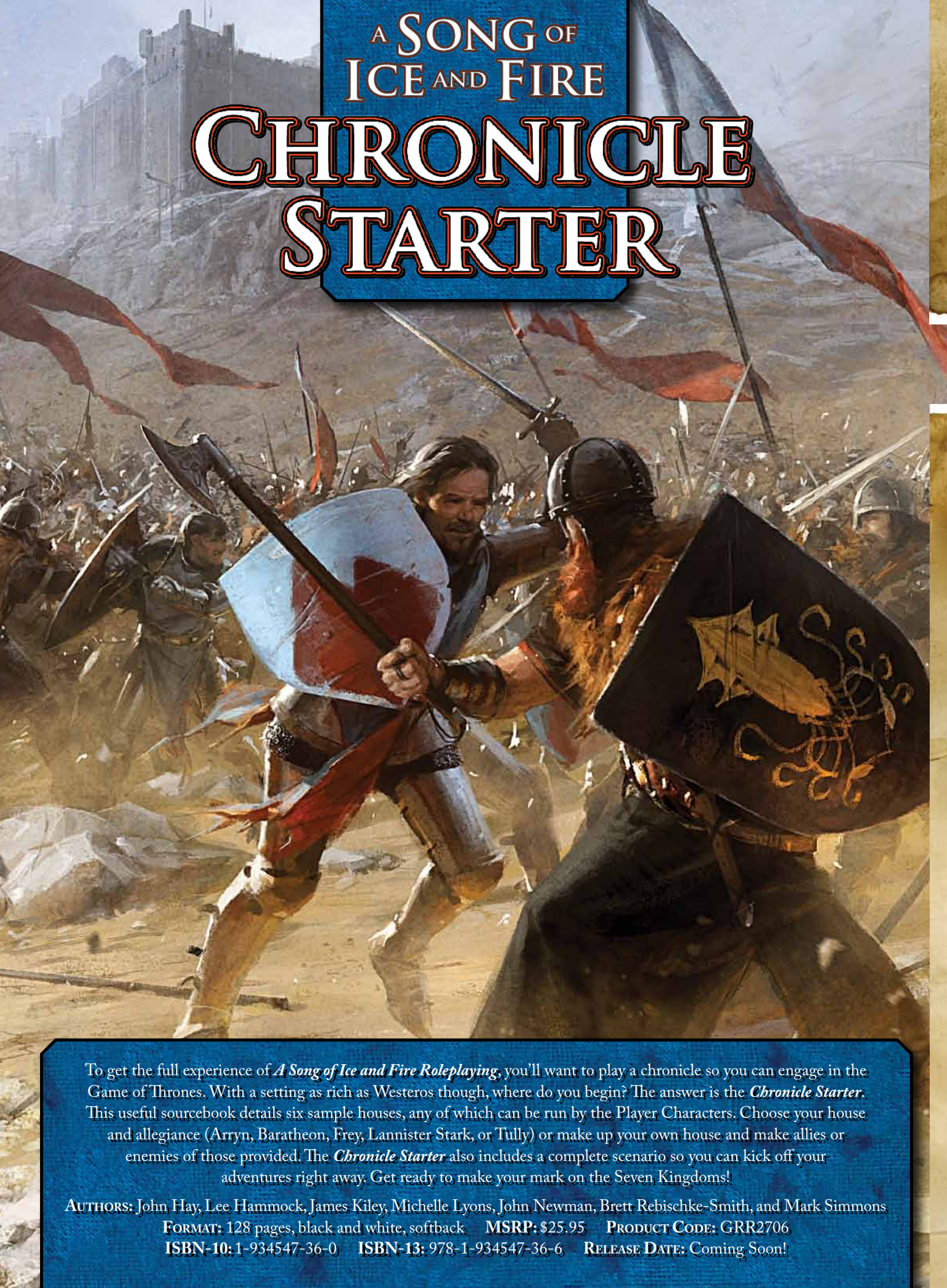
**Attack:** Melee 2 (one or two creatures); +13 vs. Fort

**Hit:** 2d6+5 necrotic damage, and the black phage makes a secondary attack. **Secondary Attack:** (original targets and up to three additional creatures within 2 squares of the original targets); +11 vs. Fortitude

**Hit:** The target is slowed (save ends).

**Contagious Shift \* Recharge 6**

**Effect:** The black phage moves up to 8 squares and makes a basic attack. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.



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**AUTHORS:** John Hay, Lee Hammock, James Kiley, Michelle Lyons, John Newman, Brett Rebeschke-Smith, and Mark Simmons

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## TRIGGERED ACTIONS

### Epidemic (disease)\*Encounter

**Trigger:** A humanoid or natural beast is killed by the black phage.

**Effect (No Action):** A black phage with 32 HP rises from the corpse on the turn following the victim's death. The black phage appears in the nearest unoccupied square next to the slain creature.

**Skills** Stealth +15

**Str** 10 (+5) **Dex** 20 (+10) **Wis** 12 (+6)

**Con** 21 (+10) **Int** 4 (+2) **Cha** 17 (+8)

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** none

## BLACK PHAGES IN COMBAT

A black phage takes advantage of the chaos of battle to attack foes preoccupied with other opponents. It rushes into combat and attacks with choking consumption, striking the same creature to take advantage of its weakened state from the first hit. It focuses attacks on one target until the creature is so sickened it has no resistance against the black phage. If in danger, the black phage uses plague lash to escape slowed opponents.

## DEATH PHAGE

*There is an onrush of air and then a choking stench as a dark corruption fills your lungs. The black cloud that burst from the sealed tomb coalesces into a*

*looming, malignant shape. From amidst the rank air emanates a palpable force of hunger and hatred.*

### DEATH PHAGE LEVEL 15 ELITE LURKER

Large natural magical beast XP 2400

**HP** 175; **Bloodied** 87 **Initiative** +16

**AC** 27; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 23

**Perception** +8

**Speed** fly 8 (hover); see also *contagious shift* blindsight 20, blind

**Saving Throws** +2; **Action Points** 1

**Immune** blinded, disease, gaze, knocked prone; **Resist** insubstantial

## TRAITS

### Foul Air (disease)\*Aura 1

Any creature that starts its turn within the aura takes 10 necrotic damage.

### Gaseous Form

A death phage can enter and move through a porous obstacle that would otherwise prevent movement (such as a door or cracked window).

### Vapor

A death phage is invisible until seen (Stealth vs. passive Perception) or until it attacks. Creatures that fail to notice the death phage might walk into its aura.

## STANDARD ACTIONS

### Feverish Delirium (disease, psychic) \* At-Will

**Attack:** Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. Fortitude

**Hit:** 2d8+8 psychic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of the death phage's next turn.

### Dark Winds of Pestilence (disease, necrotic, zone) \* Encounter

**Attack:** Close burst 3 (all creatures in burst); +16 vs. Fort

**Hit:** 2d8+6 necrotic damage.

**Effect:** The burst creates a zone of diseased air that moves with the death phage and lasts until the end of the death phage's next turn. Creatures that start their turn in the zone cannot spend healing surges.

**Sustain Minor:** The death phage can sustain the zone as a minor action.

### Contagious Shift \* Recharge 6

**Effect:** The death phage moves up to 8 squares and makes a basic attack. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

## TRIGGERED ACTIONS

### Bodily Invasion (disease, necrotic) \* Recharge 5,6

**Trigger:** A creature is weakened with feverish delirium.

**Attack (Immediate Reaction):** Melee 1 (weakened creature); +18 vs. Fortitude

**Hit:** 3d6+8 necrotic damage

**Effect:** The death phage enters the target's body, disappearing from sight. While infecting the target, the death phage cannot attack or be attacked. The target takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage and possesses the *foul air* aura (save ends both). On a save the death phage appears in a square adjacent to the target.

**Aftereffect:** The target takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage and a -2 penalty to Fortitude defense (save ends both).

### Effluent Spew (disease)\* Encounter

**Trigger:** The death phage is first bloodied.

**Effect (Immediate Reaction):** The death phage uses dark winds of pestilence, but cannot sustain the power.

**Special:** The death phage can use this ability even if it has already used dark winds of pestilence during the encounter.

### Epidemic (disease)\*Encounter

**Trigger:** A humanoid or natural beast is killed by the death phage.

**Effect (No Action):** A death phage with 87 HP rises from the corpse on the next turn following the victim's death. The death phage appears in the nearest unoccupied square next to the slain creature.

**Skills** Stealth +17

**Str** 10 (+7) **Dex** 21 (+12) **Wis** 12 (+8)

**Con** 23 (+13) **Int** 4 (+4) **Cha** 18 (+11)

**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** none



### DEATH PHAGES IN COMBAT

The death begins combat with contagious shift, and then uses bodily invasion against the weakened target. If the first melee attack fails it uses an action point to make a feverish delirium attack, followed up with bodily invasion. Otherwise a death phage uses an action point to escape superior foes or employ the dark winds of pestilence after a series of particularly damaging attacks.

### PHAGE LORE

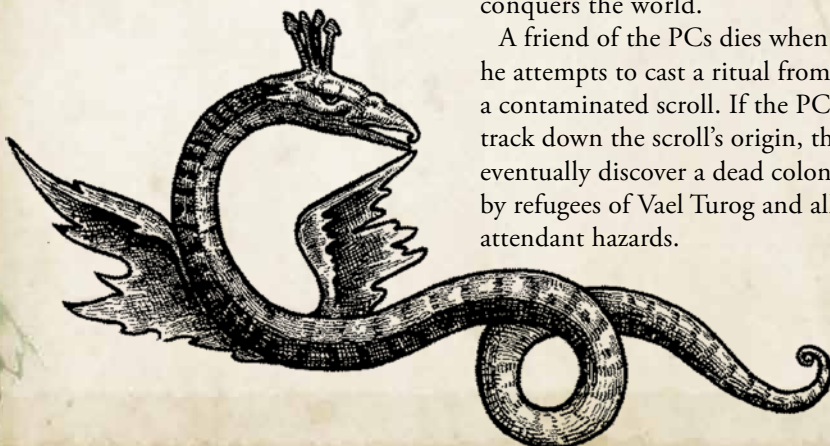
A character knows the following information with a successful Nature check.

**Arcana or Nature DC 20:** Phages are the combination of magical energy and natural diseases. They exist solely to spread their contagion and spawn new phages by slaying other creatures. As sentient diseases, phages are hard to damage with conventional weapons and powers.

**Arcana or Nature DC 25:** Phages reside in areas of their creation, or where magic once had a strong presence, usually a place once home to wizards and sorcerers. Intelligent undead or creatures immune to disease sometimes use phages as guardians. Phages are immune to the diseases of their own kind and other creatures.

### ENCOUNTER GROUPS

Most phages live among the ruins of ancient civilizations, where only the dead walk or where all that remains are the artifacts of the extinct inhabitants. Other phages are drawn to creatures that cause destruction and despair.



### LEVEL 8 ENCOUNTER (XP 1,800)

- 1 black phage (level 10 lurker)
- 1 meazel bravos (level 11 brute)
- 1 meazel hunter (level 12 artillery)

### LEVEL 10 ENCOUNTER (XP 2,700)

- 1 black phage (level 10 lurker)
- 4 flame skulls (level 8 artillery)
- 1 helmed horror (level 13 soldier)

### LEVEL 11 ENCOUNTER (XP 3,100)

- 1 black phage (level 10 lurker)
- 2 skeletal tomb guardian (level 10 brute)
- 4 battle wights (level 9 soldier)

### LEVEL 15 ENCOUNTER (XP 6,000)

- 1 death phage (level 15 elite lurker)
- 1 lich (level 14 elite controller)
- 1 shield guardian (level 14 soldier)
- 3 horde ghouls (level 13 minion)

### LEVEL 18 ENCOUNTER (XP 11,200)

- 1 death phage (level 15 elite lurker)
- 2 immoliths (level 15 controller)
- 2 storm archon lightning walkers (level 18 skirmisher)
- 1 putrid slaad (level 19 brute)

### ADVENTURES

After a week of finding the hideous, desiccated bodies of cows, an entire family in the same way, and the local authorities call in the PCs. A phage has drifted into town and now lives in the dead family's well. Investigating PCs must track the monster to its lair and contend with any disease-effects it has left behind.

The PCs meet groups of several phages appearing all at once, and link this with random but increasingly frequent disappearances. They discover that a lich is using captive humans to breed an army of phages. They must stop the lich before he conquers the world.

A friend of the PCs dies when he attempts to cast a ritual from a contaminated scroll. If the PCs track down the scroll's origin, they eventually discover a dead colony built by refugees of Vael Turog and all its attendant hazards.

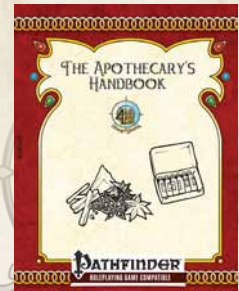
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# Know Why You Play:

## *A Conversation with Jeff Tidball*

By Jeremy L. C. Jones

Jeff Tidball is on fire. He's a decade-and-a-half into his career as a freelance writer and Origins Award-winning game designer, and he's doing more than ever. Over the years, Tidball has written for companies such as Atlas Games, Fantasy Flights Games, White Wolf, Green Ronin, and Eden Studios. Currently, he's working on projects for Evil Hat and Pelgrane Press to name but a few. He co-founded Gameplaywright with friend and collaborator Will Hindmarch. Together, they have produced such books as *Things We Think About Games*, *Bones: Us and Our Dice*, and *Hamlet's Hit Points* by Robin D. Laws.

With a degree in screenwriting and a resume as downright cool as it is varied, Tidball does it all – writes, designs, develops, edits, and anything else that needs doing. He approaches his work with an exacting attention to detail and an open mind. He measures a project's potential in terms of the people he gets to work with.

"The thing that's probably most important to me in a potential gig is the opportunity to work with awesome people – people who're generous, creative, and open," said Tidball. "As long as the gig involves writing or game design, and the other people involved are good people, there's not much in the way of subject matter that I'd turn up my nose at."

Jeff Tidball and I talk about the value of restraints in creative projects, strategies for freelancing, and of course, about his current projects.

### **Rumor has it that you've got a lot of exciting new projects going right now.**

**Jeff Tidball:** It's a fact – lots of exciting projects! Some are still under wraps, but there are some recently announced highlights, too.

Evil Hat has just announced that I'll be designing and producing their first assault onto the beach of card game publishing. It will be a relatively small project, but hopefully it will pave the way for more—and larger—projects in the future. I've admired Evil Hat's transparency and friendly culture for years and hoped to work with them for a long time. I'm excited that it's coming to pass in 2011.

Since December, I've been working on a 2D fighter video game called *Skullgirls* that its studio and publisher just announced last week. I've been working on the game's bible and stories and doing voiceover writing. This is my first time out with this kind of property, and it's been a really fun and educational experience.

Will Hindmarch and I have been working on a *Trail of Cthulhu* megacampaign called "Eternal Lies" for almost a year now. It'll be a monster book. Our drafts are all in playtesting, with both external playtesters and my own local group. There'll be some exciting multimedia content in the PDF, including voice work from Wil Wheaton. Simon Rogers, Pelgrane's director, sort of blew our minds by commissioning a full-length soundtrack for the campaign that James Semple and a crew of composers have been working on. It upped the whole ante. The music

corresponds very closely to the material we've written, and most of the tracks were created so that they loop in a sensible way, so they'll work at the game table with encounters of any length. The music is awesome, and the gameplay utility is unmatched in tabletop RPGs, as far as I'm aware.

Wil's voice work is that much more extra multimedia stuff in the same vein. I think that the whole collection of all these different contributions is really going to elevate "Eternal Lies" above similar campaign source material, even of its length.

There's one other board game design project that I'm dying to be able to talk about publicly. It's a true dream license—for me, anyway—but the publisher still hasn't announced it so my lips must remain sealed.

### **How're things going with *Dragon Age Set 2*?**

**JT:** Things are still on track for Set 2 to come out pretty close on the heels of BioWare's release of the *Dragon Age 2* video game. It's always dangerous to make public predictions on scheduling, so I hope everyone will understand that plenty of things could still affect that schedule between now and the box's release. The game's fans have been more than patient, and we're grateful to them for that.

I drafted a fair bit of the text for Set 2—probably something like 25% of the final word count—and developed the whole thing. Chris Pramas did a lot of its writing and development as well. Steve Kenson and T.S. Luikart were the other authors on the project.





### How'd the playtesting go?

**JT:** The open playtest was a massive success. We got a ton of great commentary from volunteer playtesters from all over the world. I don't know that any of it was surprising, but some of it highlighted issues that we knew were there but that we didn't realize were so important to so many players. If I have my way, we'll definitely be doing more open playtesting in the future.

The roleplaying stunts were polarizing in the open playtest; that was interesting. Lots of groups loved them, but a few groups were almost offended by the idea that roleplayed interactions ought to have any kind of mechanical onus laid on them. I'm excited about them myself, but then again, that's a part of Set 2 that I wrote, so you'd expect me to like it.

### How does working on a card game challenge you as a designer differently than, say, an RPG?

**JT:** The biggest difference between designing a card game and designing a roleplaying game (between designing just about any game and designing a roleplaying game, frankly) is that in an RPG you can rely on the game master to serve as an impartial arbiter of the group's fun, who can make judgment calls in the moment. Conversely, with a card game the rules and components have to take

up all of that fun-making slack.

Sure, you've got to interpret the rules of a card game, but while you're doing that interpretation, each player is still trying to win. A game master, on the other hand, is making interpretations whose only real goal is making sure everyone has fun.

So, from a design standpoint, a card game's rules have to be tight in a way that an RPG's rules can leave lots of specific decisions to the moment they come up. That often leads me to overwrite card game rules to address every minor possibility and corner condition.

That tendency was at direct odds with the design needs of a pair of mass-market card game projects I had last year. Both were intended for kids who—odds are—won't even read the rules. I really had to fight my natural tendencies to keep those designs simple. Luckily, other designers on both projects could call me out on my most egregious violations.

### What are your criteria for taking on a new gig? What do you look for? How do you juggle so many projects?

**JT:** I don't have any hard-and-fast criteria that apply across all projects. My immediate, knee-jerk reaction to the question—that I don't work for free—doesn't even turn out to be true, because I can think of one big project in my pipeline

whose payment is massively deferred, with the significant potential that it will never materialize at all. I try to only work on one spec project like that at a time, though, and only when there's a truly significant upside of some other kind.

I juggle all of my various open projects...um...very carefully. I've got a detailed system of spreadsheets and to-do lists I use to track where my time goes every day. Each month I follow up with myself to see whether my estimates for the last month were significantly off, so I can do a better job planning the next month. Now that I've been doing this for a while, I'm usually able to time-budget projects to within 5% or so of the time they actually wind up taking. This is a pretty crucial skill in terms of delivering what I've promised on time.

### Do you have any advice for freelancers out there?

**JT:** My first impulse is to say freelancers should develop the same kind of detailed self-tracking systems that I've got. But while that might work for some, it would clearly be a disaster for those with less-organized personalities. What works for me won't work for everyone, and that's fine.

My best strategic advice for freelancers is to know what they want out of their professional and creative life and always work toward those goals. There will be detours, but having a guiding set of objectives or principles will prevent the kind of aimless wandering that can eat a decade of one's life fruitlessly.

My best tactical advice for freelancers is to insist on some portion of payment for a project upon its commencement. Half up front and half on delivery is what you should ask for—and what is fair—but even some smaller portion on commencement demonstrates that the publisher is serious about bringing the work to market. If a publisher's not making a commitment like that, it's too easy for you to create something that will proceed to lie fallow after you turn it in, until the end of time, because what does it matter to the publisher if that happens? If a publisher can't provide anything at all up front, I suggest moving on to other projects.

#### **Are deadlines friend or foe?**

**JT:** Deadlines are definitely your friend, no doubt about it. They promote finishing, and finishing is how freelancers get paid. Constraints of all kinds promote good creative work because they kick start and focus the creative problem-solving process.

#### **When you're working on a project and you get blocked, how do you get back on track?**

**JT:** I don't really get blocked. That's one of the ways deadlines are helpful. They prevent you from being blocked by forcing you to sit in your chair and do your work.

GTD [Getting Things Done] principles—the whole David Allen thing, around which my anal-retentive to-do system is based—also fights against creative blockage. Part of that methodology involves determining the next actions on a particular project in very small chunks. It's a lot easier to despair and feel blocked on a goal like “finish the book.” It's a lot easier to just get down to work when a more immediate and achievable goal like

“write 1,000 words” is on the table.

I do find it all too easy to get distracted when I haven't defined the day's work concretely enough or when I'm scared of it. But being distracted and being blocked are quite different from each other, even though I suspect that lots of people conflate them.

#### **The work you and Will Hindmarch do on Gameplaywright seems based on a deep and abiding love of games. What is it that you love about games?**

**JT:** The thing I love the very most about hobby games—and roleplaying in particular—is that they are a creative pastime. They demand that their players make things up. And making things up is awesome.

I enjoy game mechanics challenges as well—building a sensible character given a rule-set's restrictions, fielding this army effectively against an opposing force, using the cards in my hand effectively—but my very favorite games are those where the player's creativity plays a key role.

When creative opportunities are effectively adjudicated by a game system's mechanics, that's the sweet spot. Older editions of *Car Wars* are a perfect example of a game that does this just right. The vehicle-building process of that game offers a massive wealth of creative approaches you can take to the challenge of destroying the other players' cars. The play-at-the-table allows a similar wealth of creative tactical options in the arena.

But at the same time, the rule-set is concrete enough that you can feel like your creativity was measurably successful in a way that doesn't have an analog in a creative task like, say, writing a novel. You can't “win” writing a novel the way you can win a game of *Car Wars*.

#### **Speaking of novels, have you written much fiction?**

**JT:** The answer to that depends on whether you count non-prose fiction. Of prose fiction I've written a modest amount: A six-part serial that's spread among the six releases in FFG's most recent series of *Call of Cthulhu: The Card Game* expansions,

a short story for Stone Skin Press's forthcoming *The New Hero* anthology, and the fiction that introduced the Fireborn world in that RPG's core books.

If you count screenwriting as fiction, I've also got a solid half-dozen feature screenplays—good, quality material—that I've worked on since 2000 when I went back to school at USC to get a master's in screenwriting. None have been produced, sadly; the film market is a hard and painful nut to crack. Although an average script is only 30,000 or 40,000 words, the economy of verbiage the form requires makes writing one the rough equivalent of pounding out a novel.

We also talk a lot about fiction at Gameplaywright. We think a fair bit about our three-circle Venn diagram of “gameplay, storytelling, and the work,” and how those things all fit together.

#### **How do you and Will break up the work? Which roles do each of you take on?**

**JT:** We each do blogging as we've got time, or as some topic moves us. In the first couple months of Gameplaywright's existence we tried to have a schedule where we each posted every other day, and it was untenable.

In our book publishing efforts, we generally trade off the editorial lead from project to project. Will was the driving force behind *The Bones: Us and Our Dice*. I took the fore on *Hamlet's Hit Points*.

So far, Will has designed all of our book covers; he's better at that than I am. I handle most of the administrative tasks like the accounting. But we both have very similar creative backgrounds, and we're each capable of doing individually everything that Gameplaywright does. So when tasks come up that need to be done, one of us just steps up.

#### **What is the importance of collaboration in game design?**

**JT:** Left completely to their own devices, people often wind up making stupid decisions. Collaboration is the antidote to that. Even on creative projects where there's not a strictly collaborative give-and-take, the process

of opening up to the feedback of others is pretty critical in making something that's good. [Ed: *Open Design could not agree with Mr. Tidball more.*]

At the same time, even on collaborative projects that are very egalitarian, the overall quality of a given work benefits from a single "head of state" with whom the buck stops. As a screenwriter, I'm obliged to hate the auteur theory, but at the same time, a central decision-making authority who has good taste is probably the single most important factor in creating something awesome in the creative realm. John Gruber did a talk on how this applies to projects of all kinds. He's an extremely influential Mac blogger, and his specific interest was in explaining the success of products like the iPod. He argues that they're so successful because of the surpassing taste of Steve Jobs as Apple's buck-stopper. I'd recommend his talk to anyone who publishes anything or works on collaborative creative projects of any kind.

**Earlier, you mentioned that working with good people makes all the difference. If you could assemble a dream team of designers, living or dead, who would be on it? And what sort of game would you develop?**

**JT:** What a great question! But also a hard one, because you just know that three weeks later you're going to be taking a shower and realize that you've left someone completely critical off the list.

Robin Laws would be on the dream team. His understanding of the intersection of gameplay and storytelling is unparalleled, and he understands how to collaborate effectively. He brings first-class ideas to the table with almost none of the ego-baggage that lots of other smart (and not-so-smart) people carry around. [Ed: *Robin Laws was interviewed in KOBOLD QUARTERLY #16.*]

James Wallis has a chair at that table. He has a master's grasp of both creativity and produce-ability, understanding each one's impact on the other. He understands the games' markets, pushing the edges of both what can be designed and what can be sold.

John August—the screenwriter—doesn't know me from Adam, but we're

obviously aware that he plays games and thinks critically about them. (His essay on *World of Warcraft* is part of Gameplaywright's book *Things We Think About Games*.) His sense of filmic and visual storytelling is among the best that Hollywood has to offer. I'm dying to find out what he'd do with a game.

I'd round that group out with John Tynes, whose capacity to work successfully across different media is truly terrifying. You know what else is terrifying? The man's artistic integrity. [Ed: *John Tynes contributed to the Game Designer Roundtable in KOBOLD QUARTERLY #10.*]

The dream project for this time and place would be a game played in person, on the tabletop, with beautiful physical components, for an hour or two at a time. But with that would come an evolving and continuous world and storyline that pays out across different on- and off-line media, in between games, that responds to players' creative input.

I hesitate to say "transmedia" because it's a word that's become so trite. What I envision—as opposed to the empty marketing-speak that "transmedia" has come to represent—is a cradle of story and background in different formats that support and elevate the in-person experience you have with your friends rather than pretending to a co-equal status with it.

And that's all I've got: an outline of the experience. I wouldn't want to say or imagine anything additional until everyone sat down, face-to-face, to get to work. Too many assumptions would close off too many options.

Anybody with the bankroll for that project is hereby commanded to get in touch!

**Last but not least, if you could tape a sign over every gaming table what would it say?**

**JT:** The last *Thing in Things We Think About Games* is one I wrote: "Know why you play games." My sign would reference that. It would say something like, "Be true to the reason."

Know why you play games, and remember the reason when you're playing them.

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# Ambush in Absalom

## *An Official Pathfinder Society Quest*

By Mark Moreland

Art by Jenny Clements

Cartography by Corey Macourek



### Pathfinder Society Quests

Pathfinder Society Quests are brief adventures consisting of two to three encounters designed for use in the Pathfinder Society Organized Play campaign by Paizo Publishing. A legal Pathfinder Society PC may receive a Chronicle for completing a Quest as many times as he completes it, and a game master may likewise apply a Chronicle to any of his characters when running a Quest. Each Quest Chronicle grants a single-use boon or ability, each of which may be played once per scenario.

This official Pathfinder Society adventure is made available here as a Kobold Quarterly exclusive, and all Golarion references are used by kind permission of Paizo Publishing.

The Pathfinder Society has a presence in nearly every city in the Inner Sea region but nowhere as strongly as the bustling streets of Absalom. Even when lost among a teeming population of over 300,000 souls, agents working on covert missions or setting up clandestine meetings sometimes make use of the much less-traveled passages beneath the city instead of its crowded thoroughfares and shadowy alleys. Whether the soggy Siphons below the flooded Puddles district or the wide catacombs beneath the Ascendant Court, most Absalom-based

Pathfinders have at least a passing familiarity with the city's sewer systems.

The way is anything but safe, however, as novice Pathfinder Derris Jerval discovered late last night. Venture-Captain Ambrus Valsin, the Grand Lodge's strict chamberlain, entrusted the naïve Andoren recruit with a time-sensitive message to a Varisian contact named Guaril Karela. While trying to avoid the city's many distractions and obstacles and prove himself a trustworthy agent, Jerval took a shortcut through the sewers from the Grand Lodge to the Docks district. He underestimated the difficulty of navigating the tunnels, however, and quickly became lost amid the meandering passages. Growing fearful and careless, Jerval didn't hear the sounds of movement ahead as he charged blindly around a corner and ran headfirst into a kobold patrol. In seconds, Jerval lay dead from their jagged spears, and Valsin's urgent message never reached Guaril Karela.

The skittish kobolds misinterpreted Jerval's encroachment as a sign of an imminent attack on their territory and alerted the rest of their clan, the noble Shockclaw Tribe. The industrious kobolds spent the entire night fortifying the borders of their warren tunnels with traps and additional guards. The next day the mighty Chief Alteigrik of the Blackfang Tribe from beneath Eastgate would be coming this way to meet with the Shockclaw chief, and the entire tribe wants to ensure their dignified guests' route is secure.

### SUMMARY

The PCs are tasked with following Derris Jerval's trail through the Absalom sewers to rescue him, or retrieve his body, and complete his mission. Along the way, they trigger the Shockclaw kobolds' defenses, encountering a guard patrol around a deadly pit trap. Following any fleeing foes or tracking Jerval's trail brings the Pathfinders face-to-face with Chief Altergrik's retinue as they return from their meeting with the Shockclaw's chief. Interpreting the PCs' presence as a well-planned ambush, they defend themselves and their leader viciously. The diplomatic spoils gifted to them from the Shockclaws include all of Jerval's equipment, specifically the satchel containing the vital missive to Guaril Karela. This Pathfinder Society Quest uses the *Ambush Sites* Map Pack.

### GETTING STARTED

Read the following to get the adventure underway:

In his usual terse manner, Venture-Captain Ambrus Valsin requested an audience in his office. He wasted no words once the last invitee had closed the door.

"Some of you may know a novice named Derris Jerval. Last night I gave him an important message to deliver to an associate of the Society, a Varisian businessman in the Docks named Guaril Karela. I received word this afternoon that the package never arrived. I need you to look into it.



“My initial inquiries lead me to believe Jerval entered the sewers mere yards from the Grand Lodge’s walls. I’m worried for his safety down there and annoyed that he wasn’t able to get the message to Karela. I need you to go after him. If he’s well, slap some sense into him and ensure he delivers the message. If he’s been injured or gotten himself killed, recover the message and make sure it gets to Guaril Karela at the Pickled Imp, a curiosity shop located in the Docks—and get it there soon. I’m counting on you, Pathfinders.”

Because this Quest is intended to take only a short amount of time, proceed quickly through the introduction, and get the player characters into the sewer tunnels and hot on Derris Jerval’s trail. If time is particularly tight, start immediately at the first encounter to get the dice rolling.

### 1. SEWER AMBUSH (CR 3 OR CR 6)

A set of muddy bootprints that match Jerval’s lead through the winding tunnels, following a small rivulet of stagnant runoff in a solid stone passage. The flow ends at the intersection with a perpendicular tunnel filled with a mass of filthy water and nauseatingly-colored mud. The footprints continue in the mud to the east.

The Shockclaw kobolds put many of their defensive efforts in shoring up this juncture, seeing it as a likely point of attack from surface dwellers following their scout’s path.

**Creatures:** A kobold patrol of four guards hides in the pipes branching off from this main tunnel, intently watching for intruders.

**Traps:** The kobolds set a number of traps in the sewers to waylay their foes and alert them to intrusion.

One such snare fills the 10-foot square at the intersection of the main sewer tunnel and the murky flow channel.

#### TIER 1–2 (CR 3)

#### SHOCKCLAW GUARDS (4) CR 1/4

Kobold warrior 1 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* pg. 183)

hp 4

#### TACTICS

**Before Combat** The kobolds have taken up sentry positions in the drainage pipes near their trap. They remain hidden until the PCs spring the trap or bypass it.

**During Combat** The guards surround the PCs, preferring to fight from range with their slings. They focus their attacks first on any PCs who have not fallen in the pit, especially any working to help their comrades out of the hole.

**Morale** The kobolds take their job seriously and fight to death. When all but one have been slain or knocked unconscious, the survivor attempts to flee to area 2 to alert the shaman’s guards to the attack.

## PIT TRAP CR 1

**Type** mechanical; **Search** DC 20;  
**Disable Device** DC 20

### EFFECTS

**Trigger** location; **Reset** manual  
**Effect** 20-ft.-deep pit (2d6 falling damage); DC 20 Reflex avoids; multiple targets (all targets in a 10-ft. area)

## TIER 4–5 (CR 6)

## ELITE SHOCKCLAW GUARDS (4) CR 1

Kobold warrior 4  
LE Small humanoid  
**Init** +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.;  
Perception +7

### DEFENSE

**AC** 16, touch 12, flat-footed 15 (+3 armor, +1 Dex, +1 natural, +1 size)

**hp** 30 each (4d10+4)

**Fort** +4, **Ref** +2, **Will** +0

**Weaknesses** light sensitivity

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** mwk spear +6 (1d6/X3)

**Ranged** sling +6 (1d3)

### TACTICS

Same tactics as Tier 1–2.

### STATISTICS

**Str** 10, **Dex** 13, **Con** 10, **Int** 10, **Wis** 9,  
**Cha** 8

**Base Atk** +4; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 14

**Feats** Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Perception)

**Skills** Craft (trapmaking) +7, Perception +7, Profession (miner) +1, Stealth +10; **Racial Modifiers** +2 Craft (trapmaking), +2 Perception

**Languages** Common, Draconic

**SQ** crafty

**Gear** studded leather, masterwork spear, sling with 10 bullets

## CAMOUFLAGED PIT TRAP CR 3

**Type** mechanical; **Search** DC 25;  
**Disable Device** DC 20

### EFFECTS

**Trigger** location; **Reset** manual  
**Effect** 30-ft.-deep pit (3d6 falling damage); DC 20 Reflex avoids; multiple targets (all targets in a 10-ft. area)

**Development:** In the fray, Jerval's tracks are lost among the kobolds' footprints. Locating the trail requires a DC 14 Survival check. Once located, the tracks lead east toward area 2.

## 2. THE CHIEF'S ESCORT (CR 4 OR CR 7)

This wide passage continues straight into the darkness as far as one can see, a five-foot-wide elevated walk running the length of its south side. The sound of trickling water echoes ominously through the hollow drainpipes all around.

Sewage from throughout the district flows here, where it then runs to even larger tunnels near the waterfront. As such, it serves as a major thoroughfare for subterranean denizens, including Chief Altergrik and his honor guard of the Blackfang Tribe's best warriors.

**Creatures:** As the PCs reach the wider tunnel here,

Chief Altergrik and his escort just happen to be approaching from the other direction, returning to Westgate from the Foreign Quarter's immense sewer network. Already on the alert for an ambush, when the kobolds see the PCs, they instantly assume that the PCs plan is to attack and assassinate Chief Altergrik.

## TIER 1–2 (CR 4)

## BLACKFANG GUARDS (8) CR 1/4

Kobold warrior 1 (*Pathfinder PRG Bestiary* pg. 183)

**hp** 5

### TACTICS

**Before Combat** The kobolds are on the lookout for attack and difficult to catch by surprise. Once they see non-kobolds in the tunnel with them, they rush into battle.

**During Combat** Dedicated to protecting their chief, the guards charge into melee with their spears and attempt to overwhelm the Pathfinders with superior numbers.

**Morale** All members of the Blackfang Tribe fight to the death.

## CHIEF ALTERGRİK CR 1

Kobold warrior 4 (Use the stats for Elite Shockclaw Guards from Tier 4–5 in the previous encounter with the following changes)

**hp** 30

### OFFENSE

**Melee** mwk greataxe +6 (1d10/X3)

### TACTICS

**Before Combat** Surrounded by his most loyal guards, the Chief declares the Pathfinders enemies and ambushers and orders his minions to attack.

**During Combat** Chief Altergrik prefers to let his underlings fight for him, but if threatened directly he fights ruthlessly with his greataxe. If his guards' numbers fall to three or less, he likewise enters the fray.

**Morale** An honorable leader of his tribe, Chief Altergrik fights to the death.

## TIER 4–5 (CR 7)

## BLACKFANG HONOR GUARD (4) CR 1

Kobold warrior 4 (Use the stats for Elite Shockclaw Guards from Tier 4–5 in the previous encounter)

**hp** 30

### TACTICS

**Before Combat** The kobolds are on the lookout for attack and difficult





# CHARACTER MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE FOR PLAYERS AND GMS



**Hakkon Truesilver**  
Male Human Barbarian 4, Cleric 3 - CL7 - CR 6  
Chaotic Good; Daily: Bhrlan Bhor; Age: 21; Height: 6';  
Weight: 220lb.; Eyes: Blue; Hair: Dark; Skin: Tan

Ability	Score	Modifier	Temporary
STR	12	+1	
DEX	12	+1	
CON	16	+3	
INT	11	0	
WIS	16	+3	
CHA	12	+1	

Saving Throw: Total Base Ability Resist Misc Temp Notes  
**FORTITUDE** +12 = +7 +3 +2  
**REFLEX** +3 = +2 +1  
**WILL** +7 = +4 +3

Total AC: 19 = +6 +1 +1 +1  
 Touch AC: 11 = +6 +1 +1  
 CM Bonus: +7 = +6 +1 +1  
 CM Defense: 18 = 10 +6 +1 +1

HP: 81  
 Base Attack: +6 Initiative: +1  
 Speed: 40 / 30 ft.

+2 Battleaxe, Flaming, Keen  
 Mainhand: +9/+4, 1d8+3 Crit: 19-20/x3  
 Both Hands: +9/+4, 1d8+3 1-Hand, S

Unarmed Strike  
 Mainhand: +7/+2, 1d3+1 Crit: 20/x2 Light, B

Breastplate  
 +6 Max Dex: +3, Armor Check: -4  
 Spell Fail: 25%, Medium, Slows

Shield, Light Steel  
 +1 Max Dex: -1, Armor Check: -1  
 Spell Fail: 5%, Shield

Skill Name	Total	Ability	Rank	Mac
Acrobatics	+4	DEX (1)	3	
Appraise	+0	INT (0)	-	
Bluff	+1	CHA (1)	-	
Climb	+5	STR (1)	3	
Craft: Weapons	+0	INT (0)	-	
Diplomacy	+6	CHA (1)	2	
Escape Artist	-4	DEX (1)	-	
Fly	-2	DEX (1)	-	
Handle Animal	+9	CHA (1)	3	
Heal	+7	WIS (3)	3	
Intimidate	+7	CHA (1)	3	
Perception	+9	WIS (3)	3	
Ride	+7	DEX (1)	3	
Sense Motive	+7	WIS (3)	1	
Spellcraft	+5	INT (0)	2	
Stealth	-4	DEX (1)	-	
Survival	+9	WIS (3)	3	
Swim	+1	STR (1)	2	

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## Ambush in Absalom PF

to catch by surprise. Once they see non-kobolds in the tunnel with them, they rush into battle.

**During Combat** Dedicated to protecting their chief, the guards charge into melee with their spears and attempt to overwhelm the Pathfinders with superior numbers.

**Morale** All members of the Blackfang Tribe fight to the death.

### CHIEF ALTERGRIK

CR 5

Male kobold fighter 6 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* pg. 183)

LE Small humanoid

**Init** +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +2

### DEFENSE

**AC** 19, touch 14, flat-footed 16 (+4 armor, +2 Dex, +1 dodge, +1 natural, +1 size)

**hp** 55 (6d10+18)

**Fort** +6, **Ref** +4, **Will** +4; +2 vs. fear,

**Defensive Abilities** bravery +2

**Weaknesses** light sensitivity

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** +1 *greataxe* +12/+7 (1d10+5/X3)

**Ranged** sling +9/+4 (1d3+1)

**Special Attacks** weapon training (axes +1)

### TACTICS

Same as Tier 1–2.

### STATISTICS

**Str** 12, **Dex** 15, **Con** 12, **Int** 12, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 8

**Base Atk** +6; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 19

**Feats** Dazzling Display, Dodge, Iron Will, Toughness, Vital Strike, Weapon Focus (*greataxe*), Weapon Specialization (*greataxe*)

**Skills** Craft (trapmaking) +3, Diplomacy +5, Intimidate +8, Perception +2, Profession (miner) +2, Sense Motive +4, Stealth +10; **Racial Modifiers** +2 Craft (trapmaking), +2 Perception, +2 Profession (miner)

**Languages** Common, Draconic

**SQ** armor training 1, crafty

**Gear** masterwork hide armor, +1 *greataxe*, sling with 10 bullets

**Development:** Among the items carried by the kobold guards, the PCs find a decorated bag of various items including a *wayfinder*, a Medium breastplate, a Medium heavy mace, and a book-sized bundle wrapped in paper and sealed with the Glyph of the Open Road. The PCs easily identify these as a Pathfinder's possessions and may glean they

belonged to the late Derris Jerval. The wrapped package contains a book of traditional Varisian recipes and cannot be opened without breaking the seal.

### CONCLUSION

If the PCs follow Venture-Captain Valsin's orders and deliver the package in Jerval's stead, they may easily locate the Pickled Imp in the Docks with a DC 12 Diplomacy (gather information) or Knowledge (local) check. Behind the counter the PCs find a thin, mustachioed man who answers to the name Guaril Karela. He thanks them for the book if the seal remains in place and immediately turns to a specific recipe in the back.

After reading it quickly, he returns the book, saying that he already has this volume but thanking Ambrus all the same. If the seal has been broken, he refuses the package, and asks the PCs to kindly leave lest the Venture-Captain learn that they've been prying into his affairs. Ω



*Nail down the furniture,  
and hide your children!*

*The fey are coming!*



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# On the Streets and In the Books

## *Chase and Research Scenes in Dragon Age RPG*

By Quinn Murphy

Art by Fernand Siméon

Chase scenes and research scenes have their place in cinema, literature, and of course, the *Dragon Age* RPG. The AGE system doesn't explicitly define stunts or procedures for either, however, so we have to fill in the gaps. These guidelines for stunts and running these scenes will have your players talking long after they leave the table.

Adventurers find themselves pursuing or running from their foes at least once during their careers. Quick, workable chase guidelines and stunts add polish and tension to your chase scenes.

Adventurers also don't know everything that they should about the world around them. When character face an intractable mystery or enigma, the players may resort to research. You can make cracking the books more exciting than it sounds, however, leading to growing expertise or startling insights.

### CHASE SCENES

Think of a chase scene as a compound opposed and advanced ability test (*Game Master's Guide*, pg. 18). The characters make opposed rolls against the NPC involved in the chase (use the best representative ability score for a group of NPCs).

Each side of the chase wants to reach the success threshold first; the Challenging level of 13 successes is the recommended minimum. If the party reaches the success threshold before their enemy, they nab the NPCs or make their escape. If the NPCs win, they slip away from the party or catch

them, and the GM must determine the adventurer's fate...

A good chase scene blends different ability tests. That is, chases have multiple obstacles, and the different tests represent the changing obstacles and new challenges. A chase on the rooftops may include Constitution (Stamina), Strength (Jumping), and Dexterity (Acrobatics) tests, each representing critical actions during pursuit. Mixing up the ability tests keeps interest and tension high through the scene. Plan them out beforehand for maximum pressure on the players: "Roll the Jump! Quick, the platform is tottering, roll Acrobatics!"

Any character can use the following stunts for the listed SP cost.

### CHASE STUNT TABLE

SP Cost	Stunt
1-3	<b>Burst of Speed.</b> You go all out, trying to create or close distance. If your next chase test succeeds, gain 1-3 extra points toward the success threshold equal to the points spent on this stunt.
2	<b>Clever Navigation.</b> You decide to beat the enemy by taking clever shortcuts and cunning maneuvers past obstacles. Add +1 to your next test in the chase.
3	<b>Risky Maneuver.</b> You make an exceptionally risky maneuver to gain ground or get away. Make an immediate additional opposed Cunning test, at the difficulty of the last chase test you just took, against an enemy in the chase (the GM decides which enemy). If you fail, you suffer -2 on your next test in the chase. If you succeed, you gain +2 to your next test.

Abilities and focuses typically used in a chase include: Constitution (Running or Stamina), Dexterity (Acrobatics or Riding), Perception (Searching or Tracking), and Strength (Driving or Jumping).

### RUNNING BATTLE: CHASES IN COMBAT

You can create particularly memorable scenes for your players by combining combat and chase encounters. For instance, the characters may need to escape a potent foe while his minions attempt to waylay them. One adventurer may drive a coach in pursuit of a fleeing noble, while the rest of the party defends the coach from attackers. Whatever the scenario, keep the following three guidelines in mind.

**1. Ability tests each round.** Instead of complicating each player's turn with multiple checks, at the start of a full combat round let each character in the chase make his or her check for the chase. Let them fight or take actions on their turn as normal.

**2. Choose which is more important.** Is the chase or the combat the "biggest" part of this encounter? Keep the emphasis on whichever is more important. When in doubt on pacing or adjudicate the scene, side in favor of the bigger part.

**3. One affects the other.** Actions in combat should affect the chase portion of the scene and vice versa. Don't get too complex; a simple modifier based on results is often enough.

## RESEARCH SCENES

Sometimes the obstacle that characters must face cannot be conquered by words or deed. When the challenge is their own ignorance, victory only comes through knowledge. The adventurers find clues to what they must learn—the location of a long-forgotten keep, the secrets of a threatening cult—and they delve into the related history, lore, and legends. Exploring the topic might mean speaking with experts or studying musty grimoires in candle-lit library alcoves. From these scenes, the adventurers might gain exceedingly useful intelligence, surprising insights, or more than they ever wanted to know. Given time, adventurers can become the experts themselves.

Researching simple things, such as which jeweler made a strange ring, is often a basic test taking only an hour or two of narrative time. More involved information, such as what the unknown characters engraved on the ring mean, takes extra time and requires an advanced test. Most research scenes center around Cunning but may also involve Communication and Perception.

Any character can use the following stunts for the listed SP cost.

## RESEARCH STUNT TABLE

### SP Stunt Cost

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | <b>Intriguing Details.</b> Choose an area related to your research. Subject to your GM's approval, the next time you make a test related to this area (not during research), you gain a +1 to the test. |
|---|---|

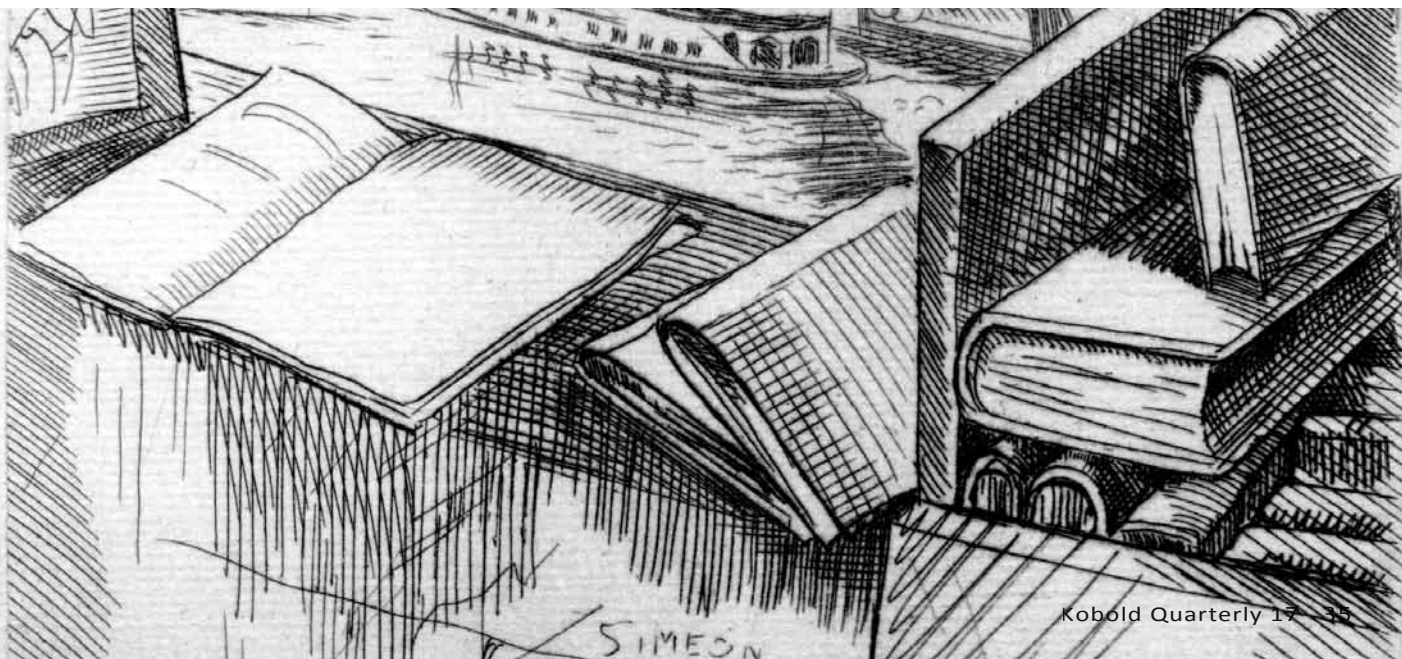
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 2 | <b>Superior Reasoning.</b> Your thinking on this topic is clear and cogent. Your next research test gains a +1 to the roll.   |
| 2 | <b>Lost Track of Time.</b> You get so wrapped up in research that you lose track of time. You gain a +2 to your next test roll but spend double time for this test.   |
| 3 | <b>Unfettered Access.</b> You locate information or gain access to areas that your allies can use in their research. Each of your allies gains a +1 to their next research test.  |
| 3 | <b>Knowledge Synergy.</b> Something you already know relates to this topic. You take double the time on your next test to add +2 to your Dragon Die if the next test succeeds.  |
| 4 | <b>Fruitful Study.</b> You find relevant information much faster than expected. You resolve this test in half the normal time.  |
| 4 | <b>Eureka!</b> You learn a great deal about the target. You gain +2 on your next test (outside of your research) dealing with the research topic. This result does not stack with itself.   |
| 5 | <b>Surprising Information.</b> You find new and potentially plot-altering information. It could lead to a side-quest or simply be a startling piece of trivia. The GM decides what you learn.   |
| 6 | <b>Developing Expertise.</b> You take triple the time to research, delving deeply into the subject, and become a bit of an expert. For further research on this topic, other characters may now use you as a reference instead of a typical reference source. The GM determines |

## 12 Dramatic Chase Obstacles

1. A sudden pit (filled with water, oil, snakes, spikes, bones, or congealed blood)
2. Fireplace, hot spring, geyser, alchemical ooze (possibly thick smoke, acidic reek, blinding ashes)
3. Long jump across (over a pit, alley, moat, magma, mud, quicksand, monstrous maw)
4. Hill, dune, or slope (muddy, overgrown, loose material such as scree or sand)
5. Wall or cliff to climb (carved, crumbling, or overgrown with ivy or moss)
6. Unstable or moving platform (barge, log, scaffolding)
7. Bridge (rope, rotted, swaying, windswept, slippery)
8. Moving vehicles (a cart, a dragon, a barge, a ship)
9. Mob of people (innocents, angry peasants, market day, parade)
10. Water (a stream, a river, a pond, a sewer)
11. Jump down (into water, mud, or hay, onto a moving vehicle)
12. Exotic obstacle (clockwork gears, lava, magic bubbles, vermin swarm, trap, moving pillars, etc)

the full scope of what information you can provide on the topic. If you make any research tests on this subject, gain +4 to basic tests and 6 points toward the threshold for advanced tests.

Ω



# Elf Needs Food Badly

## 15 Fantastical Foods

By Matthew J. Hanson

Art by Scott Foresman and Rick hershey

**M**agical food is a unique kind of (literally) consumable magic item. It looks, feels, smells, and tastes like mundane food, but magical food never spoils.

You may eat magical food as part of taking a short or extended rest; it cannot be eaten during combat. During a short rest, magical food grants an item bonus to your healing surge value for any surges you spend during that rest (typically the item's level). Most food also grants additional bonuses or powers that last until your next short or extended rest.

You can only gain benefits from one magical food at a time. If you eat a second while the first is still in effect, you lose the magical benefits of both.

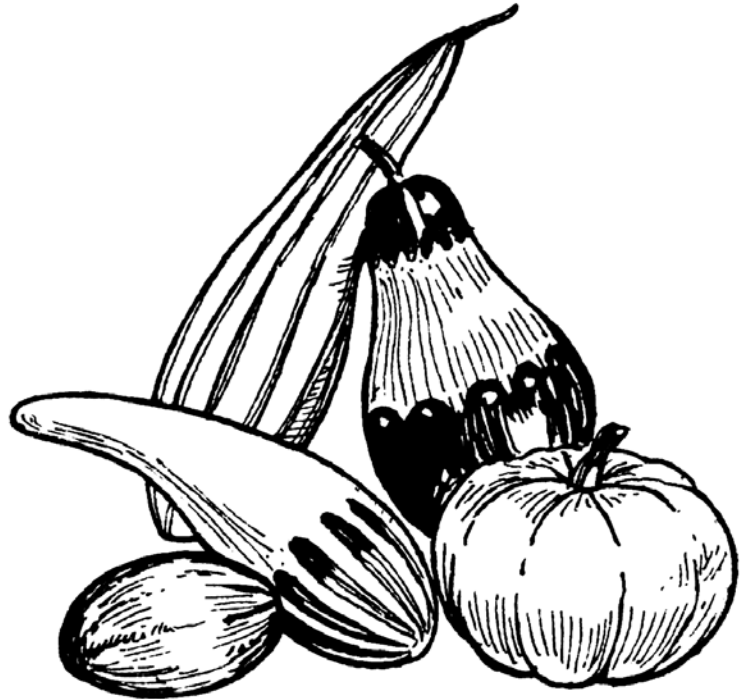
### MAKING MAGIC FOOD

DMs have a couple of options for creating magical food. The easiest way is to allow any ritual caster with the Brew Potion or Enchant Magic Item ritual to create magic food using those rituals.

To expand magic food beyond clerics and wizards, you can introduce the Master Chef feat. Characters require both the feat and a recipe for each kind of food they wish to make. Each recipe costs four times the cost of the version of the food it describes.

#### MASTER CHEF

**Benefit:** You can prepare magical food of your level or below. The process takes 1 hour and requires



ingredients worth twice the market price of the food.

**Special:** You must find or buy a recipe for each kind of food you want to create. When you first take this feat, you begin with a recipe book containing one recipe of your level or lower.

### MAGICAL FOOD IN TREASURE PARCELS

Magical food should appear as part of a treasure parcel that includes a potion plus gold. Replace the potion with magical food, and adjust the amount of gold so the total gp value of the parcel remains constant. For example, if a parcel calls for one *potion of healing* (50 gp) + 40 gp, you could replace it with one *poisonberry pie* (30 gp) + 60 gp.

#### CANDIED SPIDER LEVEL 12

*You know it's dead, but for the brief second before you swallow it, the spider seems to wriggle on your tongue.*

Lvl 12 500 gp

#### Food

**Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level  
**Property:** Until your next rest, you gain a climb speed equal to your land speed.

#### CREAMED SPINACH LEVEL 7+

*The squishy leaves are difficult to swallow, but you know they're good for you.*

Lvl 7 100 gp  
Lvl 17 2,600 gp  
Lvl 27 65,000 gp

#### Food

**Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level  
**Property:** Until your next rest, you gain a +2 item bonus to Athletics checks and melee damage rolls.  
Level 17: +4 item bonus  
Level 27: +6 item bonus

#### CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP LEVEL 1+

*The savory soup warms you to the core.*

Lvl 1 20 gp  
Lvl 11 350 gp  
Lvl 21 9,000 gp

**Food****Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level**Property:** Until your next rest, you are immune to diseases of this item's level or lower.**DIRE BACON****LEVEL 8+***Cut from a dire bore, this bacon still bears the beast's ferocity.*Lvl 8 125 gp  
Lvl 18 3,400 gp  
Lvl 28 85,000 gp**Food****Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level**Property:** Until your next rest, whenever you charge, you gain a +3 item bonus to the damage roll and can push the target up to 1 square.

Level 18: +6 item bonus and push 2 squares

Level 28: +9 item bonus and push 3 squares

**Special:** The bonus to damage does not stack with other items that grant bonus damage on a charge, such as a *horned helm*.**DRAGONFIRE PEPPER****LEVEL 4+***The intense spice of this pepper makes your tongue feel as though it will burn off.*Lvl 4 40 gp  
Lvl 9 160 gp  
Lvl 14 800 gp  
Lvl 19 4,200 gp  
Lvl 24 21,000 gp  
Lvl 29 105,000 gp**Food****Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level**Property:** Until your next rest, you gain resist 5 fire. Additionally, before your next rest, you may use the following power:**Power (Encounter, Fire):**

Standard action. Make an attack: close blast 5; +7 vs. Reflex; on hit, 1d6 fire damage; on miss, half damage.

Level 9: Resist 5 fire; +12 vs. Reflex; 2d6 fire damage

Level 14: Resist 10 fire; +17 vs. Reflex; 3d6 fire damage

Level 19: Resist 10 fire; +22 vs. Reflex; 3d6 fire damage

Level 24: Resist 15 fire; +27 vs. Reflex; 4d6 fire damage

Level 29: Resist 15 fire; +32 vs. Reflex; 4d6 fire damage

**ELECTRIC EEL SUSHI****LEVEL 4+***Your mouth tingles as you chew the fluffy meat.*Lvl 4 40 gp  
Lvl 14 800 gp  
Lvl 24 21,000 gp**Food****Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level**Property:** Until your next rest, you gain resist 5 lightning and any powers you possess with the lightning keyword gain a +1 item bonus to damage.

Level 14: Resist 10 lightning; +3 item bonus

Level 24: Resist 15 lightning; +5 item bonus

**GILL WEED****LEVEL 13***As you swallow the tough, fibrous plant you feel gills opening in your neck.*

Lvl 13 650 gp

**Food****Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level**Property:** Until your next rest, you gain a swim speed equal to your land speed and can breathe underwater.**GNOMESALT TAFFY****LEVEL 22***The sweet and sticky candy comes in a variety of flavors.*

Lvl 22 13,000 gp

**Food****Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level**Property:** Until your next rest, when making melee attacks, your reach increase by 1.**MASHED BANANA****LEVEL 2+***The sweet yellow paste wants to slip off your spoon.*Lvl 2 25 gp  
Lvl 12 500 gp  
Lvl 22 13,000 gp**Food****Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level**Property:** Until your next rest, any time you push, pull, or slide an enemy, you may move it up to 1 additional square.

Level 12: move up to 2 additional squares

Level 22: move up to 3 additional squares

**ORCISH PIE****LEVEL 3+***Pie tastes good. That's why orcs always guard it.*Lvl 3 30 gp  
Lvl 13 650 gp  
Lvl 23 17,000 gp**Food****Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level**FOOD**

Lvl	Name	Price (gp)
1	Chicken Noodle Soup	20
2	Mashed Banana	25
3	Orcish Pie	30
3	Poysonberry Pie	30
4	Dragonfire Pepper	40
4	Electric Eel Sushi	40
5	Pickled Aboleth Brain	50
5	Roast Bean Juice	50
7	Creamed Spinach	100
8	Dire Bacon	125
9	Dragonfire Pepper	160
10	Saffron Dusted Carrots	200
11	Chicken Noodle Soup	350
12	Candied Spider	500
12	Mashed Banana	500
13	Gill Weed	650
13	Orcish Pie	650
13	Poysonberry Pie	650
14	Dragonfire Pepper	800
14	Electric Eel Sushi	800
15	Pickled Aboleth Brain	1,000
15	Roast Bean Juice	1,000
17	Creamed Spinach	2,600
18	Dire Bacon	3,400
19	Dragonfire Pepper	4,200
21	Chicken Noodle Soup	9,000
22	Gnomesalt Taffy	13,000
22	Mashed Banana	13,000
23	Orcish Pie	17,000
23	Poysonberry Pie	17,000
24	Dragonfire Pepper	21,000
24	Electric Eel Sushi	21,000
25	Pickled Aboleth Brain	25,000
25	Roast Bean Juice	25,000
27	Creamed Spinach	65,000
28	Dire Bacon	85,000
29	Dragonfire Pepper	105,000
30	Purified Phoenix Tears	125,000

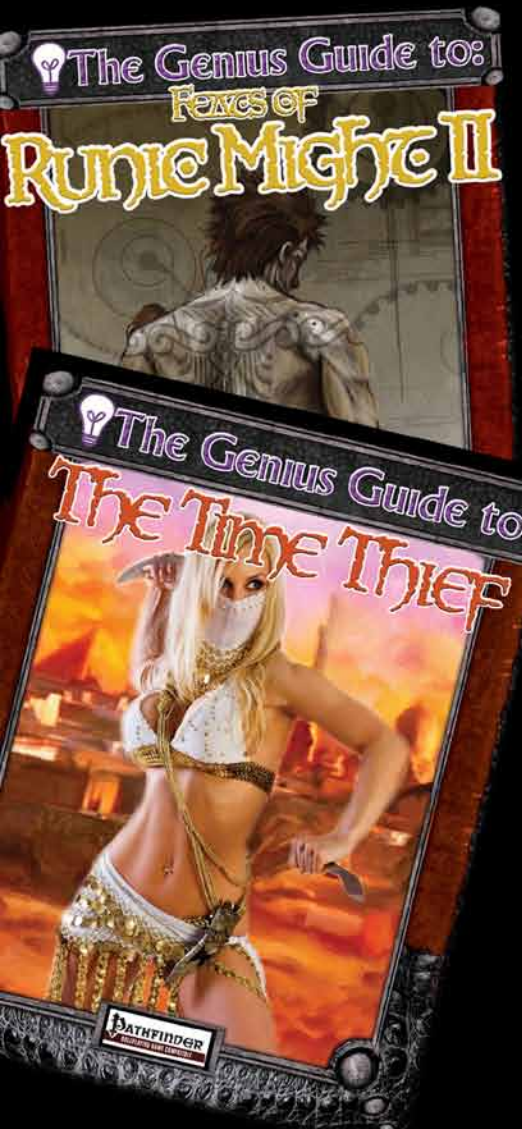
**Property:** Until your next rest, any time you blood an enemy or reduce an enemy to 0 hp you gain 5 temporary hit points.

Level 13: 10 temporary hit points.

Level 23: 15 temporary hit points.

**PICKLED ABOLETH BRAIN** **LEVEL 5+***All the cultures of all the races in the all world can agree on one thing: pickled aboleth brain is gross.*Lvl 5 50 gp  
Lvl 15 1,000 gp  
Lvl 25 25,000 gp**Food****Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level -1**Property:** Until your next rest, you gain telepathy 5 and a +1 bonus to saving throws against charm.

# WE ERR ON THE SIDE OF AWESOME!



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Level 15: Telepathy 10 and +2 item bonus  
Level 25: Telepathy 15 and +3 item bonus

### POYSENBERRY PIE LEVEL 3+

*Don't worry. It's safe to eat.*

Lvl 3 30 gp  
Lvl 13 650 gp  
Lvl 23 17,000 gp

#### Food

**Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level

**Property:** Until your next rest, you gain resist 5 poison. Additionally, if you are bloodied, any enemy that damages you with a melee attack suffers 5 poison damage.

Level 13: Resist 10 poison and 10 poison damage.  
Level 23: Resist 15 poison and 15 poison damage.

### PURIFIED PHOENIX TEAR LEVEL 30

*The crystal clear liquid tastes like true love. A little chalky.*

Lvl 30 125,000 gp

#### Food

**Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level + 4

**Property:** Until your next rest, treat any death saving throw as though you rolled a 20.

### ROAST BEAN JUICE LEVEL 5+

*A bitter-tasting beverage that has saved many adventurers from falling asleep during those all-night quests.*

Lvl 5 50 gp  
Lvl 15 1,000 gp  
Lvl 25 25,000 gp

#### Food

**Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level

**Property:** Until your next rest, you gain a +1 item bonus to initiative and a +1 item bonus to saving throws against effects that inflict the slow, immobilized, or unconscious conditions.

Level 15: +2 item bonus.  
Level 25: +3 item bonus.

### SAFFRON DUSTED CARROTS LEVEL 10

*As you crunch into these carrots, the darkness around you becomes clear.*

Lvl 10 200 gp

#### Food

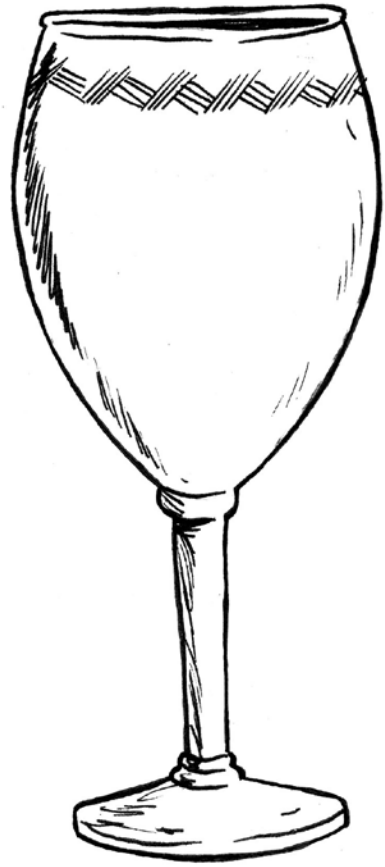
**Healing Surge Bonus:** Item's level -1

**Property:** Until your next rest, you gain darkvision. Ω

### Optional Rule: Eating During Combat

Truly piggish adventurers may attempt to eat magical food during combat, though this is not recommended. Doing so requires two free hands (no shields, weapons, or implements) and two standard actions and two movement actions to consume enough food to matter. During this time, the eating adventurer grants combat advantage. Magical food put down during consumption is spoiled and wasted.

An adventurer taking a normal hit while attempting to eat does not consume the magical food that round, but may continue trying to finish his or her meal in the next round; it is not considered spoiled. An adventurer taking a critical hit while attempting to eat it either drops the food or smears it all over something like her armor or hair. The magical food is spoiled by the critical hit.



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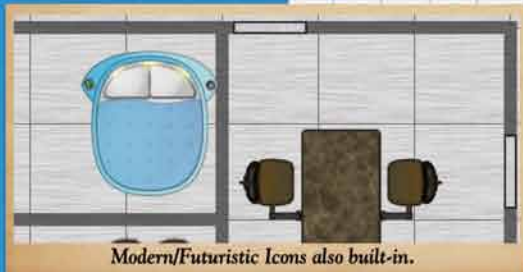
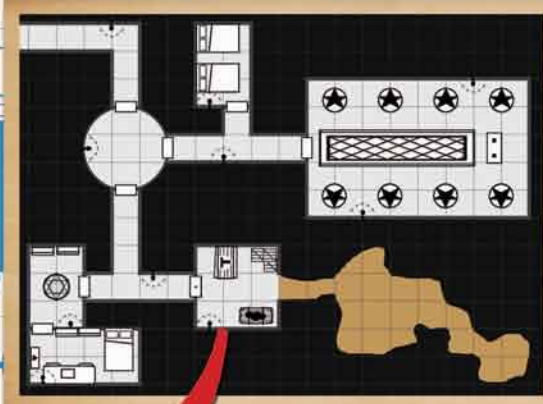
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- Can export a "1 Page Dungeon"
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- Print an entire map or any encounter area as a battlemat; automatically spans pages
- 40+ icons built-in, plus floor tiles & textures; add your own icons

Make a smaller GM's map of a dungeon, cavern or any building interior using simple "line art" style icons...

And with a simple click convert it to a 1" per square scale battlemat with realistic artwork.

Then print the whole map or any rectangular area as a 1" battlemat.



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Use the Notes Tool to describe areas & the first part of the Note Title ("1a" of "1a Entrance") is added to the map.



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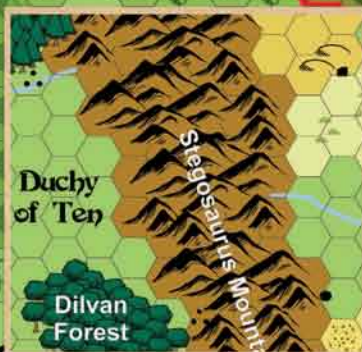
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- Add your own icons
- Use Styled Lines & Text so changing a style changes all lines/text in that style
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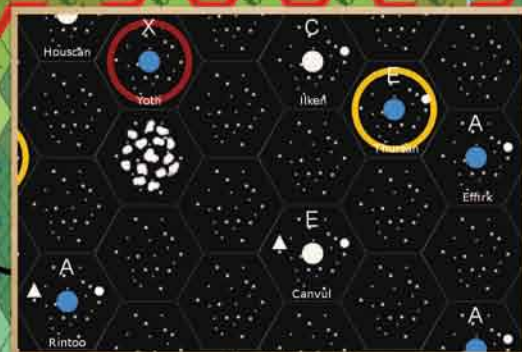
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# Secrets of the Four Golden Gates

## New Societies and Items for 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Monks

By David Adams

Art by Rick Hershey

There are as many paths to enlightenment as those who seek it, but monks stand out among these students of the self for their stern discipline and arduous training of mind, body, and spirit. Isolated to remove worldly distractions, each Order travels a slightly different road toward perfection and the refinement of ki.

### Khavakali Ascetics

*"All things reside within the mind."*

—*Blossoming Light sutra*

The Khavakali Ascetics believe that world was created with a single, unspoken word that existed only as a thought. The world continues to exist as a collection of sensory experiences and memories that are real only in the mind. These monks observe prolonged periods of ritual silence and recite all of their sutras without words. They inscribe the mantras for their meditations onto ornate prayer wheels, which they spin as they move through the slow motions of their sutras. Turning their minds inward through silence, they look to unify mind, body, and soul through mental discipline.

The Blossoming Light sutra is the most common meditation practiced by the Ascetics. As they move through a series of postures representing the rising sun, they spin their prayer wheels and visualize the motion of the sun through the heavens while remembering its warmth on their skin. Their martial studies reflect a metaphorical approach to combat

with attacks that daze or stun opponents. Rumors hold that some of their masters may use their enlightened understanding of the dream of the world to attack their opponents' non-physical aspects.

#### PRAYER WHEEL UNCOMMON LEVEL 1+

*This metal rod features a rotating head engraved with sutras in an ornate script.*

Lvl 1	+1	360 gp
Lvl 16	+4	45,000 gp
Lvl 6	+2	1,800 gp
Lvl 21	+5	225,000 gp
Lvl 11	+3	9,000 gp
Lvl 26	+6	1,125,000 gp

#### Implement (Ki Focus)

**Enhancement:** Attack rolls and damage rolls

**Critical:** The target is deafened and grants combat advantage until the end of your next turn

**Property:** You can communicate telepathically with any creature within 10 squares of you.

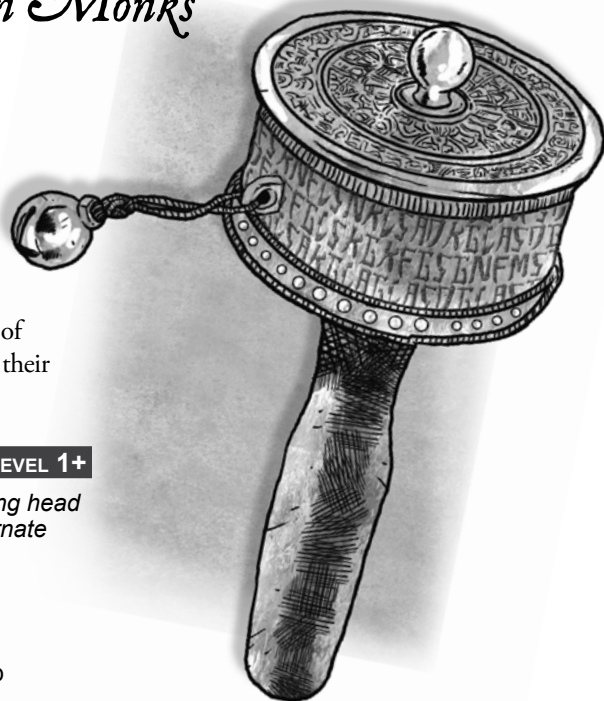
### Brotherhood of Ephemeral Sight

*"All is mere illusion."*

*Pay attention carefully."*

—*Elias, instructor of the Root Sequence*

The Brotherhood of Ephemeral Sight have adopted visual art as a meditation. Students learn to view the world as an ever-changing stream of sensory information and consequently to remain highly aware of their surroundings. Creating art captures a single moment forever and makes an excellent aid in expanding pupils' ability to observe and recollect scenes.



Annually, masters and students alike participate in a ritual called the Sounding of the Bell. Two senior monks spend the year creating an elaborate, circular, geometric mandala from colored sand. On the last day of the year, the monks gather to gaze upon the work. At the same moment they reveal the mandala, the seniors ring a massive bell suspended above the art, and its vibrations shake the sand into an incoherent blur. The attending monks then attempt to recreate the mandala, some devoting all their meditations over the following year to the task.

The Brotherhood's martial arts rely on rapidly assessing an opponent's vulnerabilities or noticing advantages of terrain or circumstance. Devotees of the Brotherhood of Ephemeral Sight are detail-oriented and inquisitive quick-thinkers who maintain a silent, unnervingly accurate observance. They are often highly-valued investigators,



and many outside the monasteries serve in that role.

### MANDALA SAND UNCOMMON LEVEL 3+

*This small leather bag contains a few handfuls of multicolored sand which you can carefully arrange into intricate artwork.*

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

Implement (Ki Focus)

**Enhancement:** Attack rolls and damage rolls

**Critical:** +1d6 damage per plus

**Power (Daily):** Minor Action. *Effect:*

Learn the location of any hidden enemies within 5 squares of you.

Until the end of your next turn, gain a +1 bonus to damage rolls against any enemy that has cover or concealment.

*Level 13 or 18:* negates cover and regular concealment, grants +2 bonus to damage.

*Level 23 or 28:* negates cover and superior concealment, grants +3 bonus to damage.

## SCHOOL OF THREE BREATHS

*“Breathe. Breathe. Now breathe again.”*

—*Wandering Flame mudra*

For those students of the School of Three Breaths, unity of mind, body, and soul comes only with slow, patient, and prepared deliberateness. Followers strive for dispassion as they slowly take control of their breathing. Mastering one’s breath—an extension of one’s ki—gives a monk the ability to control this energy. Ki is like fire, however, and its mastery must be approached carefully.

Practitioners use a damru drum—a hand-held drum with a striking surface on both sides and two weighted beads that swing to strike the drum when it is spun—to create rhythms to which they match their breathe when meditating. Their discipline recognizes three types of proper breathing: the Steady Breath, used during combat; the Resting Breath, emphasized for meditation but also a sleeping breath; and the Wandering Breath, a steady breath for normal activities.

The school rigorously trains for combat, since times of such stress are when one’s breath is most likely to become uncontrolled. Their style emphasizes power and timing, and many dwarves take to it naturally. They recognize three forms within the Steady Breath. The Readied breath focuses the monk before engaging, the Aggressive breath regulates the monk’s ki to create a rhythm that synchronizes it with each strike, and the Recovering breath aids in restoring the monk as he becomes exhausted or after a fight ends.

### DAMRU DRUM UNCOMMON LEVEL 4+

*Concentrating on the steady rhythm of this drum, you learn to synchronize your breathe with your attacks.*

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

Implement (Ki Focus)

**Enhancement:** Attack rolls and damage rolls

**Critical:** +1d6 damage per plus, and you may spend a healing surge

**Power (Encounter):** Free Action.

Trigger: You take the second wind action. *Effect:* After you spend your healing surge, you may trigger your flurry of blows class feature if you have not already used it during your current turn.

## PATH OF SINGING SPARROWS

*“So Zarrien came to them as a sparrow and sang songs to strengthen the soul.”*

—*Legend of Zarrien*

The half-elven prince Zarrien founded the Path of Singing Sparrows nearly 200 years ago. Decades of studying animals taught Zarrien a profound respect for life in all its myriad forms and granted him simple but profound insights into the nature of the world, both of which he passed to his students. He promised them that he would return from death as a sparrow and sing to them songs that would fortify their souls and bring them into harmony with the natural world.

To this day disciples following the Path of Singing Sparrows revere life in

all its forms but pay special respect to sparrows and other song birds. They believe that harmonizing with nature pacifies their souls and allows them to unite mind, body, and spirit. This quest for connection leads nearly half the order to spend their lives wandering and exploring the world’s wonders. Many attach rings or bells to their belongings so that even the smallest insects will hear their approach and retreat from accidental harm. On the longest and shortest days each year, most such itinerants seek out one of their order’s monasteries to tell their stories and ceremonially recount Zarrien’s life, a ritual called the Flight of Sparrows.

Though the Path of Singing Sparrows teaches non-aggression, it recognizes the often tragic necessity of self-defense and includes a variety of martial techniques that mimic animals. The inclination of the tradition’s great masters to wander means students must often travel to find teachers, and many of the Path’s adherents have some training as bards. All followers fuse their meditations with gorgeously-crafted bamboo flutes that mimic the songs of sparrows.

### BAMBOO FLUTE UNCOMMON LEVEL 2+

*When you use this simple bamboo flute to mimic birdsong, you can soothe the soul and invigorate the body.*

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

Implement (Ki Focus)

**Enhancement:** Attack rolls and damage rolls

**Critical:** +1d6 sonic damage per plus

**Property:** Bards can use this as an implement for bard powers and bard paragon path powers.

**Power (Daily \* Healing):** Standard Action. Use this power during a short rest. At the end of the short rest, one ally who remained within 20 squares of you during the rest gains 10 temporary hit points and a +1 enhancement bonus to speed until the next short rest.

*Level 12 or 17:* 15 temporary hit points.

*Level 22 or 27:* 20 temporary hit points.

Ω

# The Value of the Monster

by Monte Cook  
Art By Joseph Jacobs

Sometimes monsters get a bad rap. Some people even think them silly. Even the word has gone from describing something terrifying to something almost childish in common parlance. Not long ago, I was in a shop that sold ceramic figurines. I asked if they had any monsters, and the clerk giggled and said, “Monsters? No.”

What’s more, she was blatantly wrong, for there on the shelf were dragons, dinosaurs, and so on. Not only did she think monsters were a bit goofy, she didn’t even truly know what the word meant. I guess she was thinking of *Monsters, Inc.* or a muppet (not that there’s anything wrong with either).

Monsters in RPGs are sometimes looked down on in favor of more complex foes, which is to say other people. Depending on the game, a “person” might be an elf, a Vulcan, or a mutant with the ability to throw buses with his mind. There’s value, however, in the monstrous foe: alien, obviously dangerous, terrifying, and—perhaps most importantly—irredeemable.

Let’s go through those qualities one at a time.

## ALIEN: FEAR OF THE OTHER

A monster should be something completely different from the player characters, whatever they might be. The most obvious way it might be alien is in form. A Cthulhu-like, tentacled horror is a great monster, for example. So is an energy creature, or a stone golem. All of them are strange and very different from the PCs.

When fighting such a monster, it’s

easy to understand who the good guys are—and who the bad guys are—just by looking. Or by smelling. Of course, appearances can be deceiving. The hideous beast can have a heart of gold, and the kindly shopkeeper who looks like your grandmother can be possessed by an entity from beyond the reaches of time. In the first case, that’s probably not really a monster, for our discussion today, but the second one certainly is.

“Alien” doesn’t have to mean hideously ugly or strange in appearance. It could just be different in nature. A physical embodiment of the concept of injustice is going to be wholly different than your standard mortal characters no matter what it looks like. Likewise, a being that feeds on fear or is made of a hive mind of superintelligent insects is certainly going to be alien to the PCs.

As a general rule, to make a monster alien you should make it:

1. Monstrous in appearance (hulking brute, tentacles, multiple mouths, huge horns, mandibles, etc.)
2. Strange in composition (sonic energy, solid calcium, gelatinous substance, the laughter of dead men, etc.)
3. Inhuman in outlook or need (hates all living things, feeds on souls, requires gold dust to breathe, absorbs time, etc.)

## OBVIOUSLY DANGEROUS: A TRUE FOE

A monster needs to be a threat. Big teeth, claws, horns...these are the obvious accoutrements, but they aren’t

required. Many things can make a monster obviously dangerous. Perhaps it has an acidic touch, it spreads disease, the sight of it tears at one’s mind, or its mere presence disrupts nearby organisms on a cellular level. Once those who encounter the monster understand it (at least a bit), they know they’re in for trouble.

You can imagine many kinds of threats, of course. A monster might not injure you physically, but it drains your life force. Or your will to live. Or the memories of your loved ones. Or the magic from your items. Or the creature might obviously threaten innocent civilians, an important structure, or the environment.

The important thing is that the players have no question that this creature is a threat to their characters or to something they hold dear. Unlike when the PCs encounter a person, and the situation may be unclear, an encounter with a monster should be clear. The PCs shouldn’t wonder whether this thing is friend or foe. Ambiguity can be interesting, but once in a while the characters just need a straight-up foe.

## TERRIFYING: INSTILLING FEAR

Going hand in hand with obvious danger is a monster’s ability to instill fear. But being terrifying is different than just being dangerous. A gnome who makes clockwork devices that might accidentally explode is dangerous, but when he talks in his funny high-pitched voice and the bells on his hat jingle, he doesn’t exactly terrify anyone. Monsters aren’t funny or silly.

A lot of fear can come from the beast's appearance or nature, as previously discussed. Occasionally, a GM should pull out all the stops. If a 10-ft. tall reptilian monstrosity is good, a 20-ft. tall beast is better. Or 30-ft. Or 60-ft. Why not make it truly terrifying? Not that it has to be big. A tiny creature with a poisonous stinger hiding in the shadows can be just as terrifying, as can an invisible creatures that plays on the imagination.

A monstrous encounter should be truly challenging. The threat, also mentioned above, should be very real. Whatever the game mechanics involved, a good monster encounter really convinces the players that their characters might suffer great injury, loss, or even death if they don't use every bit of might, wit, and luck they have.

#### **IRREDEEMABLE: THE TRUE VILLAIN**

Perhaps the most important part of a monster encounter is the lack of ambiguity involved. Even the most benevolent, just, and forgiving soul should have no hesitation in slaying a monster.

Why is this so important? Because sometimes the players just need a straight-up challenge to overcome without being put in a moral quandary. Moreover, the monster encounter rarely brings the prisoner dilemma into the game. You know the one; the PCs take a prisoner and then spend the rest of the night arguing about what to do with it. Not every situation needs to involve an ethical debate, and an encounter with a truly evil, ravenous, destructive, and otherwise terrifying beast is sometimes just what the doctor ordered.

"Irredeemable" can mean many things. The simplest version of this kind of monstrous encounter is a mindless creature – a golem, a robot, a mutant ooze, an undead zombie. No one has to worry if destroying that kind of foe is a good or evil act. Very similar is the kill-or-be-killed encounter

with a monster. The ravenous beast with multiple arms and a toothy maw thundering out of the dark woods to devour you is, again, not really the time to contemplate ethics. You've got to defeat it just out of self-preservation.

And of course, there's the so-evil-they-must-be-destroyed monsters: demons, vampires, Cthulhu spawn. These make wonderful monsters because not only do the PCs experience no regret in destroying them, they feel better about themselves for having done it. They cheer when this kind of monster is destroyed. The world is a better place without it.

That isn't to say that you can't give a monster motivations, emotions, or an outlook all its own. In my favorite D&D module series, the G series and D series, Gary Gygax introduced the drow. Later incarnations notwithstanding, the original drow were as monstrous a foe as you could hope for. They weren't just going to eat you like an umber hulk. They weren't just insanely destructive like a

beholder, these guys were depraved.

The drow delighted in torture, betrayal, perversions, subjugation, demon worship, and all sorts of things. Portrayed correctly, they were more depraved than a human (hopefully) would ever be. They aren't mindless, but they are truly corrupt. They have their own goals, motivations, hopes and fears. And yet, the world is still a better place without them in it.

It's no secret that I love monsters. I delight in crafting new and strange creatures that populate the dangerous world the PCs inhabit. I'm influenced by the stop-motion classics of Ray Harryhausen, the descriptive genius of H.P. Lovecraft, and in more recent times the imaginative work of writers like China Miéville. Monsters can take many forms, but the kind of encounter they provide is the very meat and potatoes of gaming – a straightforward fight or chase scene where the choices before the PCs are clear and the threat is true. In the end, monsters play a vital role in just about any roleplaying game. Ω



# From the Mines

Art by Darren Calvert

## SYSTEMS MATTER

Which game systems will your upcoming **Midgard** campaign setting support? Unfortunately, I am only interested in a (Dragon) Age version. I do not want to support just another D&D 4th Edition or Pathfinder world. Maybe I am blind, but I could not find any satisfying answer to my question. It seems all 3 games are optional, but with a focus on Pathfinder RPG.

To be honest, even with a Age support I am not sure to make a patronage, but I really like your approach, and Age support is a huge plus (for me).

Best regards,  
Ingo Beyer  
Germany

*Thanks for asking! The decision was voted on by the project patrons, and the Dragon Age RPG and the Pathfinder RPG were the systems they wanted.*

*As a campaign setting, **Midgard** is primarily about characters, locales, and adventure hooks, but Pathfinder RPG and Dragon Age RPG fans will both get plenty of support for mechanical elements as well. As an AGE System supporter, you'll be happy to know that a **Midgard Bestiary** for that system seems likely as a spin-off or supplement to the campaign setting later this year.*

*While 4th Edition D&D fans didn't sign up in sufficient numbers to get official support, they are organizing a set of player material for Midgard as well. We'll keep you posted.*

## WE THINK THIS IS GOOD NEWS

Salut Lucky,

Je peux offrir la version PDF de Kobold Quarterly #11 a un friend, ce que je fais de ce pas!

KQ, ce sont les gens d'Open Design dont je parlais vendredi... du tout bon en général!

Bonne lecture!  
Xa

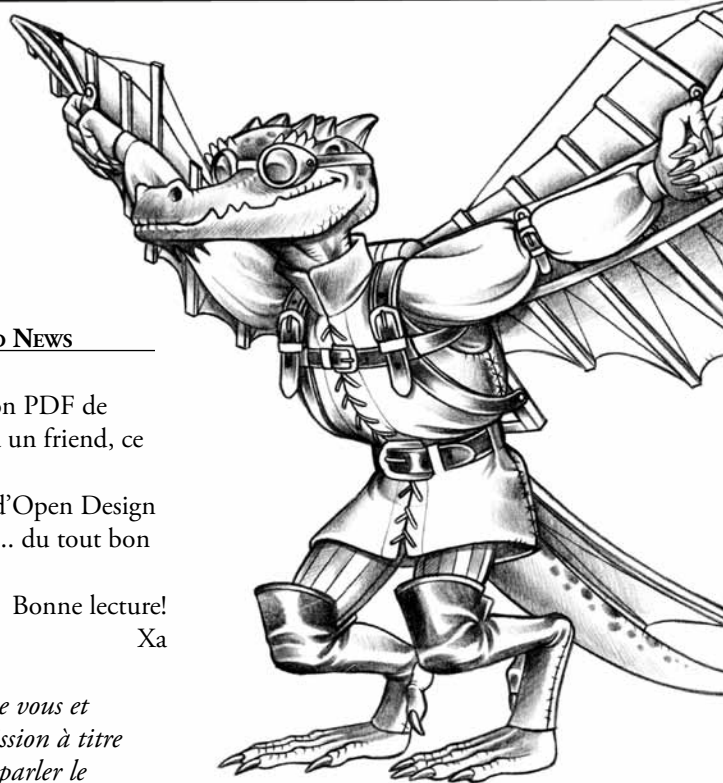
*Merci! Nous espérons que vous et votre ami apprécié l'émission à titre gratuit. Et oui, kobolds parler le français de nos jours. Consultez les articles traduits blog KQ à <http://www.pathfinder-fr.org/Wiki/Pathfinder-RPG.Articles%20KQ.ashx>*

## A NEUTRAL ALLY

I wanted to congratulate all of you, and thank you, for KOBOLD QUARTERLY magazine. I'm running a campaign on both sides of 'The Wall' right now and having a neutral ally as a resource is, in a word, awesome.

Reading through KOBOLD QUARTERLY (my first-ish is the Fall one, with Merlin and li'l Arthur on the cover) is really proof that your approach to the state of The Games should be the gold standard. That said, I hope other people don't take me up on that – I don't trust that their results would have the same authenticity as your publication.

Continued Success,  
Christian Gossett  
Creator of The Red Star graphic novel series



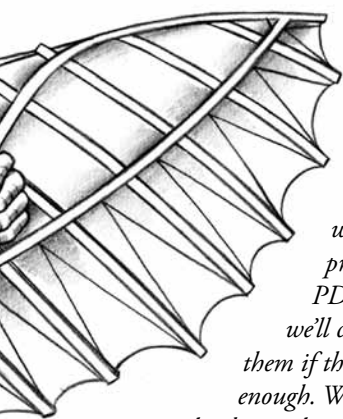
*Christian,  
Thanks for another ally in the cause of great gaming for any edition! The splintering RPG market is a rough one for the small press, but surprisingly, we get more positive mail from people about the "All Editions" approach than we get hate mail from the edition purists. We appreciate the vote of confidence!*

## WASTED PRINTER STUFF

Have you looked into making your web articles printer friendly? I keep a binder on things I find on the internet to improve my game. I really love your stuff, but I find it a hassle to print with all the advertisements and other stuff that is on your site. If I don't watch when I'm printing, I get two to three extra "waste" pages.

Thanks for the great material. Keep it coming!

Specialist Robert Larson  
US Army  
Fort Bliss TX



articles do people most want to see collected?

*We haven't looked into it, but we do offer compilations of some of the web articles in printer-friendly PDF. It's possible we'll compile more of them if they are popular enough. What sort of*

#### THANKS FROM A RETURNING SOLDIER

I've been graciously adopted by the Adopt-a-Soldier program and have loved it while I'm out here in the desert! However, I'm heading home, and my address (both physical and email) will be changing to non-military addresses. Will I still be adopted even with the address-change, or will I need to purchase a subscription to keep the Koboldy Goodness coming?

Regardless of my adoption status I want to thank you all for the magazine in general and the Adopt-a-Soldier program specifically – it's a great feeling to be thanked in practical ways instead of just words. Thank you for supporting us!

Keep on Kobold-ing,  
SrA Mathews

*Glad you like it, and no worries, your adoption subscription will keep coming for the remainder of the year; after that, hey, welcome to civilian life!*

*We figure tangible support is always better than a yellow ribbon a thousand miles away, so we do send KQ to the FOBs and PX/BX system. Tell your gaming friends they can get a free subscription!*

#### REAL MONSTERS

How about some articles on real-world creatures that are monster-worthy? I might suggest the following:

Giant Huntsman Spider-The world's largest spider, with a leg-span of 12 inches!

The Pangolin, or scaled anteater  
And try googling the words "Cannibal frog" sometime. There are frogs that eat their own young...

Hollis McCray

*Ah, a monster-hunter after our own heart! We hope someone takes you up on it and provides some stats for one or more of these.*

#### NEW EYES ON KQ

I just wanted to let you know that KQ has a new subscriber in me. I was reading that KQ has had an increase in 4e content since its launch, so I went to the KQ website and checked out the free articles that you had. I was very impressed! I decided to subscribe for a Print and PDF sub, and immediately checked out the PDF (#14) that i got. Really good stuff!

I'm glad I subscribed, and hope you guys keep up the 4e content! I'm also a fan of the PF stuff too, but I play much more 4e these days. It's great to see both systems covered, as well as some other stuff like Dragon Age.

-Craig

*Thanks Craig! We've been getting more and more good 4th Edition material for the magazine and expect to keep publishing it.*

*And every subscriber counts for us; thank you for your support. The editors always dream of the day when we have enough subscribers to afford more authors, artists, and---just maybe!---a hardware upgrade from the Kobold Commodore 64.*

#### INDEX REQUEST

After over two and a half years, the list of web articles has become very long. It's hard to find one you want to revisit, etc. Perhaps it's time to construct an index of web articles. Also, post dates would be helpful.

James Thomas

#### Correction

The article "Dancing Brooms, Skittering Sconces" was incorrectly attributed to Michael Kortez in the print edition of KQ issue #16 though a production error. The author was Thomas Baumbach. KOBOLD QUARTERLY regrets the error.

*Dear James,  
Alas, our web editor is a bit overwhelmed with other duties these days, but we are working to place a search box on the site for this purpose. Also, the tag cloud makes it easy to find a particular topic or system.*

*As to post dates...I dunno why there are no post dates. KQ blog articles are timeless, I suppose.*

#### GREAT STUFF

I just finished reading KQ Summer 2010 last night. Great issue! Love the PF stuff. I'm going to use the Tengu and perfumes in my Riddleport campaign this week. Also liked the NPC from Dave Gross's new book. Dave and I live in the same city, but we haven't connected since we both worked at BioWare years ago. D'oh.

Keep up the awesome work with KQ. I tell my readers it's the perfect replacement for print-Dragon. Looking forward to the next issue.

Cheers,  
Johnn

*It's a small world, Johnn! Thanks for your kind words – and thanks for telling your friends and game store owners about KQ. We were very happy to feature some of Dave Gross's characters in a recent issue, and look forward to meeting him and others at PaizoCon 2011.*

*Oh, I suppose we should mention that: Kobold Quarterly will again have a booth in the dealer room at PaizoCON this year! We look forward to kidnapping a Paizonian for dinner again as we did last year, and feeding them beverages and singing ribald songs. A fine tradition. If you are a reader coming to the show: we'll see you there!*

Ω

# Magical Squibs, Crackers, and Fireworks

By Jonathan McAnulty  
Art by Rick Hershey

Fire has long fascinated man. One aspect of this fascination is the creation of fireworks: turning explosions and flaming materials into works of art suitable for entertainment and celebration. Originally invented to ward away evil spirits, these combustible marvels are also employed as magical devices. In the arcane arts, as in mundane tasks, fire is a powerful tool.

Like scrolls, these pyrotechnical creations unleash stored elemental energies as a singular event. Unlike scrolls, anyone able to light a fuse may use magical fireworks—though not without risk.

## FUSES FOR MAGICAL FIREWORKS

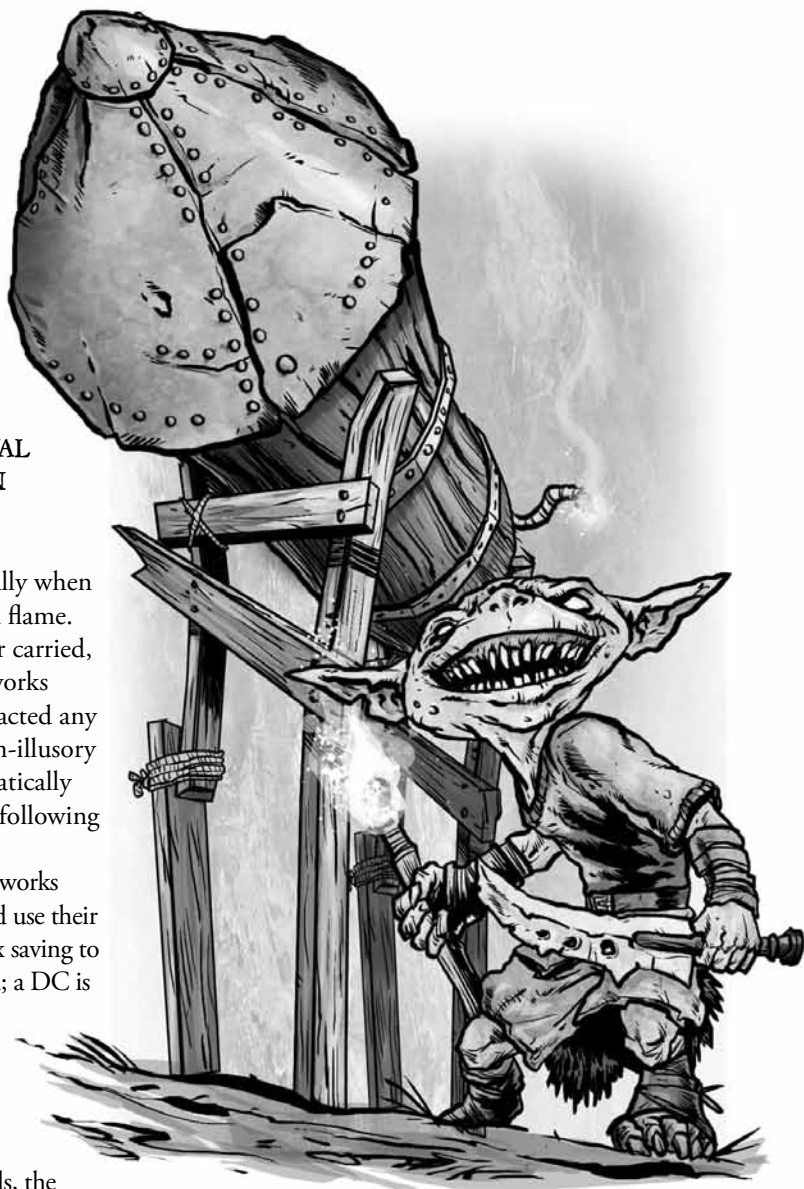
Besides making an enchanted firework universally useable, the fuse of a firework provides timing for its arcane ignition. The length of the fuse and where the flame is applied, may both be varied to closely control the explosion's timing.

Fireworks may detonate immediately or after a set amount of time. Smaller fireworks—squibs, crackers and the like—have fuses which allow for detonation up to 3 rounds after lighting. Larger fireworks, such as fountains and rockets, have fuses lasting up to 5 rounds. The creature lighting the fuse must determine how many rounds the fuse will burn, if any.

## ACCIDENTAL IGNITION

Fireworks may explode unintentionally when struck with a flame. If not held or carried, magical fireworks directly contacted any source of non-illusory flame automatically ignite in the following round.

Magical fireworks held or carried use their carrier's Reflex saving to avoid ignition; a DC is included with each firework below. If the saving throw succeeds, the magical fireworks do not ignite. If the saving throw fails, the fireworks ignite in the following round, inflicting maximum damage (for damaging fireworks), their listed effect, and 1d4+2 damage to whoever held them. The unfortunate character, in addition to his burns, suffers a -4 to any saving throws related to the firework's effect.



## THROWING AND SHOOTING FIREWORKS

Fireworks of less than 1 lb. can be lit and thrown with an effective range of 10 feet. When thrown, rockets have a 30% chance of going off in the direction desired but otherwise fly in a random direction. Most rockets are

not thrown at all, but instead they are aimed (a move action) and lit (a standard action).

A PC can aim at a moving target with magical fireworks, but this is always dangerous and results in powder burns because the aiming character must hold the rocket and track the target. Burns inflict 1d8 hp fire damage from a small rock, and 1d12 from a large one (no save).

## EXTINGUISHING MAGICAL FIREWORKS

Magical fireworks whose fuse is lit but which have not yet gone off may be extinguished. This requires a *create water*, *dispel magic*, *pyrotechnics*, or *quench* spell, or throwing at least 1 gallon of non-magical water on a lit fuse (a standard action).

Magical fireworks submerged in water are ruined beyond further use. Their powder and spells are imbalanced by the presence of elemental water. Magical fireworks likewise will not explode underwater.

### BLINDING GOBLIN-CRACKER

**Aura** moderate evocation; **CL** 11th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 3,300 gp; **Weight** –  
**Accidental ignition (Reflex) DC** 14

#### DESCRIPTION

When this small, bright yellow firecracker explodes, it does so with a blinding flash. Anyone within 30 ft. must make a DC 12 Fortitude save or be struck blind for 2d6 rounds.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *blindness*; **Cost** 1,650 gp

### DEAFENING KOBOLD-BARKERS

**Aura** faint evocation; **CL** 9th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 1,650 gp; **Weight** ¼ lb.  
**Accidental ignition (Reflex) DC** 16

#### DESCRIPTION

Comprised of a dozen, small green firecrackers, linked one after another, this item produces a rapid series of explosions, each louder than the next. Anyone within 30 ft. of the explosions must make a DC 12 Fortitude save or be deafened for 2d6 rounds.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *deafness*; **Cost** 825 gp

### ENCHANTING DRAGON'S BREATH

**Aura** moderate enchantment and evocation; **CL** 9th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 3,000 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.  
**Accidental ignition (Reflex) DC** 13

#### DESCRIPTION

When lit, This red-wrapped cone showers forth beguiling sparks for 1d4+1 rounds, after which it erupts into a 60-foot pillar of fire for one round. The pillar has a radius of ten ft., ignites flammable materials, and does 9d6 points of damage to everything within range (as the fireball spell). Any living creature which observes the beguiling sparks feels compelled to move at half speed towards the fountain, taking no other actions as they do so (DC 12 Will save negates).

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *enthrall*, *fireball*; **Cost** 1,500 gp

### ENCHANTING ELF-FOUNTAIN

**Aura** faint enchantment; **CL** 3rd  
**Slot** none; **Price** 600 gp; **Weight** ½ lb.  
**Accidental ignition (Reflex) DC** 13

#### DESCRIPTION

As this green-wrapped cone burns, it produces a fascinating shower of fiery sparks for 10 rounds. Anyone observing the sparks must make a DC 12 Will save or be *enthralled* for the duration.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *enthrall*; **Cost** 300 gp

### FAIRY FIRE

**Aura** moderate divination; **CL** 5th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 3,000 gp; **Weight** ½ lb.  
**Accidental ignition (Reflex) DC** 13

#### DESCRIPTION

This white wrapped cone is decorated with small yellow stars. When lit, this firework burns with a fierce white light for 10 rounds. Besides shedding light as a *daylight* spell, the light produced by the fire causes any *invisible* or ethereal creatures to cast an obvious shadow. Any character who succeeds at a DC 10 Perception skill check suffers no concealment penalty when attacking such a creature.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *daylight*, *see invisibility*; **Cost** 1,500 gp

### FIERY BOTTLE-ROCKET

**Aura** moderate evocation; **CL** 5th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 1,500 gp; **Weight** –  
**Accidental ignition (Reflex) DC** 13

#### DESCRIPTION

When you aim and light this small red bottle-rocket, it streaks forward in a straight line for 100 ft., or until it strikes an object (DC 13 Reflex to avoid), and explodes as a 5d6 *fireball*. On a successful saving throw the rocket continues to the next occupied square or the end of its range.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *fireball*; **Cost** 750 gp

### GUIDING LIGHT

**Aura** faint (lesser) or moderate (greater, standard) divination; **CL** 2nd (lesser), 5th (standard) or 7th (greater)

**Slot** none; **Price** 50 gp (lesser), 1,000 gp (standard), 2,800 gp (greater);  
**Weight** ½ lb.

**Accidental ignition (Reflex) DC** 15

#### DESCRIPTION

If lit indoors, this green rocket flies in a straight line for 200 ft., or until it hits an obstacle (DC 14 Reflex to avoid), exploding for 2d6 fire damage. On a successful save, the rocket continues to the next occupied square or the end of its range.

When used outside, it flies 200 ft. into the air and explodes, releasing a shower of sparks which coalesce as they descend, drifting in an easily discernible direction. The sparks of a *lesser guiding light* always drift north, regardless of wind.

Before lighting the fuse of a *standard guiding light*, characters may speak the name of an object, and so long as the object is within a mile, the sparks will drift in the direction of the object. A *greater guiding light* may locate individuals as well as objects up to a mile away.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *locate object* (standard), *locate creature* (greater), *survival* 2 ranks (lesser); **Cost** 25 gp (lesser), 500 gp (standard), 1,400 (greater)

### PRIEST LIGHT

**Aura** faint abjuration; **CL** 5th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 1,500 gp;  
**Weight** ½ lb.

**Accidental ignition (Reflex) DC** 13

#### DESCRIPTION

When lit, this thin white tube produces a tall argent flame and numerous golden sparks for 10 minutes. While burning, it produces light in a 30 ft. radius. Undead cannot enter this area, and if within the area, they must make a DC 14 Will save or flee out of the light.

**this man  
is going to  
rearrange  
your face.**

**unless, of course,  
your former partner  
does it first.**

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Creatures within the light are immune to fear effects for the duration of the flame.

### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *magic circle against evil*, *remove fear*, **Cost** 750 gp

### RED DRAGON ROCKET

**Aura** moderate evocation; **CL** 9th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 3,000 gp; **Weight** 2 lb.  
**Accidental ignition (Reflex) DC** 20

### DESCRIPTION

Papered with gold leaf and inscribed with a mass of scarlet runes on every surface, this rocket is large enough to require a hefty spear-like stick for aiming. It weighs more than most other fireworks, and some consider the red dragon rocket the “king of magical fireworks.”

When ignited, this golden rocket streaks forward in a straight line for 150 ft., or until it strikes an object, at which point it explodes as a 9d6 *fireball*.

If the rocket enters an occupied square, it strikes the occupant (DC 15 Reflex avoids). On a successful save, the rocket continues to the next occupied square or the end of its range.

### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *fireball*; **Cost** 1,500 gp

### SNAKE FOUNTAIN

**Aura** faint conjuration; **CL** 5th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 1,500 gp;  
**Weight** ½ lb.  
**Accidental ignition (Reflex) DC** 15

### DESCRIPTION

This firework fountain is wrapped in red and gold paper with a scaled motif. When lit, the fountain emits a shower of green sparks and a black ashy extrusion which, as it leaves the cone, transforms into a small black viper under your control (apply the young simple template to a venomous snake). The fountain burns for 10 rounds, producing 1 viper a round. The vipers turn to black ash when the fountain ceases to burn.

### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *summon monster III*; **Cost** 750 gp

### SMOKING DWARF-SQUIB

**Aura** faint conjuration; **CL** 3rd (smoking) or 5th (choker and sleeper)  
**Slot** none; **Price** 600 gp (smoking), 1,500 gp (choking and sleeping);  
**Weight** –

### Accidental ignition (Reflex) DC 14

### DESCRIPTION

This small, black squib produces few sparks but much smoke. As this squib burns, a cloud of smoke fills its square in the first round and expands 5 ft. in each direction for three more rounds. The resulting smoke acts as a *fog cloud* which lasts for 30 minutes.

Two variations on this smoking dwarf-squib exist, refinements from under the mountain where confined quarters make them extremely effective. The Sleeper produces soporific smoke, and those who breathe it to fall asleep (DC 11 Fortitude negates) for 3 minutes. The Choker releases vile-smelling smoke which causes those who breathe it to cough violently while in the cloud and for 1d4 rounds after leaving the area (DC 13 Fortitude negates). Those coughing are considered nauseated. The smoke of both the variants lasts for 3 minutes.

### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *fog-cloud* (smoking) and *sleep* (sleeper) or *stinking cloud* (choking); **Cost** 300 gp (smoking), 750 gp (choking and sleeping).

### SHRIEKING ROCKET

**Aura** moderate necromancy; **CL** 7th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 2,800 gp;  
**Weight** ½ lb.

**Accidental ignition (Reflex) DC** 15

### DESCRIPTION

When you aim and light this black rocket, it flies forward in a straight line for 80 ft., or until it strikes an obstacle, at which point it explodes. If the rocket enters an occupied square, it strikes the occupant (DC 14 Reflex avoids). On a successful save, the rocket continues to the next occupied square or the end of its range.

It whistles loudly as it flies, and when it explodes, it produces a banshee-like shriek and a shower of green sparks. Any character within 30 ft. of the explosion must make a DC 14 Will save or become panicked for 4 rounds. Those that make their save are shaken for 1 round. Additionally, characters actually struck by the rocket suffer 2d4 damage.

### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *fear*; **Cost** 1,400 gp

Ω



# The Black Goat

By Richard L. Smith II

Art by Kevin Crossley

Cartography by Sean Macdonald

There are things so old that mankind has no name for them; things that ruled the world before the elves discovered fire, things that have been—and should remain—forgotten.

One such a thing lives beneath the Black Goat, an inn and tavern whose only claim to fame is a nightly magic show. It's not true magic (for what wizard would debase himself so?) but such masterful sleight of hand and illusion are rarely seen even in the crossroads city.

Neither the Black Goat's proprietor Toven Grimm nor the magician Selros the Black run the inn. Rather, they are puppets of the nameless elder thing they found in the long-lost temple beneath their establishment. They were its first "converts" – but certainly not the last, and it uses the Black Goat as its recruiting house.

## BACKGROUND

The Grimm family has owned the Black Goat for many years. Through all of that time, it has teetered one short step of bankruptcy, until the day Toven Grimm hired Selros the Black to perform illusions on the little-used stage. Something about Selros's non-magical prestidigitation struck a chord with the hearts of Zobeck's people.

After a modest start, the show—ponderously titled "Selros the Black's Mystical Vistas"—began filling the taproom two nights a week. For the first time since it opened, the Black Goat prospered.

Toven and Selros found the natural cavern beneath the inn as they expanded the stage. They explored it and found evidence of both previous use and some obviously-worked expansions, but nothing lived there – at least, nothing more threatening than some city rats. They followed a staircase downward and stumbled upon an ancient temple of some sort.

The chamber stretched almost as large as the taproom of the Black Goat, and in the center lay a deep pit. While trying to look into the pit, Toven fell in and then screamed in pain. Selros listened helplessly as his friend seemed to drown or perish in the darkness, and so Selros was surprised when a few minutes later, Toven appeared at the lip of the pit, apparently unhurt. When he tried to help Toven out, Toven yanked him in, and the process repeated.

The innkeeper and the magician then climbed out of the pit and returned to the inn.

Shortly thereafter, Selros added his famous disappearing cabinet illusion to the show. To the delight of commoners and slumming nobles alike, he always takes a volunteer from the audience.



## FIRST FLOOR

### 1. TAPROOM

Bay windows shed dim light in the taproom during the day, and smoky tapers in a chandelier and on each of the dozen tables provide weak illumination at night. The food is wholesome, if dull, and the drinks are reasonably priced. The staff is quiet and works with an almost preternatural efficiency.

The entire staff (two barmaids, three cooks, and a bartender) have been converted, and they effectively share a hive mind. They speak to anyone not also converted only when required. On any given week night, the Goat hosts between 2-12 patrons. That number swells to 40 or more on weekends. Of the weekend crowd, about 1 in 6 have already been converted.

## 2. STAGE.

The stage rises about three feet above the taproom floor. Performers are lit by 4 bullseye lanterns placed along its front edge.

During the week, wandering bards and Kariv dancers use the stage, but come the night, only Selros and his volunteers set foot on it. The trap door is well hidden (Perception DC 30 to spot) and tricky to open (Disable Device DC 26) without using the lever hidden under the bar.

## 3. KITCHEN.

The kitchen is well-lit and strangely quiet. The staff here, like those in the taproom, work with bizarre efficiency.

As mentioned above, the kitchen staff is entirely converted. They work as one (gaining a +2 bonus to attacks through this coordination), and they quickly expel unwanted visitors.

## 4. PANTRY.

Crates and urns of dry goods, fresh vegetables, and spare firewood are neatly stacked in this clean, dry space.

## 5. STORAGE CLOSET.

Shelves lined with tallow candles, linen tablecloths, and simple wooden utensils line the walls, all immaculately organized.

A secret panel (Perception DC 20 to spot) behind the shelf opens into a narrow crawlspace with a ladder leading down to area 11.

## 6. OFFICE.

This dark room contains a desk, two chairs, and strange items of stage equipment: painted boxes, drapes, and a set of willow hoops. The room is unusually tidy.

The inn's strongbox (DC 24 to unlock) lies under the desk. Toven keeps the key on his person. The DM should decide an appropriate treasure

for his party here; the cash has piled up steadily since the changeover, as the staff no longer ask for wages.

## 7. CLOSET.

This closet is strangely untidy, compared to the rest of the Black Goat. It contains the accumulated junk of many years.

Toven hasn't gone into this closet since his change. Among broken and dusty baskets and old linens, it contains 2d4 sp and a fine cloak. A DC 20 Search check uncovers a battered, ill-kept ledger that shows the Goat's finances before and after Selros began his act, as well as dated invoices for the construction materials used to expand the stage, and plenty of blank space remaining.

## 8. SECOND FLOOR.

The second floor contains several single/double occupant rooms, a large room for adventuring parties or merchant groups traveling together, and a common room. It is, like the rest of the inn, tidy and quiet.

A single, altered clockwork servant named Hourhazred cleans the entire second floor daily. (The only notable difference from a standard clockwork servant is that it is directed by the same hive mind as all of the other staff members.) Room rates range from 5 sp per night per occupant for the common room to 2 gp per night per occupant for the "group room." All of the rooms except the common room (area A) have locks (DC 18 Disable Device).

Toven strictly enforces a "no shenanigans" policy, so the guests here are usually quiet and well-behaved.

## **CAVERNS**

The natural stone caverns are mildly damp but not otherwise remarkable.

## 9. LANDING.

A deep pile of soft sand dominates the south side of this

area. A 25' ladder leads up to a wooden trap door.

The sand is deep enough to turn the 25' drop from the stage trap door into 3d6 non-lethal damage. When a victim drops during the magic show, three altered clockwork servants welcome them and take them below to be converted. At any other time, they wander this level.

The secret door to the north requires a DC 20 Perception check to locate.

## 10. PASSAGE.

Little of note here other than the secret doors (DC 20 Perception check).

## 11. HIDDEN ROOM.

A ladder goes up 25' to a trap door in the ceiling of this roughly-worked room.

This is the standard way to reach this level from above. The secret door to the south requires a DC 20 Perception check to locate.

## 12. MAIN CHAMBER.

This natural cavern is damp and musty but appears sound. A twisted symbol covers the floor at the western end, and a strange black pillar stands to the east of that.

The symbol vaguely resembles an eye with a slit pupil surrounded by unknown writing. It detects as magical (abjuration), but it doesn't do anything. A trap is set just to the north of it and will be triggered by 50 pounds of weight. Everyone in the shaded area is affected.

### **POISON DART TRAP (CR 1)**

**Type:** Mechanical; **Perception DC 20;** **Disable Device DC 20** *Effects:* **Trigger:** touch; **Reset:** none; **Effect:** Atk +10 Ranged (1d3 + Blue Whinnis)

The stone pillar is unlike any other in the entire complex. Its carved pictograms are part of the same unknown language as the characters surrounding the symbol.

If translated with magical means, it tells the story of an ancient cult that worshiped “The Sleeper in Darkness”. It talks of converted cultists and warns against “going into the darkness with the sleeper”. Translating the writing around the symbol reveals it as non-specific prayers for appeasement and mercy.

The stairs lead down to the Temple Level (area 14).

### **13. STREAM CHAMBER.**

A cold, fast-moving stream moves through this disused chamber.

The stream is 2' deep and runs fast enough to require a DC 15 Balance check to walk through. A pool at the very back of this chamber feeds the courtyard well above. The denizens of this place are unaware of this access point.

If the GM wants another encounter, this would be a good place to put a natural creature such as a giant frog or a snapping turtle.

## **TEMPLE LEVEL**

The stone here is clearly worked by tools, though the floors show signs of long use.

### **14. ANTECHAMBER.**

This chamber's floor is a mosaic depicting bizarre, tentacled horrors ruling over groveling humanoids. Two doors lead to the west, and a passage runs to the north.

The 4 torches are all of the ever-burning variety and are the only illumination on this level.

### **15. CHAPEL OF THE ELDER MASTERS.**

Frescoes cover the chamber walls, most of them depicting various horrific methods of worshiping the tentacled horrors from the mosaic. A font full of water stands near the doors, and a sacrificial altar rests on the dais to the west.

The font contains 11 vials worth of

unholy water. It magically refills every 21 days. The altar's secret compartment (Perception DC 28) contains a book of black metal, engraved with the same pictographs as the pillar in room 16. The work is titled *The Eye of Calling Forth From Darkness*, and it discusses the Elder Masters in detail, and it contains 2d4 new summoning spells or it may cause insanity at the GM's discretion (see *KOBOLD QUARTERLY* #11 for insanity rules).

### **16. THE SLEEPER IN DARKNESS.**

The sound in this large chamber seems strangely muted, and there

is an oppressive aura of waiting. In the center, surrounded by low stone walls and a double row of magical sigils, is a gaping hole in the floor. Light does seem able to enter it.

The hole contains the Sleeper in Darkness. No statistics are included, so that the GM can tailor the creature to suit his campaign and party level. The Sleeper cannot, under any circumstances, escape the hole, but if attacked, it will call every altered minion to its defense. They arrive in waves of 4-6 every 3 to 6 rounds (d4+2), and there can be as many waves as the GM deems suitable. Most minions are level 1 commoners, but the GM should feel free to throw in higher-level minions. Ω



# Feats of Stunning Might and Brilliance

## *Stunt Mechanics in Dragon Age and Beyond*

By Jeff Tidball

When people talk to me about the *Dragon Age Roleplaying Game*, one of the first things they usually say is how much they like its stunt system.

For those who haven't played *Dragon Age*, the Adventure Gaming Engine (AGE) system works like this: Players rolled 3d6 for tests, add various modifiers, and compare the total to a target number. Relatively standard stuff so far.

The twist is that one die, the "dragon die," is a different color. If you succeed on a given test, *and* any dice among the three comes up doubles, then the character generates a number of "stunt points" equal to the result on the dragon die. Players spend points to buy bonus effects from a menu with options like shoving enemy combatants around, dealing extra damage, taking a defensive stance for the rest of the round, and so on.

### EXPANSION OF STUNTS

In the *Dragon Age RPG's* Set 1, only combat tests could generate stunts. In Set 2, both exploration and roleplaying tests will also generate them. (Even though Set 2 isn't out yet, visit the Green Ronin website to download an open playtest document and get more information.)

I want to explore the reasons why I think *Dragon Age's* stunt system has been so well received. I hope you'll find that interesting on its academic merits, but past the purely theoretical, I want to suggest some ways you can apply these ideas to create awesome scene-specific stunts for your own *Dragon Age* campaign, or you could even home-brew a similar set of add-on mechanics for other RPGs.

The chief reason stunts in *Dragon Age*

are so well-liked is because they're fun. Not a puzzler, when you think about it, but past that monolith of the obvious, three primary ingredients contribute to make them so entertaining.

### THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

The first reason is the AGE stunt system gives players more concrete and fine-grained choices about what their characters can do than in a lot of other systems.

In the simplest case, most games allow a character the opportunity to launch a physical attack on his turn. Some systems even allow more finely split options, like choosing between an all-out attack or a carefully aimed strike. In comparison, the *Dragon Age* Set 1 combat stunt menu lists 10 different stunts, each of which offers a distinct tactical option.

If this was the whole of the system, though—10 different options—it would be a disaster. While options are good, too many alternatives leads to paralysis. If every player had to choose between 10 options before each attack in every round of combat, even the simplest encounter would last an entire evening.

### FREQUENCY MATTERS

AGE's solution to this problem points to the second reason its stunt system is fun. The way stunts arise randomly, based on doubles, both cuts down the frequency of the choice-among-ten and shifts that choice to the back side of the die roll. It eliminates about two-thirds of the decision points while simultaneously adding another level of excitement—will there be a stunt?—to the physical act of rolling the dice. Because players can immediately see doubles without a single calculation,

the skittering dice take on the dramatic character of a spinning slot machine.

The frequency with which stunts occur turns out to be just right. They aren't so common that they're a foregone conclusion. Neither are they so rare that they never seem to happen. Each round, one or two player characters are likely to dish out an extra helping of hurt, but at that frequency, the mechanical overhead of choosing and resolving a stunt's effects doesn't slow the game much at all.

### SIMULATION AND IMPACT

The final critical reason why stunts are so much fun is the way they model sword-and-sorcery storytelling as players experience it in books and movies. The epic acts using the AGE system have a cinematic quality because they describe events in narrative terms; armor gives way, an extra blow lands, an enemy must retreat back the way he came.

Contrast this to non-narrative game "events" like, "You take 7 points of damage." AGE stunts are narrative events with concrete mechanical effects. The stunt describes armor failing or an extra blow landing, *and the outcome is reflected mechanically.*

In addition to having mechanical effects, stunts have *different* mechanical effects, which gives each one a distinct and interesting tactical outcome. The narrative aspects are more than fluff, rising above another opportunity for the improv guy in the group to wax poetic about how his slashing blade flashes in the sun.

And again, because stunts don't arise all the time, players hit the sweet spot between, on the one hand, carrying the ball downfield, hurting their enemies,

and winning the battle one swing at a time, and carrying off a few dramatic, spotlight moments on the other.

## HOW TO TURN THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Those are the reasons I think the *Dragon Age* stunt system is a success. I think knowing them is valuable largely from an academic, game designer-y standpoint. In the more practical realm, though, you can use that theoretical understanding to generate scene-specific stunts for your *Dragon Age* game and use the bare bones of AGE stunts to kit-bash a similar system for any RPG.

Published adventures for *Dragon Age* often make use of scene-specific stunts, which simply expand the stunt menu available in those scenes. For example, in “A Bann Too Many,” one of the heroes finds himself in a non-lethal fight to first blood with a brigand. A special stunt called “First Blood” is available in that scene, and a character who uses it can draw blood in a humiliating manner without dealing a life-threatening wound—a cut across the cheek, for example.

Scene-specific stunts are definitely something you should use in your own *Dragon Age* adventures. A good scene-specific stunt should allow or directly address either some unique goal of the scene or some unusual feature of its landscape. Especially given the exploration and roleplaying stunts in *Dragon Age* Set 2, these mechanics can address figurative features of a scene’s “landscape” as well as its literal topography.

For example, a stunt that takes advantage of a particular NPC’s proclivity to some type of behavior makes use of elements in the scene without using a physical component of the setting. Imagine the heroes must interrogate a shopkeeper who witnessed a crime. If, as GM, you’ve decided one of the shopkeeper’s personality traits is generosity, you might create a scene-specific roleplaying stunt that provokes him to offer the player characters a discount on his wares.

When inventing scene-specific stunts, avoid simply minor variations on what already exists. In a combat encounter on

a castle wall, you might be tempted to include a stunt for the heroes to heave their enemies over the edge. But this duplicates Skirmish, which allows a combatant to shove an enemy 2 yards per point spent.

By the same token, if you envision a scene-specific stunt, and you can imagine the players wanting to use it in all kinds of scenes, you’re probably thinking too broadly. It’s hard to imagine heroes wanting to use First Blood in most fights, for example, so it’s a good scene-specific stunt. The generous shopkeeper stunt might be desirable by players for general use, but since it hinges on the NPC in question, it too is a good scene-specific option.

When creating scene-specific stunts, remember that you can never guarantee the generation of stunt points. Because of that, you should never build a scene where a particular stunt is required to advance.

To return to the First Blood example, it’s clear the arrogant enemy can still be defeated—blood can still be drawn—with a bog-standard, white-bread attack that lands and does damage. The stunt simply offers a different, more interesting option. The generous shopkeeper stunt isn’t related to the goal of its scene at all (which is to learn the information), but instead provides a beneficial side effect to a character who pulls it off.

## CREATING YOUR OWN STUNT SYSTEM

If the AGE stunt system sounds appealing but you play a different game most of the time, you might find it rewarding to bolt on a stunt system of your own. Regardless of what system you adapt, keep the reasons *Dragon Age* stunts are fun firmly in mind while you assemble your variant.

You’ll want stunts to occur often enough, but not too often; one-quarter to one-third of the time is a statistically good place to start. If you’re playing some version of d20, for example, you might say that any check that succeeds with a raw roll of 15 or better generates the die result minus 14 stunt points. A roll of 16 generates 2 stunt points, a roll of 18 gives 4 points, and so on.

## A MENU OF AWESOME

Once you’ve determined how often and how many stunt points are generated, you need a menu for players to choose from. The existing *Dragon Age* stunts provide a good place to start. Since they include narrative explanations and the mechanical effects of each stunt, you can just go down that list and adapt the mechanics to your system. Another good option is to sit down with a favorite fantasy movie and note cool things that happen in the fights. Each one is the seed of an awesome stunt.

It’s probably wise to start with a small menu and add new options on the fly if good ideas come up. Generating a massive list of possibilities can paralyze the players with too many choices. Limit yourself to combat stunts at first. You can add roleplaying, exploration, or other classes of stunts once you have some experience with how your house rules impact your game (for an example, see “Chase and Research Stunts” in this issue, page 34).

As a final suggestion, don’t hesitate to play around more broadly if your game system has particular mechanical handles begging to be exploited. Different professions might generate different quantities of stunt points in particular circumstances, or different races might choose stunts from different menus. If you’re running 4th Edition D&D, you might rule that using a daily power automatically generates a few stunt points in addition to its normal effect. (You’d want to be careful with an idea like that, though, because it already violates the idea that stunt points should arise randomly. On the other hand, it’s a great example of the way a game system’s existing mechanics can dovetail with stunt mechanics.) Just play with it, and see where your ideas take you!

At the bottom of it all, the *Dragon Age* RPG’s stunt system is popular with good reason—because it’s fun. Understanding why it’s fun is a good exercise for players, game masters, and game designers alike, and using that understanding to create scene-specific stunts for *Dragon Age*, or to craft unique adaptations for other games, can make any—or every!—session a more exciting experience. I’m not sure what more you could want at the game table! Ω

# Lackeys, Hirelings, and Henchmen

By Tom Allman

*Melchior huffed and puffed around the corner. He knew they would dress him down for lagging behind, but he felt a genuine affection for his employers. He'd even bragged to his family that he had joined the famous Misery's Minions.*

*Melchior skidded to a stop. The dragon, who was devouring Fargrim the Chaste, raised its head to gaze at him. Melchior pushed his helm—a well seasoned dinner pot—higher on his head, smiled weakly, and backed away. No longer hungry, the great wyrm shot a little fire toward Melchior, just to show who was boss.*

*Scooting back up the passageway while shucking his smoldering load of tent and torches, Melchior realized an awful truth: he was going to have to look for another job.*

Every adventuring company needs someone to darn their socks and feed their familiars. Every GM needs someone to sneeze before the surprise round or to lose that map of the Endless Crypt.

If your campaign needs a shot in the arm, consider adding a few well-placed non-player characters. Yes, they are obviously GM tools and catspaws, but they serve a vital purpose: an NPC can give that irresponsible party-splitter someone to take care of or plant a secret plot device with those know-it-all grognards. Think of an adventuring company as roughly equivalent to a party of lower-ranked European nobles – it's not odd to picture them traveling with a group of helpers and hangers-on.

You may think that players would resent having sometimes difficult NPCs thrust upon them, but it's all in the way you present it. One of the best RPG moments for me was when the GM let my paladin have a lackey. This guy followed him around carrying his stuff, polishing his gear, and telling him how cool he was. Since then, each succeeding version of our favorite roleplaying game has minimized the role of these most useful of NPCs.

It's time to bring lackeys back!

## LACKEYS

A lackey does menial tasks or runs errands for another person. In a fantasy setting, this might include a creature that would be considered a monster, but as long as it has two arms and two legs and minimum intelligence, it should suffice. A party might start with one lackey and find him so helpful that they soon have a lackey for each player character. Once they grow too numerous, lackeys may begin to report to a more trusted henchman. Typically, lackeys earn 3-5 sp each day, and their labor includes many of the following tasks.

- Animal feeding and grooming
- Carrying supplies and equipment
- Cooking
- Delivering messages
- Fetching or purchasing supplies
- Gathering food and firewood
- Gathering spell components
- Linkboy (torchbearer)
- Repairing clothing and equipment
- Setting up tents

Lackeys are unarmed and poorly equipped compared to PCs, and their employers are wholly responsible for their safety, care, and feeding. Lackey often speak only when spoken to and dine apart from the party. At no time should lackeys be exposed to danger – but of course, bad things do happen. During combat, lackeys run away by default unless trapped and unable to flee. Even when forced to defend themselves, lackeys provide no combat advantage and do not threaten nearby foes.

Lackeys should have names and a minimal back story. They can interact with their employers but should initiate conversation only rarely. They serve to make the characters' lives easier, not harder, and may also provide some low comic relief. A lackey who survives long enough might grow into a henchman, at the DM's discretion.

## HIRELINGS

A hireling typically has a skill or trade, and the PCs hire him to perform a specific task. Lower-level characters don't usually have a permanent residence. Everything they need they must carry or purchase in their brief visits to civilization. By obtaining hirelings to follow them around, characters can fill in gaps in their party with a cleric or even an artificer.

Hirelings are responsible for their own equipment and food. At no time should hirelings be exposed to danger. Typical hireling jobs and prices per day are outlined in Table 1.

A higher-level adventuring company might have a lair, tower, or castle where they reside. In such cases, the PCs usually require teams of specialists, such as masons and carpenters, and highly-competent individuals to manage their mundane affairs, like a bailiff, caretaker, or steward to look after the place when the party leaves. Certain hirelings can be retained on a monthly basis at a discounted price.

## HENCHMEN

A henchman is a trusted follower or right hand man with practical combat skills and usually a few other useful talents. Experienced characters (and players) know the value of good henchmen. In 3rd Edition and the Pathfinder RPG, the Leadership feat addresses much of their role.

For maximum loyalty, henchmen should receive a hefty sum up front and a percentage of the loot afterwards. Their loyalty is based on the character's Charisma. A PC with a higher Charisma typically pays a lower percentage of loot and has a more loyal henchman in most cases.

Henchman can serve as a buffer between player characters and townsfolk in many situations, allowing the PCs to relax. Loot must be fenced, gear repaired, rumors gathered, provisions restocked, and tributes paid. Henchmen can take care of all this.

It's certainly advisable to protect henchmen, but at some point they may have to face danger. A henchman might act as a page or a squire for a warrior, but not as a mercenary.

Depending on the employer's Charisma, henchmen may prove more or less resistant to the GM's machinations. A party could share expenses for henchmen and lackeys.

Henchmen can be volunteers, or they can be recruited. The PCs can post notices in a literate society, or more likely hire a crier or a recruiter to find candidates. In the worst case, they hire some layabout from a tavern. You can even have a missing PC serve as a henchman for the session.

## The Lackey Lifecycle

If your party has reached 3rd to 5th level, they could have a lackey. Having reached levels 7 to 10, they could attract henchmen. At level 15 and above, they may need hirelings to staff their growing domains.

While you should avoid a huge encampment of people following your party around, a small one might help to exercise the players' roleplaying muscles, and might easily become entertaining elements of a night's play. Their casualty rate might be high (always easier to kill a redshirt), but they can be fun, heroic, cowardly, and greedy, just like PCs.

Most of all, though, they should be a way for the GM to enjoy playing some non-evil, recurring roles without ever threatening

## Table 1: Hireling Costs

Type	Daily Cost (sp)
Alchemist	200
Artificer	200
Bailiff	50
Carpenter	5
Laborer, Unskilled	1
Leather Worker	4
Mason	5
Sage	300
Scribe	5
Sailor	3
Steward	2
Ship Master	200
Tailor	3
Teamster	5
Valet	3

to take the spotlight away from the players and their characters. As always, NPC's should add to the fun and not distract from it. Put a few lackeys into play, and see how it works out! Ω



# Group Concepts

By Mario Podeschi



Getting the gang together to roll dice and kick tail in the name of heroic adventure often involves juggling detailed, intriguing, and compelling characters and stories that don't always mesh very well.

Finding ways to get players together for a game through the haze of real life commitments is often somewhat less work than finding reasons for the interesting, well-developed but very different characters to adventure together.

What do a samurai-esque human spellsworn, a dastardly elven rogue, a pure-hearted half-celestial artificer, and a dwarven fighter out to redeem his dishonored clan all have in common? Well, if you're the GM trying to organize this herd of cats into a unified party embarking on a single, compelling story, the short answer is, "not enough."

The 'meet-in-a-bar', 'fellow travelers', and 'jailbreak' clichés are functional and popular for good reason but hardly the most satisfying or rewarding ways to bring a party together.

## GROUP CONCEPTS

Group concepts are campaign frameworks that provide common starting points for all the characters. They allow for wide character variation guaranteed points of similarity, and give just enough structure to stimulate creativity instead of restricting it. Sometimes called themed games, group concepts allow GMs a clear direction in preparing stories, and give players

material to work with when developing characters.

GMs should announce their intention to use a group concept up front and negotiate with the players the best way to execute it. Perhaps not everyone wants to play a swashbuckling pirate, but there's room in that Professional concept for everything from seductive spy to slippery fence, to royal navy double agent. As long as everyone remains flexible, group concepts provide interesting, satisfying characters without undermining group cooperation.

Consider the group concepts presented below as opportunities rather than restrictions. A game incorporating a theme grounds the players in the game world, provides clear party motivations and shared adventure hooks, and still allows for wide divergence in characters without undermining their cooperation. Presenting these requirements up front may send players in interesting directions they might not have otherwise explored.

This article divides group concepts into four broad types, racial, professional, familial, and quest.

## THE RACIAL CONCEPT

*As a member of the ruling gold caste, young Belud is the de facto leader of his small clan of lost dragonborn warriors. Brood Mother Edrassa tends to the spiritual needs of their band, while the veteran warrior Agamar serves as their defender and war advisor. Together, these three search for the last remnants of their people while struggling to keep their culture intact.*

An obvious but often-overlooked unifying element, parties composed of characters from the same racial or ethnic group have built-in common ground. This does not necessarily mean they all get along, of course, and roleplaying opportunities abound. The racial concept also requires some extra work from the players, since they must maintain or develop aspects of their characters' culture and associated lore.

Whether the characters have an over-arching goal or not, much of the drama and adventure involving parties with this concept revolves around those things which make the race distinct. Their clerics may practice unique rituals or strange variants of accepted rites that lead to conflict with others. If the race has an unusual (either disadvantageous or not) status with others in the game world, the characters may find the simple act of passing through town an adventure in itself. They may find themselves drawn into intrigues or petty grudges as privileged outsiders or easy scapegoats.

Most games assign races special abilities that can lead to skill overlap for a racial concept, yet sometimes redundancy can become a strength all its own. If the entire party resists fire, for example, then patrons will pick them first for exploring a volcanic dungeon. While the players may look for ways to create a diverse skill set, the GM should look for ways to highlight their unique strengths.

Racial concepts include:

- The Halfing Riverfolk:  
Wanderers who live on the



waterways, the riverfolk move cargo, do odd jobs, trade goods and information, or outright steal throughout the world's river towns. The PCs must leave the water to lift a curse, fulfill a bargain, seek revenge, or clear their peoples' name.

- **The Exiled Devils:** Banished from Hell after angering a powerful overseer, these otherworldly PCs must collect 1,000 souls to buy their way home. Each has a special sin they can use to tempt mortals and confound the crusaders hunting them.
- **The Prodigal Bulls:** The children of exiled minotaurs who now live in the North, the PCs must make a choice. They can either navigate lands that regard their people only as corsairs and return to their ancestral home to regain their honor, or they can make their way in the wider world in spite of everything arrayed against them.

## THE PROFESSIONAL CONCEPT

*From his hidden outpost in a dangerous swamp, the 'bandit prince' Chandler leads raid after raid against the tyrannical aristocracy of his homeland. Together with the swamp druid Frectian and the so-called "Black Knight," he will not rest until the nobles are ousted from their ill-earned power.*

The highly versatile professional concept allows for great variety. Defining 'profession' broadly lets a diverse party of heroes share a common goal, and defining it narrowly focuses the game to the point where similar classes represent specialties, such as all-rogue or all-wizard parties. The key is that all the PCs share a common employer or at least job description, and their uniqueness comes in how they approach what they do.

While a lot of the roleplaying conflict may involve disagreements over methods, ethics, or standards, the great majority of the story hooks for this concept will come from the

nature of the PCs' organization. An order of holy warriors may be called to clear haunted ruins, while a duke might assemble a group of wizards to stop the magical assassin stalking him. Players should take some of the responsibility for developing the details of their associations such as rules, best practices, and even some of the goals.

Organizations or employers should provide some measure of benefit to PCs, specialized equipment or a stronghold to call home, for example. This relationship works both ways, of course, and an organization can require PCs to accept unpleasant or impossible tasks or even to work against their own goals. Enemies can attack the PCs through their employers, turning the guildhouse into a smoldering ruin, killing friendly NPCs, and forcing

the players to expend resources on rebuilding the advantages they once took for granted. Also, if the PCs seem more interested in their own projects than their patron's goals, they may find themselves unemployed, blacklisted, or outright hunted.

'Profession' need not mean 'class', but it very easily can. Troubleshooters working for the crown fit this group concept just as well as a party of clerics and paladins belonging to the same temple. In this narrowly-focused version, the PCs must balance skill deficiency with creative problem solving (putting the summoner up front instead of the fighter, for example) while finding ways to play to their strengths. As with a racial concept, the narrower limits of one or two available classes can drive creative



character concepts, and skill overlap can create unique opportunities for adventure, such as a thieves' guild compelled to rob the royal treasury.

Professional concepts include:

- **The Wizard's Enclave:** From Zobeck's Arcane Collegium to the Mharoti Empire's elusive Red Tea Society to a small guild desperately trying to advance the cause of magic in a land that hates and fears wizards, the PCs all belong to an organized group of magic-users, pursuing viscous internal politics and dubious external agendas.
- **Ironcrag Traders:** The cantonal dwarves are sharp traders running organized, profitable companies. Such PCs must do more than simply quest for personal glory and wealth; they must navigate family and clan politics, deal

with foreign agents and powers, and ensure the prosperity of their families and employers back home as much as their own.

- **The Bloody Queen:** The three-masted *Bloody Queen* serves as both a home and a staging ground for the attacks of a vicious group of pirates. As they grow more successful, more and more adversaries arrive to combat the PCs' campaign of larceny and extortion.
- **The House of Golden Lanterns:** Owned by Lady Malisande, one of the most famous courtesans in the Seven Cities, this upscale bordello in Triolo boasts the best accommodations and most exclusive clientele in the city. With contacts and customers at all social levels, Lady Malisande exercises a surprising amount of power to

protect herself and her people—and she loves to meddle in politics.

## THE FILIAL CONCEPT

*A time-honored Shander family tradition holds that the best tests of maturity come on the road, facing danger head-on. Cast out of their home during the Year of the Red Moon, the Shander brothers (and their roguish cousin Welt) will not be given their inheritance until they return with the head of a slain dragon.*

Though generating two related characters happens often enough, creating an entire party related to each other presents interesting possibilities and challenges. There are few bonds more profound (or profoundly dangerous) than family, and in the heat of combat, these connections often translate to acts of epic heroism or betrayal. Literature, from Louis L'Amour to Terry Brooks, has a wealth of adventuring families for inspiration, and this unusual concept can provide some of the most memorable characters and games.

Rich filial concepts contain several traits that most members share. Snow white hair or long noses create physical connections, and skills the family values—if they all learn swordplay from birth or tend to display a talent for magic—add links between otherwise very different characters. Playing to or against these traits is a rich source of roleplaying conflict. These shared connections may serve as story or even campaign hooks; the family might be victims of a hereditary curse they are all trying to lift, for example.

A solid family tree provides the background for this group concept. Rather than the orphans with mysterious births common to individual adventurers, the players can work together to create a vibrant history with quirks, secrets, favorites and black sheep, and interesting ancestors living and dead (or other).

Filial relationships can also bind an evil party together. Crime families with no respect for law or convention may find blood the only bond they can trust. Mistrust and betrayal often undermines such parties, but a strong



blood bond can give them a strength that even their “heroic” adversaries cannot match or break. Of course, treachery is part and parcel of family groups, more so in evil groups, and a character who recognizes no loyalty greater than personal ambition can form the centerpiece of terrific games or even the whole campaign.

Filial concepts include:

- **House Brennerhof:** Broken and shamed three centuries ago, the Brennerhofs have slowly worked their way back into the halls of power among the Grand Duchies, as bankers, tradesmen, soldiers, and power brokers with contacts from Zobeck to the Seven Cities. Such PCs must serve family ambitions before their own and deal with the lingering disgrace attached to their name.
- **The Myrs:** They say that giant’s blood runs through the veins of the Myrs. With three heroes of renown in their family history, members of this clan are expected to perform great deeds as part of the family trade.
- **The Derrigors:** For 10 generations, the eldest Derrigor child—the family’s pride and joy—has entered the priesthood of the Red Goddess, and many have risen to lead it. The other children and cousins have fended for themselves. Now, the eldest Derrigor has vanished, quit the priesthood under mysterious circumstances, and the PCs must investigate to preserve the family honor that has rarely extended to them.
- **The Crowders:** The Crowders share a tenement in the slums, a family of thugs and vagabonds who rely only on themselves. Each is their own kind of scoundrel, ranging from the thuggish older cousin to the sneaky minstrel of an elder sister to the crime boss uncle.

## THE QUEST CONCEPT

*For 30 years, Garitan has struggled for independence and the chance for its native Gesselhast family to rule its people as equals among the Grand Duchies.*

*Now an oracle has revealed the four potent items needed to guarantee the rebels success, and five stalwart patriots have volunteered to retrieve them. Should they succeed, the dreams of generations may finally be fulfilled.*

Quest concepts differ from the, ‘Oh, are you going to raid that dungeon too?’ party set-up in that they originate with outside forces. Any of hundreds of individuals or organizations might contract adventurers to perform some potentially profitable—but likely suicidal—task. *The Lord of the Rings* uses this concept, as the Fellowship is essentially a group of volunteers assembled by Elrond to complete a quest.

That said, there’s room for maneuver here. ‘Quests’ can vary from ridding the land of an evil dragon to stealing the crown jewels for the usurping king. Sometimes, they have more sinister, obfuscated motives. This concept allows GMs fond of intricate plotting (and unafraid of doing plenty of careful preparation) to create twisted stories that leave the players wondering to the very end. Specialists assembled to raid a lucrative caravan may suddenly find themselves holding the High King’s tax revenue—and also his daughter and an employer who has hung them out to dry. Most often, the roleplaying in such games arises from discovering the PCs backgrounds and their reasons for undertaking the quest. If things go sideways in some fashion, these motivations will play huge parts in the party sorting out its mess and figuring out what to do.

Quest concepts include:

- **The Righteous Crusader:** Vasskan Ulfian has a cause, and he’ll burn the world to see it done. He’s looking for a few driven and dedicated (read: fanatical) PCs to help him end slavery in the Nargul Empire, the most lucrative trade in the nation and the economic base of much of the state.
- **Mogresar the Rhymer:** The finest poet the Ironcrag ever produced, Mogresar died over 1,000 years ago, and most of his writings vanished. Now, three original (and fragile) manuscripts have surfaced

## Honorary Members

Called a “foil”, a friendly outsider can share the group’s goals and beliefs without being a conventional member. This allows the players to show off all the character- and world-building they’ve done. By learning about the characters over the course of the campaign, an honorary member can solidify the group’s identity in the game world and draw out plot points and roleplaying opportunities.

Honorary members provide an ‘out’ for the one player who just can’t get a solid character out of the group concept or who is excited at the chance to counterpoint the other characters. The lone elf in the party of half-orcs, for example, makes for interesting roleplaying and provides some useful ability variety. The odd-man-out character should not differ too significantly from the rest of the party to help preserve the unity that a group concept provides, and both players and GMs should remember that such a character’s greatest value is narrative. While the rogue in the party of wizards obviously covers for some missing skills, she should serve as a way to discover (and play out) the enchanter’s tragic backstory, the illusionist’s secret shame, and the diviner’s need for revenge.

in the collection of a Seven Cities merchant prince who will not sell them. The Rodigar Combine (a nationalist organization) will fund any group willing to steal the manuscripts. Anything else the party can carry out, they may keep.

- **The Zobeck Job:** It was supposed to be easy money, grab the sculpture and go straight to the fence. Then it all went wrong. Now the PCs are on the run from the law, shunned in the underworld, and stuck with trying to figure out why their contact arranged to get them pinched while carrying all those brand-new gearforged parts marked with a mysterious crest. Ω

# Getting Ahead

## 7 Magical Heads of Power

By Ben McFarland

Art by Kevin Crossley

Severed heads mean serious business. There's no denying that. Warriors, kings, gangsters and rebels have all used the literal and symbolic power of decapitation. Heads on pikes demonstrate the resolve of the state—or of its foes. Heads over a door can display martial prowess and serve to ward off evil spirits. Whether religious relics, mystical artifacts, or simple trophies, severed heads represent temporal and spiritual power. They show the world someone unafraid to go to any lengths to succeed.

If that description fits your characters, it might be time to advertise.

### TAKING TROPHIES

The most basic reason for carrying a severed head lies in its shock value. Anyone might boast of a victory, and an enemy might well survive the loss of a hand or an ear, but displaying a head ends all debate. Savage armies adorn their banners with heads taken in battle, and some tribes fashion their entire standards out of long stacks of impaled skulls.

The heads of great warlords or champions could even serve as bargaining chips or diplomatic concessions, something adventurers must recover in the service of lords or churches. Less noble groups could undertake such a mission as the price for an *atonement* spell or the focus of a *geas*, possibly to resurrect the head's owner or to deny its captors their famous prize.

### HEADHUNTING

Different from the more martial act of taking heads for trophies, headhunters often see the head as the seat of the soul. By taking a rival's head, a warrior lays claim to some fragment of his foe's strength and power.

The headhunter prepares his prize by removing the skull, using a material like sand to retain the shape, and then wrapping it around a stone or wooden ball to provide a solid core. This process reduces the head to roughly the size of a man's fist. The completed memento paralyzes the enemy's soul and binds it to the head to keep disease and poor harvests away from the owner. Greater rivals provide better protection and prevent enemy spirits from harassing one's ancestors in the afterlife.

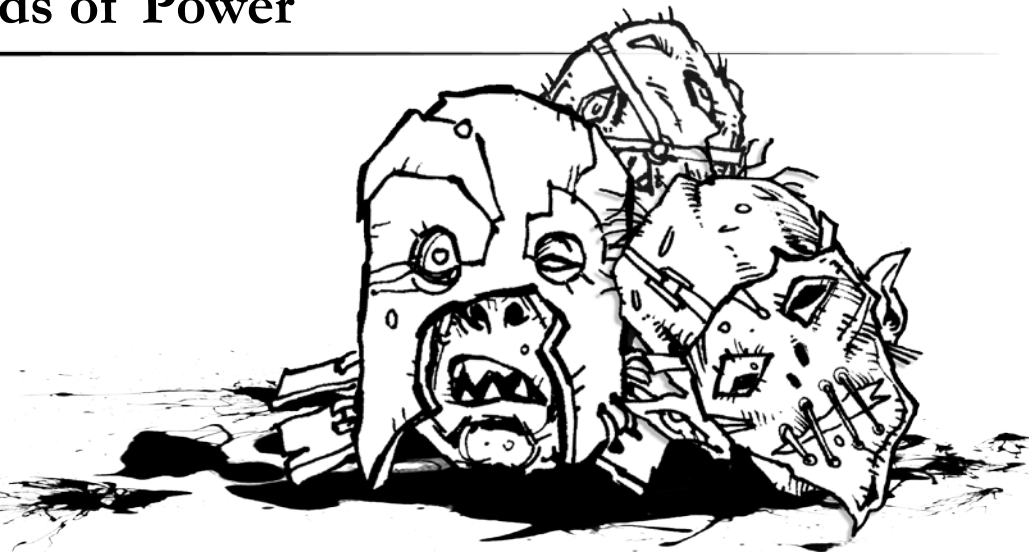
### CREATING MAGICAL HEADS

Common in a few distant regions, some tribes revel in headhunting and focus their communities on the art of making shrunken heads.

#### FEAT—CRAFT SHRUNKEN HEAD

**Requirement:** Heal 5 ranks

**Benefit:** You know the *victor's spoils* incantation (see below). You may be assisted in the incantation by a number of untrained individuals



equal two plus your Charisma bonus (minimum two). These individuals may use the aid another action when you make skill checks for the *victor's spoils* incantation and only that incantation.

#### INCANTATION: VICTOR'S SPOILS

They danced around the fire, chanting and taking turns working on the grisly remains on the table. I looked closer, to glimpse what drove them to such a frenzy, and fell back aghast when I recognized the head of one of my companions.

**School** evocation, necromancy;  
**Effective Level** 5th

**Skill Check** Craft (Leatherworking)  
DC 25, 4 successes, Heal DC 25, 4 successes; 1 check per hour

**Casting Time** 8 hours, done on the first night of the first full moon after killing the target.

**Components** F, M, S, V

**Focus**—The severed head captured by the primary performer.

**Material Components**—Potent unguents and oils, specially prepared, polished stones and needles (worth at least 500 gp).

**Secondary Casters**—Up to and no more than 10

**Range** touch

**Target** Special; see below

**Duration** 1 plus 1 day per target's HD

**Saving Throw** Will negates; **SR** Yes

**Backlash** 4d6 damage, performer exhausted (affects secondary performers)

You perform a ritual to create a shrunken head and bind the victim's soul to the fetish while slowly consuming its life force to strengthen you. Performers may increase the DC of the skill checks by up to +5, but this applies to all skill checks and must be declared before rolling any of them.

After eight hours of grueling preparation, the GM rolls a Will save with DC 16 plus performer's Charisma bonus plus modifiers plus the amount performers increased the skill checks (maximum +5). If the spirit makes this save, the ritual fails and cannot be repeated with this head.

If the spirit fails its saving throw, the incantation creates a token providing an insight bonus to all saving throws equal to +1 per 3 HD of the originating creature (max +3). This lasts for 1 day plus 1 day/HD of the original creature. Only a *true resurrection* can revive a target of this incantation.

## RELIGIOUS RELICS

Some religions keep fragments of holy men and women, including their heads, as relics to venerate their best qualities. Whether kept magically fresh or mundanely preserved, these heads can serve many purposes, from simple objects of religious awe to repositories of wisdom for the devout—or in a darker vein, as secret masters of shadowy cults. One story claims a pious king's severed head told stories for seven years and thus sustained his shipwrecked companions without food or drink until rescue arrived. Others claim healing powers or prophecy.

Whatever role works in your games, severed heads offer a visceral and useful reminder of the adventurers' bloody business and the steep price for drawing steel. The following examples might serve as monstrous prizes and grim trophies for the victors.

### BELT OF THE DEEP ONES

**Aura** moderate evocation; **CL** 5th  
**Slot** belt; **Price** 2,400, 3,600, 4,800, 6,000 gp; **Weight** 25 lbs.

### DESCRIPTION

This heavy leather and wire belt has between two and five skum heads bound to it, their fishy mouths and large eyes still silently moving. A long copper cable extends from its buckle to a 30-inch glass rod capped with a silver globe.

Three times per day, the wearer may speak the command word (standard action, no attacks of opportunity) to generate a 30-ft. stroke of lightning. Anyone along this line suffers 1d6 hp electrical damage per head (DC 15 Reflex save for half damage). Attackers may target heads on the belt with called shots. Each head has 10 hp.

### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, Craft (glassblower), *shocking grasp*; **Cost** 1,200 gp (2 heads), 1,800 gp (3 heads), 2,400 gp (4 heads), 3,000 gp (5 heads)

### HEAD OF THE DEFIANT ARCHON

**Aura** minor divination and moderate enchantment; **CL** 7th

**SLOT** NONE; **PRICE** 65,000 GP; **WEIGHT** 7 LBS.

### DESCRIPTION

The tawny fur of this hound archon has seen better days, but the head itself remains perpetually fresh and without a hint of rot. The neck oozes an emerald ichor, and its unblinking, multicolored eyes emit a faint, pearly light. The air around the bearer of the head smells faintly of lilies.

Twice per day (standard action, provokes attacks of opportunity), the bearer can command a 10-ft. aura to emanate from the head. For the next 6 rounds, any hostile creature within the aura must succeed on a DC 16 Will save or suffer a -2 penalty to attacks, AC, and saves for 24 hours or until they successfully hit the head's bearer. When this ability is active, the bearer's eyes glow like fire-opals.

A creature that has resisted or broken the effect cannot suffer it again from the same head for 24 hours.

The head's bearer can speak with any intelligent creature as though using a *tongues* spell. This ability is always active.

### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *prayer*, *tongues*; **Cost** 32,500 gp

### HEAD OF CONNING DARKNESS

**Aura** moderate necromancy and minor transmutation; **CL** 7th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 60,000 gp; **Weight** 7 lbs.

### DESCRIPTION

This decapitated head of a bearded devil often hangs upside down from the tangled plait of tendrils on its chin. The wound exudes a dark and oily blood, and its eyes still hold the dim glow of dying embers. The bearer of the head always carries the unmistakably pungent aroma of sulfur.

Twice per day (as a swift action, no attacks of opportunity) the bearer may imbue his next attack with the effects of a *contagion* spell (DC 17), inflicting devil chills on the target with a hit and a failed saving throw. (See *Pathfinder Bestiary*, pg. 73, for details on devil chills.)

Once invoked, this effect remains on the attacker's weapon until his next successful hit. The bearer's weapon smolders with a greasy black smoke while this effect is active.

The head's bearer may see unhindered in any form of darkness. This ability is always active.

### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *contagion*, *deeper darkness*; **Cost** 30,000 gp

### TROPHY OF THE PEREGRINE HARPY

**Aura** minor enchantment; **CL** 5th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 11,500 gp; **Weight** 5 lbs.

### DESCRIPTION

This well-preserved, feathered head of a harpy with hawk-like markings is slung in a net of heavy twine.



The mouth hangs open, and the eyes seem to have rolled back. The head's bearer always smells faintly of scented oils or perfumes.

This trophy grants the bearer a +2 bonus to Will saves. Once per day, by plucking a feather from the scalp (standard action, no attacks of opportunity), the bearer may command the head to sing.

The bearer is immune to this song, but all others within 30 ft. must succeed on a DC 16 Will save or be forced to move toward the trophy head by the most direct path available. Creatures moving into dangerous areas, such as through a fire, receive a second saving throw to end the effect before moving into peril. Creatures will not willingly take suicidal paths, such as off cliffs, but they automatically fail to notice concealed or magically-disguised hazards.

Affected creatures may take no actions other than to defend themselves. Attacked creatures gain another saving throw after the attack. A victim within 5 ft. of the head simply stands and offers no resistance to attacks (but still gains the additional saving throw if attacked). The head sings for 5 rounds, and the effect continues for 1 round thereafter. This is a sonic, mind-affecting charm effect.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *resistance, suggestion*; **Cost** 5,750 gp.

#### VISAGE OF THE GORGON'S SISTER

**Aura** moderate abjuration; **CL** 7th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 64,000 gp; **Weight** 7 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

Kept in a heavy, crimson sack, this

is the severed head of a medusa. Its viper hair still occasionally writhes to create small motions within the velvet bag, especially in the presence of music. The gruesome item never rots, though the blood congeals, turning to stone and creating a small pile of gravel at the bottom of the bag. The faint essence of sandalwood accompanies the bearer of this head.

The bearer gains a +2 competence bonus to Perception checks and cannot be flanked. Twice per day, when drawn from the sack and brandished (full round action), the *stolen visage* forces all creatures in a 30-ft. cone to make a DC 16 Fortitude save or turn to stone permanently.

The bearer's eyes change to show vertical irises and a yellowish tinge while carrying this item.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, 5 ranks in Perception, Dodge, *guidance, flesh to stone*; **Cost** 32,500 gp

#### HEAD OF THE JEALOUS NAGA

**Aura** moderate abjuration; **CL** 9th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 20,000 gp; **Weight** 7 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

Flared spines and thick cartilage surround the bronze wire stitching of this shrunken but recognizable head of a dark naga. The metal contrasts with the preserved port wine-colored hide, wrapping around the grapefruit-sized sphere to become a heavy braid for hanging or carrying the token. Chips of onyx replace the eyes and fangs, and the mouth is sewn shut with more wire. The fine scales offer the barest give while the creature's powdered bone within

grinds slightly to the touch.

The bearer of this item may *detect thoughts* (Will DC 18 negates) at will as the spell. The bearer is always immune to *detect thoughts*, *discern lies*, and any attempt to magically discern alignment.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *detect thoughts, nondetection*; **Cost** 10,000 gp

#### HEAD OF THE HUNTING ONI

**Aura** moderate abjuration; **CL** 9th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 40,000 gp; **Weight** 7 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

This grimacing head of pale, blue-grey skin has been reduced to an irregular sphere roughly 8 inches across. Packed with volcanic sand, it hangs from a strong wire netting festooned with the previous owner's now-oversized fangs and horns. The eyes and mouth are sewn shut, while the nose is sealed with wax or tar. The creature's thick, ivory-colored topknot is woven up into the neck of the netting, making the head appear to hang simply by its hair. The grisly item carries the subtle aroma of poppies.

Once per day (standard action, provokes attacks of opportunity), the bearer of the head may cast *cone of cold* as a spell-like ability (CL 9). Carrying the head provides the wearer with fast healing 5 (acid or fire). Fire or acid damage cannot be healed by this power. It always remains active while the head is carried.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *cone of cold, vampiric touch*; **Cost** 20,000 gp

Ω

by Stan!

## Bolt & Quiver



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# It's Not Supposed to End This Way

## 6 Plot-Friendly Alternatives to Character Death

by Scott A. Murray

Art by Darren Calvert

**D**eath is thrilling.

The risk of death sets the stakes for all adventuring, and the thrill of survival can rank with treasure and experience as one of the profession's greatest rewards. The threat of death demands the utmost wisdom, determination, and courage for mortal men and women to seize justice, treasure, and glory and ultimately become heroes.

A character's death, however, can make for unhappy individual players, a disrupted adventuring group, and might doom story-driven campaigns. The risk of death is one of the essential elements of conflict in fantasy adventure games, but players and GMs alike often find the demise of player characters anticlimactic and burdensome rather than interesting. The more time players have invested in the character and GMs in the story only intensifies the problem.

When a hero would normally die, the GM may rule that he or she instead suffers one of the six alternatives described below. Each choice enables a GM to infuse her game with narrative-friendly risks and consequences without mitigating the dramatic tension normally posed by death.



### MORTAL WOUND

Adventurers do not always perish from their wounds. Sometimes, a hero suffers a grievous injury that leaves him debilitated and dishonored but not dead.

- The character's wound results in a permanent physical disability. This impairment should reflect the injury and should inconvenience the adventurer without rendering him or her unplayable. A speed-reducing limp, an inability to use bows or shields from damaged arms, or an increased susceptibility to disease may work well.
- While the PC has made a complete recovery, word of the infirmity or failure has

spread, potentially damaging his reputation and embarrassing the party's allies and benefactors. For especially prominent characters, the suggestion of weakness may weaken alliances, exacerbate political tensions, and drive away potential followers. The infirmity may be permanent or may take months to heal, even with magical aid.

### TRAUMATIC MEMORY

Though cuts heal, bones set, and welts fade, the experience of standing at death's door can exact a lasting emotional toll. The following effects shine when inflicted upon a skilled and enthusiastic roleplayer.



- The character develops an intense fear of that which wounded her. A thief nearly crushed by a falling block might eyeball the ceiling of every corridor, freezing up when the stonework groans with age. A ranger brought down by a giant spider's poison may shrink from vermin great and small. In any case, the GM should apply stiff penalties and conditions as appropriate, such as penalties to skill checks involving concentration and negatives to important rolls from lack of sleep, respectively, in the above examples. Major threats in the category the character fears might even impose a saving throw with difficulty set by the GM depending on the situation's similarity to cause of the character's near-death experience.
- Shaken by the near-death experience, such characters become listless. The specter of their own mortality weakens their resolve. Martial heroes often let their physical condition soften. Magic-users let their minds cloud with doubt. Divine adventurers grow estranged from their deity or lose the courage to fearlessly work their god's will. As above, the GM should inflict appropriate penalties or conditions such as reduced spells, negative attack modifiers, or diminished class abilities. The character might recover only after certain conditions are met, such as completing a lengthy quest, undertaking a pilgrimage, or mentoring a new student of the arcane arts.

### DIVINE BARGAIN

Powerful beings good and evil have a vested interest in the fate of mortals. Gods and goddesses, devils, and other planar creatures often barter with the souls of the recently deceased, trading new life for servitude.

- The character's patron deity greets him in the afterlife, explaining

that he still has work to do in the mortal. The hero is provided with a second chance at life if he undertakes a quest that serving the deity's aims. If he refuses the task, abandons it, or fails, death claims him immediately.

- A malevolent entity approaches the character somewhere between the threshold of death and the afterlife. In exchange for resurrection and renewed power, the entity demands that the hero perform a nefarious deed that runs counter to his convictions.

### OTHERWORLDLY POSSESSION

Often a mortal's soul wanders for a time before entering the afterlife. This sojourn leaves the body vulnerable to possession by spirits seeking a living form with which to pursue their goals.

- An evil spirit enters the character's body before her comrades or another force can return her soul. While the hero can marshal the power to resist the spirit, she succumbs on occasion, lashing out at allies and sabotaging the party's strategies. If not exorcized, it eventually takes over the resurrected hero.
- A benign spirit suffuses the body of a revived adventurer, either returning with the soul or using its own energy to sustain the character's life. It does no harm – in fact, it may offer a boon – but the spirit pleads with the party to help it complete an important task. If the adventurers refuse or fail, the spirit flees, perhaps absconding with part of the character's essence or leaving her soul to its fate. The soulless body is entirely vacant; the other party members must find the missing comrade's soul. Which leads to...

### TRAPPED SOUL

In rare and terrible instances, something apprehends the spirit during its exodus from the body. While often the act of a dark power, this can also result from

strange, pervasive magic. Retrieving a trapped soul should be a risky and resource-intensive endeavor; however, such adventures should take only a few sessions unless intended as the springboard for a new story arc.

- A powerful outsider, perhaps one with a connection to or interest in the party's past deeds, holds the character's soul for a high ransom or tosses it into tormented servitude straightaway.
- A fluke of magic imprisons the character's spirit in a nearby artifact, such as a lich's phylactery. To free their companion, the party must venture into a dangerous territory (perhaps politically or socially instead of just physically) and destroy the artifact – and whoever might be guarding it.

### FATE, TEMPTED

Turns out, it *was* supposed to end this way. Through a strange twist of luck, the hero cheats death, but the forces of fate seek to put right the mistake. None escape their destiny.

- Unfortunate 'accidents' follow the character wherever she goes and put the entire party at risk. Massive pillars tumble toward the hero as if pushed, stray arrows seem drawn to her exposed flesh, and friendly magic fails in spectacular and dangerous ways near her. The mishaps continue, perhaps striking down or driving off friends and allies, until the cursed adventurer earns a divine pardon or destiny catches up with her.
- Merciless agents of the god or goddess of fate hunt the character. They appear at the most inopportune of times to catch her in moments of vulnerability or conflict. For every servant defeated or eluded, fate dispatches stronger minions in greater numbers. Ω

# Ask the Kobold

## *The Barking Kind of Party Animal*

By Skip Williams

Art by Darren Calvert

**What stats does a guard dog from the equipment list have? I think it should use the stats for a riding dog; however, my DM says it should be for a regular dog. All the guard dogs I've ever seen in life are pretty big dogs who can fight, but I haven't found anything to back up my claim. So right now, my fighter has a small dog who can yip and yap when someone comes near our camp, but not much else.**

**What can a guard dog do? How does it fight? Can it wear armor?**

A guard dog, priced at 25 gp, is a "regular" dog (1 Hit Die); a riding dog (2 HD) costs 150 gp.

Though the rules don't actually say so, most "guard dogs" are trained for the general purpose of guarding. (It's possible to find dogs trained for other purposes.) An animal trained for guarding knows these four tricks: attack, defend, down, and guard. A dog has an Intelligence score of 2, so it can learn two more tricks (see the Handle Animal skill description).

The dog's collection of tricks broadly defines what it can do on your behalf, so it's worth taking a look at what each trick allows the dog to do and how you get the dog to execute the trick.

### ATTACK

The animal will attack, or cease to attack, a creature it perceives as an enemy. In most cases, this means the closest enemy creature unless you point out another enemy. You can designate an enemy as part of the action you use to make the animal attack, usually by pointing with a finger.

Animals don't react well to unusual or unnatural creatures and generally attack only humanoids, monstrous humanoids, giants, or other animals. For the animal to attack creatures of all kinds, it must learn an additional trick. (The rules don't name this trick; you could call it "attack any creature" or "attack monsters.")

The attacking animal moves directly toward the foe it targets and uses its natural weapons as soon as the foe comes within the animal's reach.

Once the animal starts attacking, it keeps fighting until killed, the foe falls, or you call it off (with the down or attack tricks). The rules say an injury can force an attacking creature to break off combat, but does not define "injury." The DM will have to decide if the animal retreats.

To determine this with a dice roll, have the attacking animal make a Will save when its hit points fall below some predetermined threshold, such as 50% or 25%. Set the DC at 10 plus the damage inflicted on the animal during the round when its hit points fell below the threshold.

If the first saving throw succeeds, have the animal make a new saving throw each time it suffers damage thereafter. Increase the DC by a cumulative +2 each time the animal takes damage and by a further +2 if the animal cannot see, smell, or hear its owner.



### DEFEND

The animal fights anyone who attacks you or another creature you designate. If a foe is already attacking, a defending animal attacks the closest attacker unless you direct it to another target.

If no foe is attacking, the animal becomes ready to attack, and it may growl in warning to anyone who approaches the defended creature. Effectively, the animal uses the ready action to attack anyone who attacks the defended creature, getting in the first bite.

A defending animal fights until no one is attacking the defended creature, until you order it off, or until it is driven away as described under the attack trick. An animal using this trick will not defend a subject against creatures it normally would not attack, also as described under the attack trick.

## DOWN

The animal breaks off combat, backs down from a confrontation, or otherwise leaves what it's doing and withdraws. The animal does not necessarily come to you as part of this trick. The DM decides how far the animal withdraws and how it does so. In general, it will take at least a 5-foot step away from whatever was holding its interest and may use the withdraw action when appropriate.

## GUARD

The animal stays where it is and prevents others from approaching. In general, this works like the defend trick, except that the animal guards its current location instead of another creature.

No matter what trick is in play, it takes a move action and a Handle Animal check to command an animal to use a trick. If you have the animal companion class feature, you generally can use Handle Animal on your animal companion as a free action.

Handle Animal technically requires training in the skill. Nevertheless, I recommend you allow untrained checks to command an animal to use a trick it already knows.

The rules don't mention armor proficiency for trained fighting animals. I recommend giving medium armor proficiency for an animal that knows the attack, defend, or guard tricks, and heavy armor proficiency if the animal has been trained for the combat riding general purpose or if it has learned the attack monsters trick.

### Can my guard dog use magic items? Could it wear a ring or an earring?

Sure, a guard dog can use magic items, within some limits.

Because it's an animal with an Intelligence score of 2, a dog cannot use any items requiring command words, spell completion, or spell triggers. Many use-activated items are beyond what a dog can handle (for example, most magical weapons or tools). Continuously functioning items

would work fine for a dog.

A dog or other four-legged animal has pretty much the same item slots as a human. Magic items generally shrink or grow to fit a user of any size, so there's no reason most items you find could not fit on your dog. Armor is often built for specific body types, so your dog probably could wear barding made for a quadruped of similar size, but not your cast off armor. Here's a quick rundown of where the standard item slots fall on a canine body.

- **Armor:** Armor for a dog resembles barding for a horse; it covers the dog's back, chest, flanks, neck, head, and upper limbs.
- **Belt:** A dog can wear a belt strapped over its back and belly, behind the ribcage.
- **Body:** A robe or vestment can be draped over a dog's back and fasted under the chest and belly.
- **Chest:** A dog could wear a mantle, shirt, or vest wrapped over the front of its body, over the ribcage.
- **Eyes:** A dog can wear eyes, glasses, or goggles fitted over its head and eyes.
- **Feet:** A dog can wear boots, shoes, or slippers on its back feet.
- **Hands:** Gauntlets or gloves go on a dog's front feet.
- **Head:** A dog can wear a circlet, crown, hat, helm, or mask on top of its head. Earrings also go in the head slot.
- **Headband:** A phylactery or headband also needs to go on top of a dog's head. In this case, it's acceptable to have two items here, such as a hat and a headband.
- **Neck:** An amulet, brooch, medallion, necklace, periapt, or scarab will fit around a dog's neck.
- **Ring:** A dog could wear a ring on each front foot (over a toe).
- **Shield:** A dog or other quadruped has no way to employ a shield.
- **Shoulders:** A cape or cloak could fit over a dog's back, over the front legs.
- **Wrist:** A dog can wear a bracer or bracelet on its lower foreleg. Ω

## Party Animals

Sooner or later, just about every party picks up an animal or a whole collection of animals. Most often, a party will employ mounts or pack animals; doing so can increase a party's carrying capacity and cross-country speed, which can greatly expand its chances of success in many endeavors.

An animal of any kind of is a big responsibility for any character. The animal needs care and feeding, and it might not always do what the character wants. Some animals (such as most farm animals) have no place with an adventuring party.

An animal not trained for combat is likely to prove inconvenient at best. It tends to squeal or bolt with fright at the most inopportune times, and it's likely to draw unwanted attention from predators looking for an easy meal. Taking an inappropriate animal on an adventure is pretty much giving your DM a free pass to bedevil you with the animal's antics.

Even a properly trained animal requires some effort from a character before it does anything useful. Remember that it takes a move action to command an animal to perform a trick it knows. This is often a situation in which hirelings (see pg. 56) can come in handy.

The DM may decide that an animal will sometimes act on its own, especially when it has performed a trick many times and comes to know what the owner expects. (A badly-treated animal probably won't care what its owner expects.) For example, a fighting animal may follow its owner into combat and fight alongside the character without any prompting once it has been through a few combats. When in doubt, call for a Handle Animal check (and a move action).

Some animals, such as dogs, have an instinct for fighting in packs and may maneuver to flank foes when they can. Others, such as pet birds or horses, may lack this instinct and will not move to flank unless commanded to. Such animals do provide a combat advantage, but PCs have to work for it.

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# COMING NEXT ISSUE

We expect double dragons! And triple treasures! Yes, our warping of time and page count is beyond belief in the amazing Summer spectacular issue!

While there's never any guarantees when it comes to packing the biggest issue of the year, here's a few things you might see next issue... If the stars are right.:

## Gifts of Faith

The Dragon Age RPG has three classes, and none of them are named "Eric the Cleric". So how do you handle religion and faith in the AGE System? One of the Ronin might have some ideas brewing.

## Dragon Hunters of Illyria

The Dragon Empire is right on Illyria's border, so the Grand Duchy has learned to handle draconic foes. But how do you best kill a dragon? Very, very carefully.

## Engines of Triumph

Siege engines and ballista have a long history in fantasy games, and now's the time to stat them up for a new generation! Designer Matt James builds on the engines in *Soldiers of Fortune* to present more siege engines and how to use them in adventures: blam, boom, POW!

Plus we might have gnomish cavaliers, advice from Skip Williams and Monte Cook, new drakes and dragons, and a second sneak peek of the Midgard campaign setting. All coming next time so—ride on, kobold editors, ride!



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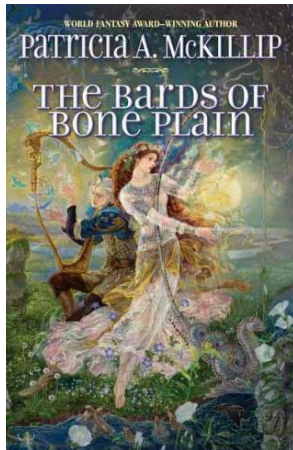
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# Book Reviews

By Ben McFarland, Caoimhe Ora Snow, and Pierce Watters



## THE BARDS OF BONE PLAIN

Patricia A. McKillip

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In this sort-of-maybe-steampunk-y world exists a school for bards. Here Phelan Cle studies, teaches, and looks for an easy way out of this career chosen by his father. Jonah Cle, Phelan's father, is a drunk, a genius, and an expert in antiquities who directs digs for ancient things all around the city of Caerau. Princess Phoebe, daughter of King Lucien, drives a steam-powered car and spends her days digging with Jonah Cle.

Centuries ago, King Oroh conquered the lands of the five kingdoms which became the nation of Belden, and his bard Declan commandeered the tower around which the city of Caerau grew. Here Declan created the most famous bard school in Belden, where Phelan now studies.

A mysterious stranger appears, a bard named Kelda who serves Lord Grishold. Dark, beautiful, and frightening, she sings the old songs and poems of the land itself and plays an ancient harp adorned with the symbols of a forgotten language.

When she meets Quennel, the Royal Bard, he nearly chokes on a fishbone and declares his immediate retirement.

Quennel's retirement calls for a competition to choose a new Royal Bard, and some fear that Kelda will win, and nothing good will come of it. Among the best bards in Belden opposing Kelda, is Zoe Wren, student-teacher and lifelong friend to Phelan. Only Zoe's sweet voice might stand in the way of Kelda's triumph.

The Bards of Bone Plain is a dual tale of bards and magic. As we read the story of Phelan and Jonah and Zoe and Kelda, we also learn the story of the original school and of Declan and his greatest pupil, Nairn. Nairn also faced a dark and powerful stranger, called Welkin, in a battle of bards and now must forever wander the earth bereft of his music.

This novel is pure McKillip. The prose flows like the poetry and the songs it describes, and the reader is captivated by the characters as the story strides inevitably toward the final competition. If you love fantasy, read this book. If you love bards read this book. Highly recommended.

By Pierce Watters

The D&D Gamma World game, released last fall, updates the original game from the late 1970s with modern rules and a new explanation for the post-apocalyptic world of Gamma Terra (not a spoiler: the Large Hadron Collider did it).

"Sooner Dead" by Mel Odom is the first of several novels published by Wizards of the Coast based on the new version of the game – and it's the first true novel set in Gamma World (earlier prose tie-ins were choose-your-own-adventure books).

Set in a Gamma World version of



## SOONER DEAD

Mel Odom

Wizards of the Coast  
Paperback  
320 pages  
\$7.99

Odom's home state of Oklahoma, "Sooner Dead" is the story of two mutant mercenaries and their mission to guard a scientific expedition from New Mexico, where civilization is apparently less broken.

Hella, the main character, is a young, nanite-powered redhead who can form her hands into guns. Her partner and surrogate big brother Stampede is a humanoid bison with mysterious seismic powers. They're hired by the unpleasant Klein Pardot, the head scientist on a team trying to investigate strange portals from other worlds. Along the way they encounter mutated stalking beasts, strange tentacle monsters that carry off women in the dead of night, and armed gangs of roving armadillos on motorcycles.

If that sounds like your average madcap Gamma World session, you may be disappointed to find that the humorous style found in the game is simply not present in "Sooner Dead," which plays everything straight.

Discarding the trademark zaniness

of Gamma Terra is an odd choice, harkening back to the poorly-received sixth edition of Gamma World. While “Sooner Dead” does use the current edition’s timeline and Large Hadron Collider experiment, that’s almost all that that is distinctively from Gamma World.

Reality blips (and Alpha Fluxes) are unknown in this Gamma Oklahoma; instead, alien beings fall randomly through rifts – er, ripples – in space. The main characters all use normal, high-tech, military grade equipment and none of the silly parking-meter weapons and street-sign armor found in D&D Gamma World. Gone too are the funny place names; Texas is just “Texas,” New Mexico is just “New Mexico.”

It’s not that the book is poorly written – it works well and is an enjoyable read, despite a rather predictable ending telegraphed halfway through. Hella and Stampede have a good professional and personal chemistry, and side characters such as a four-armed talking ape, an extended human family, and a pair of alien presences, are presented well.

Anyone hoping for the kind of hilarity that often ensues in a D&D Gamma World session, however, might wonder why these people are so gosh-darn serious all the time, and why they never seem to dig up old Omega Tech or Ancient Junk. The difference in tone is jarring and doesn’t seem an effective way of cross-promoting products between the gaming and novel lines. “Sooner Dead,” while not a good introduction to the current version of Gamma Terra, was still an enjoyable read.

Review by Caoimhe Ora Snow

In *Plague of Shadows*, Howard Andrew Jones presents a classic tale of companions entering dangerous ruins to save a man they respect. However, this story twists the bones of what could be another forgettable adventure and clothes them in the flesh of engaging character interactions running the gamut through discovery, betrayal, love, loss, and loyalty. This skillfully executed tale never becomes a stale recounting of someone’s roleplaying sessions and adeptly conceals the influence of game mechanics.



### **PLAGUE OF SHADOWS**

**Howard Andrew Jones**

Paizo Publishing

Paperback

350 pages

\$7.99

Set in Paizo’s world of Golarion, *Plague of Shadows* showcases Taldor’s northwestern frontier before continuing into darkly revolution-obsessed Galt and then plunging into the Vale of Shadows. Elyana, the primary character, is an elf raised by humans. This creates a viewpoint both familiar and alien as she occasionally exposes the reader to her insights on the comparatively short-lived humans she counts as friends and allies.

Jones’s interesting and nuanced characters provide sincere dialogue as Elyana leads an old friend, a young baron, the baron’s half-orc guard captain, and a human court wizard on a race against time to recover a lost artifact and save the old, bedridden baron from a wasting curse. The setting itself provides several variations on the usual fantasy tropes which help keep the story clever and fresh. The flashbacks reveals moments of backstory which might have been awkward as dialogue.

There’s a danger in novels like *Plague of Shadows* — a trap of easy comfort, where the author could simply allow us to fill in details with established fantasy clichés. It’s a hazard Jones avoids quite capably by providing a fast-paced romp which doesn’t linger on stereotypes but delivers excitement. This is the third standalone novel in the Pathfinder Tales library, and it has me eagerly looking forward to the next.

Review by Ben McFarland Ω

## BLACK AND READ

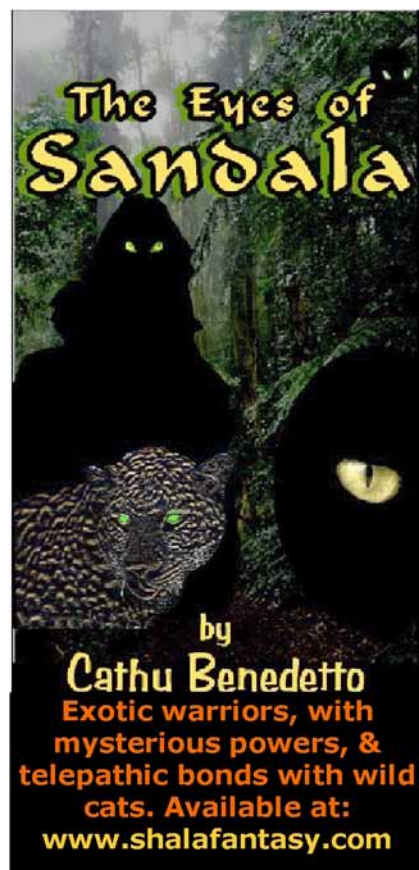
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# Seven Secrets of the Seven Cities

By Wolfgang Baur  
Art by Olaus Magnus

When the last elvish Emperor of Valera rode out of that great city and onto the Fey Road with all his shining retinue, never to return, the land was suddenly in the hands of the humans who had been little more than workers and servants to their Valeran masters. Peace lasted only a few days. The struggle to seize the throne swept the realm, and warfare in one form or another has consumed the peninsula's cities ever since.

## RED RICHES

The scarlet dye of Friula is worth a great deal more than gold to worshippers of Mavros, god of war. His cloaks serve as a uniform among the officers of the Valeran legions. Fortunately for adventurers, Friula ships chests of scarlet to all corners of the Seven Cities and beyond, and they are among the most valuable of treasures; easy to take as plunder and easy to sell at the market, no questions asked.

## ELVISH MAGIC

The abandoned empire stretches over vast distances, from the city of Thorn in the north to the cave arena of Capleon in the south. Its magical roads, soaring towers, and distinctive style of highly-mobile, arcane warfare are all unique Valeran elements that no successor has successfully repeated, though not for lack of trying.

Now, the scholars of Friula and the diggers in the layers of the Old City in Valera alike seek to recover elvish tools, wands, and documents in hopes of unlocking that high magic. So far, they have

met with limited success, but the chance of a priceless discovery increases daily.

## THE MERCENARY COMPANIES

From dwarven crossbowmen and Triolan corsairs, to Valeran centaur companies and the kobold skirmishers of Kammae, the Seven Cities boast a dazzling variety of mercenary styles and races. There's a lot of money to be made in war, even when that war is somewhat formalized. The rump empire of Valera defends its claims against all comers. The overfilled granaries of Trombei lead its Commune to think they can conquer their neighbors with just one grand sweep. Only the Oracle of the Moon Goddess at Kammae wants nothing to do with the fanatical worship of Mavros, god of war.

## A CULT OF WAR

War is institutionalized and respected in the Seven Cities; martial success is divinely approved by Mavros, and his priests often serve as officers in the armies of Trombei, Valera, Capleon, and Melana. The laws of war are relatively clear: do not attack women and children, ransom captives back to their liege lords or families, and do not kill prisoners out of hand. Adventurers visiting the Seven Cities can always find work as mercenary scouts, elite night raiders, or similar occupations.

## THE ORACLE AND HER BLOODHOUNDS

The Inquisitors of Kammae-Straboli serve the Oracle of the Moon Goddess, but they are not

above farming out work. Catching a dangerous fugitive and returning him for justice is an excellent way to win the Oracle's favor; and perhaps gain an audience that foretells an adventurer's future.

## THE SULTANA'S GAMBIT

The whispers are very quiet in the polyglot Barony of Capleon, where southern traders mix with Mhatori dragonkin and the minotaurs. A group called the Red Tea Society has surfaced in Capleon in recent years, brought in from the East. They are a dangerous mix of traders, spies, and sorcerers, and most of the natives resent their right to trade at all. The baron protects them for reasons of his own, granting safe passage to the Sultana's people throughout Capleon.

## THE GREAT LIBRARY

The Seven Cities are better known for steel than ink, but scholars are valued as well: they understand politics and diplomacy, the gentle arts of getting your enemies to do what you want without spending a fortune on mercenaries. One library, though, seems to offer more than knowledge to certain visitors. The library is connected by portals or secret paths to other places, other planes, and even realms of knowledge far beyond Midgard. The Friulan Scholars are a clever breed, to survive the dangers of their own infinite library. Ω



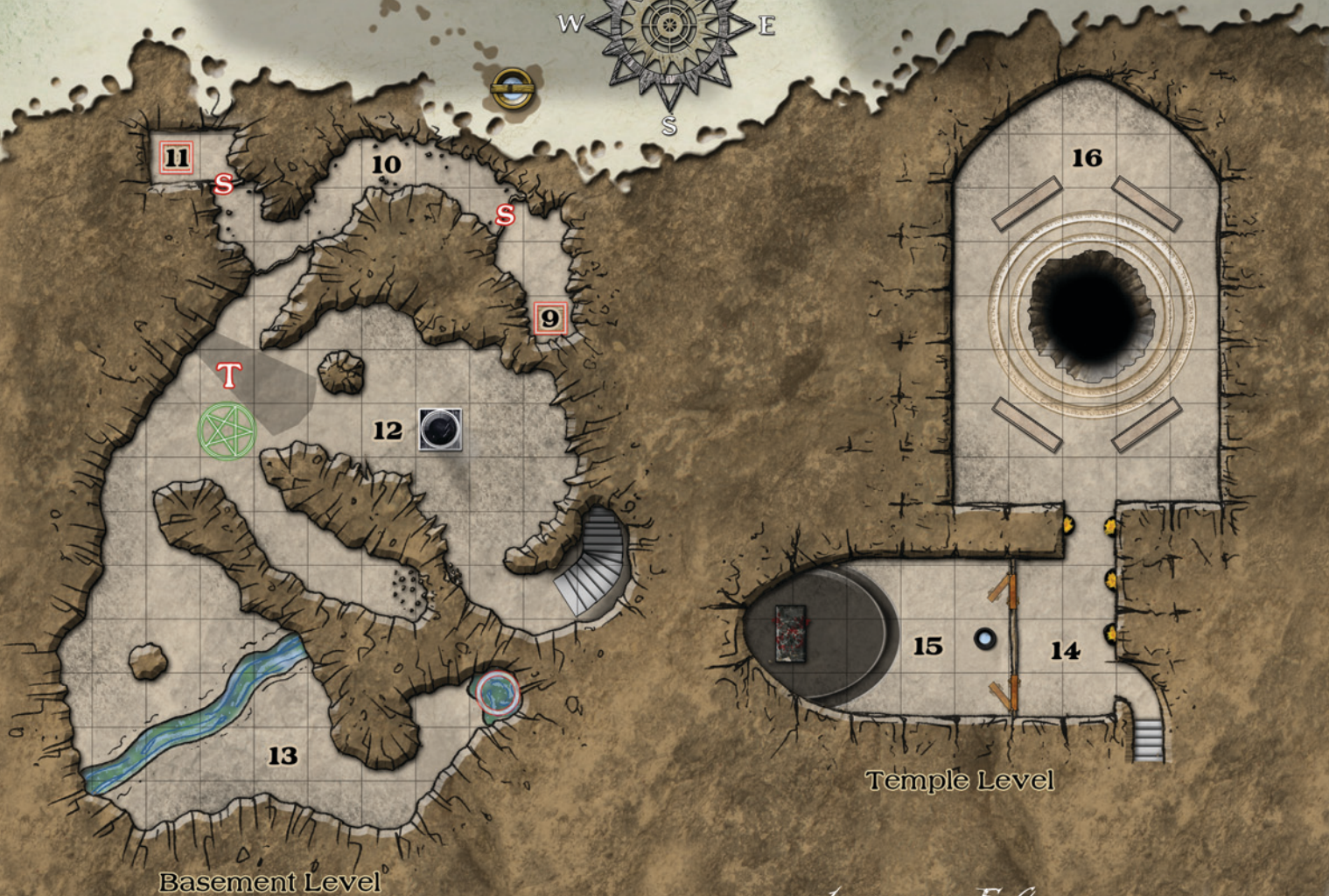
# The Black Goat



First Floor



Second Floor



Basement Level

Temple Level

1 square = 5 ft.