

Summer 2012 #22

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Editorial:

The Ground Has Shifted



You may have noticed that the fantasy RPG field is undergoing one of its occasional bouts of ferment and change. *Pathfinder* RPG is still the top of the heap, 4th Edition is fading slowly from the spotlight despite a big following—and a public playtest brings the hope of a glorious, shiny new 5th Edition. New systems like *13th Age* are on press or soon will be. And both newer systems like AGE and *Savage Worlds*, and older ways of doing things in the form of *Castles & Crusades* or *Swords & Wizardry* or *Lamentations of the Flame Princess*, all have their adherents. It is a great time to be a tabletop gamer!

So Switzerland just got a little bigger this issue. We've got coverage of more fantasy games and game styles than usual (with a huge helping of *Pathfinder* RPG, as we often do—including one article by Paizo ace Wes Schneider). At the same time, let me put out a very public call for 5th Edition articles, *13th Age* articles, and anything else you'd like to see covered here in future—heck, check the KQ Forums for a poll on this subject. I will say that while 4th Edition articles have slowed

to a trickle, I don't want to do more than 90% *Pathfinder* RPG. There's always something you can learn from seeing how someone else runs their game, and which rules, story elements, or GM tricks make it memorable. And hey, it's fun to mess around with something weird on the side. Send us a *Gamma World* query, what the hell. Submission guidelines are on the KQ website.

In this time of changing systems and changing games, you might say, "But we're still playing 3.5, and we're really happy with it!" No worries. KOBOLD QUARTERLY has always offered system-independent advice, sage design insights, d20 house rules, and system-less tweaks and setting material. That's not going to change, and you'll see Monte Cook, Steve Winter, and others continue to share their experiences and suggestions for better play. Because at the end of the day, no matter which rules you love best, we're all happy to have that spark of greatness that makes this week's game better than last week's, and KOBOLD is here to help.

Onward!

Wolfgang Baur

Kobold in Chief



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Kobold-in-Chief: Wolfgang Baur

Cover Design: Cathy Rundell

Associate Editor: Christina Stiles

Editorial Assistant: Christopher Bodan

Consulting Editors: Miranda Horner

Web Editor: Miranda Horner

Graphic Designer: Callie Winters

Ad Manager: Shelly Baur

Circulation Director: Pierce Watters

Gearforged Copywriter/Marketer: Wade Rockett

Contributing Authors: William Banks, Shelly Baur, Wolfgang Baur, Rodrigo Garcia Carmona, Charles Lee Carrier, Monte Cook, Will Doyle, Alex Greenshields, Rob Heinsoo, Jeff Ibach, Jeremy L.C. Jones, Brian A. Liberge, John E. Ling, Jr., Ben McFarland, Nicholas Milasich, Wes Schneider, David Schwartz, Christina Stiles, Pierce Watters, Skip Williams, and Steve Winter

Cover Artist: Craig J. Spearing

Contributing Artists: Stacey Allan, Andreas Cellarius, Storn Cook, Rick Hershey, Guido Kuip, Pat Loboyko, William McAusland, Aaron McConnell, Chris McFann, Lee Moyer, Russ Nicholson, Brian Patterson, Ryan Portillo, Stan!, Callie Winters, and Stephen Wood

Court Calligrapher: Shelly Baur

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BARBATOS

Gatekeeper of Golarion's Hells

By Wes Schneider

Art by Pat Loboyko and Callie Winter

THE BEARDED LORD HOLDS OPEN THE GATE TO HELL.
HE IS SUITOR TO WITCHES AND FATHER TO WORMS.
IN HIS THREE-EYED GAZE LIES THE BEGINNING,
THE END, AND THE ETERNITY OF ALL THINGS.

—FROM THE BOOK OF THE DAMNED

Of all the blasphemies and tortures of the Pit, few sights inspire greater dread than a glimpse of its burning threshold, the Grave of Angels, the Field of Suicides, the Iron Wilderness, Avernus—the first layer of Hell. Over the deserts of burning iron, mobs of the disordered damned, and pathways to deeper dooms rules Asmodeus's gatekeeper, the robed ancient called Barbatos, whose origins, agendas, and indeed even his true face number among the greatest mysteries in all of Hell.

BARBATOS

LE male archdevil

Unholy Symbol a triangle of slitted eyes over an inverted pyramid of beardlike waves

Areas of Concern animals, corruption, gateways

Domains Evil, Law, Magic, Travel

Favored Weapon quarterstaff

Temple animal graveyards, crossroads, stone circles, unmarked graves

Worshippers ambitious ambassadors, druids, frontiersmen, kin to suicides, and witches

Minions achaierai, barbazuus, manticores, medusas, fiendish animals and vermin

The inhabitants of the mortal plane know Barbatos by many names: the Bearded Lord, Demon Friend, the Mistletoe Monk, the Iron Hierophant, and the Keeper of Lost Children are among his most common epithets. For all his titles, he is best known as a tyrant apart from Hell's other archdevils, his deeds marked as chaos given reason, his emissaries simple and vulgar beings, even his origins distinctly not of Hell's iron-shod depths. Yet for all the aberrations of his existence, he remains among Asmodeus's most trusted advisors, his council plainly reasoned, influenced by seemingly impossible experiences, and as ingenious as it is undeniably evil.

Barbatos's form is rarely seen, but he takes the shape of an ancient humanoid beggar, clad in rags of sun-bleached skin and leaning heavily on a staff of knotted animal flesh and blinking bestial eyes. Roiling darkness seethes beneath his

grisly mantle, from which extends only a pair of seven-fingered hands, a twitching beard of tendril-like roots, and the baleful glow of three alien eyes.

His mantle hides much. From the darkened cavity of his being, Barbatos might draw forth an oily orb of black dooms, bearing within the name, sins, and exact location of every soul roaming Avernus' plains. When he speaks, his voice is a cordial rasp, that of a councilor left waiting upon his deathbed, and when he pulls back his hood, all who witness the blasphemies within question the multiverse's sanity before their souls experience utter obliteration.

Barbatos is the Lord of the First, ruler of Avernus, the highest layer of Hell. While most of the layer's infernal dukes raise iron citadels within the volcanic mountains and near strategic hellmouths—semi-sentient portals to Hell's deeper strata—the Bearded Lord eschews the harsh landscape and its endless crush of damned souls. Indeed, he looks down on it, for the Promised Land, his personal domain, floats above Avernus' molten oceans and sheering rust deserts. Throughout this drifting country sprawl robust gardens, towering orchards, and sparkling lakes, all populated by hearty wildlife and carefree revelers—but nothing here is as it should be.

All things in Barbatos's personal paradise are misshapen and rotten. Plants squirm like fanged anemones, scabrous trees weep and bleed in sulfuric breezes, drops of lake water cut like razors, unnamable animals lope upon limbs never meant for locomotion, and the screams of white-clad souls ring only in their own desperate eyes—as hungry worms stitch their mouths eternally closed.

At the heart of Barbatos's realm stands the Penitent Cross, a titanic willow tree hung with the corpses of worshipers, devils, and infernal dukes who either failed the Lord of the First—or sought to betray him. Barbatos makes his home in the shadow of this monument of traitors. There he sits like a mad vagabond, his meditations directing the motion of his drifting realm, tallying the souls endlessly washing up on Hell's shores,

Infernal Dukes of Avernus

With all of Hell dependant on the arrival and righteous dispersal of the damned, every influential figure in the Pit has a vested interest in Avernus—whether to safeguard passage across the layer or to tip the flood of souls to a single realm's favor. More infernal dukes—the demigod lesser nobility of Hell—claim kingdoms upon Avernus than on any other layer.

Of these multitudes, four hold especial prestige and consider Barbatos their sole liege lord. Others have held similar positions—such as dukes Drobail, Gavarse, and Sobartonz—but all neglected their duties or betrayed Barbatos, and now hang, withered and bleeding, on the Penitent Cross.

Duke Eaqueo: None delight more in knots and lost breath than Duke Eaqueo, who endlessly weaves and preciously protects his weeping, cliff-spanning tapestry of suicides. *Portfolio:* depression, nooses, sad stories; *Domains:* Evil, Law, Liberation, Madness; *Favored Weapon:* net.

Duke Furcas: From his citadel, the Forked Pyre, dark-armored Duke Furcas protects the most frequently travelled passage to Dis, capital of Hell. *Portfolio:* duty, flames, herbalism; *Domains:* Evil, Fire, Law, Plant; *Favored Weapon:* trident.

Duke Kalma: Refined and beetle-like, Duke Kalma watches over the squirming steps of the Bonestair, an occasional link between the Promised Land and the layer below. *Portfolio:* burial rites, death, insects; *Domains:* Animal, Death, Evil, Law; *Favored Weapon:* heavy pick.

Duke Losarkur: The Beastlord of Avernus, Duke Losarkur keeps vast kennel-caverns of cerberai and hellhounds. A legion of edavagors serves him. *Portfolio:* dominance, hounds, punishment; *Domains:* Animal, Evil, Law, Nobility; *Favored Weapon:* club.

and drifting across the multiverse to inspire ever-greater abominations.

BARBATOS'S CORRUPTIONS

While most of Hell's archdevil lords tempt mortals and inspire desperate atrocities, Barbatos's hand typically manipulates more primal forces. His fingers tug at the frayed fringes of civilization, provoking savage corruptions—unpredictable storms of green lightning, strange fecundity among deadly beasts, crops bearing mewing fruit, plagues spreading with terrifying speed—dark miracles that drive homesteaders and frontiersmen to despair. In the aftermath of such foul omens, his voice rings in the ears of witches and from the tongues of beasts, either demanding intruders flee back to huddle behind cramped city walls, or promising reprieves in return for sacrifices of blood and bestial flesh.

His will corrupts the isolated, tempting them to turn against the natural order and forsake their morals and taboos, slowly transforming men into monsters

and monsters into his slaves. Even in urban centers, where his influence is less overt, his tactics are the same: Barbatos leads the isolated and outcast to perform desperate acts. In the alleys he tempts the hungry with cannibalism; in the sewers, coprophagous creatures gain power over filth and disease; and in dark apartments, he directs the disparaged on the virtues of noose tying.

Several religions enforce strict tenants against suicide. In many of these lawful religions—Erastil's and Torag's faiths, for example—suicides are denied a place in the god's home in the afterlife, instead being condemned to Hell—specifically the plains of Avernus. Such discarded souls wander the Iron Wilderness, untouched by the pressgangs of infernal dukes that drag souls to Hell's deeper depths.

Instead, they wander in eternal hopelessness, facing endless pursuit from Avernus's flocks of achaierai and packs of hellcats, or finding their way amid the mind-bending terrors of the Promised Land. Although they appear to

be castaways on Hell's shores, Barbatos values these souls among all others, for in their despair and accidental damnations he finds the seeds of true spiritual perversion. While most deities turn their backs on the suicides among their flocks and offer hollow comforts to despairing fathers and new widows, Barbatos listens—and to the most desperate, offers to grant their common wish, in an especially peculiar way.

More so than any other archdevil, Barbatos readily bargains for the release of souls from Hell, willingly trading the soul of a suicide for another mortal's service. Typically, the Bearded Lord's terms seem reasonable enough—as they echo from the throats of rats or amid the rustling of rotting crops. He frees the soul of a mortal's beloved in return for future favors. Should the mortal ascent, she receives some vision of her lost loved one truthfully freed from Hell, released back into the queues awaiting the judgment of Pharasma, goddess of the dead. The mortal is then left to contemplate her infernal bargain. When Barbatos's call inevitably comes, it is minor, but typically tears the scab from a years-old wound of doubt and dread. Steal, bear false witness, forsake a promise, do so, or know that Hell's hunters will righteously seek the return of the freed soul.

Following this first deed, the requests come more frequently and increasing in severity—poison a stray, take an enemy's food, and defile a well. Gradually the ante escalates, but Barbatos has already fulfilled his part of the bargain, and the mortal has no recourse but to suffer as an unwilling instrument of evil, hastening their own damnation. For Barbatos, the game is easy and the trade of a pathetic soul for one nurtured on evil, simple. Ultimately, even the freedom of the original suicide's soul proves hollow, as—unknown to Barbatos's victim—Pharasma's second judgment always proves to be the same as her first, or the soul loses itself among the planar wildernesses, wandering until it succumbs to some other immortal terror.



ALLIES AND ENEMIES

Barbatos's perversion of the natural order exhibits not just a god-like understanding of nature, but of the mysterious truths of the multiverse itself. Beyond his liege Asmodeus, numerous other extraplanar figures seek out the archdevil for his ability to predict changes in the balances of the Great Beyond and the river of souls upon which the planes depend. His prophecies typically come at a price: amoral petitioners find reasonable, usually information rather than souls. The goddess Urgathoa, the Horsemen of Abaddon, and the kyton demagogues most often send ambassadors to seek Barbatos's advice.

Occasionally, though, the Lord of the First leaves his post to take a journey, walking the paths between the planes for decades, and contemplating such sites along the way as the height of Pharasma's spire, the activities of the aeon monad, and the strange depths of the Maelstrom. In his travels, he occasionally calls on the potent chaotic beings—particularly the protean Speakers of the Depths, the titans of Elysium, and the demon lords Cyth-V'sug, Orcus, and Yhidothrus. What he discusses there, the specifics of the prophecies he carries, and whether those god-like beings hearing his words believe him to be a prophet or a liar are mysteries mortals can only ponder. His

travels never take him near the foothills of Heaven or the fields of Nirvana.

Within Hell, many still consider Barbatos an outsider. He stands as the newest of the archdevils, replacing Typhon, the former Lord of the First, whom Empyrean Lord Ragathiel slew—some believe at Asmodeus's urging or scheming—after his blasphemous dalliance with the Demon Queen Lamashtu.

Barbatos has held his position for a period easily measured by the life spans of Material Plane worlds, yet, despite his fathomless tenure, several archdevils—specifically Baalzebul, Belial, Mammon, and Mephistopholes—still regard him with suspicion. Cunning Dispater, who alone shares a border with Barbatos's realm, regards him as a wise, if inscrutable, seer, though Dispater would never be so brash as to openly call him an ally. Among Hell's nobility, only the Whore Queen Mahathallah, Dowager of Illusions, calls on Barbatos with any regularity, participating in the strange archdevil's meditations and sharing cryptic prophecies on the end of all things.

SOULS & SERVANTS

Every infernal duke who raises a dark stronghold in the Iron Wilderness pays at least lip service to Barbatos—though most have stronger allegiances to the archdevils of deeper layers, their fortresses and collections of fresh souls guarding and fueling agendas deeper within the Pit. Barbatos cares nothing for such dual loyalties, so long as none of the other archdevils' servants claim more than their share of newly arrived damned or overtly deny the supply of other infernal realms. The stream of damned souls endlessly flooding Avernus is the artery feeding each of Hell's blackened organs, and Barbatos protects it and the infernal realms with quiet fanaticism. In this act, four particular infernal dukes aid him, their interests wholly devoted to Avernus and the Lord of the First (see sidebar).

All barbazus, the bearded devils, owe some measure of allegiance to Barbatos, as he first crafted them from the bleeding soil of Hell. When he first

appeared at Hell's gates and treated with Asmodeus, Barbatos brought with him a mortal world's worth of souls, transformed them into the first barbazu, and gifted them to the Prince of Darkness. Since, bearded devils have pervaded the rank-in-file troops in the Pit's armies, and the mysterious half-living processes of Hell have since begun spawning more of these devils without the Lord of the First's aid.

On Avernus, flocks of gaavs and magaavs, the winged host devils, and his beast-like trackers, the *edavagors*—also called hunter devils—serve Barbatos. Vaguely hound-like, with six powerful legs and two eyeless heads, edavagors are covered in sleek, bladed plates of insectile armor. Within these shadowy exoskeletons teem masses of hungry worms, which drive the cunning devils with a single deadly intelligence and allow them to track even the most elusive souls across the Iron Wilderness and beyond.

EDAVAGOR**CR 12****XP 19,200**

LE Large outsider (devil, evil, extraplanar, lawful)

Init +9; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Perception +22

DEFENSE

AC 26, touch 14, flat-footed 21 (+5 Dex, +12 natural, -1 size)

hp 184 (16d10+96)

Fort +16, **Ref** +17, **Will** +8

Defensive Abilities amorphous, **DR** 10/ good; **Immune** mind-affecting effects, fire, poison; **Resist** acid 10, cold 10; **SR** 23

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft., **climb** 10 ft.

Melee 2 bite +25 (1d8+10 plus disease and spoor worm), 2 claw +25 (1d6+10), 1 tail +25 (1d8+10 plus trip)

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

Special Attacks breath weapon (2 30-ft. cones, 8d6 fire damage plus spoor worm, Reflex half DC 24, usable every 1d4 rounds)

STATISTICS

Str 30, **Dex** 21, **Con** 23, **Int** 13, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 16

Base Atk +16; **CMB** +27; **CMD** 42 (46 vs. trip)

Feats Acrobatic Steps, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Lunge, Nimble Moves, Power Attack, Run

Skills Acrobatics +24 (+32 when jumping), Climb +37, Knowledge (planes) +20, Perception +22, Stealth +20, Survival +22, Swim +26

Languages Common, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

ECOLOGY

Environment any (Hell)

Organization solitary, pair, pack (1 with 2d6 cerberi or 3d6 hell hounds)

Treasure incidental

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Breath Weapon (Su) When an edavagor uses its breath weapon, both of its heads breathe a 30-ft.-long cone of flame. These cones can be directed to affect separate squares (dealing 8d6 hp fire damage to those within), or can cover

the same area (wholly or partially; dealing 16d6 hp fire damage to those within). The save DC is Constitution-based.

Disease (Su) *Devil Chills*: Bite—injury; save Fort DC 24; onset immediate; frequency 1/day; effect 1d4 Str damage; cure 3 consecutive saves. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Spoor Worm (Su) Any creature bitten by an edavagor must make a DC 24 Reflex save as a wave of worms spills over its wound. On a failed save, the devil's worms latch onto the creature or burrow into its wound. While the worms don't damage or hinder the creature, their presence allows the edavagor to know where the infected creature is at all times, as per the spell *locate create* with no maximum range and even between planes. Any *remove-disease* effect instantly destroys a spoor worm infestation. Immunity to disease offers no defense. The save DC is Constitution-based.

THE CULT OF BARBATOS

The Lord of the First seeks worshipers among those civilizations shunning individuals with radical ideals, violent perversions, obvious disfigurements, and other philosophies or afflictions causing them to abandon society or inhibit them from joining it. Those viewing cities as a kind of wilderness—members of tramp societies, runaways, and fugitives—might fall into Barbatos's clutches in civilized lands, embracing his messages of survival at any cost and the animalistic natures of even the most cultured beings.

Rarely, but more preciously, Barbatos discovers an individual believing herself above society's strictures. Barbatos courts such amoral souls as leaders of his cults and as pawns within civilized societies, their voices carrying his messages of sinless indulgence and of the wilderness as a place to either be feared or brought to heel. The Lord of the First's cult flourishes most readily in wilder settings, though, where the uninitiated typically mistake them for reclusive groups of druids or witch cults.

Wherever Barbatos can contrast society's illusions of safety and enlightenment against the instincts and brutality



of the natural world, he does so. Upon such frontiers he hopes to coax desperate mortals into espousing what he calls the Old Truths, laws of nature far harsher and more real than those of civilized lands. To some, such rhetoric appears as nothing more than the fervent acceptance of natural chaos—which Barbatos does not necessarily oppose if such sends mortals scurrying back to fear and fester behind city walls.

In truth, though, the Bearded Lord delights in degrading sentient beings, and he would see them reduced to barbaric proto-societies and vicious feral packs where only the strongest survive. To aid him toward such ends, he seeks out shunned witches and hedge wizards, furious druids, and villagers largely abandoned by their deities. Among the truly savage, medusas and manticores number among his favorite followers, because their fused and monstrous forms give them a deeper understanding of nature's ruthless ways.

Barbatos's cultists congregate in parodies of druidic sanctuaries and places where animals have been brought to heel—burnt stables, slaughterhouses, swirling sewer junctions, and standing stones etched with their lord's three-eyed symbol being preferred chapels. They also consider crossroads sites of their lord's favor, particularly those that branch into three or six routes, and all the more if suicides, supposed vampires, and similar unwanted dead have been buried there. In places where the uninitiated are likely to wander past, the trappings of the shrine are not overtly evil, though still unnerving—a tree with its bark peeled away and carved with Barbatos's symbol, a stump with a freshly skinned kill left on it to rot, or a road marker with its directions vandalized to point down.

Where cult members can indulge their worship undisturbed, the signs of diabolism are far more obvious. Deep in the woods, in stained abattoirs, and in abandoned kennels, the cult of Barbatos invokes its master's symbol, scrawling it in animal blood over carcass altars. Cages and the stink of scared beasts always feature in these dark sanctuaries, the animals—typically goats, wild dogs, boars, and rats—hobbled or silenced if they prove too rambunctious or desperate for escape. At points during these animals' brief lives, they serve as revered embodiments of Barbatos himself, the focus of unspeakable rituals, executioners of captured foes, and finally as vehicles for gory haruspices.

Barbatos cares little for sacrifices except as a means by which his followers might prove their devotion and as a method of directly acquiring damned souls. As with other fiendish lords and evil deities, Barbatos can collect mortal souls of beings his cult sacrifices to him as part of an elaborate ritual. These souls appear on Avernus, usually in the Promised Land, forgoing their rightful judgment and place in the afterlife.

The cult of Barbatos sends such pitiable souls to their lord in a ritual known as the Shearing. In this ritual, they strip and bind the victim—preferably

a successful hunter, just councilor, or religious virgin—as an animal. Then the youngest or newest member of the cult shaves the sacrifice's body hairless, using a razor or shears left to rust in goat's blood. Occasionally, a victim doesn't survive the hundreds of nicks and gashes inflicted during this preparation, but if he does, they hobble him and place him within the cult's beast pens, feeding and abusing him as one of the animals, and giving him vicious lashings for any unbest-like behavior. Once the traumatized victim loses all semblance of his civilized self, the cult members sacrifice him as any other beast, and use his organs to divine messages of Barbatos's favor.

MANIFESTATIONS OF BARBATOS

When his cultists and other fool-hardy mortals draw his attention, Barbatos chooses to express his will on the Material Plane in certain distinctive ways, a devilish sort of signature. These diabolical manifestations are treated as haunts, but they require a mortal to perform some simple rite to invoke them. If the divinity recognizes the mortal's ritual, it invests the area or object with otherworldly might. A *detect evil* or *detect law* can detect a diabolical manifestation before it activates, and positive energy can neutralize it; the haunt resets only if the called devil wills it.

These manifestations can be destroyed either as listed below or by the spell *hallow*. Otherwise, they function just as haunts (see the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game GameMastery Guide* for more details).

BEARDED PROPHET

CR 5

XP 1,600

LE manifestation of Barbatos (5-ft. by 5-ft. altar)

Caster Level 9th

Notice Perception 22 (to notice low growling from the altar)

hp 10; **Trigger** touch (perform ritual);

Reset 1 day

Invocation A Lawful Evil creature must spend 1 day constructing an altar of animal remains, inscribing each bone with the eyes of Barbatos. Once the altar is complete, the creator or a servant must cast *magic circle against good* on it.

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Barbatos in the Real World

As with many of the *Pathfinder RPG*'s fiendish lords, Barbatos's name and inspiration comes from real world demonology, in this case the *Pseudomonarchia Daemonum*. More pertinently, Barbatos Khem was the name of Paizo publisher Erik Mona's craven tabloid-writing wizard in Monte Cook's long-running Ptolus campaign. With that in mind, when it came to consigning figures to Golarion's version of Hell, the name of a certain craven magic-user seemed most deserving of a place in it.

Effect Once per day, if an animal of CR 3 or lower is killed on the altar, it is immediately restored to life, grows a thin beard, and is affected as per the spell *awaken*. Its animating spirit is imp an in service to Barbatos, which temporarily possesses the creature. The animal's Intelligence changes to 13, its Charisma to 14, and its alignment to Lawful Evil. It also gains

the languages and Intelligence- and Charisma-based skills of an imp.

The animal is free willed and does not need to obey its killer, but it typically provides advice and aid that furthers the worship of Barbatos. Killing the animal prevents it from moving or attacking, but it can still speak for as long as the *awaken* effect lasts. Any spell that would dismiss a summoned outsider immediately ends the *awaken* effect and kills the animal. The manifestation ends and the animal dies after either 24 hours pass, or when the manifestation on the altar is neutralized. If another animal is sacrificed on the altar, the same imp possesses it.

Destruction Burying the bones comprising the altar and casting *magic circle against evil* where it stood destroys the manifestation. The altar reforms if the bones are simply scattered.

THE EYES AND NAME CR 4

XP 1,200

LE persistent manifestation of Barbatos (5 ft. by 5 ft. wall or floor)

Caster Level 5th

Notice Perception DC 14 (to notice living goat eyes within Barbatos's symbol)

hp 18; **Weakness** damaged by weapons;

Trigger proximity; **Reset** 1 day

Invocation A LE creature must spend 1 minute drawing Barbatos's symbol on a surface in blood, then speak the archdevil's name as it touches each of the symbol's eyes.

Effect The three eyes of Barbatos's symbol become real, goat-like eyes within the surface. These eyes hear and see as the spells *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, allowing Barbatos to peruse the area if he desires. Additionally, any animal summoned within 30 ft. of the symbol gains the fiendish template and maximum hp.

However, the summoned creature is under Barbatos's control, not the caster's. This is not necessarily obvious to the caster if her will coincides with Barbatos's, but should the archdevil please, he may chose to have his emissary act as he wishes—even turn on an unworthy conjurer.

Destruction Stabbing out all three eyes ends the manifestation's *clairvoyance* and its effect on summoning spells until the manifestation resets, but *clairaudience* remains in effect. Putting out the eyes with a good or silver weapon destroys all aspects of the manifestation. Ω

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DRAGONKIN

The Mhraoti Empire's Legions

Scaly New Options

By Brian A. Liberge

Art by Russ Nicholson

One of the most fearsome races in Midgard, the dragonkin of the Mhraoti Empire were unknown before the unification of dragons. As one of the world's youngest races. Their armies have expanded quickly, demonstrating their warriors' strength, skill, and ambition. Though they rarely leave the Empire's borders except to make war, each passing day finds a few more of them spreading across the continent, especially in the East and South.

Dragonkin combine the magic of their dragon heritage with the drive of humanity, and bring a powerful force of personality as well. Every dragonkin has a powerful frame, scaled hide, clawed hands, and an innate arrogance. This blend makes them both terrifying foes and inspiring allies.

Like humans, dragonkin vary widely in appearance and abilities. Males are often larger, heavier, and may have horns or crests in contrasting colors to their scales.

Their tails are short and occasionally spiked. Females are often smaller and faster with longer, more mobile tails.

Dragonkin display their draconic heritage in the color of their scales. Most are brass or tan, said to be a mark of mixed bloodlines. These dragonkin make up the majority of the soldier and edjet classes and manifest the combat abilities of the inspiring dragonkin.

Less common are the so-called purebred of the Four Elemental Bloodlines. The flame dragonkin—the most numerous among these—feature yellow, gold, or orange scales and red crests. Wind or storm dragonkin have blue, white, silver, or grey scales with black crests. The significantly less common stone and cave dragonkin have brown, grey, black, and rarely white scales with purple or white crests. Rarest of all, the wave dragonkin's scales shine gold, blue, or green with bright green or yellow crests. These bloodlines most often manifest the least common abilities of the elemental dragonkin.

DRAGONKIN RACIAL TRAITS

The dragonkin of Midgard have their own racial powers.

INSPIRING DRAGONKIN

All dragonkin have powerful personalities. Some show a natural talent for diplomacy and inspire others to push themselves to greater achievements. Others cultivate a terrifying presence and drive their allies through fear.

DRAGONKIN INSPIRATION

A quick word or a meaningful glance can transform an ally's potential mistake into a renewed success.

Encounter

Immediate Interrupt **Close burst 10**

Trigger: An ally in the burst makes an attack roll and dislikes the result.

Target: The triggering ally.

Effect: The target rerolls the attack and takes the second result, even if it's lower.

DRAGONKIN RACIAL POWER

ELEMENTAL DRAGONKIN

All dragonkin trace their bloodline to one of their powerful dragon lords. Some, however, have a more direct descent, and through this affinity with a particular breed of dragon, they gain power over the associated element. In battle, they call on that power to add a burst of energy to their attacks.

DRAGONKIN DRAGONKIN ELEMENTAL INFUSION RACIAL POWER

You call upon your heritage to add the force of the elements to your blow.

Encounter • Varies

Free Action

Personal

Trigger: You hit an enemy with any attack.

Effect: The attack deals 1d8 extra damage.

Special: When this power is first selected, you choose the power's damage type: acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, or thunder. This choice remains for as long as you have this power.

DRAGONKIN UTILITY POWERS

Many dragonkin receive little from their bloodline beyond appearance and some minor abilities. Some, however, have a greater draconic connection. While allies concentrate on developing skills linked to profession or class, these dragonkin work to unlock the potential of their blood. Those who master these abilities gain physical and magical prowess and can even sprout wings and take to the skies.

FOCUSED FURY

The rage of the great wyrms is legendary. All dragonkin seem to increase in power as combat injuries increase their fury, but you have learned to use that anger to shrug off minor hurts.

FOCUSED FURY DRAGONBORN RACIAL UTILITY 2

You feel rage begin to boil up inside of you and focus it outward so the battle can continue.

Daily

Minor Actions

Personal

Requirement: You must be bloodied.

Effect: You spend a healing surge and gain temporary hit points equal to your healing surge value.

WAFI

Wafi is one of the oldest spells in the school of draconic magic. Flight represents a dragon's most basic advantage. Even those without mystical skill can call on this innate magic of their heritage.

WAFI DRAGONKIN RACIAL UTILITY 6

A powerful breeze lifts you up and guides you where you want to go.

Encounter

Move Action

Personal

Effect: You fly up to 5 squares. If you do not end your movement on a horizontal surface, you fall as normal.

PUFF OF SMOKE

Most dragonkin who manifest this ability won't admit there's more magic than draconic skill to this trick. As you focus on the breath of your ancestors and exhale, the smoke comes not from within but appears from nothingness, completing blocking out all light.

PUFF OF SMOKE DRAGONKIN RACIAL UTILITY 10

With a deep breath, you summon forth a cloud of smoke to conceal your allies or confuse your enemies.

Encounter • Shadow, Zone

Minor Action

Area burst 1 within 10

Effect: The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn.

Any creature within the zone has total concealment and loses line of sight to squares outside the zone. Creatures with darkvision, blindsight, or truesight are unaffected.

Sustain Minor: The zone persists until the end of your next turn.

LEGENDARY ROAR

There is something more than bestial about the roar of a dragon. It evokes terror in foes that goes beyond simple fear. You've developed a bond with your allies that feeds upon your roar in a profound way. When they hear your call, they know it's time to fight on.

LEGENDARY ROAR DRAGONKIN RACIAL UTILITY 16

A bellowing roar escapes from deep within you, strengthening the resolve of your allies.

Daily

Minor Action

Close burst 5

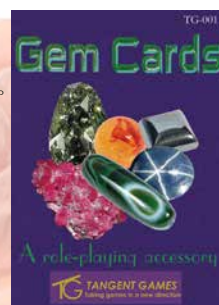
Target: Each ally in the burst.

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Effect: The target gains temporary hit points equal to 5 + your Constitution modifier. In addition, the target gains a +2 power bonus to saving throws until the end of your next turn.

DRAGON BLOOD HERITAGE

The blood of the mightiest dragons has always flowed through your veins. It helped shape your abilities as you trained and advanced until finally you've realized your true potential. You now know how to guide the souls of your ancestors to help reshape your form. You suddenly grow in size and gain in strength, and leathery wings spring from your back.



DRAGON BLOOD
HERITAGE

DRAGONKIN
RACIAL UTILITY 22

You feel the blood of your ancestors flow through you as wings sprout from your back and your form fills with might.

Daily • Polymorph, Primal
Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You assume the form of a greater kin and gain the following benefits until the end of the encounter.

Your size increases to Large.

Your reach increases by 1.

You gain a fly speed equal to your base speed.

When you are bloodied, your melee basic and melee at-will attacks knock the target prone on a hit.

NEW FEATS

Although dragonkin all share some traits, the different bloodlines and choices of the individual allows their abilities to manifest themselves in many different ways.

BLOOD MEMORIES

Images of flight haunt your dreams.

As you seek out ways to gain the ability to soar through the air, you find you're a naturally talented flyer.

Prerequisite: 11th level, dragonkin

Benefit: Whenever you take an action to fly, you can fly an additional 2 squares.

DRACONIC RESISTANCES

Your scaly hide helps to protect you from the elements your ancestors have mastered.

Prerequisite: Dragonkin

Benefit: Choose a damage type from acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, or thunder. You gain resist 5 to that type. The resistance increases to 10 at 11th level and 15 at 21st level.

DRAGON'S CLAW

Every dragonkin has sharp talons, but most find them only occasionally beneficial in daily tasks. You have strengthened your claws and practiced their use until you can wield them as fearsome weapons.

Prerequisite: Dragonkin

Benefit: You gain the claw as a light weapon with which you are proficient. This weapon grants a +3 proficiency bonus, deals 1d6 damage, and has the off-hand property. As an unarmed



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Dragonborn as a Base Race

Fourth edition dragonborn can be substituted for the dragonkin of Midgard. When playing a dragonkin, select dragonborn as your race, and choose one of the two racial traits presented here. This choice replaces the dragonborn's *dragon breath* racial trait.

Dragonkin may choose any appropriate option available to dragonborn as long as it does not require the *dragon breath* racial power as a prerequisite.

attack, your clawed hand is an unarmed attack with 1d6 and you gain a +2 feat bonus to clawed attack rolls. Enchanted claws count as a hand slot item.

ELDER CLAW TECHNIQUE

Your ability to fight with your natural claws has increased, allowing you to make more precise blows and deeper cuts.

Prerequisite: 11th level, dragonkin

Benefit: The damage die of your unarmed attacks increases to 1d8 damage. When you hit the target with an unarmed attack, the target takes ongoing damage equal to your highest ability modifier (save ends).

ELEMENTAL HYBRID

Many dragonkin spring from mixed bloodlines. The ruling class often looks down on these kin, but you have learned to tap into the varied abilities of your blood, something the purebloods can never do.

Prerequisite: Dragonkin, *dragonkin elemental infusion* racial power

Benefit: Choose a damage type from acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, or thunder, other than the type you have selected for your *dragonkin elemental infusion* racial power. The attack now deals damage of both types.

ELEMENTAL POWER FLARE

Dragonkin with an affinity for the elements might find a special knack for punishing their enemies. Some develop a greater destructive potential than others.

Prerequisite: 11th level, dragonkin, *dragonkin elemental infusion* racial power

Benefit: Your *dragonkin elemental infusion* racial power now deals 1d10 instead of 1d8.

GIFT OF THE WYRM TONGUE

Your natural charisma always shines through, whether setting friends at ease or making enemies tremble. You have learned to turn potential social blunders to your advantage.

Prerequisite: dragonkin

Benefit: Once per day, when you roll a 1 on a Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate check, you can reroll the check with a +2 feat bonus. You must use the second result.

INSPIRING FURY

You inspire your comrades to great skill and kindle a passion that pushes them aggressively toward their foe. Sudden intensity pulses through them and provides a more powerful blow.

Prerequisite: dragonkin, *dragonkin inspiration* racial power

Benefit: When an ally hits with an attack granted by your *dragonkin inspiration* racial power, he or she gains a +2 power bonus to the damage roll for that attack.

INSPIRING RESOLVE

A timely intervention on your part can make an ally's failure transform into success. You instill a renewed sense of confidence that has lasting effects.

Prerequisite: 11th level, dragonkin, *dragonkin inspiration* racial power

Benefit: When an ally hits with an attack granted by your *dragonkin inspiration* racial power, he or she gains a +2 power bonus to the next attack roll he or she makes before the end of his or her next turn.

SIGHT OF THE DRAGON

Your eyes adjust quickly to the dim light of the night sky or the pervasive darkness of caves.

Prerequisite: dragonkin

Benefit: You gain darkvision. Ω

MONSTERS OF MORPHOI

A Sneak Peek at

By Christina Stiles with Ben McFarland

Art by Craig J. Spearing and Chris McFann

JOURNEYS TO THE WEST

The creatures presented below hail from the Isle of Morphoi, created by Brandon Hodge and the patrons of the upcoming *Midgard Campaign Setting*. It is mysterious island that few sailors know about, let alone have ever encountered—or at least, very few remember encountering it. What's not to love?

AN ISLAND ALONE

Rumors float among the taverns of Barsella and other ports about an island of lovely Amazons, and the morphoi—the race of indigenous shapeshifters that give the island its name—are at the root of this myth. They along the island's cliffs, often disguised as beautiful human women (though they are actually androgynous plant creatures) and perpetuate the stories to entice sailors to seek them out. But not for food. These cunning flora serve Mnemosyne, the goddess of Memory and Time, who lives among her priestesses in a temple at the island's center.

The goddess and her island have suffered terribly in the last 15 years. A

Kammaen attack stole her memories (and her newborn daughter). Hecate's power has twisted her priestesses into lamias and lamia matriarchs. At the same time, the Kammaen army defeated and captured her husband Nethus, the sea god. The Oracle keeps him chained in Kammae Straboli. Mnemosyne's servants and shapeshifting priestesses scour the world for the knowledge the Kammaen's stole (by stealing the memories from others)—including the knowledge of how to free the goddess's divine husband, Nethus.

All this on one little island! *Journeys to the West* has naturally expanded the isle's allure and mystery. Additionally, the *Midgard Tales* collection will further explore the tale of Mnemosyne and Nethus. For now, though, enjoy this glimpse into our journey.

MORPHOI LAMIA MATRIARCH

These creatures have the lower bodies of spotted horses, and they appear to be adolescent female centaurs.

MORPHOI LAMIA MATRIARCH

NO. ENCOUNTERED: 1-2, 2-12

SIZE: Medium

HD: 15(d8)

MOVE: 40 ft.

AC: 31

ATTACKS: +1 *scimitar* x2 (1d6+7) or Weapon (+7 to hit and damage for melee weapons)

SPECIAL: Change Shape, Darkvision 60 ft., Foresight, God-Like Abilities (24 strength, 25 charisma), Immunity to Mind-Affecting Effects, Immunity to Temporal Effects, Memory Drain, Multiple Scimitar Attacks, Rend, Spell-Like Abilities, Spell Use, SR 20, Twilight Vision, Wisdom Drain

SAVES: M, P

INT: Genius

ALIGNMENT: Chaotic Evil

TYPE: Monstrous Humanoid

TREASURE: 14

XP: 6,100 +15

Mnemosyne's greatest handmaidens, these lamias have gained some of their goddess's power over time and memory. They have the upper torsos of fey-looking females and the lower bodies of painted (or spotted) pony-sized horses, the result of the Kammaen inquisitors' curses. Many mistake them for adolescent female centaurs, and the Morphoi lamia matriarch s exploit this by pretending to be docile centaur youths playing about their island home—but they are truly the deadliest of all the lamia.

The desire to recover their goddess's memory consumes these matriarchs. They use any subterfuge to uncover clues to unlocking Mnemosyne's mind, including taking human form to explore other lands and infiltrate governments. They also seek to free Nethus by whatever means necessary. Those living on Morphoi protect the goddess and her temple, oversee other races on the island, and deal with new arrivals, usually by interrogating them.

Like their lamia matriarch cousins, they can move with shocking ease from silken-tongued temptresses to dervishes, striking with all the deadly precision of vipers. They also luxuriate in gory feasts, violent trysts, and bloody entertainments, reveling until they tire and move on or their playthings finally break.

COMBAT: These creatures receive a +5 initiative bonus due to their Foresight ability (see below); their god-like strength gives them +7 to hit and damage with melee weapons.

Morphoi lamia matriarch s use guile and subterfuge as their first line of offense, but they enjoy combat as much or more than manipulation. Since their goddess prefers the lamias to steal memories, the lamias attempt to capture opponents rather than kill them.

CHANGE SHAPE: A Morphoi lamia matriarch can assume the form of any small- or medium-sized humanoid creature. This form remains until the lamia chooses to change it.

FORESIGHT: A Morphoi lamia matriarch can see a few seconds into the future. This ability prevents her from being surprised or flanked. It also grants her a +5 bonus to her AC (included above) and initiative.

IMMUNITY TO MIND-AFFECTING EFFECTS: They are immune to all enchantment and mind-affecting spells or spell-like abilities.

IMMUNITY TO TEMPORAL EFFECTS: A Morphoi lamia matriarch is immune to all time-related spells and effects (including *time stop*, *temporal stasis*, and the like).

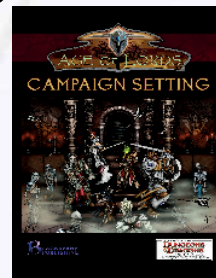
MEMORY DRAIN: A Morphoi lamia matriarch drains 1d4 days of a target's memory each time she hits with a touch attack. A successful wisdom save negates the effect but will not restore any memories previously drained by this ability. The lamias gain any stolen knowledge as their own.

REND: When the lamia hits with both of her scimitars, she may rend an opponent with them, adding an additional 1d6 damage.

SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES: These lamias cast the following spells as 15th-level spellcasters: *charm monster* (at will), *displacement* (constant), *dream* (3/day), *hallucinatory terrain* (1/day), *major image* (3/day), *mirror image* (3/day), *sleep* (3/day), *suggestion* (3/day), *temporal stasis* (3/day), *time stop* (1/day), *tongues* (constant), *ventriloquism* (at will)

SPELL USE: A Morphoi lamia matriarch is at least a 10th-level cleric; she serves the goddess Mnemosyne.

WISDOM DRAIN: Whenever a Morphoi lamia matriarch successfully touches an opponent, that creature suffers -1 wisdom drain. A successful wisdom save negates this effect but will not restore any wisdom previously drained by this ability. If an opponent is reduced to 3 or less wisdom, the victim falls into a catatonic state of submission and will follow every command the lamia gives it. In this state, creatures cannot use wisdom-based

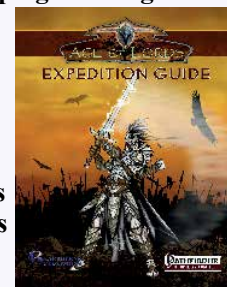


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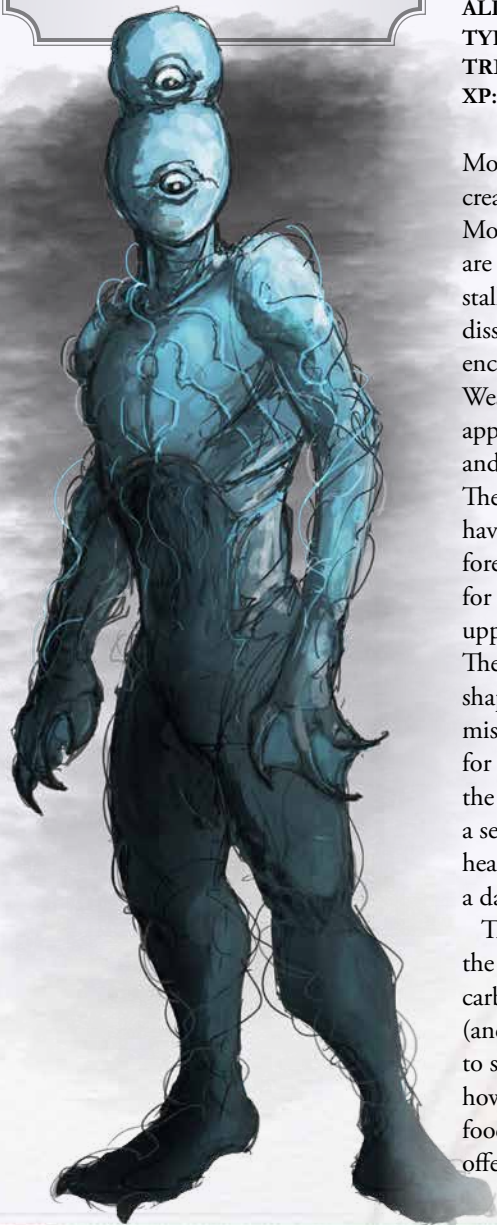
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Old School Revolution!

The Journeys to the West project got underway in November of 2011, and as lead designer, I wanted to give you a glimpse at what's in store for those riding the Western Ocean's waves. Although the Journeys project uses the Pathfinder RPG rules, I decided to provide this creature preview using one of my favorite OGL systems, Castles & Crusades—the first appearance of Castles & Crusades material in KOBOLD QUARTERLY. (Pathfinder versions of these creatures have previously debuted on the KQ blog and will be in the Journeys book.) So this is for all the Crusaders—and, all you old-school gamers—out there!



abilities. A human cleric, for example, loses the ability to cast spells or turn undead.

MORPHOI

This blue-skinned humanoid wields a trident. Its vertically-stacked eyes are the only features on its face.

MORPHOI

NO. ENCOUNTERED: 1-6, 20-200

SIZE: Medium

HD: 1(d8)

MOVE: 30 ft., 30 ft. (swim)

AC: 15

ATTACKS: 2 Claws (1d3) or Weapon (by weapon)

SPECIAL: Amphibious, Change Shape, Darkvision 60 ft., Perceptive, Plant Traits, Twilight Vision, Immune to Temporal Effects

SAVES: M

INT: High

ALIGNMENT: Chaotic Evil

TYPE: Plant

TREASURE: 1

XP: 7 +1

Morphoi are shapeshifting, plant-based creatures indigenous to the Isle of Morphoi, which bears their name. They are often mistakenly called “faceless stalkers,” an entirely different and dissimilar shapeshifting race (ugothols) encountered throughout the isles of the West. In their natural forms, morphoi appear as light-blue, medium-sized, androgynous beings about 5½ ft. tall. The morphoi’s figure-eight-shaped heads have limited facial features with no chin, forehead, or nose—they have mere slits for ears, and vertically placed eyes at the upper and lower parts of their heads. They closely resemble nethysule, a non-shapeshifting distant cousin, and many mistake morphoi in their natural form for the more peaceful nethysule. Unlike the nethysule, however, morphoi have a second set of eyes in the back of their heads. When harmed, the creatures bleed a dark red, saplike substance.

The morphoi gather nutrients from the sun or through an intake of organic carbon, so they do not need to eat (and do not necessarily need sunlight to survive). While in humanoid form, however, they consume small amounts of food to aid their pretense, but this food offers them no sustenance.

Morphoi live in communities on their home island or in the water surrounding it, since they are amphibious. Many—posing as beautiful women or stranded travelers—manage to leave the island on unsuspecting ships. Lacking the ability to mimic others or read thoughts, they create new backgrounds for themselves. All morphoi serve and venerate Mnemosyne and willingly give their lives to protect her and her handmaidens.

Approximately one in 30 morphoi are chieftains (with at least 5 HD or class levels). Their leader is always at least 10th level. A morphoi community always has several rangers, druids, and illusionists among its ranks. Those chosen as infiltrators are usually rogues. When the morphoi shapeshift, they keep their additional eyes, placing them on an advantageous part of their body. Favored positions include the back of the neck or the back of a glove-covered hand. They prefer to see in two or three directions at once.

COMBAT: Morphoi avoid combat unless they have the upper hand—usually through subterfuge. When they do attack, they approach potential victims in non-threatening disguises or befriend them and attack when least expected. Morphoi capture targets rather than kill them, as their goddess seeks such targets’ memories for the information they hold. They usually free their victims after getting what they want, leaving confused people with troubling memory gaps.

CHANGE SHAPE: A morphoi can assume the form of any small- or medium-sized humanoid creature. This form remains until the morphoi chooses to change it.

IMMUNITY TO TEMPORAL EFFECTS: The morphoi’s strong connection to Mnemosyne has made them immune to all time-related spells and effects (including *time stop*, *temporal stasis*, and similar spells or effects).

PERCEPTIVE: A morphoi’s additional eyes give them a +4 bonus to wisdom attribute checks to avoid being surprised or to spot something out of the ordinary.

NETHYSULE

This blue-purple-skinned humanoid wields a quarterstaff. It has vertically placed eyes and a ridged forehead.

NETHYSULE

NO. ENCOUNTERED: 1-2, 2-15

SIZE: Medium

HD: 1(d8)

MOVE: 30 ft., 30 ft. (swim)

AC: 15

ATTACKS: 2 Claws (1d3) or Weapon (by weapon)

SPECIAL: Amphibious, Darkvision 60 ft., Plant Traits, Spell-Like Abilities, Twilight Vision

SAVES: M

INT: High

ALIGNMENT: Neutral or Chaotic Neutral

TYPE: Plant

TREASURE: 1

XP: 7 +1

Nethysule are androgynous, asexual,

plant-based creatures indigenous to the Isle of Morphoi. They closely resemble the natural form of their morphoi cousins, but the nethysule's ridged heads and purple-tinged skin distinguish the two from a distance. Unlike the morphoi, the nethysule cannot change shape and do not possess an additional set of eyes in the back of their heads.

Generally peaceful, nethysule avoid combat whenever possible and keep to their druidic circles. They tend the island's flora, creating beautiful garden patches throughout the Isle of Morphoi.

Believed to be creations of Nethus, many of the nethysule's circles (the more chaotic neutral ones) once served the sea deity's whims. All nethysule still revere the sea god and make weekly offerings of small crafted items to the sea. None have seen or heard from the god for some time, and they do not understand why Nethus abandoned them.

Because the lamia kill them for sport, the nethysule keep away from the Temple of Mnemosyne, and so have not learned anything about Nethus's disappearance.

The nethysule gather nutrients from the sun or through an intake of organic carbon, so they do not need to eat (and do not necessarily need sunlight to survive).

They live in small communities called circles, including underwater, since the nethysule are amphibious.

COMBAT: Nethysule are generally peaceful creatures. They avoid combat whenever possible, using their *sanctuary* ability to keep themselves safe.

SPELL-LIKE

ABILITIES: *entangle* (1/day), *sanctuary* (3/day), *speak with plants* (constant)

SPECIAL: Nethysule leaders tend to be druids of at least 10th level. A circle will contain at least two 5th-level druids and three 3rd-level druids.

MORPHOI HULK

An enormous crab-like brute rises silently out of the waves, trailing bits of kelp and flexing its main set of claws as it steadily treads inland. Gouges and scrapes mar its rusty-looking carapace in a dozen places, marking it as a difficult and tenacious foe.

MORPHOI HULK

NO. ENCOUNTERED: 1-2, 3-6, 5-16

SIZE: Large

HD: 10(d8)

MOVE: 40 ft., 40 ft. (swim)

AC: 20

ATTACKS: 2 Claws (2d6+5 plus grab), Bite (2d6 + 5 + poison)

SPECIAL: Amphibious, Darkvision 60 ft., Extraplanar Insight, God-Like Ability (23 strength) Immunity to Poison (full), Improved Grab, Poison, Spore Burst, SR 15, Twilight Vision

SAVES: P

INT: Average

ALIGNMENT: Chaotic Neutral

TYPE: Extraplanar

TREASURE: 8

XP: 900 +10

The towering and stoic hulks appeared on Morphoi and several other islands in the Western Ocean centuries ago. Dubbed the Morphoi hulks by the islands' populace, these creatures claim a now-dead civilization summoned them to battle the neh-thalggu, the hulks' natural enemies, after the sorcerous aberrations invaded Midgard in their living ships. Unfortunately for the hulks, their summoners tasked them with the complete eradication of the neh-thalggu. Since this duty remains unfulfilled, they cannot return home. The Morphoi hulks have lived in Midgard so long that they have acclimated and are considered natives.

Several times each year, the hulks go on hunting rampages, scouring Morphoi and other isles for neh-thalggu. During these rampages, they delight in killing anything unlucky enough to cross their path. When not seeking neh-thalggu foes, the Morphoi hulks keep to



themselves, building tunnel warrens and chambers of coral and resin (created with their saliva) in shallow lagoons.

COMBAT: The hulks have god-like strength and receive +5 to hit and damage. They gain +2 to initiative and saving throws due to their Extraplanar Insight ability.

Morphoi hulks are combative when on hunting rampages, when attacked, and when encountering the neh-thalggu. Otherwise, they leave others alone. In combat, these fierce foes can easily tear a creature from limb to limb. Their ability to paralyze opponent makes them especially dangerous.

IMPROVED GRAB: When a Morphoi hulk successfully strikes with both claws, an opponent must make a successful strength save or be held immobile in the creature's clutches. In the following round, and any round the victim remains held, the hulk gains a +4 to-hit bonus

with its bite/poison attack. The hulk can grab creatures of its size or smaller.

EXTRAPLANAR INSIGHT: A Morphoi hulk adds a +2 as a racial bonus to all its saving throws and as an insight bonus to AC.

POISON: A victim of the Morphoi hulk's bite must make a successful constitution save or suffer 1d6 damage.

SPORE BURST: Once per day as a move action, a Morphoi hulk can release a lingering cloud of poisonous spores from its eyestalks. The cloud moves with the hulk for 5 rounds before dissipating. The spores have the same effect as the Morphoi hulk's poisonous bite, affecting any creature within 5 ft. Anyone entering or beginning their turn within the cloud must make a constitution attribute check or suffer the poison's effects. The cloud only lasts for 3 rounds underwater. Ω



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Blood Brothers

An Archetype for Two Rogues

By David Schwartz

Art by Storn Cook

Some heroes are defined not by the obstacles they overcome or the evils they defeat so much as by the companions facing those challenges with them—Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser; Gimli and Legolas; even Pintel and Ragetti from *Pirates of the Caribbean*. The bond between companions often makes possible greater feats than either could accomplish on his own, and for blood brothers, this is especially true.

Though they come from different families, blood brothers are as close as any siblings. Though they are not romantically involved, they are as committed as any couple. Beyond this passionate friendship, little else defines blood brothers (or blood sisters). Some blood brothers assume the same dress and demeanor, and some are so different as to leave others wondering how they can be friends at all.

The blood brother archetype is unusual in that it modifies two characters.

Typically, this means two players must together decide to take this archetype. When starting a new campaign, players who work well together might choose to play childhood friends with the blood brother archetype. Alternatively, after gaining several levels adventuring together, two PCs might take levels in blood brother rogue to increase their synergy.

Blood brothers know each other very well, and both players should know both characters just as well. To make the most out of this archetype, the players should choose their skills and feats together. What do the characters

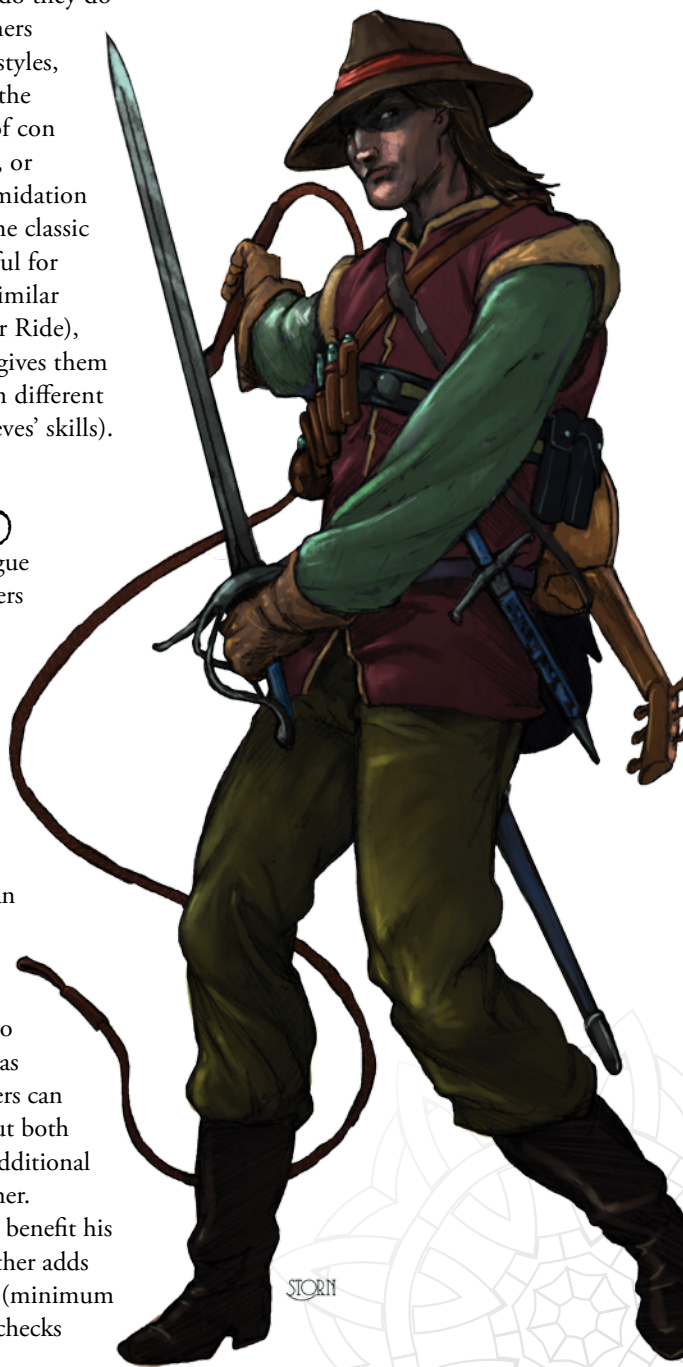
have in common, and what do they do differently? Two blood brothers might use identical combat styles, or one might be strong and the other agile. Are they a pair of con artists with maxed out Bluff, or perhaps one focuses on Intimidation and the other Diplomacy (the classic good cop, bad cop)? It's useful for the blood brothers to have similar mobility skills (e.g. Climb or Ride), but diversifying other skills gives them more options (specializing in different Knowledges or different thieves' skills).



BLOOD BROTHER (ROGUE ARCHETYPE)

A blood brother turns his rogue abilities to working with others in both social and combat situations. He is particularly skilled at coordinating with his bonded brother, the character sharing this archetype with him.

Brother's Bond: There is no such thing as a single blood brother. A character can only take a first level in blood brother at the same time as another character. From that point on, these two characters are forever bound as blood brothers. Blood brothers can take levels in other classes, but both bonded brothers must take additional levels of blood brother together.

When using aid another to benefit his bonded brother, a blood brother adds half his class level as a bonus (minimum +1) to his attack roll or skill checks





to aid. He also gains this bonus on Bluff checks to send secret messages to his bonded brother and Sense Motive checks to detect enchantment on his bonded brother. This ability replaces trapfinding.

Team Talents: As blood brothers gain experience, they learn a number of talents that aid them and confound their foes. Starting at 2nd level, the blood brothers choose a team talent for which they both gain the benefits. They gain an additional team talent for every 2 levels of blood brother after 2nd level. The blood brothers cannot select an individual talent more than once (unless the talent says otherwise). This ability replaces all rogue talents.

Create Opening (Ex): If a blood brother makes a successful Bluff check to feint an opponent, that opponent loses his Dexterity bonus to AC against the next attack made by the blood brother and any ally who also threatens the target. These attacks must be made on or before the feinting character's next turn. If the ally is his bonded brother, the feinting blood brother gains his brother's keeper bonus on his Bluff check.

Deliver Touch Spells (Su): If a blood brother casts a touch spell while in contact with his bonded brother, he can designate his bonded brother as the "toucher." The second blood brother can deliver the touch spell just as the caster would. As usual, if the caster casts another spell before the touch is delivered, the touch spell dissipates.

Double Team (Ex): When a blood brother successfully uses aid another to increase an ally's AC, if the chosen opponent's next attack is (or includes) a combat maneuver, treat that ally as one size category larger when determining whether he is affected. When a blood brother successfully uses aid another to increase an ally's attack roll, if that ally's next attack is (or includes) a combat maneuver, treat that ally as if he were one size category larger when determining whether the chosen opponent is affected.

Empathic Link (Su): A blood brother has an empathic link with his bonded brother reaching out one mile. The blood brother can communicate

empathically with his bonded brother but cannot see through his eyes. The link's limited nature means only general emotions can be shared. The blood brother has the same connection to an item or place as his bonded brother.

Good Cop, Bad Cop (Ex): A blood brother can use Intimidate instead of Diplomacy to gather information. When a blood brother uses Diplomacy to influence a character affected by a fear effect, Intimidate skill, or otherwise under duress (as determined by the GM) from a third party, treat that character as if his attitude toward the blood brother were one step higher.

Goons (Ex): A blood brother touching or in line of sight of his bonded brother adds his brother's keeper bonus to the DC of attempts to Intimidate him. When a blood brother aids an ally's Intimidate check, treat that ally as one size category larger for the purposes of Intimidation.

Hammer and Anvil (Ex): When a blood brother aids a successful sunder attempt, he adds his weapon damage to the damage dealt by the sunder attempt (before subtracting Hardness).

Individual Interests: Each blood brother gains a rogue talent. They can choose the same or different talents. If they are 10th level or higher, they can choose advanced talents. Blood brothers can select this talent more than once.

Keep Away (Ex): When a blood brother aids another character's disarm attempt, that character suffers no penalty for being unarmed if the blood brother is armed. If the disarm attempt is successful, and the blood brother has no weapon, he may automatically pick up the item dropped.

Paying Attention (Ex): Any class skill for one blood brother counts as a class skill for the other. A blood brother with no ranks in a skill can use that skill as a trained skill if his bonded brother has ranks in that skill.

Teamwork Trick: Choose a teamwork feat. Both blood brothers gain that feat as a bonus feat.

Snap Out of It (Ex): As standard

action, a blood brother can touch and speak to another character under the effects of an enchantment or fear effect. The target can make a new saving throw (at the original DC) to overcome the effect; if the target is his bonded brother, he gains his brother's keeper bonus on this roll. This talent has no effect if the enchantment or fear effect did not allow a saving throw initially. Each blood brother can use this talent once per day, plus an additional time each for every five rogue levels he possesses.

Tag Team (Ex): When a blood brother makes or aids a successful combat maneuver check to reverse a grapple, the aiding character may become the grappler, thereby grappling the creature holding his blood brother.

Wingman (Ex): When a blood brother aids an ally's contested Bluff check, the opponent must roll his Sense Motive check twice and take the worse result. When a blood brother aids an ally's contested Sense Motive check, the opponent must roll his Bluff check twice and take the worse result.

Brother's Keeper (Ex): At 3rd level, a blood brother can use aid another in place of a melee attack (instead of a standard action) when he uses it to increase an ally's AC or attack roll. An ally cannot benefit from the blood brother's aid more than once per round.

In addition, when a blood brother successfully uses aid another, the recipient receives an additional +1 circumstance bonus to his AC or on his attack roll or skill check. This bonus increases by an additional +1 when the blood brother reaches 6th level and every three levels thereafter. The circumstance bonuses from multiple blood brothers do not stack. This ability replaces trap sense.

Advanced Team Talents: At 10th level, and every two levels thereafter, a blood brother rogue can choose one of the following advanced team talents in place of a team talent.

Defensive Aid (Ex): If a blood brother use aid another to increase to increase an ally's AC against an opponent's attack, and that attack misses, that opponent

provokes attacks of opportunity.

High and Low (Ex): If both blood brothers are threatening a creature, they both count as flanking that creature regardless of their actual positioning.

Interference (Ex): A blood brother does not provoke attacks of opportunity when he aids another, and any attack, combat maneuver, or skill check he successfully aids does not provoke attacks of opportunity. If he aids an ally's skill check, that ally may take 10 even if stress and distractions would normally prevent him from doing so.

Mystic Link (Su): If his bonded brother is the target of a spell or spell-like ability, and the blood brother is within range of the spell, he can choose to also gain the spell's effects. The blood brother does not count against the number of targets the spell can affect. The blood brothers must have the empathic link team talent before choosing this talent.

Offensive Aid (Ex): When a blood brother successfully aids an ally's attack roll, he adds his aid another bonus (including his brother's keeper bonus) to both the attack roll and weapon damage roll. This additional damage is multiplied on a critical hit.

Share Pain (Su): When he would be reduced to 0 or fewer hit points by damage, a blood brother can share his pain with his bonded brother if they are within one mile of each other. The blood

brother takes only half damage from the attack, and his bonded brother suffers the rest. Each blood brother can use this talent once per day. The blood brothers must have the empathic link team talent before choosing this talent.

Share Spells (Su): A blood brother may cast a spell with a target of "You" on his bonded brother (as a touch spell) instead of on himself. A blood brother may cast spells on his bonded brother even if the spells do not normally affect creatures of his type. The blood brothers must have the deliver touch spells team talent before choosing this talent.

BLOOD BROTHERS IN PLAY

While the blood brother archetype presents exciting options for players, it is not without pitfalls for the GM. Because of their shared talents, blood brothers must advance simultaneously in this class, which may cause problems for a GM handing out individual experience awards. If the gap is small, allow the more experienced PC to delay gaining a level until his bonded brother catches up. For a larger gap, the more experienced PC may have to take a level in another class to represent his experience apart from his bonded brother.

This article assumes the blood brothers are played by two different players. At the GM's discretion,

however, an experienced player could play both bonded brothers. This is especially useful for GMs with few players as it increases the number of party members. Alternatively, the GM might allow a PC with the Leadership feat to take levels of blood brother with his cohort. As with individual experience, the player and GM must mind the level gap between the PC and his cohort. In either case, the GM should not to give the player twice as much face time as anyone else just because he has two characters.

The death of a PC is always dramatic, but the death of a blood brother brings additional complications. While a blood brother rogue can still function without his bonded brother, he loses access to several distinctive abilities. If the possibility of *resurrection* (or similar) exists, the blood brother should certainly press for that, perhaps even making it a campaign plot point.

If *resurrection* is not possible, the remaining blood brother has a few options. The simplest is to retire the character. Alternatively, the GM can allow the character to retrain abilities depending on the bonded brother, either immediately or as he advances. This retraining could involve replacing some of his team talents with rogue talents, or it could mean abandoning the archetype altogether. Ω

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by Stan!



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Game Theories

The GM's Influence on Character

by Monte Cook

It's been a while since I've written something controversial or heretical, so here goes: Past a certain point, the more influence a player has on character creation, the more boring the resulting character will be.

Now, let me be clear. The key to that statement is the bit about "past a certain point." To an extent, character development and customization is critical to a well-rounded, fun-to-play character. Players should absolutely get to play the characters they want to play.

The problem arises after the initial bit of character concept and customization: the point at which character creation becomes character building.

To illustrate my point, take a look at any fantasy RPG character of any edition (although 3rd edition, 4th edition, or *Pathfinder* RPG make the point most clearly) of about 5th level or higher, and that reached that level through actual play. Now ask a player—almost any player—to use the same set of rules and build a new character from scratch. Allow them to equip the character with about the same amount of gear as the original character (whether that's a lot or a little—doesn't really matter).

Nine times out of ten, the "built" character is going to be dull, dull, dull in comparison. The original character, developed over time and shaped by actual, in-game experiences will have unique quirks, connections to the setting, odd bits of treasure or gear, and a far more well-rounded set of abilities. The character developed this way

because of the character's needs at the time, rather than following some single-minded goal.

PLAYERS AT WORK

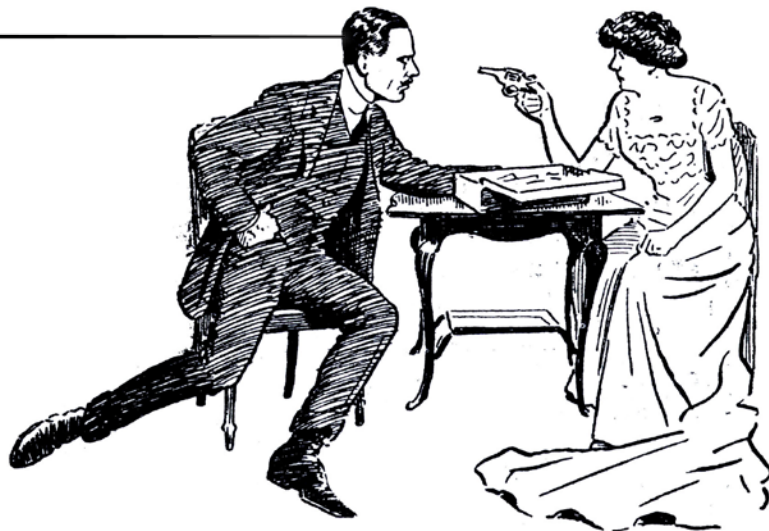
Now don't get me wrong, the built character is far more optimized than the developed character. Some people really enjoy optimizing characters, and there's nothing wrong with that, per se. But without the influence of the world around them—which is to say, the GM—any characters created in a vacuum look like, well, characters created in a vacuum. They are not the stuff of wondrous stories or epic tales of adventure.

The built character will be designed around a specific goal and concept, usually to the exclusion of well-rounded abilities. His gear will match this concept perfectly, and he'll likely have only a small number of really good items and abilities, each as good as they can be for his level. The developed character will have a larger number of items, likely less direct in their application, and almost certainly not

directly tailored for the character. The campaign-formed character will have developed abilities as he needed them, over the course of many adventures. He might still have a single overarching concept, but he will have some abilities for other activities as well. Again, probably not as powerful, but almost certainly more interesting and believable.

You can't really expect a player to do otherwise. Players want powerful characters. They want to choose a thing—fire magic, throwing knives, diplomacy, or anything else—and be the best that they can be. There's seemingly no "reward" in being interesting while a player is in a character-building mindset. But the loss of the interesting touches we're discussing here *will* be felt later on, as the campaign progresses.

Optimized characters are usually one-trick ponies. They excel at only one kind of adventure or encounter, and as soon as the character faces a different kind of challenge, the built character will fall flat and often will seem ridiculously



hollow and fake. Alternatively, a good GM, when looking for character hooks to either get a character involved in an adventure or to build an adventure around, will find none on the built character. The character will seem flat and lifeless.

A GM'S INFLUENCE

The GM influences the characters in her campaign a lot more than people think. Particularly good GMs. A good GM ensures that characters become influenced by and are tied to the setting, the adventure, or the campaign in subtle but interesting ways.

For instance, that third fall into the intelligent fire pit in the Keep of the Lava Duke? Now the character is fire-scarred, both physically and emotionally. That good deed the character did for the Twin Queens of the Leucrotta? Now the character has a necklace of bones that can magically transport him to the Land of Fey once each month to rest in safety and comfort for seven consecutive days. The curse by the hag covey in the dungeon last month? The cure actually made the character mystically stronger, but only at night.

The GM shapes character by deciding what treasures and rewards he might find, and what kinds of experiences might influence him.

These are not the kinds of things that a typical player is going to build into his character on his own. They're not even the kinds of things a typical player *can* build into his character, because they're not the kinds of things one usually finds in rulebooks. (Yet another reason having a living, breathing, empowered GM is preferable to a computer or a GM who is nothing but a by-the-book rule arbiter.) By presenting setting, adventures, experiences, and rewards, the GM can make a cool character into an amazing one. Better yet, the player will have great stories to go with each of their treasures and abilities.

WHAT'S A GM TO DO?

Sometimes, a GM needs to have players build characters, whether at the start of

a new game, or to bring a new character into the middle of an ongoing campaign. Players should have the freedom to create the character they want. But the GM should get involved too with campaign links, story, and mystery.

Campaign Links. Throw in some links to the setting, like a relationship with the Lord Mayor (good or bad), a debt owed to (or by) a dragon in a nearby lair, or a past shaped by a plague that ravaged the countryside the previous year. Make sure that not all the character's gear is chosen by the player, unless for some reason in your game the players always get to choose all their gear. If you award some treasure randomly (or seemingly randomly--you know what I mean, GMs!) in the course of a game, give new characters some random equipment too.

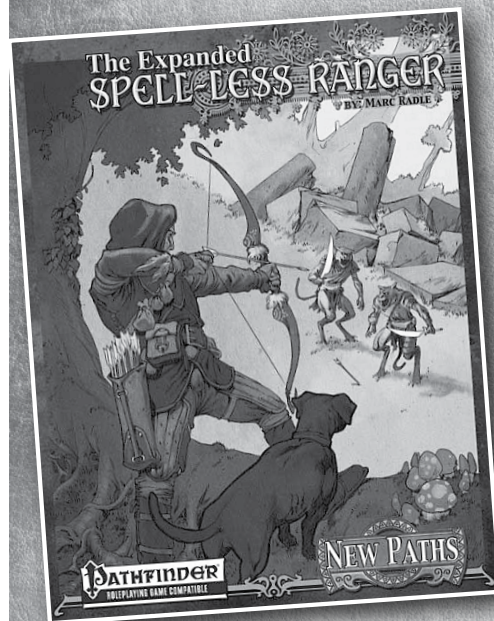
Story Hooks. Paint the built character liberally with story. Sure, the guy who wants to play a great archer has a wondrous longbow, but *where'd he get it?* Did he get it on some great quest? Was it a gift of the elven spirits at the summit of an impossibly tall peak (and did the gift come with a price still unpaid)? Was it looted from the body of a dead adventurer found lying next to the hoard of a massive dracolisk? Did he have it made for him in the hidden Workshop of Thieves beneath the capital city?

Mystery. And don't overlook the need for mystery. Built characters are often dull because nothing about them is unknown. Where did that strange scar suddenly come from? What's the secret power of the dagger he found in the ancient crypt of the golem master? Why did that genie mysteriously appear to magically grant him such great Strength on the 13th day of the 13th month? You don't need the answers right off, but you need the mysteries built in.

These things—the stories, the mysteries, the *weird stuff*—are the hallmarks of real adventurers. More importantly, they are all both the result of adventures of the past and fodder for adventures in the future. They tie the character to the campaign past, present, and future. Ω

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The Escalation Die

by Rob Heinsoo

Art by Aaron McConnell and Lee Moyer

13th *Age* is a streamlined d20-style indie-tinged dungeon-crawling game Jonathan Tweet and I designed and are both excited about. We hope people who've enjoyed our other games will find likeable things in the upcoming *13th Age* game.

But that's about all I'm going to say about our new setting. I'm not spending the rest of this article priming the publicity engine. Here, in Wolfgang's magazine-sized slice of Switzerland, you all already have one or two or three dungeon-crawling fantasy roleplaying games you enjoy. Writing the traditional "let me tell you about our new game" article seems self-centered.

So let's save the traditional preview approach for another forum and, instead, talk about an element of *13th Age* usable in any games using a d20 for attack rolls... and a couple that don't, as we'll see when we touch upon *Dragon Age* and *Feng Shui*.

ESCALATION DIE: BASICS

Grab the biggest or the most impressive d6 you own. You only need one. If you've got nothing special in the d6 department, use an ordinary d6 but place it atop an upturned glass or other pedestal to separate it from the common d6's on the table.

Keep the die off the table or off its pedestal until the start of the second round of combat—yeah, the escalation die starts at 0. At the start of the second round, the escalation die goes up to 1, and should be placed upon its pedestal, positioned where all the players can see it. Rest assured the players will take turns reminding each other about the



escalation die...because the first great thing about the escalation die is that it's added as a bonus to all the player characters' attack rolls.

And the second great thing is that the escalation die keeps increasing. At the start of the third round, the escalation die goes to 2, on the fourth round it goes to 3, and so on, until you've maxed out at 6.

REWARDS OF DRAMATIC ESCALATION

The escalation die represents the way true heroes pull themselves together to overcome foes. In a lot of heroic fantasy fiction, and certainly in film, the heroes start out getting kicked around a bit. Then they pull themselves together and conquer the villain in the end.

So we adjusted our basic math by raising the monster's defenses by a point. Every monster has an AC at least one point higher than it *should* be based on the accuracy we think feels right for PC attacks. Consequently, many combats start out feeling rather desperate. At the beginning of combat, characters miss with decent attack rolls, the monsters



hit the PCs, and everyone looks at each other saying, “Wow, this is scary. What are we going to do?”

Survive until the third round: that’s one answer. When the escalation die hits 2, the advantage swings to the player characters. Basic math plays out as a steadily rising power curve instead of the diminishing returns we’re all familiar with from fights rewarding you hugely for eliminating scary opponents early. With the escalation die in play, PCs don’t automatically start serious fights by using their biggest spells and most powerful attacks. Your best attacks will be a lot more likely to hit later in the fight, so there’s tension between the possibility of dealing big damage now and the much greater probability of dealing big damage later.

Since we designed our classes with the escalation die in mind, we have options for characters who fight much better later in fights, usually when the escalation die is 3+. If you’re playing a fighter, for example, you can opt to be the guy who becomes truly deadly after you’ve taken measure of your adversaries.

Stalling for a good escalation amount isn’t an option in our system. If the DM judges the PCs are delaying or acting non-heroically, the DM can roll the escalation die back down. In practice, we’ve never had to resort to decreasing (de-escalating) the die. Our PCs fight hard until they can fight even harder. But a couple life-leaching undead can even tamp down the escalation die, deadening hope.

Speaking of monsters, we don’t add the escalation die to monster attacks. The monsters aren’t the heroes of our stories. But we made an exception for dragons. Dragons are scary because they *do* add the escalation die to their attacks. Player characters, who are supposed to be fearless, have executed pell-mell tactical retreats rather than face-off with a dragon that’s otherwise no tougher than other monsters of its caliber... so we figure we’ve done something right.

ESCALATING OTHER GAMES

Jonathan and I plan to use versions of the escalation die when we run other RPGs that can benefit from a drama

curve and faster combat. Obviously, the math works out differently in other games, but we’re not sticklers for that much precision. It’s more important to create the right dynamics during play.

The first question when using the escalation die in other games is whether you’ll raise enemy defenses by 1. If your goal is to speed up slow combat with the escalation die, then start by keeping the NPC/monster defense numbers as they are. Don’t complicate the escalation die experiment by simultaneously slowing attacks down in the first round of combat with higher defenses.

If combat already flows quickly enough for your group, you’ll probably want to raise the monsters’ ACs and defenses. Alternatively, you could keep the defense numbers where they are but add additional opposition.

USING THE ESCALATION DIE IN 3E, 3.5, & PATHFINDER RPG

Add the escalation die to both PCs’ attack rolls *and* to PC spellcasters’ DCs for spells and effects. If you only add the escalation die to attack rolls, spellcasters won’t benefit from the die.

Auto-Hit: Another consideration is that playing with the escalation die reduces the value of a spell like *magic missile*, which guarantees a hit. The problem is small enough to be ignored, but if you want to fix it, consider adding the escalation die or some level-based multiplier of the escalation die to auto-hit spells, thus keeping them relevant. Of course, rolling a 1 in combat still misses no matter how high the escalation die rises, so auto-hit spells still have a useful place in the game.



The Orc Lord by
Aaron McConnell and Lee Moyer



Aaron McConnell and Lee Moyer collaborated on the 13th Age art. The Prince of Shadows

Monsters & Dragons: Monsters shouldn't use the escalation die. But what about dragons in these games? My sense is that dragons are tough enough in 3.5 and *Pathfinder*. So it's either a matter of taste, OR you could distinguish between legendary dragons and regular ol' dragons. Regular dragons attack like normal monsters; legendary dragons should add the escalation die.

ESCALATION DIE IN 4TH EDITION

Adding the escalation die to all PC attacks is more straightforward in 4e since spellcasters roll attacks instead of forcing saving throws.

Monster Tweaks: Some 4e monsters have a lot of abilities. One method of simplifying 4e combat for the DM while adding a dramatic escalation effect would be to classify one or more monster powers as 3+ abilities. Making certain monster powers available only toward the dramatic conclusion of a fight speeds up combat and makes the final rounds more interesting. It's a trick we use in *13th Age*, and it would work in 4e or any of the earlier editions.

ESCALATION DIE IN AGE

If you use the escalation die the way we used it in *13th Age*, you should definitely start NPC TN Defenses 1 point higher—but the stunt points system also offers an intriguing alternative.

Stunt Point Escalation: I had a few ideas about integrating the escalation die into the *Dragon Age* stunt points system, but they seemed bad, so I asked my neighbor Chris Pramas, the game's designer, what he thought. Chris suggested starting the escalation die at 0, increasing it by 1 each round, and leaving Defense TNs as-is: "You could add the escalation die to the number of stunt points generated by doubles. So, on the second round, you'd get your dragon die +1, on the third round dragon die +2, and so on. This would make it easier to pull off stunts like lethal blow (which adds 2d6 to an attack's damage) as the combat goes on, and inflicting more damage will end fights faster. A combat lasting 7 rounds would get to an anime level of crazy action, so I wouldn't recommend it for every game, but I'm sure some players would have fun experimenting with it."

ESCALATION DIE IN FENG SHUI

I know *Feng Shui* isn't KQ's usual fare. But the escalation die is so perfect for Atlas Games' and Robin Laws' game of Hong Kong action movie mayhem that I'm going to dig into it and hope some of you can use the results.

Speeding Up: *Feng Shui* already translates every point of attack bonus into another point of damage if the attack hits, so using the escalation die is guaranteed

to speed up combat considerably. That's not bad, because odd circumstance, bad matchups, and the bizarre outcomes of open-ended dice rolls occasionally over-extend *Feng Shui* battles. Using the escalation die in *Feng Shui* is especially nice because it makes attacks against mooks late in the fight more likely to take them out by hitting by 5+.

Stunts & Escalation: What's the big reward for an amazing PC stunt that players will be talking about forever? The GM raises the escalation die by a point in honor of the stunt.

How Big? There's no reason to stop the *Feng Shui* escalation die at 6, so take it to d10.

Escalation & the Big Bruiser: In my games, I find damage-dealing characters, like the Big Bruiser, are at a considerable disadvantage compared to characters who are better at hitting, like the Old Master. The next time I run *Feng Shui*, I'll consider letting the Big Bruiser add the escalation die to the damage of all attacks, hit or miss. Yes, that's double-impact with the Big Bruiser's hit, but I'm thinking it might work out.

Named & Escalating? Mooks clearly don't get to use the escalation die, but what about named NPCs? My vote would be to let one or two of a named NPC's attacks each fight benefit from the escalation die. Save the escalation for the moment when the named villain pulls off an amazing stunt, or when it's most dramatic for him to receive the full bonus. But using the escalation die for *all* named NPC attacks turns what should be a PC advantage into a higher threat level for everyone, and I don't believe *Feng Shui* needs that.

OTHER DESIGN STUNTS

Look for *13th Age* later this year for the full implementation of the escalation die and of several other campaign-adaptable game mechanics. For updates along the way and beyond, see the *13th Age* page at www.pelgranepress.com, check my blog at robheinsoo.blogspot.com, and follow @13thAge on Twitter. Ok, I did sneak a little traditional preview message in there, but I hope the preview mechanic makes up for it. Go escalate! Ω



ELVEN ARCHER MAGIC

10 New Spells for Eagle-Eyed PCs

By Charles Lee Carrier and Nicholas Milasich
Art by Rick Hershey

Elven archers, a new class which appeared in *Kobold Quarterly* #20, have developed a number of divine spells which belong to them alone. While most of their magic is cast on arrows rather than direct against opponents, making their projectiles more potent, some elven archer spells are divinatory in nature, allowing them to be relentless trackers. With a few notable exceptions, most elven archer spells are subtle—a casual bystander might not even realize magic has been used—which is exactly the way elven archers like it.

Elven archers believe the forest spirits watch over them, granting them their spell knowledge, and for this reason, they do not often share their gifts. At the GM's discretion, however, elven archers may teach befriended rangers or druids a few of these spells. Gaining an elven archer's friendship to gain such spell knowledge could, indeed, become the basis of an ongoing adventure. If the GM allows other classes to learn these spells, treat these spells as one level higher.

1ST LEVEL SPELLS

CONJURE ENERGY ARROWS

School conjuration (creation); **Level** elven archer 1, ranger 2, druid 2
Casting Time 1 swift action
Components V, S, DF (bow or crossbow string)
Range touch
Target one ranged bow or crossbow string touched
Duration 1 round/level
Saving Throw none;
Spell Resistance no

When cast on your bow or crossbow, you may pull back the string at the start of each round, thereby equipping the weapon with an energy arrow or bolt. The archer selects the energy type (acid, cold, electricity, fire, or sonic) at the time of casting. The weapon deals the same amount of damage as its standard ammunition, but the damage is of the chosen energy type. You may shoot as many arrows or bolts per round as you have attacks. Each arrow evaporates into a wisp of mist one round after being created, so the elven archer must use them quickly.

HEARTSTRIKE

School divination; **Level** elven archer 1, ranger 2, druid 2
Casting Time 1 swift action
Components V, S, DF (an arrow or bolt)
Range personal
Target you
Duration see text
The spirits of ancient elven warriors carry your next shot true and straight. Your next single bow or crossbow ranged attack roll (if it is made within the same round) gains a +10 insight bonus. Additionally, your ranged attack is not affected by any miss chance applying to concealed targets.

NET ARROW

School conjuration (creation); **Level** elven archer 1, ranger 2, druid 2
Casting Time 1 swift action
Components V, S, M (a bit of spider web), DF (an arrow or bolt)
Effect webs in a 10-ft.-radius spread
Range touch
Target one touched arrow or bolt
Duration 1 min/level (D)
Saving Throw Reflex negates; see text;
Spell Resistance no

The next arrow you shoot trails a gossamer net of strong, sticky spider silk behind it. The net's strands anchor to any targeted creature of Large size or smaller, trapping it. The net does not affect the arrow's range or accuracy.

If your arrow hits, it does its normal damage, and the creature must make a Reflex save or gain the grappled condition. If the creature saves, the web harmlessly encases its body, but it is otherwise unaffected. Grappled creatures can break free by making a combat maneuver check or an Escape Artist check as a standard action against the spell's DC.

The strands of this spell are flammable. A *flaming weapon* can slash them away as easily as a hand brushes away cobwebs. Any fire can set the web alight and burn away one 5-foot-square in 1 round. All creatures within flaming webs take 2d4 hp fire damage from the flames.

Alternately, the archer may shoot near the creature to avoid causing it damage (treat as a tricky shot, with a -5 penalty—see *Ultimate Combat*). If successful, and the creature fails its Reflex save, the creature is still grappled, as stated above, but is not harmed.

The arrow must be shot within one round of this spell's casting, or the spell dissipates.

POINT THE WAY

School divination; **Level** elven archer 1, ranger 2, druid 2

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, DF (an arrow or bolt)

Range touch

Target one touched arrow or bolt

Duration instantaneous

Saving Throw no; **Spell Resistance** no (harmless)

You whisper a question to an arrow, and then toss (not shoot!) it into the air. It lands pointing in a direction in response to your question. Suitable questions involve a straight-line ("as the crow flies") direction to geographic features and landmarks.

This spell does not reveal the direction to locations having passed out of common knowledge, were never common knowledge, or are deliberately hidden. Suitable questions might include: "Which way to Ridgeline Road?" or "In what direction is the Bridal Veil waterfall?" Unsuitable questions might include: "Where is the lost city of Shibolet?" or "Which way to the secret lair of the goblin king?"

Note the arrow always lands pointing in some direction – if you asked a suitable question, it lands pointing in the correct direction. If you asked an unsuitable question, it lands pointing in a random direction (GM's discretion).

SHED THE RAIN

School abjuration; **Level** elven archer 1, ranger 2, druid 2

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, DF (duck feather)

Range touch

Target one creature

Duration 1 minute/level (D)

Saving Throw Will negates (harmless);

Spell Resistance yes (harmless)

Rain and all similar liquids bead up and roll off you like water off a duck's back. This protection extends to anything you are wearing or carrying. You can walk through a downpour and remain dry. This effect also gives you a +1 circumstance bonus on saving throws against splash attacks like acid and flaming oil. Any damage from such attacks is reduced by 1 (but never less than 0).

This spell does not affect thick or goopy liquids like grease. This spell also does not protect against immersion, so wading through a puddle or falling into a lake leaves the affected body parts soaked. Also, this spell does not dry out wet items.

SLICE THE AIR

School transmutation; **Level** elven archer 1, ranger 2, druid 2

Casting Time 1 swift action

Components V, S, DF (an arrow or bolt)

Range touch

Target one touched arrow or bolt

Duration 1 round

Saving Throw none; **Spell Resistance** none

The next arrow or bolt you shoot completely ignores all natural winds, from gentle breezes to tornado-force winds. The spell reduces the effects of magical winds by one category (see "Winds," in the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*).

If you do not make a shot within one round of casting, the spell dissipates.

2ND LEVEL SPELLS

FEEL YOUR DOOM

School necromancy (fear, mind-affecting); **Level** elven archer 2, ranger 3, druid 3

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, DF (bow and arrow or bolt)

Range 60 feet

Area ray

Duration 1 round/level or 1 round; see text

Saving Throw Will partial; **Spell**

Resistance yes

You must have a notched arrow in your bow (although the bow need not be drawn) to cast this spell. Every living creature you point at suddenly feels the naked horror of dying with your arrow piercing their heart. Each creature becomes panicked unless it succeeds on a Will save. If cornered, a panicked creature begins cowering. If the Will save succeeds, the creature is instead shaken for 1 round.

You may point at as many creatures per round as you have attacks. Creatures must be able to see you (or otherwise sense your presence) to be affected.

GHOSTLY ARROW

School transmutation; **Level** elven archer 2, ranger 3, druid 3

Casting Time 1 round

Components V, S, DF (an arrow or bolt)

Range touch

Target arrows or bolts touched

Duration 1 round/level

Imbued with the spiritual power of the forest, any arrows you fire within the spell's duration become misty and insubstantial in flight, returning to their normal deadliness when they strike a foe's corporeal body. The *ghostly arrows* make a touch attack, and they ignore any AC bonuses for armor or cover from intervening creatures or terrain. The arrows do not affect ethereal creatures. The archer must be able to see the targeted creature.

KNOW MY ENEMY

School divination (scrying); **Level** elven archer 2, ranger 3, druid 3

Casting Time 10 minutes

Components V, S, M (three drops of quicksilver), DF (an arrow or bolt)

Range unlimited

Effect magical vision

Target touched arrow or bolt

Duration 1 round

Saving Throw Will negates; **Spell Resistance** yes

You touch an arrow and gain a brief vision of the creature that last owned or used it, no matter how distant they are. You clearly see (but do not hear) them for one round, even if they are currently shrouded by fog, darkness, or other visual cover. You see only the individual, not its surroundings. This spell fails if the targeted creature succeeds on a Will save, is warded against *scrying*, or is on another plane.

If the spell succeeds, you also learn one piece of random information about the individual. The added information is common knowledge to the individual's

normal companions – you cannot discover someone's secrets with this spell. At the DM's option, you might learn:

- Commonly used name
- Nickname
- Destination (if the creature is traveling)
- Who he serves, or whether or not he has a master
- Favorite combat maneuver (frequently used feat or special ability)
- Current location (unless he is hiding via magic)

At 10th level, you learn a second piece of information, and at 20th level you learn three. By casting this spell, you become the last person to have used the arrow. The next casting of this spell using the same arrow grants a vision of you.

SEEKER'S ARROW

School transmutation; **Level** elven archer 2, ranger 3, druid 3

Casting Time 1 round

Components V, S, DF (an arrow or bolt)

Range touch

Target touched arrow or bolt

Duration 1 hr/level

Saving Throw Will negates; **Spell**

Resistance yes

You make a minor spiritual bond with one of your arrows, which you then fire at an enemy creature (others can fire them, but do not gain the seeker's bonus). If this arrow hits, the target must make a Will save.

If it fails the save, the spiritual bond transfers from the arrow to the target, and you gain awareness of the creature's presence. If the creature is invisible and within 300 ft., you know the exact square it is in, but you cannot see it. You also gain a +10 to Survival checks to track this enemy, and you always know in which direction your target lies.

This bond lasts as long as the enemy is within 10 x your caster level in miles. The arrow from this spell may be enchanted and then used later, though the duration begins at the time the spell is cast and this counts as a held touch spell.

THUNDER ARROW

School evocation (sonic); **Level** elven archer 2, ranger 3, druid 3

Casting Time 1 swift action

Components V, S, DF (an arrow or bolt)

Range touch

Target touched arrow or bolt

Area 30-foot-radius spread

Duration instantaneous

Saving Throw Fortitude partial; **Spell**

Resistance yes

The next arrow you shoot emits a tremendously loud noise when it hits (even if it doesn't hit what you were aiming at). The sound can be a hideous shriek, a thunderclap, an animal or demonic roar, or any other wordless clamor.

All creatures within 30 ft. must succeed on a Fortitude save or be stunned for 1 round. Creatures within 10 ft. with less than 6 HD are knocked unconscious instead. Deaf creatures are immune to the arrow's effects. *Thunder arrow* and *silence* cancel each other.

You must shoot the arrow within one round of casting, or the spell dissipates.

WIND ARROW

School evocation (air); **Level** elven archer 2, ranger 3, druid 3

Casting Time 1 swift action

Components V, S, DF (an arrow or bolt)

Range touch

Target touched arrow or bolt

Area see text

Duration 1 round

Saving Throw none; see text; **Spell**

Resistance yes

The next arrow you shoot spreads a brief, powerful wind gust in its wake, as if some colossal creature just sped by.

Within 10 ft. to either side of the arrow's path, the gust extinguishes small fires (candles and torches), scatters live embers from larger fires, tears papers and similar items from unsuspecting hands (Reflex save to retain the object), and knocks Fine-size flying creatures out of the air. Small, unattended items are sucked up into the wind's wake, and carried for 3d6 x 10 ft. before falling to the ground. Large-but-lightweight items, such as tents, have a 10% chance of being knocked over. Unsecured shutters flap violently, while unsecured doors slam shut or burst open.

Out to 20 ft. on either side, the gust extinguishes tiny flames (candles), and small fires sputter. Small, unattended objects are knocked over and moved 3d10 ft. Larger objects, like tents, may rock and sway, but remain undamaged. Fine-size flying creatures are whirled about and left disoriented for 1 round and are staggered. Unsecured shutters and doors flap forcefully.

3RD LEVEL SPELLS

AVENGE THE PAIN

School necromancy; **Level** elven archer 3, ranger 4, druid 4

Casting Time 1 swift action

Components V, S, DF (an arrow or bolt)

Range unlimited

Target one creature

Duration instantaneous

Saving Throw none; **Spell Resistance** yes

You pluck an arrow from yourself and shoot it back at your attacker. You don't need to have the attacker in line of sight – you don't even need to know his location. Simply shoot the arrow into the air, and the winds of vengeance propel it to its origin without error—the arrow always strike its target, regardless of distance or intervening obstacles. The spell fails only if the target is warded against *scrying* or on another plane.

The avenged wound must be fresh—less than 1-hour old. The spell allows the caster to easily extract the arrow in a usable condition, and when it strikes its target, it does its normal arrow damage in addition to the damage you originally suffered from it.

BLOOD SPOOR

School divination; **Level** elven archer 3, ranger 4, druid 4

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, DF (drop of quarry's blood)

Range personal

Target you

Duration 10 minutes/level

Saving Throw none (harmless); **Spell**

Resistance yes (harmless)

By touching a drop of your quarry's fresh blood (blood gained within an hour), you can unerringly follow his trail across land or through water, no matter how fast you are moving. If your quarry takes flight, you can follow the trail either through the air (if you have means to fly) or from the ground.

If your quarry uses magical movement (such as *dimension door* or *teleport*), you can sense the trail leading in a straight line from where the magical movement started to where it ended (although this straight-line track may lead through impassable barriers). This spell even reveals a druid's path, regardless of his trackless step ability.

Wards against *scrying* prevent this spell's *effects*. You cannot track your quarry to another plane.

MERCURIAL ARROW

School transmutation; **Level** elven archer 3, ranger 4, druid 4

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, DF (arrow or bolt)

Range close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target 50 arrows or bolts (all of which must be together at the time of casting)

Duration 1 hour/level

You can imbue up to 50 arrows or bolts with one of the following traits: adamantine, silver, or cold iron—allowing them to bypass damage reduction

vulnerable to these traits. The projectiles must all be of the same kind, and they have to be in a single quiver or similar container as a group. You must pick which trait you desire before casting the spell, and you cannot change it.

The projectiles lose their transmutation once they are used or when the spell's duration expires.

SHARE INSIGHT

School transmutation; **Level** elven archer 3, ranger 4, druid 4

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, DF (an arrow or bolt)

Range touch

Target one creature

Duration 1 round/level

Saving Throw Will negates (harmless);

Spell Resistance yes (harmless)

You share your physical archery skills with a willing recipient. This includes your base attack bonus, Dexterity bonus, combat feats, and extraordinary abilities such as Preferred Target, Precision, and Take Aim. This spell does *not* allow you to share supernatural or spell-like abilities, nor can you share innate magical abilities or magic-item-granted advantages.

While the spell lasts, the recipient can use either your archery skills or his own combat skills, but not both in the same round.

4TH LEVEL SPELLS

ARROW OF THE ANIMAL SPIRIT

School transmutation; **Level** elven archer 4, druid 5

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, DF (an arrow or bolt)

Range touch

Target touched arrow or bolt

Duration 1 round

Powerful animal spirits are bound into an arrow, which you must loose in the next round for the spell to be effective. When the arrow strikes, ghostly wolves, bears, aurochs, or wildcats appear around the shaft and attack the target. A successful hit deals normal damage, and you may make a combat maneuver, adding a +5 competency bonus to your CMB. This maneuver may be a Bull Rush, Grapple (one round only), Overrun, Trip or Feint.

FIREBURST

School evocation (fire); **Level** elven archer 4, druid 5

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, DF (a drop of pitch mixed with sawdust, and an arrow or bolt)

Range touch

Target touched arrow or bolt

Area 20-foot-radius spread; see text

Duration 1 round

Saving Throw Reflex half; **Spell**

Resistance yes

The next arrow you shoot resembles an ordinary flaming arrow, but you can set it to explode. The explosion scatters burning sawdust or embers everywhere within a 20-ft. radius. These burning embers hang suspended in the air, drifting with the wind. After 1 round, nothing remains but a bit of smoke and some light ash.

You choose how loud the explosion is, from a tiny pop to large boom. You also choose the flame's colors—being magical, any color is possible.

Fireburst does not burn as hot as a wizard's *fireball*. *Fireburst* does 1d4 hp fire damage per caster level (maximum 15d4). It does ignite combustibles, but it cannot melt metals.

You can set the arrow to explode at any point along its trajectory. It may be shot high into the air as a signal, or shot low over an area to provide 1 round of illumination. *Fireburst* provides clear illumination in a 100-ft. radius, and shadowy illumination out to 200 ft. A *fireburst* arrow always explodes on contact with any solid object—it can thus be stopped by an invisible wall or other barriers.

FLY TRUE

School transmutation; **Level** elven archer 4, druid 5

Casting Time 1 swift action

Components V, S, DF (an arrow or bolt)

Range touch

Target touched arrow or bolt

Duration 1 round

Saving Throw none; **Spell Resistance** none

You can disable or destroy a device by having your next arrow hit *exactly* where you want it to hit. You can make the famous "cleave your opponent's arrow" shot with ease. You can sever a hangman's rope, or snuff a candle flame without disturbing the wax. Your target must be a stationary, inanimate object, within your weapon's maximum range, and the spot you wish to hit must be at least partly visible. You gain +20 to your ranged attack roll, your arrow or bolt ignores 30 points of hardness, and it does maximum its normal damage +5 per elven archer level. This spell is highly useful against objects hidden behind *walls of force*.

If you do not make a shot within one round, the spell dissipates.

HUNTER'S SHOT

School necromancy; **Level** elven archer 4, druid 5

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, DF (arrow or bolt)

Range touch

Target touched arrow or bolt

Duration 1 hour/level

Saving Throw Fortitude partial; **Spell**

Resistance yes

You can slay game animals – or people – with one shot. You make your attack roll as usual; if you hit, your prey must make a Fortitude save.

If your prey's Hit Dice total is less than or equal to half your archer level:

On a failed Fortitude save, your prey is killed. On a successful Fortitude save, your prey takes damage equal to half its current hit points, or your normal arrow damage, whichever is greater.

If your prey's Hit Dice total exceeds half your archer level:

On a failed Fortitude save, your prey takes damage equal to half its current hit points, or your normal arrow damage, whichever is greater. On a successful Fortitude save, it takes only your normal arrow damage.

This spell affects *all* the arrows you shoot during the 1 round it is in effect. Although this spell can kill outright, it is not a "death attack"; it simply helps your arrows strike as effectively as possible. Therefore, it does not prevent the subsequent use of *raise dead* or similar magic. Ω



XII

TAURUS ♉ TWELVE



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4^E, SYSTEM-NEUTRAL, and PATHFINDER
ROLEPLAYING GAME.



Howling Tower Total Party Kill or Total Buzz Kill?

by Steve Winter
Art by Stephen Wood

It happens to every GM eventually. Your adventure is clicking along smoothly, the players are engaged, the action is brisk and tense, and then a fight scene takes an unexpected turn south, and you find your campaign teetering on the brink of a TPK. Your stomach knots up. Your dice glisten with the sweat from your palms. Your mind flops back and forth between guilt and dread. Should you intervene somehow, or kill 'em all and let the dice gods sort 'em out?

Relax. You have options.

First, consider why this potential TPK is looming. It's probably for one of five reasons.

1. One player made a foolish mistake (the classic poorly aimed *fireball*).
2. One player made a mistake through misunderstanding a rule or the situation.
3. The entire group made a bad decision, such as tackling a foe they should have known outclassed them or pressing on when they should have turned back.
4. You (the GM) made the encounter too dangerous. (I'm assuming that happened by mistake rather than vindictiveness.)
5. Plain old bad luck.

Understanding the cause should help shape your response. Broadly, you can let the chips fall where they may, intervene to prevent the TPK from happening, or take steps afterward to amend the outcome.

C'EST LA GUERRE

Everyone knows that an adventurer's life is fraught with peril. If they don't, perhaps now is as good a time as any for

players and the GM to learn that lesson. Draw the curtain and cue the funeral march.

Bittersweet Victory. A total party kill isn't automatically a failure. Films such as *Seven Samurai* and *The Wild Bunch* see the heroes wiped out, but their sacrifice achieves something glorious. If the characters destroy the story's ultimate villain but die in the attempt, they've won a bittersweet victory. Without the evil genius holding things together, his minions will drift away and his schemes disintegrate. That's a fine ending.

A New Hope. If the outcome truly was a disaster for the good guys, that needn't spell the end of the campaign. When the players pick up again with new characters, consider dropping them into the world 10 to 20 years down the road. By then, the villain who crushed their

previous heroes has had time to reshape the world according to his darker vision. The new heroes set out to accomplish what their forebears could not.

Fly, You Fools! A third possibility is to give one or two characters the chance to save everyone else by sacrificing themselves; the classic “Get out of here! I’ll hold them off!” scene. Everyone knows the one who stays behind is doomed, making the scene that much more poignant.

Players aren’t likely to arrive at this point by themselves, but someone might surprise you by jumping at the chance if you suggest the idea. Sometimes players get tired of a character and would like to try a new one, but they are not sure how to engineer the change. A heroic, selfless death might offer just the escape clause they’re looking for.

THIS IS YOUR INTERVENTION

GMs should not mother players too protectively. They’ll pick up on that and lose all fear of failure, followed shortly by losing all interest in the game. But you can intervene on their behalf, if you do it wisely.

Pulling Punches. The very best fights are those that come as close as possible to a total party kill without actually killing everyone. “There is nothing as exhilarating as getting shot at without result,” Winston Churchill famously wrote of his experience during the Boer War. For this to have power, though, the players must believe in the very real possibility of seeing their characters shredded. The specter of a TPK should never be entirely off the table; a glimpse of that ghost is deliciously frightening.

To fudge or not to fudge dice rolls is an eternal question facing GMs. I believe there are times when it’s justified, but they’re rare. First, it’s all too easy for players to catch on and feel cheated or cheapened. Second, fudging is a slippery slope. Once you start, it can become a bad habit. It’s easiest to get away with when characters get into trouble through a string of misfortune. A reversal of bad luck can be passed off as Fate rebalancing the scales.

Here Comes the Cavalry. Previously unseen NPCs coming to the heroes’ rescue is one of cheesiest ways to forestall a TPK. It’s in tone with a very pulpy campaign, but otherwise, try to avoid this one. If you must use it, lean on NPCs the players know about. Even better, have character sheets ready for those NPCs, and let players whose characters have fallen in the fight take control of them.

At Last, I Have You Right Where I Want You. The right sort of villain might prefer to have the characters locked up rather than dead. Captives can be tormented, experimented on, sold into slavery, forced into gladiatorial contests, turned into mental puppets, assigned a *geas*, or just ransomed for an unimaginable sum. The villain might invite the characters to save themselves by surrendering or wait until they’re all unconscious and scrape their bodies off the deck. In any event, the characters survive with a chance to escape and fight again.

You Call Yourself Heroes? A variation of the villain who takes prisoners is the one who defeats the characters so easily that he is content to leave them alive with their humiliation. After all, they present no threat to him. They don’t qualify as real heroes at all.

Pick Your Targets. Characters who are on the ropes can get a fighting chance if you choose your targets carefully. For example, finishing off the one or two weaker characters might create an opening for the strongest characters to gain the upper hand.

Alternatively, focusing attacks on the strongest characters might buy enough time for the weakest to recover. One healing potion later, maybe they can get back into the fight.

It’s a Balrog! What can prevent an enemy poised at the edge of victory from crushing the heroes? An even worse threat, that’s what. This is a variation of (Raymond) Chandler’s Law, a staple in private eye novels and movies: “When in doubt, have a man come through a door with a gun in his hand.” The sudden arrival of a dragon, demon, or

similar dramatic device can sow enough confusion to let the beleaguered heroes slip away or flee like panicked baboons. It might even create a situation where the heroes and their foes must join forces to defeat the common enemy that intends to eat them all. Handled correctly, players will think this is what you intended to happen all along.

Self-Destruct Countdown. Instead of an enemy, the situation can be thrown into chaos by an environmental change: a *fireball* sets the whole place aflame; a berserk ogre’s wild swing smashes a roof support beam, and the ceiling starts collapsing; or an *earthquake* spell cracks the seawall, and the chamber begins flooding. Friend or foe, anyone who doesn’t get out NOW never will. Like the balrog gambit, this can look like it was your plan from the beginning if done with flair and a straight face.

Just One...More...Swing. A staple of heroic sagas is the hero who keeps on fighting despite wounds that would have finished lesser men. Some games incorporate rules for that sort of thing, but most assume that when your hit points are gone, you’re down for the count. Exceptional situations, however, can call for exceptional solutions.

Consider offering a bargain to the players: their characters can keep fighting after they should by all humanly logic be struck down, but at a cost. In effect, you’re playing the role of the devil here. The exact implementation depends on the situation and the game you’re playing. In D&D 4E, for example, you could allow characters to stay on their feet and keep fighting when they should be down and making death saving throws.

This superhuman exertion must come at a significant and permanent cost. For example, the character might suffer a head injury that cuts his Charisma (or Intelligence!) in half, or a leg wound that leaves him permanently slowed. He might lose the ability to ever again use a daily power, a feat, a particular stunt, or spell slot, as chosen by the DM. The penalty might be so severe that the player will prefer to retire that character, and

that's okay. They've already beaten death at his own game. What's left?

Cleansing Breath...whooh. TPK situations often arise because players have habitual responses to situations. When they find themselves in trouble, they may just keep doing more of what's always worked in the past, even though it's not working now.

If the situation is steaming out of control, nothing's wrong with taking a step back and giving everyone a chance to gather their wits. Encourage players to get creative. Point out, if there's any doubt, that they're up against the wall. Then go get yourself a soda or take a bathroom break.

When you return, if the players came up with an ingenious plan, give it a fair shot. There's no better time to reward cleverness than when it really matters.

WELL, THAT WENT BADLY

Either you chose not to intervene or your intervention didn't work. The field is strewn with bodies, the heroes among them. But neither you nor the

players are ready to say farewell to these characters. You can still retrieve the situation.

It Was All a Dream. Yes, Really. This chestnut has moved beyond cliché to settle in Jokeland. One twist might make it workable. That is, when the characters awaken, they find themselves in the home or camp of an oracle who explains that what they just experienced is the fate their present course locks them into. To change it, they must reassess their plans and possibly complete a quest of some kind to zero out their bad karma. You just might get away with it, once.

A Curse in the Blood. If the characters died fighting vampires, werewolves, or any other monster that infects its victims' blood, there's your answer. The campaign can continue with the PCs struggling against their new, monstrous natures while seeking a cure, hated and hunted by a world that fears and abhors them.

Think Ahead. When characters venture into extreme danger, equip them with a magical dingus that can pull them out of the fire if the flames get too hot. It might be a whistle to blow, a twig to snap, or (my favorite) a fragile glass ball containing a tiny demon that teleports back to its master's abode with the dead and dying characters dragged along in its wake. Such a wonderful item should be available only from the GM.

You Die, She Dies, Everybody Dies. But only for a while. With magic in the equation, death never needs to be permanent. When all the PCs are dead, however, someone else needs to see to the resurrecting. This could include their patron, an enemy of their enemy, some obscure cult of resurrectionists with a use for the characters, or some even more alien and mysterious entity. The experience might have subtly changed the characters, or the change might not be subtle at all. They might return as goblins, or sprites, or rabbits, with a special mission to complete before getting their own bodies back—and they certainly owe someone a huge favor.

This is also a perfect chance for the GM to remove troublesome magical items from the picture.

Dead and Loving It. The characters are dead; so what? Most ever fantasy world incorporates a thriving spirit world in one form or another. Being dead just means that they've transitioned from one form of existence to another. Mythology is rife with tales of heroes who escaped from the world of the dead. Instead of saving that adventure for later, with an artificial setup and lead-in, now is the perfect time for it. "You're dead on the shore of the River Styx. What are you going to do next?"

THE INEVITABLE SILVER LINING

The best approach to this problem is to openly talk about the possibility of a TPK *before* the situation arises. Think of it as a living will for RPG characters. Some players may be fine with losing characters, while others want the GM to take extraordinary lifesaving measures on their behalf. Either way, it's best to know in advance. Understand that many players who say they're fine with character death really aren't. Encourage honesty in this conversation, and know your players. Some may be more open when talking one-on-one than in a group.

It's also wise to ponder the possibility from a planning perspective. When creating climactic encounters or designing fight scenes that you know will be tough, ask yourself what you can do if the situation veers toward a TPK. Treat it as a standard part of adventure planning until it becomes second nature.

When a TPK lands on your tabletop, don't waste the opportunity to learn something from the experience. Let's be frank; a TPK stresses a campaign like nothing else, and not all game groups will survive the quake. A bit of preparation can maximize your campaign's chance to outlive the characters and even to turn a potential catastrophe into an epic and unforgettable event. Use it to move your campaign forward instead of backward.

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WEAPONS FOR A NEW AGE

Three Black Powder Variants

By Rodrigo García Carmona

Art by Guido Kuip

If you love the AGE system, but also crave playing in a more technologically advanced setting, you'll soon find you need some rules for firearms. Maybe you want to play a daring pistol-wielding pirate or a dwarven engineer armed with his faithful arquebus. Here's how to include black powder weapons in your AGE games.

The following rules cover firearms of the late medieval and Renaissance periods. These expensive and complex, muzzle-loaded weapons fire spherical bullets propelled by the controlled detonation of black powder. Lacking the rifled barrel that would eventually produce more accurate guns, the weapons presented here have a limited range; the bullet itself could travel further, but the difficulty of aiming at those distances makes them ineffective. On the other hand, their power more than compensates for this factor.

The prices given work for a fantasy world in which firearms are rare. However, the Game Master can modify these values if desired.

FIREARMS

Arquebus: Also called a “hackbut”, the arquebus is the standard battlefield firearm. It is around 4 ft. long and

requires both hands to fire: one supports the barrel while the other pulls the trigger. Its relatively small size makes handling it an easy task, especially in comparison to the heavier musket. Arquebuses are the preferred weapons of skirmishers.

Musket: Much heavier than the arquebus and characterized by its extremely long barrel, the musket is the biggest firearm that one person can carry (and a very muscular one—early muskets often weighed 15 to 20 pounds). A musket's 4-foot-long barrel makes reloading difficult. With range comparable to a bow, it has enough power to kill an armored knight with one shot.

Pistol: An engineering wonder, the pistol's small size belies its high power. Nobility and rich merchants favor these weapons for their ease of concealment and lethality. Also, their high cost rarely bothers those with deep pockets. A pistol can be held and fired with just one hand, leaving the other one free.

DAINGEROUS MISFIRES

If an attack performed using a weapon from the Firearms Group fails, and the Dragon Die shows a 1, the weapon misfires. Roll damage against the original

attacker. This damage is penetrating, ignoring any armor. Also, the misfired weapon is broken, its barrel fouled, possibly with a bullet jammed in its mechanism. It cannot be used again until repaired (at half the original cost).

MOUNTED COMBAT

Arquebuses and muskets cannot be used on horseback. If you attempt it, they count as improvised weapons.

FIRING STAND

The minimum Strength requirement for using a Musket drops to 1 when fired with the barrel resting on a stand. However, this set up takes some time (2 full rounds if done during combat) and restricts the shooter's movements—he can't leave the stand without taking the musket out of it. Any movement (voluntary or not) will force the shooter to repeat the set up process. A firing stand is really feasible only for defensive positions and battlefield formations.

Pistol reloading: Even though fired single-handed, reloading a pistol still requires both hands.

SUPERIOR FIREARMS

Firearms are made of both wood and metal. As stated in *Dragon Age Set 2*

Firearms

Weapon	Damage	Min. Str	Cost	Short Range	Long Range	Reload
Firearms Group (Dexterity)*						
Arquebus	2d6+2	1	60 sp	12 yards	24 yards	1 major action
Musket	3d6	3 (1)	100 sp	16 yards	32 yards	1 major action & 1 minor action
Pistol	1d6+3	-1	100 sp	6 yards	12 yards	1 major action

*Weapons from the Firearms Group add Perception instead of Strength to damage.

(Game Master's Guide, page 35), a weapon can benefit from the effects of only one superior raw material. Keep in mind that firearms are ranged weapons, so they also benefit from any increase in range that these materials may grant.

NEW TALENTS

FIREARM WEAPON STYLE

Classes: Rogue and Warrior.

Requirement: You must be trained in the Firearms Group.

Firearms are famously dangerous, slow, and unwieldy—except in your hands. As an experienced user of these powerful weapons, you can stand toe-to-toe with any archer or crossbowman.

NOVICE: Extensive training has taught you to use the normally hazardous firearms safely. You are no longer subjected to the “Dangerous to use” special rule while using weapons from the Firearms Group. A failed attack roll never results in an accident.

JOURNEYMAN: Thanks to careful preparation of cartridges containing both powder and bullet, and a steady hand, you can reload your weapon blazingly fast. You can reload an arquebus or pistol as a minor action and a musket as a major action.

MASTER: You have learned that the force of a speeding bullet can stop even the most stubborn opponent. You can perform the Knock Prone stunt for 1 SP instead of the usual 2.

NEW SPECIALIZATIONS

With new weapons come new styles of combat. These are all intended for a black powder setting.

GUNSLINGER

Rogue Specialization

Firing a pistol looks like an easy affair: just point your weapon at the enemy and pull the trigger. But underneath this simple task lies what some call an art form. The practitioners of this art call themselves Gunslingers, and their skill is surpassed only by their arrogance.

Many Gunslingers come from noble families. Wealthy and stylish, most begin

as bored scions of the powerful, but after their first brush with danger at gunpoint, they become addicted to the sensation. Nothing can compete with the tension of walking those few paces and turning to fire at an opponent, or looking directly into the eyes of a true rival knowing that only one of them will walk away.

A Gunslinger is a whirlwind of emotions. Boastful and daring, the fire in their hearts burns stronger than the one inside their weapons. Since every day could be their last, they tend to be romantics and prone to excesses of poetry.

GUNSLINGER TALENT

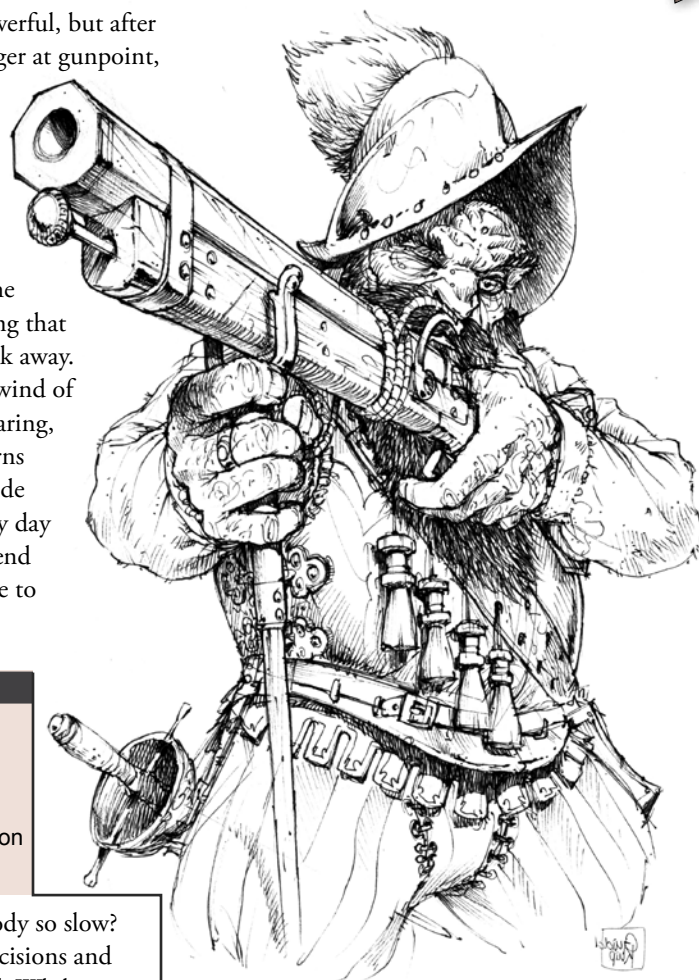
Class: Rogue

Requirement: You must have Dexterity and Perception 3 or higher, and the Firearm Weapon Style (novice)

NOVICE: Why is everybody so slow? You make split-second decisions and react with lightning speed. While your enemies consider their next move, you have already drawn and fired with deadly precision. You can reroll any Dexterity (Initiative) test, but you must keep the second result, even if it is lower. Also, as a minor action, you can ready and aim a pistol, gaining the usual +1 on your next attack roll.

Journeyman: Sometimes killing is not enough. Humiliation is so much more satisfying, especially when you can show off at the same time. When attacking with a pistol you can perform the Disarm stunt, even if it normally could only be executed during a melee attack. If you win the opposed attack roll that is part of this stunt, the weapon will be knocked 1d6 + 3 yards away instead of the usual 1d6 + Strength.

Master: The telltale sign of a master Gunslinger is his ability to fire two weapons at the same time, even at different opponents. After all, some



despicable cowards break the rules by bringing friends to a duel. If you have a loaded pistol in each hand and make an attack with one of them, you can make another attack with the other as a minor action. The second attack cannot generate SPs, and you only add half of your Perception (rounded down) to damage.

THUNDERER

Warrior Specialization

A wise soldier fears the crackling sound of thunder on a clear day, because this can only mean that he is already dead. The poor victim knows he has become the target of a Thunderer, a terrifying warrior who carries a musket of impressive size.

Thunderers are loud, big, and imposing, and they prefer weapons of the same breed. Raw power characterizes firearms, and Thunderers exploit this by using the biggest weapons their arms can lift.



Every Thunderer loves her weapon and guards it with her life. These huge warriors take every opportunity to improve and customize their muskets, usually to make them bigger and louder. They eventually reach a point where their firearms are unusable by any other person, because of their complexity and tremendous size.

THUNDERER TALENT

Class: Warrior

Requirement: You must have Perception and Strength 3 or higher, and the Firearm Weapon Style (novice)

Novice: The deafening roar of your weapon instills fear in the hearts of even the most stalwart enemy. You can perform a special Thunderous Shot stunt for 4 SP when firing a musket. All enemies who hear this mighty sound must make a Willpower (Courage or Self-Discipline) test. The target number (TN) is 10 + your Strength ability. Those who fail will have a penalty of

-1 to all their tests until the start of your next turn.

Journeyman: Some believe that strong plate can stop any bullet, but nothing can be further from the truth. All armor has weak points, and your mighty shots can turn small chinks into fatal cracks. When you perform the Pierce Armor stunt while attacking with a firearm, your damage is penetrating. (This stunt normally halves your opponent's armor rating, but penetrating damage allows you to ignore it altogether.)

Master: Even if your opponents muster the courage to attack you, they still have to reach you. Firearms are very imprecise to the point of uselessness at long ranges, but when needed, you can adopt a fixed shooting position and shoot with much greater accuracy. You can enter Ironbelcher mode with an activate action. While in this mode and firing a musket, you double both the short and long range of your weapon. Any movement (voluntary or not) ends this mode.

NEW MAGIC ITEMS

GUNS OF THE RED DEVIL

Masterwork Benefits: *Attack Bonus:* +1, *Damage Bonus:* +0

Superior Benefits: *Minimum Strength:* -1, *Talent Level Bonus:* One level, *Focus Benefit:* No, *Short Range:* 9 yards, *Long Range:* 24 yards

These paired pistols are the weapons of choice of the infamous Red Devil, a fearsome pirate who has terrorized the eastern fringes for more than 300 years. Some believe that the weapons grant immortality (otherwise, how could anyone survive for so many years?). In truth, numerous pirates have inherited the position of Red Devil over the years, all adopting the same name and attire.

In addition to granting a +3 social benefit among pirates, the Guns of the Red Devil give their owner the ability to perform the Stunned Silence roleplaying stunt for 2 SP instead of the normal 3.

MAGE-HUNTER

Masterwork Benefits: *Attack Bonus:* +2, *Damage Bonus:* +0

Superior Benefits: *Minimum Strength:* -1, *Talent Level Bonus:* No, *Focus Benefit:* No, *Short Range:* 15 yards, *Long Range:* 36 yards

Rune Slots: 1

During the worst fighting of the long war against the underground empire of the ghouls and their necromancers, the dwarves' lack of magical skills was costing them dearly. In response, the finest dwarven engineers worked night and day until they devised the weapons later called mage-hunters.

These fine arquebuses imbue each shot with a powerful magic-disrupting field. In addition to the usual damage to Health, any Mage hit with a mage-hunter loses Mana Points equal to one quarter of the damage (rounded down).

Note: Rune Slots rules are detailed in *Dragon Age Set 3.vv*

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Kobold Diplomacy

WHAT'S RIGHT

FOR THE GAME

An Interview with Pathfinder RPG Lead Designer Jason Bulmahn

By Jeremy L. C. Jones

Back in the spring of 2009, when the Kobold Diplomats first spoke with Jason Bulmahn, he was knee-deep in play-testing the Pathfinder RPG. This spring, he was scrambling to get *Ultimate Equipment*, a 400-page “one-stop-shop for all of your gear and magic item needs,” ready for the printer so it will be out in time for GenCon 2012.

Bulmahn’s goal back then, as now, was quite simple: “I just want to put out a game that is true to the spirit of the 3.5 rules system, while at the same time evolving it into a better play experience. I think we’ve managed to do that and I hope the fans agree.”

Fans, it seems, agreed. Response to Pathfinder RPG exceeded his expectations—and everyone else’s at Paizo.

After just a handful of years, the Pathfinder roleplaying game line has grown just enough (and not too quickly). Bulmahn has been at the helm of this game since the beginning, as lead designer.

Interestingly, it’s Bulmahn’s efforts on the Beginner’s Box that reveals the most about his vision for the Pathfinder RPG line and for playing RPGs in general.

This time, Bulmahn chats with the Kobold Diplomats about how his design team selects the next project, how they bring a project from concept to completion, and why he—and many of us—love playing RPGs in the first place.

What are you working on?

Bulmahn: Right now I am neck deep in *Ultimate Equipment*. The book is 400 pages long and contains virtually every piece of gear and magic item we could come up with. We pulled out almost all the material from our core rulebooks—there’s a couple things we didn’t get in there—and everything from the *Advanced Players Guide*, everything... plus a mountain of new material. That old material only makes up a fraction of book. We really wanted to make this the one-stop shop for all of your gear and magic item needs.

How’d you come to be focusing on this particular product?

Bulmahn: I’m the lead designer of the role-playing game line, so all of the core rulebooks go through me. We have adventure paths, we have modules, we have scenarios, we have companions, we’ve got cards, we’ve got maps... we’ve got a lot of different product lines. But me and my team, our entire focus is the core rule book line. I’m the manager, so it’s my job to make sure that we’re working to get the book done.

It’s pretty much our job to take [core] books from inception to completion. We start from the basic idea, the barest of

concepts, flesh that out into an outline, order all the text, write all the text in-house that needs to be written, stitch it all together, order the art... There are a lot of people helping on that, obviously. [Laughing]

For instance, *Ultimate Equipment* started out with just one sentence: “the big book of gear”—and it went from that into a giant, 400-page crusher.

Also, if the book has a brand new sub-system in it that we’ve never done before, that we have no template for, it falls on me or my staff to generate that system from scratch. We tend not to freelance out big pieces like that. We’ll freelance out a bunch of feats with some guidelines as to what we want and what we’re looking for but when it comes to the big, new systems in a book, that’s pretty much my team’s responsibility.



It's a complicated process and it goes through a number of phases. But, yeah, in the end it's our job to take this book and make it into a book. And getting the text ready so it can be laid out, it can be edited, and so it can be ready to go to the printer.

How do you decide what book to do next?

Bulmahn: We have relatively regular meetings where we talk about what we're thinking about doing far off in the future. We have a big list of ideas that I keep and maintain. I add to it on occasion and chat with other folks here in the office about some ideas that we might use.

From there we just kind of narrow it down to what we need to flesh out the line, what fits well with our other products and offerings. We really just kind of think about what we need to make the game better.

A lot of the times we'll go to the fans and ask them, "Hey, what aren't we doing right now?" It's a collaborative process, but my team is responsible for pulling together those ideas.

The last time we spoke (for the KQ blog, May 7, 2009), the Pathfinder RPG hadn't even been released yet. Has much changed since then in terms of the way you do things?

Bulmahn: [Laughing] A lot has changed! Back during the beta-testing, the only person on the design team was me. But we couldn't pull off three large, hardcover rulebooks with only one person developing and designing them. To be clear, it was never a solo effort. I always had the assistance and help of other people here in the office, but they had other responsibilities that kept them busy, right?

We quickly realized that [the *Pathfinder RPG*] was going to become a very important part of our business. To make the products of the quality that we wanted, we needed a whole team of people working on just the core rule books and developing this game. A lot of that need came from the fact that we were such a success. We thought we were

going to do pretty well. We had high hopes, but we blew those hopes away almost immediately.

In those early days we were so frantic just to get the system put together and get the first book out. We didn't understand the process fully. We'd spent years doing magazines and we'd come out with adventure paths and modules and things like that, but we'd done nothing on the scale of a 500-page hardcover rule book.

But that first book was, in some regards, simple by comparison to the *Advanced Players Guide*. That's when we realized we really needed more people very desperately. There was just way too much work. The *Advanced Players Guide* was brand new, whereas with the core rulebook we had some text we were able to work with from the OGL. We had a lot of the text right at the beginning and we didn't have to worry about some aspects of it. But when it came to the *Advanced Players Guide* it was all new. Every piece of it needed to be reviewed and worked with. For that book, I was still pretty much by myself and it became readily apparent that it was too much for one person to handle.

Since then we've expanded and grown. Now we're a full team and we're much more capable of handling the challenges of running a very successful game line.

How do you avoid over-expanding or growing too quickly?

Bulmahn: That's obviously something we're very concerned about. We don't want our game to grow at an unmanageable pace. We spend a great deal of time thinking about what book is right for the line at any given moment. We have a very hard limit of three hardcover books per year, and that's it. Some game lines in the past... have come out with a book or two in a month and that's just too much. We feel that that would grow our line far too quickly and unmanageably.

Right now we're sticking to the three books a year. We feel that's a very modest but reasonable amount of growth. It keeps the system expanding and giving people new things to play with, but

not at a rate that they can't toy with all the pieces that are given to them or at least the pieces that appeal to them. Otherwise, it comes to a point where entire books will go by and it's just like, "Yeah, we don't have time to experiment with any of that because we only had two game sessions between books."

[Laughing]

We're really focused on making sure the stuff we put out is up to the quality we want for the game and that it's fun to play. You can put out an awful lot of ideas and they might all be fun, but if no one has time to play them because the next idea just hit them then you're wasting your effort.

When we first spoke, you were making the new RPG on the block. Now, you're making one of the hottest games out there. Has that change of position influenced what you do, how you do it, and how you interact with the roleplaying community?

Bulmahn: I'd say we've tried very hard *not* to change. Paizo's always been very focused on being open, communicative, and friendly with our customers. The people who buy our books and buy our games, they're the ones keeping us in business and we're very grateful for that. We're more than happy to be providing them with fun games and fun tools to use in their games. We're really excited to be doing that. I think it's really easy for a company to say, "Yes, they will buy whatever I put out!" I'm not sure that that's true.

To some extent, you have to give customers what they want, but there's a balancing aspect. You also have to give them what's right for the game. We spend a great deal of time interfacing with our fans and talking to our fans, letting them know that we care about their concerns and that we are working as hard as we can to make the game that they want to play. That doesn't always work out.

Not everything will be for everyone. We put out *Ultimate Combat* and it had a gunslinger class in it. And that rubbed some people the wrong way. We kind of stated from the outset, "Not everything we put out is going to be great for

everybody, but... this is an option you now have available to you and its only one part of a very large book.”

It’s a tricky line to walk, but I think we do a pretty decent job of it.

What are some of the ways you interact with and get feedback from the players?

Bulmahn: Generally speaking, we get most of our feedback through one of two means. The first and by the far the largest is our message boards. We spend a great deal of time looking at our message boards. We pay attention to what’s being discussed, what’s being thought of, what’s being thrown out, what questions people are having, what problems people are having. Our community is really good at letting us know what we’ve done right and what we’ve done wrong. We spend a great deal of time responding to that. You’ll see a number of us all over the message boards quite frequently.

The other way we get feedback is through conventions and organized play. Organized play has always been a very important component to our game and it tells us how people are actually playing.

Message boards tend to be quite anecdotal. It’s this big sea of posts. You can pick a post out but it’s this one drop in an ocean of communication; whereas, with organized play we can really take a look at the way people are playing. These are the things we are seeing and we can get feedback directly from that. That also happens a great deal at conventions where we can speak to people face to face and wander the halls and wander the tables and see what people are doing.

We try to gather as much information as we can, through as many means as we have available to us. It’s pretty valuable to us.

You mentioned above “what’s right for the game.” What is right for the game? What criteria do you use?

Bulmahn: [Laughing] Well, if it was easy to figure out, they wouldn’t need me! It’s really tricky. We look at the things we’ve put out and the things we have planned for the near future, and

see how these elements are being played by both players and game masters.

Frequently, we’ll take a look and go, “Well, we’ve done a lot of X and we need more of Y.”

The *Advanced Race Guide* was a book that we just kind of sat down and went, “Ya know, the one thing we really haven’t touched in any of our books is races.” The *Advanced Players Guide* really didn’t have a lot on races; it just had a spread on each of the races from the *Core Rulebook*. *Ultimate Magic* and *Ultimate Combat* really had no mention of races in them at all. Our *Bestiaries* had some monsters that could be played as races, but they didn’t really treat them as player races.

Races are an important part of the game. It’s a decision every character has to make. If this is important to the game, maybe we should take a look at giving some more content on it and using one of our precious three books per year on.

That’s the decision we have to make whenever we’re coming up with a new book. Is this the right piece of content for the game at this time? It’s not a simple process. We often change our minds. We might shift priorities and move books around or change them entirely. That’s happened a number of times.

Something you said earlier, reminded me of the blue note in jazz—a flattened note that’s technically “wrong” but otherwise just absolutely, utterly right. It just sounds perfect. Have there been any blue notes in the Pathfinder RPG line so far? [Interviewer’s note: I’m not a musician and I freely admit to using the term “blue note” loosely, here.]

Bulmahn: I don’t think we’ve played any blue notes just yet. At least not on a grand scale. We’ve done some smaller ones. Some parts of books have been kind of us pushing the boundaries and doing things that are outside what most people would expect.

A book like the *Advanced Race Guide* had virtually no blue notes in it at all. We had a bunch of new classes,

but everything fell within pre-defined parameters. They were all fantasy classes. All the other stuff in the book was more feats and more spells, more magic items, and things that you were going to expect from something called the *Advanced Race Guide*.

When we got to *Ultimate Magic* and *Ultimate Combat*, we started pushing out our boundaries and started doing things that people maybe didn’t expect. *Ultimate Magic* had the Words of Power magic system which is really kind of out there and it’s quite experimental for how. It allows you to do freeform magic, which is not something that are system really accommodates. And it met with some success, and I know that there are a lot of GMs who have tinkered with it and maybe introduced it in a very limited sense to their game without adopting it wholesale. And some of them probably just ignored it entirely.

With *Ultimate Combat*, it was the gunslinger, of course.

What we’re trying to do is push outward and do some things that people maybe won’t expect. I don’t think we’ve done that on a book-wide scale... yet.

Do players who come to Pathfinder RPG from 3.5 tend to be uncomfortable with change, with pushed boundaries?

Bulmahn: The resistance to change has been interesting. When we first launched the game, we had a big tug of war going on. There were people who really wanted it to be a straight 3.5 reprint, all the way to, “Hey, do whatever you want. Rewrite the whole game!”

And it was important to us for people coming at it with a shared history and knowledge to have a game that was fundamentally similar to the game experience they had been having for so many years.

The core of the game was pretty close to what people had been playing for years. A lot of people have said, “Hey, this is great! I can use all my old books.” And that was our goal. We wanted to make sure that people could take all the books that they had, all the materials

that they had spent years collecting, and a lot of money investing in, and still be able to use that material.

But as time has gone on, we've found that a lot of people have left those old books behind. A lot of people have said, "Hey, this is great! I don't need those old books anymore. They don't work as well, and the material in the Pathfinder books is just as exciting and fills all the niches that I need for my game." They enjoy the play experience that's being offered by Pathfinder. Our player base is more open to new experiences and new directions now.

We're going to continue offering the game that people know and love, but we find that we have a bit more freedom to offer new and exciting rules options.

For whom is the *Beginner's Box* a good place to enter the world of the *Pathfinder RPG*?

Bulmahn: Gamers experienced with 3.5 should just go straight to the *Core Rulebook*. It's really just learning the differences between the systems.

The *Beginner's Box* was really designed with two groups of people in mind: 1) people who have never played a role-playing game before and 2) people who have played a role-playing game before but never played Pathfinder. This product was something I wanted to do from the very beginning of the Pathfinder role-playing game line. It was a product very similar to this that got me into gaming back in the early 80s. I've always dreamt of doing a box to teach people how to play, to stoke the same kind of excitement that I have for gaming.

When we sat down to design it, we really wanted to make sure that the game taught you as you went. We found that, generally speaking, handing someone a 500-page rulebook and saying, "Hey read this and then we'll have fun!" is not a formula for success. [Laughing] "This role-playing game is a three credit course at your local community college!"

We wanted to make sure that people were able to sit down, open the box, and within 10 minutes they could be playing no matter what their situation.

If they were all by themselves, we included a choose-your-own-adventure style game in there to teach them the basic concepts. If they had some friends, they could start in minutes with pre-generated characters and an adventure that held the GM's hand and walked him through the rules as they came up.

For example, the very first combat is really, really simple. The monster has no real special abilities, it just runs up and swings at you and you swing at it until its dead. Then, as we go along, we introduce new concepts with each encounter, just kind of building your own lexicon of how the game world works. You don't have to worry about skills and feats and crazy stuff in the first fight. All you have to worry about is making attack roles and taking damage.

We really wanted to insure that people who had no roleplaying experience at all would be able to learn how a roleplaying game works and, in particular, how Pathfinder works.

On the flipside, for those who'd already played a role-playing game, we wanted to make sure we didn't burden them with re-teaching them every little aspect of what a role-playing game is. Some of the material that teaches you what a role-playing game is, is in relatively discreet components that you can gloss over and you can get right into what the system is and how it works. You can jump straight in.

We've been phenomenally pleased with how this product has done. We couldn't be happier with some of the stories we hear about parents teaching their kids or people gifting them to friends. It's been really exciting.

In some ways, using the *Beginner's Box* is like jumping into white water and you sort of wake up downstream. You jump in and you're already playing. It's a really impressive bit of teaching.

Bulmahn: We went back and forth over this product to make sure that we weren't making assumptions, and—at the same time—that we weren't burdening you with explanations at the beginning. We wanted to jump you right into the action

of playing and really get at what I believe is the heart of roleplaying games: creativity.

There's a lot of things out there competing for the attention and the time of young adults and kids—video games, card games, television, and movies, all sorts of stuff—and the one thing that roleplaying games can offer them that the none of the other things can is freeform creativity.

You can really do whatever you want to do. You can tell the kinds of stories you want to tell. For us, it was vital that the *Beginner's Box* teach you those sorts of things right up front. It's important to know how to make an attack role and how to deal damage, but we wanted to make sure people walked away from the *Beginner's Box* knowing *why* you play, not *how* you play.

And why do we play? Why do you play?

Bulmahn: That goes back to when I started playing. I was, I think, 11 and it was a good creative outlet. I play because it's the best way for me to spend my free time, you know? It allows me to explore my own creativity and to explore my creativity with others in a ways that you just don't get a lot of in the age of video games.

Don't get me wrong, I play a lot of video games, too, but there's not much of a personal interaction in video games. I feel like I'm being taken along through someone else's story when I'm playing a video game. And that's exciting and I have fun and there are certainly things they can do that I wouldn't think of, but ultimately I'm on rails. I'm here to experience what *they* can give me.

Roleplaying games are one of the few ways that you can have a collaborative, creative effort that everyone walks away from going, "Wow, that was a really great story" or "That was a really good time!" It's a shared experience above and beyond what you can get from just hanging out in a bar or going out to eat. It gives you stories and memories. Some of my fondest memories are from the game table. That's just something you can't get any other way.

Ω

From the Mines...

Art by Chris McFann

CONVENTION SEASON!

I saw your list of upcoming Cons in the Kobold Quarterly email. We attend a great con every year in Vancouver. It is called VCon. This year's guests include SF Grandmaster and author Connie Willis and artist James Ng. This year VCon 37 will be held at the Sheraton Vancouver Guildford on September 28 to 30, 2012. The website is www.vcon.ca.

Rockie Lowe
Fan and occasional volunteer

Rockie, thanks for the tip! VCon sounds like a great convention, and yes, the kobolds love attending both the Pacific Northwest shows and a few of the bigger conventions back east. Heck, we'd go to ComicCon in Dubai if anyone wants to pack us in a crate with a few airholes.

Readers, send us a convention report or news of an upcoming show (at least 4 months in advance!), and we'll help spread the word through the Kobold Courier newsletter and elsewhere.

STRICTLY MULTI-SYSTEM

Hi guys at KQ,

Is KQ going strictly *Pathfinder* RPG? I am finding less and less *Dungeon-y* and *Dragon-y* content lately and just wanted to know if that is the direction intentionally as I consider my subscription and game shop orders.

Thanks, nothing against *Pathfinder* RPG, I just prefer the original and want to know the direction KQ is going with content.

Rob G
Via email

*Great question, and one that has been troubling me a bit as well. KQ has no intention of going strictly *Pathfinder* RPG until the day Paizo buys us out in a massive international IPO. Until then, though, the editors are stuck in a tough position.*

*KQ isn't getting enough high-quality 4E D&D content to publish, so the editors must sometimes take a piece that isn't as good as we'd like (and then, reviewers deservedly tear us a new one—but it's all we've got!). The editors take the best of what's there, and sometimes that is quite good; like the two articles this issue on *Dragonkin* and the *Scaled Steamball*. But KQ can't offer what we don't have—content is driven by submissions.*

*I've tried begging for 4E submissions (with mixed luck), and I'm hoping that 5E will generate some submissions to the web page or magazine. Best of all, *Open Design* has launched a Kickstarter for a 4E version of the *Midgard Bestiary* (please support it today, funding that project succeeds or fails by mid-July!).*

*Kobold Quarterly intends to keep supporting all popular editions of the original RPG, and to do that, we need more good 4E submissions by freelancers, subscribers and *Open Design* patrons. Right now, it's a rough patch for the game, and it might be that 5E eventually supplants it. We'll certainly watch that with great interest, and I hope the system-less articles, the existing D&D content, and the columnists all still make the magazine worth your while.*

I appreciate you raising the issue and look forward to other perspectives in the letters inbox.

—Wolfgang Baur

CUSTOMER LOVE

Please pass this information on to the Kobold-in-Chief... I am very grateful for your response and quick resolution of my issue. I will be recommending your publication to many friends and my D&D group. I haven't found enough people to play *Pathfinder* RPG yet, but I hope to soon. Thanks again, Shelly,



you've been a dream come true. I am patiently awaiting my new issue. (Ok, maybe not so patiently).

Have a GREAT day!
Michael

Our kobold minions recently got a lot of glowing praise on the KQ boards. And deservedly so: we love our customers and want to make them happy, and your recommendations to others are crucial to keeping one of the little guys breaking into new stores and making new friends. It's a virtuous circle of gamers helping gamers. So, thank you!

TYPOGRAFIKAL ERRORS

Dear Kobold,

I've made a habit of picking up your magazine whenever I visit Midtown Comics in Manhattan, and I've always enjoyed the depth and range of its content. Last week, I was able to buy issue 19, which, once again, offers plenty of strong material. I did want to say, though, that the content is marred by a significant number of typographical errors.

Any publication is going to have one or two typos slip in, I think, but I have never seen a professional publication go to print with so many errors. Maybe InDesign was playing cruel tricks. Maybe the wrong proof went to the printer.

Maybe this is nitpicking. But when the clarity of rules, descriptions, and the like counts -- and it does indeed count with RPGs -- it's hard for a reader not to get tripped up by numerous mistakes.

Thanks for reading this letter.

Best wishes,
Chris McCreary
Via email

Chris, thanks for the letter and keeping us honest! While I could make the excuse that small-press magazines are often hardpressed just to get to print at all, that's really not satisfactory. Truth is, the period around issue 19 (Fall 2011) was a bit of a low point for us in terms of copyedits—Shelly and I were dealing with the birth of our second child, and the business suffered. The perils of a small business are many!

Fortunately, we've since expanded our editing staff to be somewhat more eagle-eyed and to include additional help. I hope you notice the difference, and we'll keep up the fight against the gremlins. This issue, I feel confident, is a big step up from #19 in terms of total typos.

OLD GUYS GO ADVENTURING

Nice job on #20. I got quite a kick out of "Putting the Band Back Together" piece.

Thanks,
Eddy Morrow
Northfield, MN

Thank you! That issue was a fine one, what with both the Elven Archer and the "Putting the Band Back Together" article. I like to think that if old guys like Gandalf and Ezren can go adventuring, then why not your PCs with a few decades of wear and tear on them? It was another fine adventurer who said "It's not the years, it's the mileage..."

MYTHOS HUNTER?

I find myself looking over the "Dragon Hunter" article (KQ #18 Summer 2011), and while I'm not a big fan of the whole dragon hunting aspect of traditional fantasy RPGs it got me thinking of adapting it, at least in concept, to something else. I'm sure many of us who love *Pathfinder* RPG are big fans of the work of H.P. Lovecraft

which is more often than not represented by aberrations.

My questions are twofold. First, has something like this been put in KQ that I missed at some point? And if not would the powers that be in charge of articles be interested in such an article? And if they would be interested would you prefer it as a prestige class or a ranger archetype?

Kodyax
Via email

Kodyax, thanks for your letter! Open Design did recently release the extremely popular Spell-Less Ranger in the New Paths series, with two archetypes, and of course it's possible that readers are a bit "rangered out". We did print some Mythos-

friendly paragon paths for 4th Edition back in #13.

But no, we haven't done an article like this possible ranger-champion archetype or prestige class with anti-Mythos overtones and a Yokai Hunter link. Ok, that sounds sort of jumbled and needs a better name, and this arrived in the hands of the Letters editor rather than the Submissions files, but... Who knows?

When you nail down where you want to go with these ideas, please do check out the New Paths Expanded Spell-less Ranger and the Kobold Quarterly Writer's Guidelines, available on the KQ website. We'd love to hear from you and other Lovecraft fans, for Pathfinder RPG or whatever your favorite fantasy RPG is!

10'x10' Toon

by Stan!



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Ask the Kobold

Animal Companions and Bags of Tricks

By Skip Williams

Art by Chris McFann

When a druid chooses to dismiss an animal companion, exactly what must the druid do? How long does it take? Also, what happens to the dismissed companion? Does the animal vanish? Run away?

Would the animal lose the extra Hit Dice and tricks it gained while being a druid's companion? If so, when?

If the druid has trained the animal to heel with the heel trick (not with a free trick the animal gains for being a companion), could the character keep the trained animal? Could a druid use this method to train a pack of wolves, for instance?

Neither the d20 rules or Pathfinder RPG provide detailed information on dismissing animal companions, though they do note the druid (and thus the ranger) may release them under Nature Bond. Ultimately, then, the druid controls the relationship with the animal between the character and the companion and can choose to end it. I recommend treating the dismissal as a major campaign event that leaves the released companion at least temporarily hostile. Under those conditions, it would be difficult to cycle a group of animals through companionship to build up a menagerie of trained animals.

Here are the details I recommend:

- The dismissed companion must be able to see and hear the druid.
- The druid uses a full-round action to dismiss the companion, breaking



the shared link. The animal and druid immediately lose all benefits from the druid/companion link. For example, the druid can no longer handle the former companion as a free action nor share spells with it. Likewise, the former companion loses all extra Hit Dice, tricks, natural armor, and other benefits gained as a companion.

- The shock of separation makes the animal hostile to the druid and fearful as well. The former companion moves away from the druid for at least 10 minutes and remains hostile to the druid for at least a day. If the druid encounters the animal again after the day has passed, the character might be able to train the animal via the Handle Animal skill, but the former companion acts like any other animal.

- The druid must remain without a companion for a minimum of one month. The DM might make the druid wait until some significant, but periodic, natural event passes before acquiring a new companion. Example qualifying events might include an equinox, solstice, change of season, migration, or other natural event. Thereafter, he can perform the ceremony requiring 24 uninterrupted hours of prayer in an environment where the new companion lives—as listed in the druid rules for both d20 and Pathfinder RPG.

How easily can a character control animals from a bag of tricks? Does a character need to use the Handle Animal skill to make animals from the bag perform tricks they already know?

The bag of tricks uses conjuration magic, which allows the bag's user to control the produced animals. I recommend the bag-using character be able to make the animals perform any trick in the Handle Animal skill list as a move action requiring no skill check. Pushing an animal (see the Handle Animal skill), however, still requires a skill check. Characters cannot train or rear animals from the bag. Ω

Animal Companions—When Players Took Charge

The animal companion has become an important feature of the druid and ranger classes, but it did not start out that way.

Previous versions of the game included a spell called *animal friendship*, which allowed druidical spellcasters to befriend regular animals and make them perform unusual tasks or tricks on command. The *animal friendship* spell was not universally appreciated, and players who understood the spell's potential gained more mileage out of their druid and ranger characters than players overlooking the spell.

When revising the game, the design team decided to retain the spell, but also introduced rules governing what PCs could do with their animal buddies—those rules additions ultimately gave rise to the Handle Animal skill (at least in its current form). Later on, we decided to provide short lists of equipment for starting characters, just to make character generation go a little faster, and because using *animal friendship* was such a good idea for characters who could cast the spell, we naturally included a companion animal in the starting druid equipment package.

That inclusion, however, had an unintended result; players tended not to treat their animals as pieces of replaceable gear as we expected, but, instead, as permanent extensions of their characters. We frequently received letters and emails bemoaning the lack of any formal system for improving a companion animal as a druid or ranger advanced in level. Pointing out that gaining a more formidable companion only required casting the *animal friendship* spell again on a much tougher creature did nothing to appease these players.

When it came time to revise the new edition, the designers decided to discard the *animal friendship* spell in favor of the more permanent animal companion class feature. This is an excellent example of how play styles can influence the game's development.

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Hold 'Em For Questioning

By Jeff Ibach

Art by Guido Kuip

Suppose your party really needs to learn what the henchman knows, or the surrendering bandits hint there's someone far more important behind their crime spree? Or worse, from a DM's perspective, what if your player characters suddenly take one of the mooks you included just to slow them down as a prisoner, and they decide to put him through the ringer? This article presents various and interesting options for NPC prisoner tactics based on their existing stats.

Once the PCs have their prisoner and have settled on methods of interrogation, look over the NPC's or monster's statistics and go down this list to determine what approach they might take. If a solution doesn't present itself in the first option, move to the next until you find something that works for the

situation. Not all forms of questioning need involve torture, but for those that do, consider using the torturing PC rules (from *KOBOLD QUARTERLY* #11).

1) Alignment: Lawful and good characters will attempt reason and worthwhile bargains or steadfastly stay true to their cause under questioning. Chaotic and evil characters will try first to escape and then lie or say anything to be spared or set free. Those unaligned or with a neutral outlook may try anything they think will work.

2) Station: If the NPC is just a (poorly?) paid goon, he will likely say anything if offered freedom or mercy. He will repeatedly insist he is just a hireling, a servant, hardly a noble or commander. If he is a leader, high ranking, fiercely loyal, or fearful of his boss, he may try to hold out as long as possible.

3) Skills: If the prisoner has any unusually high social interaction skills, now is the time to use them. Diplomacy, Intimidation, Bluff, and Sense Motive will all help them talk their way out of trouble—let your roleplaying reflect that, even if the NPCs don't get to make skill rolls to escape a tough situation. Failing that, the prisoner may try skills to slip free given a good opportunity. Note that many of these skills can benefit or suffer from penalties based on the situation, good roleplaying, how the group treated other prisoners, and the GM's discretion.

4) Mental attributes: Smart or witty prisoners—those with high Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma—will try to make bargains, bide time, delay or trick opponents through guile, or offer intricate lies in an attempt to escape. They also weigh their own wellbeing carefully over

possible threats made against them. Slow or dumb prisoners act only against what they are offered, believing more easily anything the captors say, and are likely to collapse or cooperate if wounded. Charismatic captives may try charming their way out of danger or telling convincing lies to buy time.

5) Physical attributes: Prisoners with good Strength or Constitution scores might be tough guys and might try to test their captors and hold off on cooperation. On the other hand, weak and unhealthy prisoners may cave in as soon as they are threatened with violence. Also, watch for telling feats like Toughness or Iron Will to help guide your reactions.

6) Class or Role: If you have reached this stage and cannot work out what the prisoner will do, take a cue from their class or role. Fighting and martial prisoners will most likely fight or use their physical attributes to their advantage. Bards will try negotiation and diplomacy. Clerics and (un)holy warriors will base their reactions on their loyalty to their deities and religion, and might get some direct divine aid if they are especially strong servants of their faith. Wizards and sorcerers will try any magic trick they have that might aid them (hiding in a *rope trick* spell, for instance, to feign an escape, or disguising themselves with an *alter self* to confuse and distract).

All of these options are suggestions to spur roleplaying. If you've gone through the whole list and still come up blank, roll randomly on the tables or just pick something that suits your needs. Regardless, how the NPCs react is up to you. It can be great fun to let the players interrogate a prisoner, so use it for all it's worth, and ham it up. It's not just fun for the players, of course: It's a great opportunity for you to give out information they need or that you need to plant to keep the story moving.

It's helpful to keep a short list of story points or plot hooks handy, elements you know will come up in the next few sessions or matter to the campaign, if you have to make things up as you go. Even something as simple as "the book of royal lineage, the missing opal, the treacherous guard captain" can give you all the material you need.

INITIAL REACTION BASED ON STARTING ATTITUDE

When the PCs first confront the prisoner, ask them if they're using Diplomacy or Intimidation. Use the resulting Initial Reaction to generate a stance for the prisoner.

HOSTILE/UNFRIENDLY REACTIONS

1. Aggressive
2. Antagonistic
3. Argumentative
4. Belligerent
5. Bullying
6. Cold
7. Destructive
8. Egotistical
9. Insulting
10. Intimidating
11. Loud
12. Profanity-laced
13. Quiet
14. Rough
15. Rude
16. Scared
17. Selfish
18. Thrashing
19. Uncaring
20. Violent

INDIFFERENT REACTIONS

1. Agitated
2. Aloof
3. Amused
4. Annoyed
5. Awkward
6. Bored
7. Bribable
8. Busy
9. Cold
10. Defeatist
11. Distant
12. Distracted
13. Escapist
14. Happy
15. Indulgent
16. Jaded
17. Self-pity
18. Superior
19. Thoughtful
20. Unimportant

FRIENDLY/HELPFUL REACTIONS

1. Agreeable
2. Caring

3. Compassionate
4. Generous
5. Hospitable
6. Listening
7. Lovable
8. Noble
9. Patient
10. Pleasant
11. Reciprocal
12. Sacrificial
13. Selfless
14. Sociable
15. Supportive
16. Sympathetic
17. Tolerant
18. Touching
19. Understanding
20. Welcoming

PRISONER RESPONSE AND DEAL TABLES

If the prisoner is clever or desperate enough, they may make offers of their own. Use the following tables to provide ideas for bargaining tools and styles for particular kinds of NPC prisoners.

PRISONER BARGAINING TOOLS

1. Allies
2. Books/Knowledge
3. Dangers
4. Healing
5. Keys
6. Locations
7. Magic cache
8. Magic item activation
9. Maps
10. Passwords
11. Promises
12. Revelations
13. Riches
14. Safety/Succor
15. Secrets
16. Service
17. Strengths
18. Threats
19. Weaknesses
20. Weapons

LAWFUL ALIGNMENTS

1. Carefully answers questions truthfully but leaves out key details
2. Details his worth if ransomed
3. Offers his life in exchange for goods
4. Offers his life in exchange for service

5. Offers an equal exchange of information
6. Offers to crusade for the captors in a truce with own group
7. Only says name, rank or title, and prayers
8. Promises captor's mercy if released
9. Promises cooperation if civilly treated and fed
10. Refuses any information; remains faithful to cause
11. Reminds captors of their religious convictions of mercy
12. Requests a signed contract of prisoner/captor terms
13. Requests/demands a merciful death
14. Tries to Bluff being dumb or dominated
15. Tries to end own life so as not to betray comrades
16. Tries to reason with captors through Diplomacy
17. Demands to be turned over to proper authorities
18. Warns captors against their actions through Intimidation
19. Cooperates within reason if captors guarantee survival
20. Works only with obviously lawful religious types

CHAOTIC ALIGNMENTS

1. Acts sick, poisoned, or diseased
2. Stalls for time to turn the tide
3. If wounded captors, says weapons were poisoned, offers antidote
4. Lies in answer to any questions
5. Exaggerates worth in hopes of ransom
6. Looks for unguarded paths of escape
7. Notes items not looted to use against captors
8. Offers fealty, then escapes at first opportunity
9. Offers property held elsewhere if brought there then released
10. Offers to join captor's side and help
11. Offers to reveal weaknesses or secrets of their own group
12. Plays dead or mortally injured
13. Reveals all information asked if let free
14. Reveals any info if just allowed to live
15. Discloses treasure locale then leads captors into ambush
16. Tries to ally with one captor against other captors

17. Tries to break bonds through any means
18. Tries to demoralize captors through Intimidation
19. Using Bluff tells how his equipment is cursed
20. Whimpers and begs for mercy through Diplomacy

CRAFTY PRISONER ACTIONS

1. Acts as if there has been a misunderstanding. He's not allied with the group's foes; he was working with them because he had no choice and was looking for a chance to escape.
2. Carefully listens to the group talking and tries to offer information or secrets regarding their current mission. These might be real and useful or false and meaningless, depending on the prisoner.
3. Claims a powerful spellcaster *geased* or *dominated* him to become confused and uncertain under stress, that anything said may or may not be true. If a PC attempts to detect magic there could be an aura—this need not be entirely a bluff.
4. Claims any alchemical loot is poisoned and offers an antidote, which is a distance away.
5. If martially or supernaturally skilled, feigns weakness to lure captors close—and then head butts, bites, or slams if otherwise held or restrained.
6. If the prisoner performed poorly in combat (or didn't get to act at all) they claim they were deliberate holding back and would not harm the captors. Because he has caused no harm he should be treated fairly.
7. Produces a real (or forged) document of property ownership and offers to turn it over to the group at a legal institution in exchange for freedom.
8. Tries to prove they are a completely useless prisoner: goes limp, claims they know nothing and should be put to the sword, that the gods will mete out justice on the killer in due time for their evil heart.
9. Continually repeats one or two sentences of gibberish and pretends

not to speak the captors' language. Because it is gibberish, no one can know the "language" and magic won't reveal anything.

10. Notes an obscure item or relic and claims it is a holy symbol of a new deity or cult of freedom. He is the first worshipper or cult leader and to not set him free would anger the powers that be.
11. Offers to lead the captors to an evil leader, taking careful note of their skills and capabilities. When they confront the boss, the prisoner maneuvers away and shouts warnings about the character's strengths and weaknesses.
12. Picks out the most reasonable or kind-acting captor and claims that they will cooperate, but only with that person.
13. Pretends to be asleep or unconscious to listen to captors talking. If the party mentions an important name, place, or thing, the prisoner can reference it in casual conversation to gain a bargaining chip.
14. Claims to be the last one of their family name, which with his death will be lost to obscurity since he has not found his true calling or destiny.
15. Takes stock of any spells or powers to use against captors without an implement, free actions, or with verbal components only.
16. Tells a long and involved tale of his crimes and his history as a wanted criminal in a locale nearby. The reward posted is substantial but only if he is brought in alive.
17. The person may note a tattoo or body scar and claim it marks a curse. Anyone who harms or kills him will suffer a terrible fate. Might even be true.
18. Claims to be tired of the cause and the fight—his bones ache and his heart is heavy—and just wants to settle down and start a normal life if spared.
19. Begins crying, blubbering, and whimpering about family or loved ones hoping for mercy eventual freedom.
20. When alone with a captor of the opposite sex, uses charm or persuasion to try and gain their cooperation. Ω

Dwarven Magical Rings

15 New Ways to Smite and Protect—and to Bewilder Your Foes

By John E. Ling, Jr.

Art by Rick Hershey and William McAusland

Dwarves excel at crafting fantastic items from metal, so it's no surprise they're responsible for creating many of the world's finest weapons and armors, not to mention the best-quality metal cookware, tools, horseshoes, and fasteners. With their elite metalworking skills, they are also amazingly deft at making jewelry, crafting extraordinary and intricate items, especially rings, that are as much artwork as jewelry.

When imbued with magical energy, these rings and other items become even more special. Although other races have long since copied the arcane formulae needed to craft these magical items, the dwarven-crafted ones remain a sight to behold and serve as status symbols among the wealthy and famous.

BAND OF BLUFFING

Aura moderate transmutation; **CL** 2nd
Slot ring; **Price** 18,750 gp; **Weight** —

DESCRIPTION

Small rubies and sapphires adorn this mithral band. The ring's wearer gains a +5 circumstance bonus on Bluff checks, and he gains the Improved Feint feat, even if he doesn't meet the feat's prerequisites.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Forge Ring, Improved Feint, creator must have 5 ranks in the Bluff skill; **Cost** 9,375 gp

BAND OF SECOND CHANCES

Aura moderate conjuration; **CL** 11th
Slot ring; **Price** 71,000 gp; **Weight** —

DESCRIPTION

Several small diamonds encircle a much larger diamond within this wide gold band. Its diamond-dust-infused gold band sparkles brightly in the light.

This powerful ring must be worn for one week before it can ward the wearer's

life force. After this attunement period, if the wearer ever falls below 0 hp or ever fails a saving throw against a death effect, the ring provides its wearer a second chance. 1d3 rounds after the ill-effect, the *band of second chances* flashes brilliantly and restores the wearer to life, as per the *raise dead* spell. He is, however, fatigued until he can rest for 8 complete hours, and he gains two permanent negative levels. If he suffered from any poison, disease, or curse at the time of his death (magical or otherwise), the *band of second chances* cures him completely.

After restoring the wearer's life, the ring's center diamond turns smoky for one week and, during this time, the ring is restoring arcane energies and does not function — if the ring's wearer dies again during this time, he remains dead. After one week, the smoky quality clears, and the ring functions normally.

The ring may only restore life three times. After the third restoration, the ring's diamonds all crumble and turn to dust. The gold band remains, but it has no magical energy.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Forge Ring, *raise dead*, *remove curse*, *remove disease*; **Cost** 38,000 gp

BAND OF THE SCORPION

Aura moderate conjuration and necromancy; **CL** 7th

Slot ring; **Price** 67,900 gp; **Weight** —

DESCRIPTION

Crafted from the magically hardened chitinous scales of a scorpion, this ring makes its wearer immune to all natural poisons. In addition, he can opt to poison a foe with a touch attack 3/day, as the *poison* spell; and, once per day, the wearer can summon a giant scorpion, as the *summon monster IV* spell.

CONSTRUCTION

Prerequisites Forge Ring, *neutralize poison*, *poison*, *summon monster IV*; **Cost** 33,950 gp.



CORPSE'S PEACE

Aura faint necromancy; **CL** 1st
Slot ring; **Price** 500 gp; **Weight** —

DESCRIPTION

When slipped onto the finger of a corpse, this delicate marble band prevents the corpse from rotting. In addition, the corpse cannot become undead as long as the band remains on its finger.

CONSTRUCTION

Prerequisites Forge Ring, *gentle repose*; **Cost** 250 gp

COURTESAN'S PEARLS

Aura faint illusion; **CL** 10th
Slot ring; **Price** 6,550 gp; **Weight** —

DESCRIPTION

The pearls comprising this delicate pair of earrings are each worth 100 gp. Upon uttering the earrings' command word, the wearer's clothes alter, taking on any desired appearance, from the dirtiest rags to the most exquisite ball gown. The wearer can add appropriate accessories to this glamoured costume, such as a purse, parasol, or accompanying jewelry, etc. However, these accessories cannot be set down or removed. In addition, the wearer gains a +5 competence bonus on Perform (dance) checks. The earrings take up one of the wearer's ring slots.

CONSTRUCTION

Prerequisites Forge Ring, *disguise self*, creator must have 5 ranks in Perform (dance); **Cost** 3,325 gp

FEYBAND

Aura moderate transmutation; **CL** 15th
Slot ring; **Price** 18,500 gp; **Weight** —
Description

The wearer of this simple brass ring gains several benefits. First, whenever interacting with a creature of the fey type,

treat the fey's initial attitude toward the wearer and her allies as one step better (see the Diplomacy skill).

Second, the wearer gains a +5 circumstance bonus to any saving throws to resist the fey's enchantment spells and spell-like abilities; the ring also provides resistance to any plant-based spells or abilities (such as *blight*, *entangle*, and *warp wood*), regardless of the caster's creature type.

Finally, the ring's wearer does not leave a trail in natural surroundings, and thus he cannot be tracked.

CONSTRUCTION

Prerequisites Forge Ring, *eagle's splendor*, *resistance*, creator's caster level must be at least three times the ring's bonus, and the creator must be a fey with Trackless Step; **Cost** 9,250 gp

HUNTER'S LOOP

Aura moderate (no school); **CL** 13th
Slot ring; **Price** 12,000 gp; **Weight** —

DESCRIPTION

This ring grants the wearer the benefits of the ranger's favored enemy class feature against one type of creature. The creator determines the specific type (and subtype where appropriate) when forging the ring, and this type cannot be changed. If the wearer does not have the favored enemy class feature, he's treated as a 1st-level ranger for the purposes of determining the bonuses (+2 bonus on Bluff, Knowledge, Perception, Sense Motive, and Survival checks against creatures of the selected type; he also receives a +2 bonus on weapon attack and damage rolls against them).

If he has favored enemy (or similar, such as the "Preferred Target" class feature of the elven archer featured in *Kobold Quarterly* #20) as a class feature, and that feature has the same type as the ring, the bonus increases by +2.

CONSTRUCTION

Prerequisites Forge Ring, *wish* or *miracle*; **Cost** 6,000 gp

LOOP OF SMITING

Aura faint evocation; **CL** 5th
Slot ring; **Price** 10,000 gp; **Weight** —

DESCRIPTION

This simple copper band allows a paladin, antipaladin, or other class with a smite ability to treat his class level as three levels higher for all effects related to smiting. If the wearer does not have a smite class feature, he's treated as a 1st-level paladin if good-aligned, or as a 1st-level antipaladin if evil-aligned. Those of neutral alignment gain no benefit from this ring if they do not already possess a smite class feature of their own.

CONSTRUCTION

Prerequisites Forge Ring, creator must have the smite class feature; **Cost** 5,000 gp

NEGOTIATOR'S RING

Aura faint enchantment; **CL** 5th
Slot ring; **Price** 14,250 gp; **Weight** —

DESCRIPTION

This exquisitely crafted ring is a braid made of silver, gold, and platinum strands. The wearer gains a +5 circumstance bonus on Diplomacy and Sense Motive checks. In addition, she can use *calm emotions* twice per day.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Forge Ring, *calm emotions*, creator must have 5 ranks in Diplomacy and Sense Motive; **Cost** 7,125 gp

RING OF BATTLE PROWESS

Aura faint transmutation; **CL** 7th
Slot ring; **Price** 1,500 gp (+1), 6,000 gp (+2), 13,500 gp (+3), 24,000 gp (+4), 37,500 gp (+5); **Weight** —

Corpse's Peace in the Grisol Canton

The cantonal dwarven armies of Midgard make extensive use of these bands, especially when battling hordes of ghouls or vampires from Morgau and Doresh. These bands facilitate returning their dead home for proper burial, and priests of Volund offer them at cost to any dwarf going to defend the Black Canton against the creatures of the tomb.

In an interesting twist of the item's original intention, a vain lich used one to maintain his appearance after his vile transformation, allowing him to walk among the living without exuding the stench of death.



DESCRIPTION

First designed a millennium ago by a dwarven Overthane who believed ranged combat was for cowards, these rings are now widely produced by many races. The ring grants an enchantment bonus to any held non-magical weapon's melee attacks and damage from +1 to +5, as per the *greater magic weapon* spell. However, the wearer takes an equal circumstance penalty to ranged attacks (though not ranged damage). The ring's bonus does not allow a weapon to bypass damage reduction aside from magic, and it does not stack with a masterwork weapon's +1 bonus on attack rolls. The ring's enchantment does not affect projectiles or thrown weapons.

CONSTRUCTION

Prerequisites Forge Ring, *greater magic weapon*, creator's caster level must be at least three times the ring's bonus; **Cost** 750 gp (+1), 3,000 gp (+2), 6,750 gp (+3), 12,000 gp (+4), 18,750 gp (+5)

RING OF COMMAND

Aura faint transmutation; **CL** 7th
Slot ring; **Price** 8,000 gp; **Weight** —

DESCRIPTION

This delicate platinum wire grants the wearer an improved leadership score. For the purposes of determining followers, the ring's wearer gains a +4 circumstance bonus to her leadership score. In addition, she doesn't suffer the usual -1 penalty for moving around when attracting followers.

In addition, she gains a +2 circumstance bonus to her leadership score for the purposes of determining the level of her cohort, though she still cannot

attract a cohort of a level higher than her character level minus two.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Forge Ring, Leadership, *eagle's splendor*; **Cost** 4,000 gp

RING OF INCREASED GRIP

Aura moderate transmutation; **CL** 9th
Slot ring; **Price** 15,000 gp; **Weight** —

DESCRIPTION

This adamantite band allows the wearer to wield weapons one size category larger than his size allows without suffering the usual penalties. For example, a human could wield a greatsword sized for a Large creature in two hands without suffering the -2 penalty for oversized weapons. The benefits of this ring do not stack with any other abilities, feats, or spells providing the same benefit.

CONSTRUCTION

Prerequisites Forge Ring, *shrink item*; **Cost** 7,500 gp

RING OF LUCKY BLOWS

Aura faint evocation; **CL** 1st
Slot ring; **Price** 2,000 gp; **Weight** —

DESCRIPTION

Once per day, when the wearer of this ring misses with an attack roll, he may use an immediate action to make another attack. All bonuses and penalties appropriate to the first attack apply. This "lucky blow" scores a critical threat only on a natural 20, regardless of the weapon's normal threat range or any special feats or abilities, such as *Improved Critical* or *keen*.

CONSTRUCTION

Prerequisites Forge Ring, *true strike*; **Cost** 1,000 gp

RING OF MANEUVERS

Aura faint transmutation; **CL** 3rd
Slot ring; **Price** 1,800 gp; **Weight** —

DESCRIPTION

This wide, cold iron band bears intricate etchings bearing the words to dwarven battle songs. Its wearer is treated as one size larger for all combat maneuver purposes, even when such a size increase would be disadvantageous. The wearer's actual size does not change.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Forge Ring, *enlarge person*; **Cost** 900 gp

SPECIALIST'S BAND

Aura faint (*specialist I-III*), moderate (*specialist IV-VI*), strong (*specialist VII-IX*) (no school); **CL** 4th (*I-III*), 11th (*IV-VI*), 17th (*VII-IX*)

Slot ring; **Price** 1,000 gp (*I*), 4,000 gp (*II*), 9,000 gp (*III*), 16,000 gp (*IV*), 25,000 gp (*V*), 36,000 gp (*VI*), 49,000 gp (*VII*), 64,000 gp (*VIII*), 81,000 gp (*IX*);

Weight —

DESCRIPTION

A specialist wizard wearing this polished brass band can prepare one spell from an opposition school by using one spell slot, rather than the normal two slots required. This ring provides no benefit to a universalist wizard, nor to members of any other class.

CONSTRUCTION

Prerequisites Forge Ring, *limited wish*; **Cost** 500 gp (*I*), 2,000 gp (*II*), 4,500 gp (*III*), 8,000 gp (*IV*), 12,500 gp (*V*), 18,000 gp (*VI*), 24,500 gp (*VII*), 32,000 gp (*VIII*), 40,500 gp (*IX*) Ω

D20 MONKEY



The Scaled Steamhall

By Will Doyle

Cartography by Stacey Allan, Art by William McAusland

A jewel in the crown of the Mharoti Sultanate, the Scaled Steamhall is a luxurious bathhouse perched atop a titanic mountain's summit in the Dragoncoil chain, and it hosts heroes, kings, and even otherworldly emissaries. More than this, it serves as a hatchery for Sultana Casmara Azrabahir's dragon cavalry.

Adventurers in the paragon and epic tiers may fly here to receive magical spa treatments, meet with powerful NPCs or forbidden lovers, or even purchase dragon mounts. DMs looking to explore the Dragon Empire, or introduce some exotic flavor into their games, should find plenty of adventuring opportunities in the Sultanate.

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VISITING THE SCALED STEAMHALL

The Scaled Steamhall's marbled walls are hewn from the rock face and dressed with sheets of polished iron. Columns of steam coil from the Steamhall's three golden-scaled domes, whose windows sparkle with colored crystal. Waterfalls tumble 2,000 feet from the structure's walls, crashing on jagged rocks below. From afar, the building glitters above the clouds like a star plucked from the heavens.

The Sky Plaza: The Steamhall is only accessible from the air. Steep vertical cliffs and turbulent winds prevent climbers from scaling the mountain, and generally lead those attempting the ascent to their deaths—though the bathhouse's aerial staff rescues the occasional fools, enslaving the idiots as bathhouse servants in payment for their troubles, or feeding them to the nearby roosting fire dragons.

Visitors disembark on an open plaza, where enchanted stone hands serve as landing platforms for their flying mounts. An imperial flying carpet shuttles guests back and forth from the capital for a mere 500 gp, although regulars who know the plaza's portal key usually teleport. Veiled concubines greet all arriving guests.

The Bathhouse: Polished marble flags the bathhouse's shaded interior, and incense and rare oils sweeten the air. Built for giants, the Steamhall's décor exudes epic decadence. Silken drapes flutter in unfelt breezes, and mosaic floors swirl into new patterns as guests drift past. The Steamhall's fang guards openly patrol the bathhouse, protecting both clandestine lovers and worldwide dealmakers who meet here, allowing no misconduct or possession of weaponry within the building's walls.

Wash Rooms: Those seeking spa treatments enjoy a luxurious experience. After disrobing in the changing rooms, guests enter the *hararet*, or hot room. Under-floor piping draws boiling water from the wyrmpens, keeping the room at a sweltering temperature. Statues massage guests lounging on heated stones called the "Belly of the Dragon," and unseen servants are always on hand with cool decanters of endless water. Additionally, guests may take steam showers in adjoining alcoves. Once treated, guests move to the *havuz*, a large, pillar-flanked bathing pool. After washing, they adjourn to the *soğukluk*, or cool room, where they may take tea, sleep, or conduct business from one of many private balconies.

ENTERING THE WYRMPENS

The Steamhall's lower floor is restricted to the bathhouse's workers and those seeking to purchase dragon mounts; the fang guards accompany the latter to the wyrmpens. Unauthorized guests discovered in the lower level receive an armed escort back upstairs—if they are individuals who might be missed—or they simply vanish.

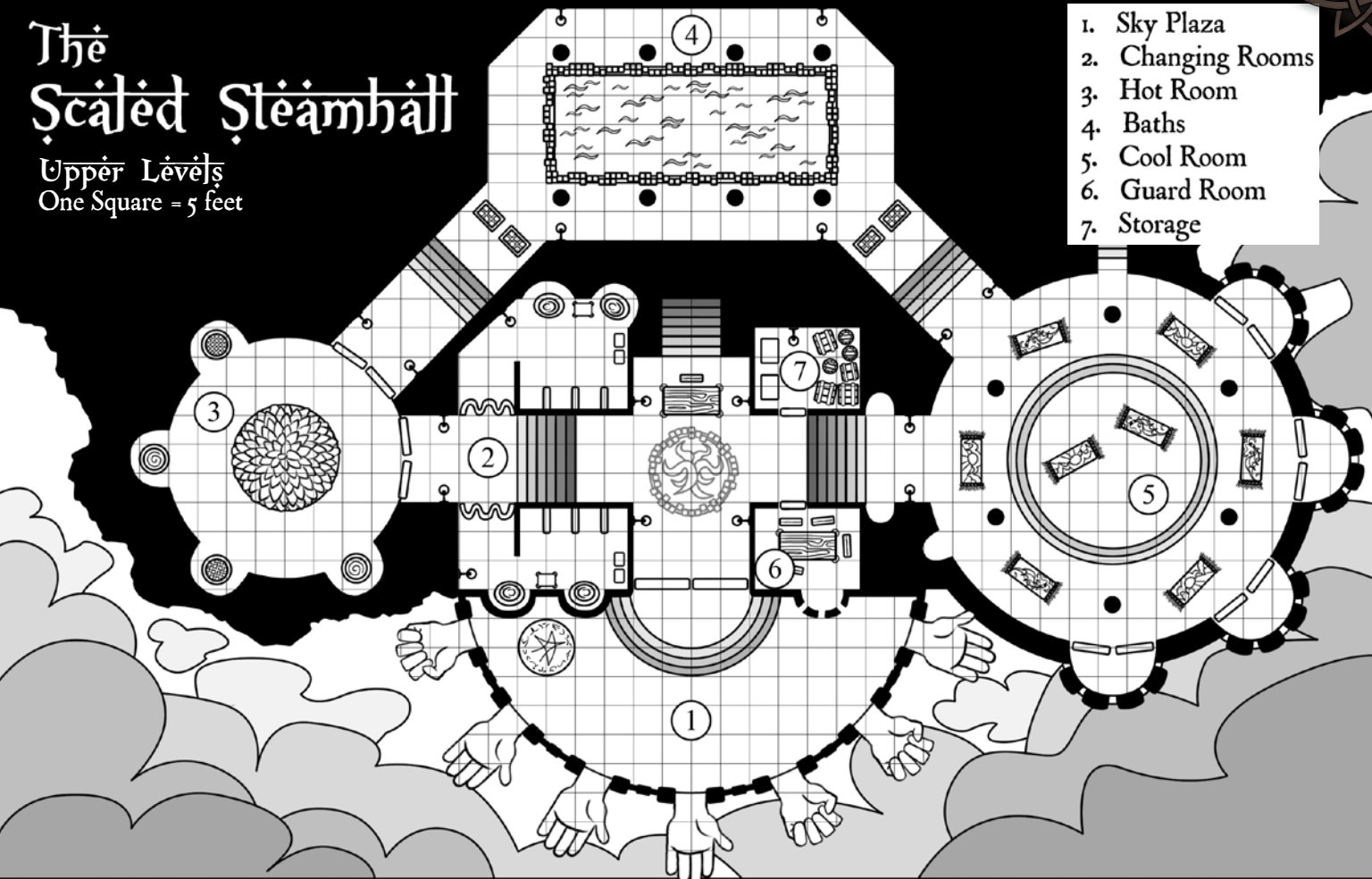
The Wyrmpens: The fang guards raise fire dragons in a yawning cave beneath the Steamhall. Steel gantries overlook four rune-etched cauldrons squirming with dozens of newborn fire dragons. When they're big enough, the juvenile wyrmlings are removed from the cauldrons and are chained up in one of the training alcoves. After they are broken-in, the dragons claim a proper roost on the outer cliff.

The Chaos Dredge: The Chaos Dredge, a fiercely guarded chamber providing the Steamhall with lighting,

The Scaled Steamhall

Upper Levels
One Square = 5 feet

1. Sky Plaza
2. Changing Rooms
3. Hot Room
4. Baths
5. Cool Room
6. Guard Room
7. Storage



fire, and water; also pumps lava through the wyrmpens. The Dredge itself is a vast engine of stone flanked by magic portals. Twin stone chains hold it aloft, each piercing a different realm of elemental chaos. Magical sails trawl the seething planar storms beyond, dredging elemental matter back into the engine.

Staff Quarters: A mess hall, barracks, and lodgings for the concubines adjoin the wyrmpens.

WYRMSPA TREATMENTS

The Scaled Steamhall offers dozens of treatments, all of them therapeutic, most magical. The precise procedures are a closely guarded secret, but all are derived in some way from dragons. Dragon blood may be used in place of massage oil, and their egg yolks may be mixed with rare earths to form a curative wrap. The young Sultana makes regular visits, receiving treatments said to grant her eternal youth (surely not true).

For player characters, each wyrmspa treatment takes an hour to administer and lasts until their next extended rest. PCs can only benefit from one treatment at a time. For those embarking on a dangerous mission, a visit to the Scaled Steamhall beforehand can pay dividends.

Many treatments exist, but not all are available to newcomers. Those listed here are but a small sampling of what guests can experience—for the right price:

ASH OF THE FALLEN LEVEL 16 UNCOMMON

Your skin has been wrapped in the ashes of dragonfire-slain enemies. As it breaks, so you gain clarity.

Price: 2,700 gp

Wyrmspa Treatment

Power: Free action. Spend one or more charges to gain a +2 bonus to your next skill check for each charge spent. The treatment lasts until you take an extended rest but begins with no charges. Add one charge every time you spend a healing surge.

EARTH OF REMEMBRANCE LEVEL 19 UNCOMMON

Your scalp has been anointed with an admixture of ground dragon skulls, enlivening your every thought.

Price: 6,300 gp

Wyrmspa Treatment

Power: Minor action. Spend one charge to recover an encounter power or three charges to recover a daily power. The treatment lasts until you take an extended rest and begins with two charges. Add one charge whenever you receive a critical hit.

SCALES OF THE FIRE WYRM LEVEL 21 UNCOMMON

The concubines of the Scaled Steamhall have scrubbed your skin with the scales of a great wyrm. Now it dances with a fire that craves release.

Price: 13,500 gp

Wyrmspa Treatment

Power: Free action. Spend an action point after you hit with one of your powers. You do not benefit from the extra action, but your last attack deals additional fire damage equal your



- 8. Wyrmpen
- 9. Kitchens
- 10. Barracks
- 11. Harem
- 12. Chaos Dredge

Lower Levels
One Square = 5 feet

level instead. Any powers triggered by spending an action point still apply. The treatment lasts until you take an extended rest.

TEARS OF CELERITY **LEVEL 24 UNCOMMON**

You have been washed in the blood of the dragon, imbuing your muscles with supernatural swiftness.

Price: 31,500 gp

Wyrmspa Treatment

Power: Free action, once per round. Spend a charge to move up to your speed. The treatment lasts until you take an extended rest and begins with three charges. Add one charge whenever you are bloodied by an enemy attack.

WARBRED DRAGON MOUNTS

Dragons take centuries to mature and are fiercely independent. Rearing them for military service requires “warbreeding,”

a process of mental conditioning, ritual sorcery, and alchemical poisoning that vastly accelerates the aging process in selectively-bred wyrmlings. Their intelligence may be stunted to bestial levels, but they retain much of their strength. In this form, warbred dragons (known also as “knuckers”) make for obedient, if savage, riding mounts.

WARBRED FIRE DRAGON **LEVEL 22 SOLDIER**

Large natural magical beast (dragon) XP - HP 206; Bloodied 103 Initiative +20 AC 38; Fortitude 36; Reflex 36; Will 32 Perception +19 Darkvision Speed 8, fly 10 Resist 20 fire
STANDARD ACTIONS

✗ Bite • At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +27 vs. AC **Hit:** 4d12 + 18 damage, and the mounted

rider can make a melee basic attack against the target if they are in range.

❖ Claw • At-Will

Attack: Melee 1, two attacks (one or two creatures); +27 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 14 damage. If both attacks hit, the warbred fire dragon can make a bite attack as a free action.

🔥 Breath Weapon (fire) • Recharge 5/6

Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +27 vs. Reflex

Hit: 6d8 + 10 fire damage.

Miss: Half damage.

MINOR ACTIONS

Dragon’s Roar (mount) • At-Will

Effect: The mounted rider makes an Intimidate check with a +5 bonus, opposed by the Will of a single creature in sight. If the check succeeds, the enemy grants combat advantage until the end of the turn.

Skills Endurance +22, Intimidate +15
Str 24 (+8) Dex 20 (+16) Wis 16 (+14)
Con 22 (+7) Int 8 (+10) Cha 8 (+10)

Alignment Unaligned Languages —

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There is always danger where rich men meet. Business can escalate into confrontation, painting old rivalries in freshly spilt blood. Others may lose a fortune to deception or fall afoul of cleverly plotted assassinations. More than one guest has plunged from the balconies; sometimes in plain view of the staff, for the fang guards can be bribed like anyone else. Their prices are simply higher.

Situated over a conduit to elemental realms, the Steamhall is also rich in otherworldly promise. Djinn conduct trade with their wizardly associates, and demons dine with pact-bound warlocks. On rare occasion, destined heroes may be feted by aspects of the gods, who clamor to win their services with lavish gifts and divine boons.

Roll on the table below to find out who is present when your PCs arrive. If you're looking for an adventure seed, roll again on the second table, treating your chosen guests as the antagonists for that plot. Ω

D10 Guests

- 1 Dusky beauties, their every motion a dance.
- 2 Interplanar travelers who communicate through talking monkeys.
- 3 An old, blind medusa who still thinks herself beautiful.
- 4 Gang of gutter thieves showing off great wealth.
- 5 Ogre jailor who hangs his keys from piercings in his skin.
- 6 Group of retired adventurers whose bodies have been half-petrified.
- 7 Five princes, each vying for their father's throne.
- 8 Half-orc barbarian with thorns for hair, who says he bears the soul of a lost god.
- 9 Rival pirate captains meeting on neutral ground.
- 10 Warrior sent back from death to

The Fang Guard

Fifty warriors from the Sultana's honor guard work the wyrmpens and maintain order throughout the bathhouse. Fang warriors excel in dragon handling, and flame-warding tattoos—up to the whites of their eyes—crisscross every inch of their flesh. Despite these protections, most are maimed by dragonfire. They bear such scars proudly as badges of devotion to their duty.

The fang guards work in shifts, alternating between the Steamhall, the pens, and resting. When an alarm is raised, all available fang guards move to protect the Chaos Dredge powering the hall, as sabotage to the Dredge can result in an elemental backlash capable of ripping the building from its foundations.

realize the dreams of a god.

D10 Reason for Visit

- 1 Hired by a jilted lover to spy on the Sultana's favored suitors.
- 2 Meeting an interplanar emissary to smuggle a stolen artifact off-world.
- 3 Sent by the god of pestilence and disease to poison the treatment store.
- 4 Hunting a renegade doppelganger currently masquerading as a massage statue.
- 5 Liberating a concubine before she is married to her otherworldly suitor.
- 6 Dragon(s) in disguise sent to destroy the hatcheries.
- 7 Here to steal plans for the Chaos Dredge and wage war across the planes.
- 8 Guarding a maiden who is sentenced to hurl herself from the mountain.
- 9 Here to spoil a marriage ceremony between genies.
- 10 Hired to collapse the bathhouse while the Sultana is present.



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Book Reviews

By William Banks, Shelly Baur, and Pierce Watters



SCOURGE

Jeff Grubb

302 pages, Del Rey

Paperback, \$7.99

Kindle, \$7.99

ISBN 978-0099542667

It's about time someone investigated the Hutts, and who better than Jeff Grubb? That's not a slam: Grubb worked on a number of incarnations of the Star Wars franchise in game form, from the RPG to the minis game, and his love of the setting is pretty clear in this surprisingly dark view of the Hutts' criminal society. Well, maybe not entirely surprising, but the mysterious new spice called Scourge and the unexplained murder of a Jedi are the starting points of this tale, and set the tone of gangsters and investigations.

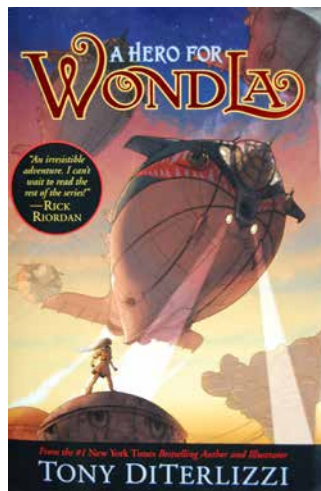
Our hero is a Jedi, the archivist Mander Zuma, and his doubts and confusion grow as he follows the drug trail to its source. He's not the humble sage, and he's not quite the brash young padawan either—he's a Jedi growing into a wider understanding of his strength and determination. Grubb draws a fine portrait of the transition into a teacher's role, haunted by the loss of a student.

It's worth noting that Grubb has an eye for the non-humans: Bothans, Rodians,

Wookiees, and other non-human races make up a good part of this novel's supporting cast, and it's a good thing to see them take a more active role. All too often, Star Wars novels are just about the humans, and this time, that's not the case at all. They're more than stage dressing, and as a gamer, it's always fun to see other societies and their quirks. I'm half-tempted to make the halflings in next *Pathfinder* RPG game into Rodian-style revenge-seekers.

Overall, this feels like the script to a first-trilogy Star Wars film, maybe a Han Solo spinoff that starts in a cantina and never quite shakes the grime off its Jedi robes. Highly recommended for any Star Wars fan.

Review by William Banks



A HERO FOR WONDLA

Tony DiTerlizzi

464 pages, Simon & Schuster

Hardcover, \$17.99

Kindle, \$9.99

ISBN: 978-1416983125

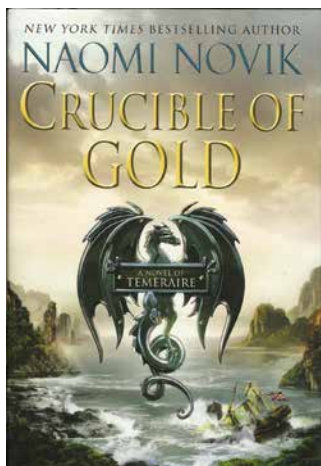
As you'd expect from *New York Times* bestseller Tony DiTerlizzi, he's defined his new WondLa world with art—

organic, art nouveau illustrations for every chapter. As the author and illustrator of *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, and the artist known among gamers for his *Planescape* and *Monstrous Manual* art, that's not surprising. Combine great art with a young, female heroine Eva 9, and you can easily imagine a the *Hero of WondLa* as Studio Ghibli film. Shades of classic SF works appear, like *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*, and *Logan's Run*.

In the first book in this series—*The Search for WondLa*—Eva 9 emerges from a sanctuary where she was raised by her robot Muthr. When that caregiver is destroyed by an alien, Eva 9 must explore the greater world, trying to determine friend from foe. Monsters (every one of them rich in campaign ideas) abound in both the wilderness and the alien towns Eva 9 visits as she seeks a new home.

In the end, Eva's search leads her to a human city New Attica, reached in the recently-released book 2, *A Hero for WondLa*. Here Eva 9's explorations of the city become the catalyst for her choices. It is not a question of whether she will become *A Hero for WondLa* so much as how she evolves into one, how she decides who to support, and how this will reshape her world. As you'd expect from the middle book in a series, you're left hanging at the end. Now we just need book 3 and the movie!

Review by Shelly Baur



CRUCIBLE OF GOLD

Naomi Novik

Del Rey, 336 pages

Hard Cover, \$25.00

Kindle Edition, \$12.99

ISBN-13: 978-0345522863

I *Crucible of Gold* is the seventh novel by Naomi Novik in the Temeraire series. This is an alternate history saga set at the time of the Napoleonic wars. Imagine European war, 1800's style, with dragons—and the dragon varieties are legion. There are small dragons in the one-rider size, medium-sized dragons, big dragons, bigger dragons, large dragons, zeppelin-sized huge dragons. Imagine a dragon outfitted with a crew and guns, riflemen, the dragons-of-the-line are quite like flying ships.

Temeraire is a special dragon and his Captain, Englishman William Laurence,

is an officer faithful to his country and even more faithful to Temeraire. Their friendship is the heart of the series.

Crucible of Gold finds Temeraire and Laurence in Australia along with several other dragons and humans. These include the dragon Kulingile with his captain Demane, and the sometimes troublesome, fire-breathing Iskierka and her captain John Granby.

In the Australian bush, British diplomat Arthur Hammond, late of China, arrives in the outback and summons Temeraire and his fellows on a desperate mission to South America: to Brazil, and the land of the Incas. There Napoleon is working to bring the empires of South America under his control, as strong allies against Britain and the countries of Europe that still resist the French emperor.

As always, Novik brings us a thrilling story, and as the series progresses the characters grow deeper and more vivid. Temeraire has become an old friend to the reader, as has Captain Laurence. Iskierka's youth, inexperience, and over-confidence sometimes leads the group into trouble, but the dragons and humans work together to find solutions to their problems.

As always, Naomi Novik's tales of Temeraire are highly recommended. Start at the beginning and enjoy them all.

Review by Pierce Watters



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A PATHFINDER SOCIETY GUIDE TO VARISIA



By Alex Greenshields
Cartography by Rob Lazzaretti

Greetings, fellow Pathfinders, and welcome to Magnimar and the lands of fabled Varisia! Thanks to the recent opening of Bloodsworn Vale, Varisia will soon become a favored destination for adventure-seekers of all stripes. Don't let the Pathfinder Society be left behind as Varisia gives up her long-held mysteries!

The ruins of Thassilon beckon, brimming with unimagined treasures, but only the foolhardy would dare enter their darkened halls without sufficient study and preparation. I have included a short history along with the gazetteer you asked for, only because I feel Varisia cannot be understood, even superficially, without a bit of historical background.

HISTORY

Although Varisia has only recently been “civilized,” one of the earliest human nations on Golarion, the empire of Thassilon, once thrived in its lands. Thassilon’s people were immigrants from the lost nation of Azlant—the cradle of human civilization itself—and they founded a great nation in the north. In time, Thassilon fractured into seven feuding kingdoms, governed by powerful wizards called runelords. However, not even the runelords’ incredible magic, could save Thassilon from the devastation of Earthfall.

Recovery was slow. As civilizations rose in other parts of Golarion, the land of Varisia remained a wilderness. Only the wandering Varisian people and the tribal Shoanti called it home, but neither group built permanent structures or large cities. Instead, the people happily lived among

the magically preserved ruins of Thassilon, or else they roamed the territory as nomads. This changed with the arrival of Chelish settlers more than 300 years ago.

The Empire of Cheliox—Old Cheliox, that is, before it fell under the yoke of the Hell-backed House of Thrune—founded Fort Korvosa in 4407 AR. Despite clashes with native Shoanti tribes, the Chelish army persevered and eventually drove its opponents north to the Storval Rise. Settlements soon sprouted up, and Varisia seemed destined to become yet another of Cheliox’s far-flung-but-prosperous colonies.

The death of Aroden ended those dreams, and Cheliox retreated into itself, consumed by a civil war. Without Cheliox’s guidance and support, Varisia stood on its own. Thousands of Korvosans rebelled against the city’s authoritarian government, and then left to found the independent city of Magnimar. In time, most of Varisia’s smaller communities fell under the influence of either Korvosa or Magnimar, and the two cities remain bitter rivals to this day.

Below the Storval Rise, Varisia remains largely wilderness, a collection of independent towns and cities with little influence over the surrounding countryside. North of the Storval Rise, the land is dry, largely uninhabited, and home to countless dangerous creatures; extreme caution should be taken before venturing there.

GAZETTEER

To prepare you for the dangers you may face in Varisia, I’ve prepared this brief introduction to the places and people awaiting you therein.

MAGNIMAR

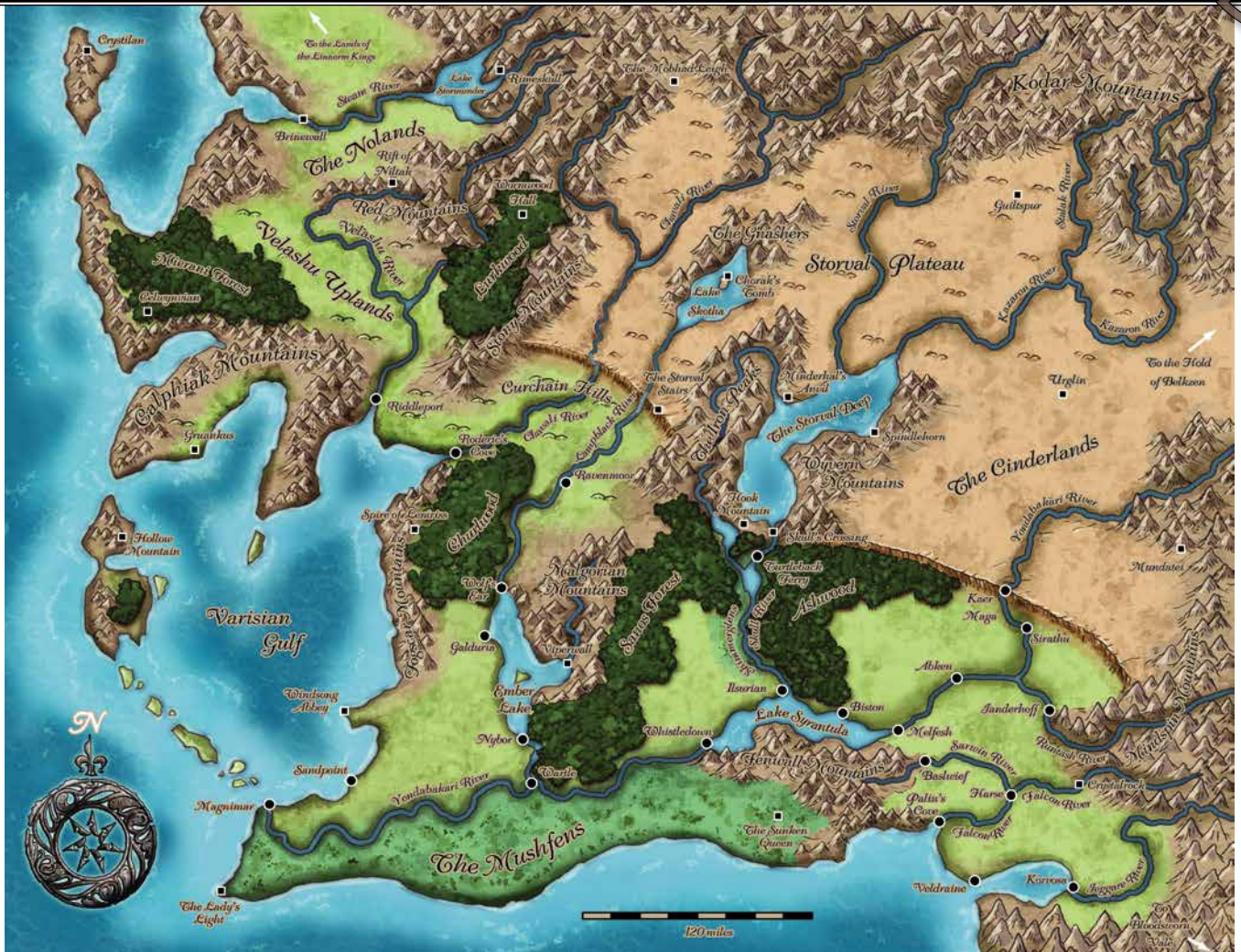
Magnimar, the City of Monuments, was built on Varisia’s western coast beside the cyclopean Thassilonian bridge known as the Irespan. No one has investigated the bridge since the last attempt nearly 100 years ago, which released a flood of spider-like creatures that invaded neighboring streets and communities. Magnimar is the only city in the region with a Pathfinder Lodge: my home, Heidmarch Manor.

KORVOSA

Magnimar’s main trade rival is its mother city, Korvosa, located about 400 miles to the east on Conqueror’s Bay. The city is home to Varisia’s only monarchy, and Sickly King Eodred II currently occupies the Crimson Throne. Korvosa is also home to the Academiae, Varisia’s most prestigious school of magic. The school holds the annual Breaching Festival, in which students and outsiders compete to burglar the Academiae, overcoming the teachers’ nigh-impenetrable wards and protective spells.

SANDPOINT

The minor town of Sandpoint lies two days’ journey north of Magnimar, along the Lost Coast. The town is largely unremarkable: its citizens are peaceful and hard-working. A ruined Thassilonian tower known as Old Light is the town’s only place of interest, and no one truly knows what purpose the structure once served—although many scholars have certainly speculated on the subject. Several goblin tribes frequently harass Sandpoint, making it a dangerous place to visit.



RIDDLEPORT

Pirates hoping to prey on Chelish shipping lanes settled the city of Riddleport shortly after Korvosá's rise. True to its founding, to this day, Riddleport remains a haven for pirates, thieves, and bandits. Although the Overlords of Riddle rule the city, Riddleport's government is little more than a sophisticated protection racket. Riddleport has also become the center for a new form of wizardry called cypher magic, which practitioners have gleaned from studying the Thassilionian arch known as the Cyphergate, a stone structure straddling the city's harbor.

KAER MAGA

The anarchic City of Strangers clings along the high edge of the Storval Rise. One of the most unusual settlements on the continent, Kaer Maga lies inside an enormous hexagonal wall. Scholars say it predates the founding of

Thassilon. The venerable city now serves as the last home of the persecuted, the misunderstood, and the truly bizarre, who come to Kaer Maga from all over Golarion to simply be left alone.

URGLIN

The orc town of Urclin on the Storval Plateau should be avoided unless absolutely necessary. Although it is more accepting of non-orcs than settlements in the Hold of Belkzen, that is not saying much. It is a den of violence, misery, and disease, where the strong dominate the weak, and where visitors are likely to spend their short lives in the fighting pits, bleeding and dying to amuse the city's vicious inhabitants.

JANDERHOFF

The ancient Sky Citadel of Janderhoff is carved into the very rock of the western Mindspin Mountains, and is the largest dwarven settlement in northwestern Avistan. A city of great

industry and commerce, it is largely built underground. Only its massive iron curtain walls—topped by copper-roofed towers—are visible from the outside.

ILSURIAN

Korvosan separatists founded this small farming and fishing community on the banks of Lake Syrantula less than a century ago. Although their descendants have continued this independent spirit and refuse to fall under the sway of the region's larger cities, Ilsurian is now little more than a quiet country town.

RAVENMOOR

At first glance, Ravenmoor seems a perfectly innocent frontier village on the banks of the Lamplack River. Try to spend the night here, however, and you will find the settlement holds a darker secret. Locals will refuse you lodging, urging you to travel on to Roderic's Cove or Wolf's Ear. Those who have stayed past sunset tell of hushed

Varisian Traits

Player characters participating in the Pathfinder Society Organized Play campaign may take any of the following traits at character creation or any time they gain another trait (such as the Additional Traits feat).

Monument Scholar: As a child in Magnimar, the Irespan and the city's other ancient monuments inspired you with both wonder and awe. Your fascination with these relics has only grown in the years since, encouraging you to join the ranks of the Pathfinder Society to quench your thirst for knowledge. Though you know little about the history of these monuments, you've studied these colossal works extensively, developing an intimate relationship with some of the city's most famous landmarks. You gain a +1 trait bonus on Knowledge (history) checks made in Varisia due to your familiarity with its historical remnants. This bonus increases to +2 if the check relates to the city of Magnimar.

Ruin Raider: While the mercantile industries of Magnimar appeal to your keen eye for monetary gain, you know the boldest route to true fortune lies in hunting down rare relics and selling them to the highest bidder. Becoming a Pathfinder seemed like an obvious decision, allowing you to travel throughout Varisia in search of wealth, so you signed up right away. Your sharp eyes have a keen ability to distinguish fakes from the genuine article, so you gain a +1 trait bonus on Appraise checks. Additionally, you gain a +4 bonus on Perception checks made to distinguish statue-like creatures (like caryatid columns, golems, or gargoyles) from actual sculptures.

villagers skulking about empty streets and the sound of droned chanting echoing off basement walls.

BRINEWALL

Chelish expansionists founded the village and castle of Brinewall in the early days of Varisia as a bulwark against attacks from Ulfen raiders to the north. One day, a generation or so ago, all the inhabitants of Brinewall simply disappeared without a trace. Subsequent investigations showed no signs of fighting, disease, or struggle, and no bodies were ever recovered. The mystery of Brinewall has yet to be solved.

LADY'S LIGHT

This enormous statue of a one-armed woman clad in flowing robes and holding a staff is often the first sight of Varisia ship-bound visitors glimpse. Her staff glows at regular intervals, leading some to conjecture the statue is a Thassilonian lighthouse of sorts. The large door at its base corroborates this theory, but no one in modern times has been able to open it.

WINDSONG ABBEY

Pacifist monks wishing seeking cooperation among all religions founded the Abbey as a refuge. Once members of all Varisian faiths (even evil ones) held talks at the Abbey, but that all changed with the god Aroden's death. Several faiths withdrew, leaving Windsong Abbey a lonely place, increasingly isolated and mistrustful of others.

CELWYNVIAN

The elves abandoned their city of Celwynvian in the Mierani Forest shortly before Earthfall. When the elves' returned thousands of years later, they found a darker presence had settled therein. Unable to destroy it, they have instead chosen to contain it, coordinating their efforts from the nearby village of Crying Leaf.

HOLLOW MOUNTAIN

On Rivenrake Island in the Varisian Gulf, Hollow Mountain is perhaps the most enticing Thassilonian ruin in our land. It is the site of Xin-Bakrakhan, the capital of the runelord Alaznist's realm. Her massive face is carved into the mountain itself, although millennia of earthquakes and

erosion have cracked its center, revealing an intricate system of passages and rooms within. Temper your excitement about what treasures might lie buried in Hollow Mountain, for powerful traps, wards, and creatures still protect its secrets.

CINDERLANDS

The Cinderlands are a dry, volcanic region of the Storval Plateau lying roughly between the Wyvern and Mindspin Mountains. It is home to terrifying emberstorms and wildfires that burn through the region during the dry season, and its numerous Shoanti tribes that do not take kindly to trespassers.

STORVAL STAIRS

This massive, giant-carved Thassilonian staircase rests in the side of the Storval Rise that divides the harsh, dry Storval Plateau from the lush, lower-lying coastal lands. A pair of ruined statues of the runelord Karzoug flanks the stairs, although the southern one has almost completely disintegrated due to erosion.

VIPERWALL

Viperwall, a small castle lying on the eastern shores of central Varisia's Ember Lake, contains countless towers adorned with stone serpents and numerous wall carvings of the same. The local populace avoids the place, as it emits a sickening green light and poisonous fog. Rumors persist that serpentfolk from the Darklands built the castle as an outpost, but no proof of this has ever been uncovered.

MOBHAD LEIGH

From the Shoanti phrase meaning "Steps into Hell," the Mobhad Leigh is an enormous, perfectly circular hole in the middle of the northern Varisian wilderness, resting at the foot of the Kodar Mountains. A set of stairs extends hundreds of feet into the abyssal hole. Mobhad Leigh's true depth remains unknown, although some scholars believe it drops thousands of feet, all the way into Sekamina, the second layer of the Darklands.

May Desna smile upon you,
Venture-Captain Sheila Heidmarch Ω

COMING NEXT ISSUE!

It's time to get nasty! The Fall issue of **KOBOLD QUARTERLY** will feature demons and devils, and everything that your mother warned you about in the 80s! Yes, the kobolds are going back to black, throwing the horns, and getting in touch with our fiendish roots. Join us next issue for some or all of the following:

Mechuitl, Cannibal Demon Lord

When you go exploring the savage islands of the Western Ocean, there's always a chance that you'll wind up somewhere horribly, horribly wrong. Such as at the volcanic fortress-island of Mechuitl, master of demon apes and cannibal cultists. Pulp-y yet satisfying!

The Midgard Campaign Poster Map

A poster map for the Midgard campaign setting! Drawn by the same hand that brought George RR Martin's *Game of Thrones* setting to life in a recent map collection, the incomparable Jonathan Roberts!

Potions & Poisons

Time to get alchemical! Some unique potions and poisons of the Seven Cities, revealed at last!

Not enough? There's also a chance we'll have another official Golarion Arch-Devil by Wes Schneider, an all-new AGE adventure for Midgard, and maybe another element of 13th Age. The editors have a lot of promises from writers too, but so far, no manuscripts: stay tuned!



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The Void of Veles

By Wolfgang Baur

Art by Andreas Cellarius

The Free City of Zobeck lies far from the edge of the world, so far that few ever think of that sharp line of mountains called the Serpent. And yet Midgard is a flat world, and the void beyond its land and oceans is a strange realm of stars, ether, and magic, where comets and citadels hang suspended in the vault of heaven. Few understand it, and the wisest sages only shake their heads when asked what lies beyond the realms that mortals know. What little is known is more than slightly strange.

THE STARS OF MIDGARD

The stars shining in the sky are particular places and sources of light. Each is thought to be a person, a god or goddess of light, a saint, or a great hero cast up into the heavens as a reward. Certainly the priests of the Golden Goddess Lada, and the paladins of the Sun God Khors and Aten, make much of this future reward. To some extent, it is true. For this reason, the constellations include both human and inhuman creatures of legend: the Hunter, the Gatekeeper, the Whale, the Serpent, the Twin Saints, the Horse, the Lesser Serpent, and the Knight.

Among the stars lie great castles and tiny towers, some inhabited and others abandoned. Reaching these pinpoints requires a powerful spell that can sustain flight for days, a flying ship, a sleipnir or other steed that does not easily tire,

or a special shortcut. The Sky Stairs of Beldestan, for example, are a column of 10,000 steps said to lead directly to the heavens, though not all heroes who climb them return—and sometimes celestial creatures descend the stairs to do some exploring in the strange world below their own usual haunts.

Even after adventurers explore one star, countless others await, a myriad of celestial homes and spirits strung out over the black void. Most starry islands have a ruling spirit with servants and magic to sustain them. Many lesser creatures, called star bearers, live here as well. These include both holy and loving archons and vile, hideous demons, such as the shining children of Veles. These strange creatures shine bright but devour souls and destroy all travelers to the Vault of Veles.

DWELLERS IN THE VAULT

The stars are not the only creatures that live above the earth. Others travel swiftly through the dark, from angels and shadow fey to star bearers and kytons. Greatest of all these are the void dragons, enormous floating monsters feeding on the lesser inhabitants of the void. Some believe that the mighty god Veles himself, the World Serpent, is simply the greatest and most powerful of these void dragons. They are said to be miles in length, and only the mightiest of mortals can communicate with them.

Veles himself is revered by the void dwellers, stars and dragons and archons alike. The *Song of Veles* tells that the serpent has other children than dragons (though the dragon gods dispute this), including Yemaja the goddess of the sea and memory. In the Northlands she is associated with Wotan's ravens, Huginn and Muninn. In the south she is best known as the mother of Shango, god of lightning, and the source of song and sea—with little connection to the World Serpent. But no one knows for sure exactly what Yemaja's relationship with Veles is. A few whisper that she is Veles' sister-bride, the mother of the world egg, a figure of great power and modesty, the true power behind all goddesses. Others claim that as ardent nonsense. The truth seems to be that Thought and Memory are among the greatest gifts of Veles to the world, and the most mysterious. This may be why his home, the Great Void, is also the home of tricksters, devils, and illusions more potent than any earthly foe.

Because of his power and his gifts of thought and reason, the mansions in the strange celestial citadels are built on foundation far stranger than stone. Those who travel the dark roads and visit the shining hells of Midgard sometimes find that there are whole worlds beyond the sky, and the vault of heaven is little more than a gateway to greater paradises, and incalculable danger. Ω