

MONSTER MAKER



VENTURE
4TH

a monster design kit for 4e

MONSTER MAKER

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INTRODUCTION

The monster design guidelines in the core rulebooks state openly that they're only an approximation. Gamers have described those rules as 'rough' at best and 'crudely unbalanced' at worst. The golden design standard of 'N + Level' creates inconsistent monster statistics. Most PC statistics cannot increase at the grueling '+1 per level' pace that monsters enjoy, so high level monsters hit PCs and dodge PC attacks much more often than low level monsters do. In addition, the game designers themselves seemingly ignored their own guidelines most of the time, as many monster statistics presented in the core books don't match the design guidelines, and seem arbitrarily assigned.

Creating monsters using the guidelines as presented does work, of course -- and some players don't mind repeatedly missing and getting pounded upon while their foes consistently hit and dodge -- but the following optional rules are for Game Masters who want more exciting and faster-paced monsters for their players to fight.



DESIGN STEPS

1. CHOOSE LEVEL.

Whether you choose your monster's level to match an encounter that you are planning for your PCs, or to reflect your idea of the monster's power level and place in your campaign, level is the single most important factor in monster creation. A monster's level, combined with its role, determines its initiative bonus, hit points, attacks, defenses and skill bonuses.

2. CHOOSE ROLE.

Your monster's role is a shorthand for how your monster acts in a fight and a guideline for what special abilities you will later assign your monster. The seven basic roles are: artillery, brute, controller, lurker, minion, skirmisher and soldier. These roles are described in full in the core books.

3. DETERMINE COMBAT STATS.

Use the guidelines at below to determine your monster's combat statistics: Initiative bonus, Hit Points, Defense & Attack bonuses. It's okay to deviate from these guidelines by a couple of points; in fact your monster's NADs (non-armor defenses) should differ from each other by one to four points. Note: All division in the formulae below should be rounded up.

4. CHOOSE POWERS.

Powers are the most creative step of monster creation, and the least easy to give guidance for. Your monster should have one or two basic attacks that are usable at-will; usually these are a melee attack and possibly a ranged attack. Your monster should also have one encounter or recharge power per tier (one at heroic, two at paragon and three at epic); these powers should help

COMBAT STATS BY ROLE

	Artillery	Brute	Controller	Lurker
Initiative	(1/2 Level)	(1/2 Level)	(1/2 Level)	4+ (3/5 Level)
Hit Points	18+ (6.5 xLevel)	22+ (10.5x Level)	20+ (8.5x Level)	18+ (6.5x Level)
AC	12+ (4/5 Level)	12+(4/5 Level)	14+ (4/5 Level)	14+ (4/5 Level)
Other Defense	12+ (4/5 Level)	12+ (4/5 Level)	12+ (4/5 Level)	12+ (4/5 Level)
Attack vs AC	7+ (Level) ranged 5+ (Level) melee	3+ (Level)	5+ (Level)	5+ (Level)
Attack vs Other	5+ (4/5 Level)	1+ (4/5 Level)	3+ (4/5 Level)	3+ (4/5 Level)

your monster act appropriately to its chosen role in combat. Minions should only have basic attacks. The best way to gauge the effectiveness of monster powers is to compare them to existing monster powers and then to use them. You might want to play test your monster and its powers against five 'tester' PCs of appropriate level or simply throw your monster into your adventure and see how it fares against your players' PCs.

5. DETERMINE DAMAGE.

Use the guidelines below to determine damage for your monster's powers. Most at-will attacks should use the medium normal damage expressions. Most encounter and recharge attacks should use the medium limited damage expressions.

Exceptions include:

- Artillery melee attacks, which should use low damage expressions.
- Brute attacks, which should use high damage expressions.
- Lurker attacks, which should use high damage expressions.
- Any attacks that include significant control functions, which should use low damage expressions.
- Any attacks that effect multiple targets, which should use low damage expressions.
- Minion attacks, which should simply deal 4 + (1/5 level) damage.

COMBAT STATS BY ROLE

	Minion	Skirmisher	Soldier
Initiative	(1/2 Level)	2+ (3/5 Level)	2+ (3/5 Level)
Hit Points	1; a missed attack never damages a minion	20+ (8.5x Level)	20+ (8.5x Level)
AC	14+ (4/5 Level)	14+ (4/5 Level)	16+ (4/5 Level)
Other Defense	12+ (4/5 Level)	12+ (4/5 Level)	12+ (4/5 Level)
Attack vs AC	5+ (Level)	5+ (Level)	7+ (Level)
Attack vs Other	3+ (4/5 Level)	3+ (4/5 Level)	5+ (4/5 Level)

DAMAGE

Normal

Heroic

Paragon

Epic

Limited

Heroic

Paragon

Epic

Low

1d6 + 3 + 1/5 level

2d6 + 3 + 1/5 level

3d6 + 3 + 1/5 level

2d6 + 5 + 2/5 level

3d6 + 5 + 2/5 level

4d6 + 5 + 2/5 level

Medium

1d8 + 4 + 1/5 level

2d8 + 4 + 1/5 level

3d8 + 4 + 1/5 level

2d8 + 6 + 2/5 level

3d8 + 6 + 2/5 level

4d8 + 6 + 2/5 level

High

1d10 + 5 + 1/5 level

2d10 + 5 + 1/5 level

3d10 + 5 + 1/5 level

2d10 + 7 + 2/5 level

3d10 + 7 + 2/5 level

4d10 + 7 + 2/5 level

6. CHOOSE SKILLS

Choose any skills that you feel are appropriate to your monster. Note those skills in your monster's stat block and add a +5 to +10 bonus to each of those skills to reflect training and natural aptitude, as you feel appropriate.

7. ASSIGN ABILITY SCORES

Assign whatever ability scores you feel are appropriate for your monster, but keep the highest ones roughly within the limits of a specialized PC of your monster's level. Modify your monster's skill bonuses with its ability modifiers, but do not modify any other statistic.

8. DETERMINE RANK.

Elite and Solo monsters are both 'ranking' monsters; they create a challenge for more than one PC at a time during a fight. As such, it is very simple to turn new or existing monsters into ranking monsters.

A monster's rank is how many PCs it is meant to challenge at once during a fight. Normal monsters are only meant to challenge one PC at a time, but ranked monsters are meant to challenge two or more.

If you've decided that your monster is not a ranked monster, then the design process is complete. If you've decided to create a ranked monster, however, first assign the monster's rank -- a rank 2 monster is intended to challenge two PCs at once during combat; a rank 3 monster is intended to challenge 3, etc. A "solo" monster should have a rank equal to the number of PCs in your party (default 5).

Once you've determined the rank, make the following adjustments:

- **Adjust XP:** Multiply your monster's XP by its rank.
- **Adjust Hit Points.** Multiply your monster's total hit points by its rank.
- **Adjust Defenses.** Give your monster a bonus to all defenses equal to its rank.
- **Add Action Points.** Give your monster a number of action points equal to half its rank.

- **Adjust Powers.** Your monster needs to deal an amount of damage roughly equal to the damage of a normal monster multiplied by your monster's rank. You can accomplish this in several ways --

Extra Actions, Extra Attacks or Multiply Damage:

Give your monster extra standard actions, give it extra attacks per turn or multiply the damage its attacks already do. Note that if your monster can deal more than double damage to one PC at once you run the risk of killing PCs too quickly. One remedy to this problem is to give your monster extra attacks that cannot target the same PC as its other attacks.

Recharge When First Bloodied: Choose one of your monster's encounter or recharge powers. Your monster gains an immediate second use of that power when it becomes bloodied for the first time in an encounter.

Immediate Actions: Your monster gains an immediate interrupt or reaction power to counter or respond to your PCs' attacks or movements.

DESIGN EXAMPLES

VIOLET DRAGON

Anna is DMing a campaign that takes place in an area of low hills and wide open plains. She wants a big, bad scary monster that she can challenge her PCs with repeatedly and that will remain in her players' memories long after the campaign ends. The obvious choice is a new type of dragon, so Anna starts by imagining this dragon. She decides that this dragon is violet in color like the favorite flower that is so prevalent in the endless plains of her campaign.

Violet dragons are greedy like other chromatic dragons, but they are supremely vain and love the sound of their own voices. Violet dragons have deep, rolling, almost irresistible voices that become frighteningly loud when angered. The roar of an ancient violet dragon can be heard for miles on a calm day. Violet dragons like to fly high above the earth and perform feats of grace and agility that even other dragons envy. They are creatures of air and storm and thunder.

Now that she has an idea of what her dragon looks like and how it acts, she moves on to writing up its statistics. First she decides that she wants violet dragons to exist at all levels; the youngest ones will be level 1 while the most ancient will be level 30. For this example, we'll do three different stat blocks; one for each tier of play.

Next Anna looks at the seven basic monster roles; violet dragons are fast, acrobatic and live in wide open spaces so the skirmisher role fits them perfectly. Anna wants violet dragons to be scary and memorable like other dragons, so she assigns them a rank of 5 (otherwise known as a solo monster).

Next Anna assigns her dragon its initiative, hit points, attack bonuses and defenses using the guidelines above. She modifies its Fortitude defense down by 2 and its Reflex defense up by 2 to reflect its agile yet frail form. Then she assigns it a base speed of 6 squares, a fly speed of 12 (hover) and an overland flight speed of 18 to reflect its short legs and aerial grace.

Now Anna gets to the fun part of statting up her dragon --its powers. It needs a basic attack, so she gives it a claw attack using the guidelines above. To add extra damage potential when it makes an opportunity attack, she gives it a bite attack that deals extra thunder damage, its theme element. To give it extra attack opportunities and to protect it from flanking PCs, she gives her dragon a tail attack and the shifty tail slash power.

To increase its damage output per turn while removing the temptation to annihilate one PC at a time, she gives it the draconic fury power. To give her dragon added potential to damage multiple PCs at once, she gives it a recharge breath weapon. To make sure the dragon gets to use it at least a few times during a fight, she adds the bloodied breath power. Then she adds frightful presence; the violet dragon doesn't really need this power, but it is thematic among dragons and will help to make her violet dragon memorable.

Finally Anna needs to give her dragon a set of signature powers that help it to fulfill its skirmisher role in combat. She gives her heroic tier dragon, the young violet, the flyby attack power. At each tier after heroic, she improves flyby attack to make it more potent. Then she adds a final potent ability at the epic tier to make it really scary; thunder clap. Satisfied with the violet's powers, she moves on to the last details.

Anna's violet dragon is a rank 5 monster so she multiplies its hit points by 5, gives it a +5 bonus to saving throws and gives it 2 action points. To reflect its closeness with thunder, she gives it resistance to thunder damage according to its tier. She decides that violet dragons are good at the bluff, diplomacy and insight skills so she notes those in her stat block and adds a +5 bonus for each other them. She decides that violet dragons are exceptionally acrobatic and intimidating so she notes those two skills with a +10 bonus each.

Lastly she assigns ability scores; dragons are big so she starts its Strength at 14; violets are agile but frail for their kind so she starts its Constitution at 10 and its Dexterity at 18; they have a commanding presence and voice so she starts its Charisma at 18; and they are quick-witted but not very wise so she starts its Intelligence at 14 and its Wisdom at 10. At each tier after heroic, she adds 4 to the violet's Dexterity and Charisma to reflect its growing skill and talent.

VIOLET DRAGON STAT BLOCKS

Young Violet Dragon Level 3 Solo Skirmisher *Large Natural Magical Beast (Dragon)* XP 1000

Initiative: +5 **Senses:** Perception +7, darkvision
HP 315 **Bloodied** 158

AC 19: **Fort** 14, **Ref** 18, **Will** 16 +5 to Saves
Resist 15 Thunder

Speed 6, fly 12 (hover), overland flight 18

Action Points: 2

Bite (standard, at-will) * Thunder
Reach 2, +10 vs AC; 1d8 + 5 damage
+ 1d6 thunder damage.

Claw (standard, at-will)
Reach 2; +10 vs AC; 1d8+5 damage.

Tail (standard, at-will)
Reach 2; +7 vs Ref; 1d8+5 damage.

Draconic Fury (standard, at-will)
The dragon makes two claw attacks and one tail attack. The tail attack cannot target the same enemy as the claw attacks.

Flyby Attack (standard, recharge 5-6)
The dragon flies up to 12 squares and uses its draconic fury power at any point during the move without provoking opportunity attacks from the targets.

Shifty Tail Slash (immediate reaction, when an enemy moves into flanking position, at-will)
The dragon makes a tail attack against that enemy and then shifts 1 square.

Breath Weapon (standard, recharge 5-6) * Thunder
Close blast 5, +7 vs Ref; 2d8+8 damage and the target is deafened (Save ends) and pushed 1 square. Miss: Half Damage.

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied, encounter) * Thunder
The dragon's breath weapon recharges, and the dragon uses it immediately.

Frightful Presence (standard, encounter) * Fear
Close burst 5, +7 vs Will, target is stunned until the end of dragon's next turn. Aftereffect: target is -2 to attack rolls (Save ends).

Align: Unaligned **Languages:** Common, Dragon

Skills: Acrobatics +17, Bluff+11, Diplomacy +11, Insight +7 Intimidate + 17.

STR 14 (+2) **DEX** 18 (+4) **WIS** 10 (+0)

CON 10 (+0) **INT** 14 (+2) **CHA** 18 (+4)

Adult Violet Dragon Level 15 Solo Skirmisher *Huge Natural Magical Beast (Dragon)* XP 6000

Initiative: +11 **Senses:** Perception +11, darkvision
HP 740 **Bloodied** 370

AC 26: **Fort** 22, **Ref** 26, **Will** 24 +5 to Saves
Resist 25 Thunder

Speed 7, fly 14 (hover), overland flight 21

Action Points: 2

Bite (standard, at-will) * Thunder
Reach 2, +20 vs AC; 2d8 +7 damage
+ 3d6 thunder damage.

Claw (standard, at-will)
Reach 2; +20 vs AC; 2d8+7 damage.

Tail (standard, at-will)
Reach 2; +15 vs Ref; 2d8+7 damage.

Draconic Fury (standard, at-will)
The dragon makes two claw attacks and one tail attack. The tail attack cannot target the same enemy as the claw attacks.

Flyby Attack (standard, recharge 5-6)
The dragon flies up to 14 squares and uses its draconic fury power at any point during the move without provoking opportunity attacks from the targets.

Shifty Tail Slash (immediate reaction, when an enemy moves into flanking position, at-will)
The dragon makes a tail attack against that enemy and then shifts 2 squares.

Breath Weapon (standard, recharge 5-6) * Thunder
Close blast 5, +15 vs Ref; 3d8+12 damage and the target is deafened (Save ends) and pushed 2 squares. Miss: Half Damage.

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied, encounter) * Thunder
The dragon's breath weapon recharges, and the dragon uses it immediately.

Frightful Presence (standard, encounter) * Fear
Close burst 5, +15 vs Will, target is stunned until the end of dragon's next turn. Aftereffect: target is -2 to attack rolls (Save ends).

Align: Unaligned **Languages:** Common, Dragon

Skills: Acrobatics +22, Bluff+18, Diplomacy +18, Insight +13 Intimidate + 22.

STR 16 (+3) **DEX** 21 (+5) **WIS** 10 (+0)

CON 10 (+0) **INT** 14 (+2) **CHA** 21 (+5)

Ancient Violet Dragon

Gargantuan Natural Magical Beast (Dragon)

Level 25 Solo Skirmisher

XP 35000

Initiative: +17 **Senses:** Perception +18, darkvision

HP 1165 **Bloodied** 583

AC 34: **Fort** 30, **Ref** 34, **Will** 32 +5 to Saves

Resist 35 Thunder

Speed 8, fly 16 (hover), overland flight 24

Action Points: 2

Bite (standard, at-will) * Thunder

Reach 2, +30 vs AC; 3d8 +9 damage
+ 5d6 thunder damage.

Claw (standard, at-will)

Reach 2; +30 vs AC; 3d8 +9 damage

Tail (standard, at-will)

Reach 2; +23 vs Ref; 3d8 +9 damage

Draconic Fury (standard, at-will)

The dragon makes two claw attacks and one tail attack. The tail attack cannot target the same enemy as the claw attacks.

Flyby Attack (standard, recharge 5-6)

The dragon flies up to 16 squares and uses its draconic fury or breath weapon power at any point during the move without provoking opportunity attacks from the targets.

Shifty Tail Slash (immediate reaction, when an enemy moves into flanking position, at-will)

The dragon makes a tail attack against that enemy and then shifts 3 squares.

Breath Weapon (standard, recharge 5-6) * Thunder
Close blast 5, +23 vs Ref; 4d8+16 damage and the target is deafened (Save ends) and pushed 3 squares.
Miss: Half Damage.

Thunder Clap (standard, recharge 5-6) * Thunder
The dragon flies up to 16 squares and cracks the air with its wings at the end of its move. Close blast 3, +23 vs Fort, 4d8+16 damage and the target is stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn and deafened (Save ends). This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied, encounter) * Thunder

The dragon's breath weapon recharges, and the dragon uses it immediately.

Frightful Presence (standard, encounter) * Fear
Close burst 5, +23 vs Will, target is stunned until the end of dragon's next turn. Aftereffect: target is -2 to attack rolls (Save ends).

Align: Unaligned **Languages:** Common, Dragon

Skills: Acrobatics +30, Bluff+25, Diplomacy +25 Insight +18 Intimidate + 30.

STR 18 (+4) **DEX** 24 (+7) **WIS** 10 (+0)

CON 10 (+0) **INT** 14 (+2) **CHA** 24 (+7)



ROCK APE

Matt is looking to create a heroic-tier creature for his campaign. His players have discovered a dwarven settlement, and Matt has decided that these dwarves are using slave labor as the basis for their society -- because he wants to do a slave uprising as the focus of the adventure.

Matt decides that the dwarves are using a monster called a Rock Ape for manual labor, but that the Rock Apes are barely under control. They are smarter than the dwarves give them credit for, and they're looking for their opportunity to rise up and slaughter their oppressors.

Next Matt looks at the seven basic monster roles; the obvious choice for the Rock Ape is the brute. He wants them to be physically imposing, but not particularly quick, or possessed of any real tactical ability beyond their strength.

He decides that the Rock Ape will be a higher-level heroic tier creature, so assigns it 9th level. His players are slightly below that, so it should be a challenging creature for them to fight, but he keeps the rank at 1, since he intends them to fight one-on-one with the PCs.

Next Matt assigns the Rock Ape its initiative, hit points, attack bonuses and defenses using the guidelines above. He modifies its Fortitude defense upward by 2 and its Reflex defense down by 2 to reflect the Rock Ape's sturdy but cumbersome nature. Then he assigns a base speed of 6, average.

For the Rock Ape's powers, Matt knows that it needs a basic attack, so she gives it a slam attack using the guidelines above. He also gives the Rock Ape an artillery attack (to mix things up a bit -- not usual for a brute, but it will be a nice surprise), and decides that the natural choice is for the ape to hurl stones.

For the Rock Ape's encounter power, he gives it a slam frenzy -- and he also decides that the power recharges when the Ape is bloodied.

For the Rock Apes' skills, Matt decides that the creatures are especially talented in Athletics, Endurance and Intimidation, so he notes those in his stat block at a +5 bonus.

Lastly he assigns ability scores -- the obvious choices for high scores are Strength and Constitution, so he makes both of those an 18. Charisma figures into Intimidation, so he makes it slightly lower, at 16. The Rock Ape is not particularly agile or wise, so Dexterity and Wisdom will both be 10, and to reflect that they're smarter than the dwarves suspect, he gives them an intelligence of 13.

Rock Ape	Level 9 Brute
<i>Medium Natural Humanoid (ape)</i>	XP 400
Initiative: +5	Senses: Perception +5
HP 106	Bloodied 53
AC 19:	Fort 21, Ref 17, Will 19
Speed 6	
Slam (standard, at-will)	
+12 vs AC; 1d10+7 damage	
Hurled Stones (standard, at-will)	
Area burst 1 within 10; +12 vs AC; 1d6+5 damage	
Slam Frenzy (encounter, recharge when bloodied)	
Close blast 2, +12 vs AC; 2d8+10 damage.	
Align: Unaligned	Languages: Rock Ape
Skills: Athletics +9, Endurance +9, Intimidate + 8.	
STR 18 (+4)	DEX 10 (+0) WIS 10 (+0)
CON 18 (+4)	INT 13 (+1) CHA 16 (+3)



MOVIE ZOMBIE

Jim wants to shake up his campaign by throwing zombies at his players -- not the usual 4E zombies that they've come to expect, but the sort of zombies that feature in zombie movies: the kind where a wound from a zombie can turn you into a zombie as well.

Jim looks to the vampire for his rules inspiration -- the vampire has a rules statement that says that any humanoid killed by their bite attack becomes a spawn. There doesn't appear to be any other rules governing that. So he decides that he will simply use a similar caveat -- any humanoid killed by a movie zombie's necrotic attack, rises to become a zombie themselves.

Next Jim looks at the seven basic monster roles; he decides that the sort of zombie he wishes to emulate are the fast-moving variety of recent films, and decides that the skirmisher role suits them best.

He decides that the Movie Zombie will be a mid-level heroic tier creature, so assigns it 6th level. He decides that it's slightly more powerful than a rank 1 creature, so he decides that it's a Rank 2, which means it's an Elite. He alters XP, HP, Defenses and Action points accordingly.

Next Jim determines the Movie Zombie its initiative, hit points, attack bonuses and defenses using the guidelines above. He modifies its Will defense upward by 2 and its Reflex defense down by 2 to reflect the Movie Zombie being unshakeable but not particularly agile. Then he assigns a base speed of 6, average.

For the Movie Zombie's powers, Jim knows that it needs a basic attack, so she gives it a bite attack using the guidelines above, assigning it a necrotic descriptor, and ongoing damage.

Jim decides to lift a grab power from one of the existing Zombie templates, and the standard Weakness of Zombies as well.

He gives the Movie Zombie no skills, and lastly he assigns ability scores -- using the Zombies in the core rules as a guideline.

Movie Zombie

Level 6 Elite Skirmisher

Medium natural animate (undead)

XP 500

Initiative: +6 **Senses:** Perception +0, darkvision

HP 142 **Bloodied** 71 (see also Zombie Weakness)

AC 219: **Fort** 21, **Ref** 19, **Will** 23

Speed 6

Action Points 2

Bite(standard, at-will) * Necrotic

+17 vs AC; 1d10+7 damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends) -- if a humanoid dies from this attack, they rise in 1d6 rounds as a Movie Zombie with this stat block.

Zombie Grab (standard, at-will)

+8 vs Ref; the target is grabbed (until escape)

Checks made to escape the Zombie's grab take a -5 penalty.

Zombie Weakness

Any critical hit to a Movie Zombie reduces it to 0 hit points, instantly.

Align: Unaligned

Languages: --

Skills: --

STR 14 (+3) **DEX** 10 (+0) **WIS** 8 (+0)

CON 11 (+1) **INT** 1 (-4) **CHA** 3 (-3)

