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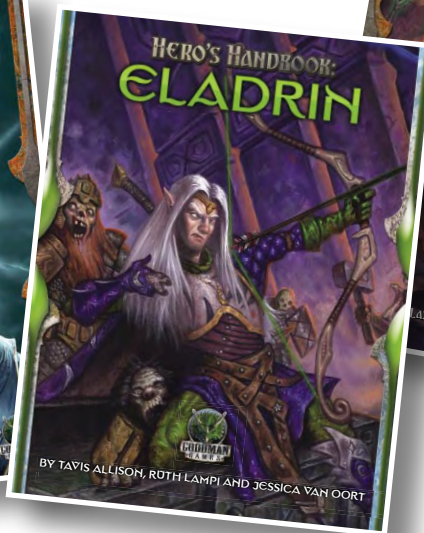
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LEVEL UP • Volume 1, Issue 2 • July 2009
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FROM THE EDITOR

THERE'S NOTHING I LIKE MORE THAN A LITTLE TOUCH OF EVIL IN MY D&D GAME. Okay, that's a lie. I like a big, steaming pile of evil in my D&D game. I'm not talking about the run-of-the-mill, mustache-twisting bad guy, but villains and monsters that make a player's skin crawl, his gorge rise, and cause him to utter the words that every DM longs to hear: "How many Raise Dead scrolls do we have?"

This issue is about evil. It's about bad guys, and the monsters, minions, and magic items they love. In this issue, you'll get a taste of Eberron evil from WotC's very own James Wyatt, three new evil artifacts that are just innocuous enough to tempt players into using them, and two new PC races that spring from evil lineages. But that's not all...

[Pause for evil chuckle.]

I'm giddy with malevolent glee to bring you the first 4E appearance (to my knowledge, at least) of a few horrors from H.P. Lovecraft's pulp tales of terror and the supernatural. That's right kiddies, *Level Up* brings you all the squishy, squamous goodness of the deep ones and the dread shoggoth,

fully statted and detailed in this issue's installment of *Blackdirge's Bestiary*. You can't get more evil than that... or can you?

In addition to the Lovecraftian monsters in *Blackdirge's Bestiary*, this issue includes a special treat for DMs: the first Cthulhu Crawl Classic adventure, entitled *Shadows of the Deep*. DMs, not only do you get a bunch of new Lovecraftian critters to add to your 4E bestiary, but you also get the opportunity to inflict these eldritch horrors on your players right away. In *Shadows of the Deep*, your paragon-tier players can explore a mysterious risen isle in the depths of the ocean and the queer obelisk that stands at its center. Nothing to fear there, right?

I can hear the screams and pleas for mercy now...

Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel

Editor-in-Chief

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VILLAINS OF EBERRON

By James Wyatt

The *EBERRON Campaign Guide* releases in July, chock full of all the information you need to get a 4th Edition Eberron game off the ground. It's got a gorgeous poster map of Khorvaire, plenty of details about every region of the world, a short starting adventure, dozens of new monsters... and villains. Lots of villains. From the greedy and power-hungry merchant lords of the Aurum to the scheming cosmic forces of the Lords of Dust and the Dreaming Dark, the *EBERRON Campaign Guide* offers villains of every power level and description to thwart the heroes of your Eberron game at every turn.

Here's a quick rundown of the villainous forces, organizations, and individuals found in the pages of the *Campaign Guide*:

HEROIC TIER	PARAGON TIER	EPIC TIER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ashbound • Aurum • Cults of the Dragon Below • Dragonmarked Houses • Foulspawn • Goblins of Darguun • High Cardinal Krozen • Holy Uldra • Ikar's Salvage • Irristia Immiar • Jhorash'tar • King's Citadel of Breland • Order of the Emerald Claw • Royal Eyes of Aundair • Skullborn • Warlock of the Aberrant Scar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrion Tribes • Chamber • Children of Winter • Dreaming Dark • Drow of Xen'drik • Empress Donata • Fortress of Fading Dreams • Gorodan Ashlord • King Kaius of Karnath • Lady Vol • Lord of Blades • Mishva the Conqueror • Mourning • Rshesh Turakbar • Seren Dragon-Cults • Talons of Tiamat • Tzaryan Rrac 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argonnessen Ancestral Vassal • Belashyrra, the Lord of Eyes • Chaos Fleet • Daughters of Sora Kell • Lords of Dust • Mordain the Fleshweaver • Rhashaak

THAT'S 40 VILLAINS, MONSTERS & GROUPS you can use as antagonists (or sometimes allies) for the player characters in your Eberron campaign. Some might call that too many choices. How do you choose from that long list to find the right villains for your campaign?

CAMPAIGN THEMES

Chapter 1 of the *EBERRON Campaign Guide* gives some advice on that matter. It provides an overview of the most important themes of the setting—things like the Draconic Prophecy, the importance of the Last War, and the exploration of ancient

ruins. When you build your own Eberron campaign, choosing one or two of these themes to be central for your game is a great start. The themes you choose naturally suggest some villains that would be a good fit.

Drawing on examples presented in the *Campaign Guide*, if you want a campaign that spotlights the shadowy intrigue

among the nations of Khorvaire in the wake of the Last War (the “shadow war”), you might pit the characters against the Royal Eyes of Aundair, the King’s Citadel of Breland, the Order of the Emerald Claw, the Trust of Zilargo, and the two dragonmarked houses most involved in espionage: House Phiarlan and House Thuranni. On the other hand, if you have a campaign in mind that’s all about exploring ancient ruins and plundering their artifacts, you have plenty of monsters to throw at the characters in their exploration (including the foulspawn), but things get particularly interesting when the characters are dealing with patrons and rivals, which might include any of those espionage agencies, the Chamber and the Lords of Dust, the Aurum, the Library of Korranberg, the Twelve and all the dragonmarked houses, the Wayfinder Foundation, and Morgrave University.

Both of those examples narrow the long list down quite a bit, but building your campaign isn’t just a matter of choosing a theme and a villain to go with it. Things really start to get interesting when you weave different strands together.

For example, looking at the list of organizations involved in the Shadow War, I realize that they’re all presented in the *Campaign Guide* as heroic-level threats. That’s not necessarily a limiting factor—I can certainly present them with higher-level enemy agents, as well as monsters straight out of the *Monster Manual* in the service of those organizations as the characters reach higher tiers of play. Will my players bat an eyelash when their 12th-level characters face a shadow demon (from *Manual of the Planes*) that turns out to have been summoned by a mage in House Thuranni? I don’t think so.

Even so, my campaign will be richer if I start to evolve its themes as the characters get into the paragon and epic tiers. Let’s say that I start the campaign off with the characters working as sort of freelance agents affiliated with the King’s Citadel of Breland. They spend much of their time in the heroic tier on missions that pit them against their counterparts in rival organizations—the Royal Eyes of Aundair, the Order of the Emerald Claw. Some of their missions, though, also involve delving into ancient ruins in search of magic that Breland can use to solidify its power in the event of another outbreak of war. They visit goblin ruins across the south of Khorvaire, make one or two trips to Xen’drik, and along the way nurture some contacts at Morgrave University and the Wayfinder Foundation.

As the characters reach the top of the heroic tier, House Thuranni becomes an increasingly important opponent—dragonmarked elves and others bound to the service of the house (including shadow demons) keep showing up, trying to thwart the characters’ work. At the same time, the Order of the Emerald Claw remains a persistent threat. Gradually, as the characters advance into the paragon tier, they begin to realize that both of these sinister organizations are primarily interested in them because of the Draconic Prophecy and the role the characters play in its verses.

Weaving the Draconic Prophecy into the campaign as a second theme suggests new villains (as well as potential allies): the Chamber and the Lords of Dust, the Undying Court, and all the dragonmarked houses. Perhaps the characters discover that their occasional patron at Morgrave University is actually an agent of the Chamber.

Soon the characters find themselves exploring different kinds of ruins. They’re searching the remains of truly ancient structures once inhabited by demons, and delving into twisting natural caverns where the Prophecy is written in the earth. They begin to transcend the nationalistic concerns that motivated them as servants of Breland early in their careers, and might end up cooperating with former rivals in the Royal Eyes.

SIDEBARS

Of the forty villains and groups listed at the start of this article, some are clearly major players. The Dragonmarked houses hold tremendous power across Khorvaire, and it’s easy to see how you might spend much of an entire campaign exploring their interrelationships and struggles. The Jhorash’tar orcs of the Mror Holds, on the other hand, aren’t likely to be that important to anyone’s campaign. You could build your campaign around them if you wanted to, but that would be a pretty significant deviation from the average Eberron campaign.

Even in a tightly-themed campaign, though, it’s a good idea to deviate from your theme once in a while, to mix things up and give the players something different to do, to think about, and to fight for a while.

The sample campaign idea I sketched out above doesn’t involve making use of the Mournland as a major theme. However, I love the idea of sending them on a mission into a Mournland ruin, even if it’s just once in the campaign. While they’re there, they could fight rivals from Ikar’s Salvage as well as some of the weaker monsters from the Mourning section.

Sometimes a villain is really just another monster. Maybe a mission in the heroic tier takes the characters to the mountains of the Mror Holds, where they fight some Jhorash’tar orcs. Perhaps they delve into the depths of Khyber and face some foulspawn. These opponents don’t need to have grand schemes that stand in opposition to the characters’ plans – they could just be in the way.

It’s easy to use most of the creatures and organizations on the big list as short-term villains, letting their nefarious plans stand in the characters’ way for the duration of a single adventure. Perhaps in the heroic tier the characters have to race against a rival group of adventurers bankrolled by the Aurum. Maybe in the paragon tier the characters discover that Tzaryan Rrac is after some of the same relics or information that they’re seeking. In the epic tier, they might come into direct conflict with the Daughters of Sora Kell or the Chaos

Fleet as part of their work to unravel the Prophecy. Even if a villain isn't a long-term threat, it can have short-term goals that both put it into conflict with the characters and relate it to the overall themes of the campaign.

MAKING THE WORLD YOUR OWN

What if you want your campaign to explore certain themes, but you really like a villain that has nothing to do with that theme? What if I really wanted to use the Lord of Blades in my campaign that focuses on the shadow war, dungeon exploration, and the Draconic Prophecy?

Well, I could always add another theme to my game, making the Mourmland a more significant part of the campaign. I could tie it pretty easily to the shadow war aspect of the campaign, with the characters and their

rivals in other nations particularly interested in discovering the cause of the Mourning. The Mourning could replace the dungeon exploration component of the campaign.

Or I could rework the Lord of Blades so that he is tied in to the themes I want to explore. Even though the *Campaign Guide* doesn't say anything about the Lord of Blades' interest in the Prophecy, in *my* version of Eberron he could be consumed by it. Perhaps he has explored every scrap and fragment of the Prophecy for some hint that the future he envisions—a future dominated by warforged—is actually the world's destiny, foretold in the Prophecy. Frustrated by his inability to prove his mad doctrines in the words of Prophecy, he seeks to rewrite the Prophecy. To do that, he needs the power contained in dragonmarks...

The *EBERRON Campaign Guide* is a toolbox full of resources you can use to build your campaign. Draw on the tools it contains to make the world your own!

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Roads to Adventure:

Shadows of the Deep



AN ADVENTURE FOR 12TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS

By Aeryn “Blackdirge” Rudel

Remember the eldritch days of role-playing, when adventures were in forbidden tombs and crumbling Cyclopean ruins, PCs were there to be killed or driven mad, and the finale of every dungeon was a terrifying elder god from beyond space and time? Well, those days are back. Cthulhu Crawl Classics feature horrifying combats with creatures that should not be, sanity draining traps, and no PCs that aren't meant to be eaten by slimy, tentacled horrors. Each adventure is a 100% soul-

shattering delve into insanity, with the monsters you hope won't be summoned by the cultists, the traps that drive you mad, and the ancient, crumbling books you know you shouldn't read but do anyway.

Shadows of the Deep is a short adventure designed for five 12th-level characters. The adventure can accommodate any mix of characters, but parties with strong strikers that can deal a lot of damage to the incredibly tough deep ones have the best chance of success. See the “Scaling Information” section for ways to tailor this adventure to your group's unique style of play.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The merchant vessel, *Sharpsail*, recently discovered a newly risen island off the shore of the port town of Ensmoth. A small group of men from the ship went ashore and were quickly attacked and slain by deep ones, a race of fishmen that worship terrible, alien gods. The island, which has been thrown to the surface by a massive earthquake deep beneath the ocean, holds a strange monolith, beneath which lies a temple to the deep ones' god, Cthulhu. The temple holds a sacred statue that the deep ones are trying to recover by summoning a shoggoth, a monstrous ooze-like creature, which will carry the statue back to the deep ones' watery home.

Eager to avenge the deaths of his crew, the captain of the *Sharpsail* hires the PCs to investigate the island, slay the deep ones, and recover the remains of his men for a proper burial. The captain transports the PCs back to the island where they battle the deep ones on the shore and discover the entrance into the temple complex below the monolith.

In the temple, the PCs battle more deep ones and finally arrive in a terrible chamber with a massive statue of Great Cthulhu. There, deep one priests are performing a ritual to summon a shoggoth from the sea floor. The PCs must battle the priests, their guardians, and the mind-numbing effects of the statue itself to halt the ritual before the shoggoth can be summoned. If the PCs are victorious, they will have avenged the crew of the *Sharpsail*, prevented the deep ones from reclaiming their relic, and kept an eldritch horror from being summoned from the watery abyss.

GAME MASTER'S INFORMATION

ENCOUNTER TABLE

To help the GM prepare, we have included a quick reference table showing all encounters at a glance. Loc – the location number keyed to the map for the encounter. Pg – the module page number that the encounter can be found on. Type – this indicates if the encounter is a trap (T), puzzle (P), or combat (C). Encounter – the key monsters, traps, or NPCs that can be found in the encounter. EL – the encounter level.

Loc	Pg	Type	Encounter	EL
1-1	8	C	5 deep one raiders 1 deep one leviathan	12
2-2	11	C/T	1 deep one priest of Cthulhu 5 deep one hybrids 4 deep one raiders 2 star spawn statues	13
2-3	13	C/H	2 deep one priests of Cthulhu 2 deep one leviathans Statue of Great Cthulhu 1 shoggoth	14 or 16

SCALING INFORMATION

Shadows of the Deep is designed for five characters of 12th level, but may be adjusted to suit parties of different sizes or levels.

Weaker Parties (11th level or lower, or 3 or fewer characters): Make the following adjustment to each encounter area, as detailed below:

- Replace the deep one leviathan with a deep one priest of Cthulhu in Area 1-1. This reduces the encounter to an EL 10 Encounter.
- Remove two of the deep one raiders from Area 2-2. This reduces the encounter to an EL 11 Encounter.
- Remove one of the deep one leviathans from Area 2-3. This reduces this encounter to an EL 12 encounter.

Stronger Parties (13th level or higher, or 6 or more characters): Make the following adjustment to each encounter area, as detailed below:

- Replace two of the deep one raiders with deep one priests of Cthulhu in Area 1-1. This increases the encounter to an EL 13 Encounter.
- Add two more deep one raiders to Area 2-2. This increases the encounter to an EL 14 Encounter.
- Add a third deep one leviathan to Area 2-3. This increases the encounter to an EL 15 or 17 Encounter

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Recent seismic activity deep below the ocean has forced a portion of the sea floor to the surface. Unfortunately, this particular portion of sea floor contains an ancient temple belonging to the twisted aquatic humanoids known as the deep ones. The temple contains a sacred statue of their awful deity, the unpronounceable elder god, Cthulhu. The statue is vital to the deep ones' plans to wake the elder god from the watery prison where it now slumbers, an act that would spell certain doom for the hundreds of coastal cities and towns near the deep ones' territory.

In an effort to reclaim their sacred relic, the deep ones have sent a number of priests and raiders to the surface. There, the priests shall attempt to summon up a shoggoth, a horrific protoplasmic ooze-like creature, from the sea floor to move the colossal statue of Cthulhu back into the watery abyss. However, summoning a shoggoth is no easy task, even for the warped deep one priests of Cthulhu making the attempt. It requires five days of uninterrupted, ritualistic chanting to draw the shoggoth from the ancient, ruined city of its former masters to the surface.

The deep one priests have been chanting for two full days now and have posted guardians inside the small temple complex that houses the sacred statue, as well as on the surface of the risen isle. One day ago, a small merchant vessel, the

Sharpsail, happened upon the isle and sent a small group of men to investigate. The men were quickly slain by the deep ones, their grisly deaths visible to the remaining crew aboard the merchant vessel.

Horrified at the death of their crewmembers, the remaining crew and the captain of the *Sharpsail* fled hurriedly back to port in the small coastal town of Ensmoth. There, the crew related their harrowing tale, describing the horrible risen island and the fish-frog monstrosities that killed their fellows. Ensmoth is a small merchant port, and the town and its citizens do not have the resources to avenge the crew of the *Sharpsail* nor to stop the deep ones from reclaiming their relic. Luckily, there is a small band of heroes passing through who can help....

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

The most likely scenario for getting the PCs involved in this adventure is to have them traveling through Ensmoth (or any port town in your world), and learn of the fate of the *Sharpsail*. The captain of the *Sharpsail*, Tyrus Pickman, is eager to hire a group of heroes and return to the isle to avenge the deaths of his men and recover their remains. He is willing to pay the sum of 3,000 gold pieces for the PCs' services; however, particularly mercenary groups can easily push the desperate captain to sweeten the deal. If asked for more, Captain Pickman agrees to throw in one of his prized possessions, a pair of *winged boots* and three *potions of vitality*.

If the party agrees to his terms, Captain Pickman can tell the PCs the following:

- The *Sharpsail* discovered an island where no island should be off the coast of Ensmoth early yesterday morning. The island contained weird broken ruins; the only intact structure was a black monolith rising from the center of the island.
- Treacherous rocks ringed the island, but a small party of his crew was able to land on the island in a rowboat.
- The crewmen that landed on the island were attacked almost immediately by horrible fishmen that ripped some to shreds with their claws and dragged the rest into the sea to drown.
- The captain believes that something horrible is happening on that island, and, although he is terrified, he believes it is his duty to return, avenge his men, and stop whatever evil is happening on the island.

Alternately, if the party is currently traveling on the ocean, they could simply stumble upon the risen isle and decide to explore it. In this case, feel free to add the *winged boots* and the potions mentioned above to the treasure in Area 2-2.

PLAYER BEGINNING

Start the adventure by reading the following:

The sea around your small boat is oddly calm, as if the waves themselves are cowed by the awful, looming presence of the small, hideous island before you. As you near the slime-choked mound of weeds and mud, a terrible stench assails your nostrils: a foul vapor that is reminiscent of spoiled fish and voided bowels. The isle itself is devoid of life, and its sole feature is a black monolith of polished stone that rises like a necrotic finger from the muck and stink.

A treacherous ring of massive stones surrounds the island like a circle of giant teeth rising from the briny deep. A small gap in the stones, however, looks navigable and should allow you to land your boat on the island's muddy shore. As your boat finally slides from the greasy waves onto the mud and seaweed of the island, you notice that the small shore is strewn with boulders and broken bits of masonry; anything could be concealed in the jumbled mess...

AREA 1: THE RISEN ISLE

AREA 1-1: THE SLIMY SHORE

Encounter Level 12 (XP 3,400)

SETUP

5 Deep One Raiders (R)

(See page 24 for complete stat block)

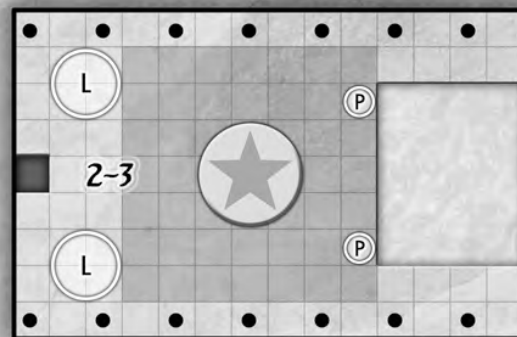
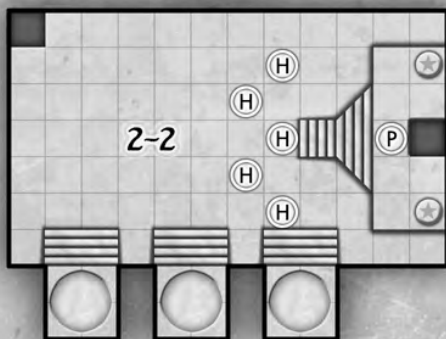
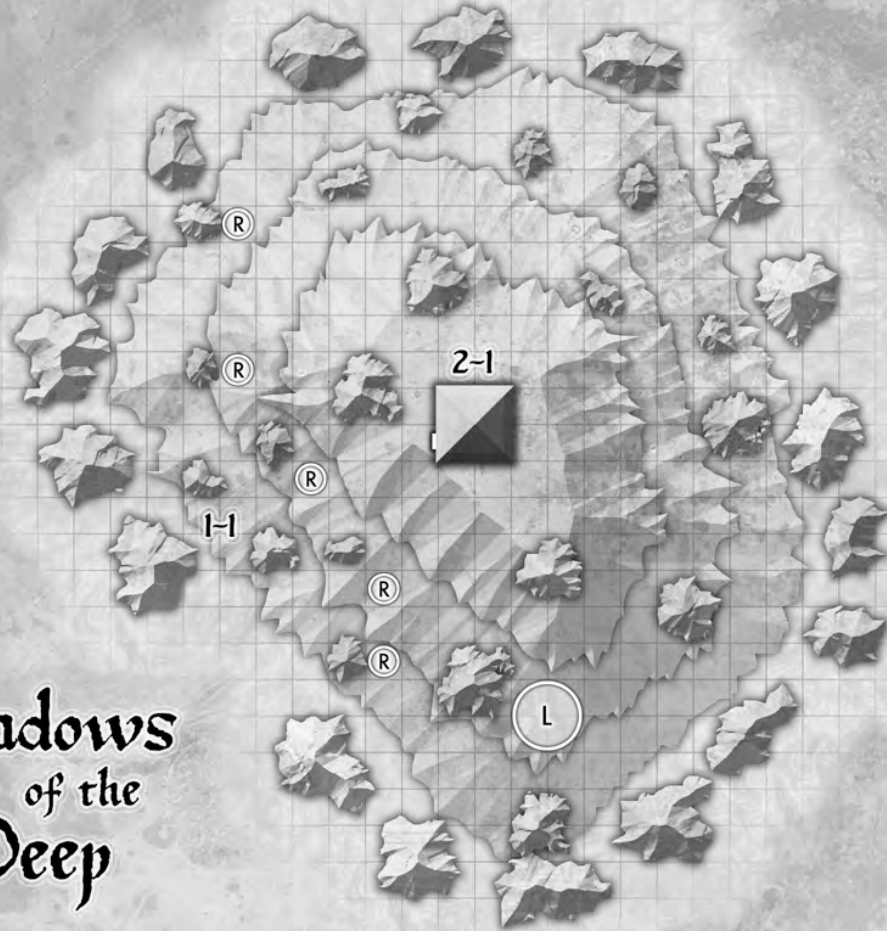
1 Deep One Leviathan (L)

(See page 25 for complete stat block)

This small island is little more than a mound of slime-choked mud and weeds surrounded by massive, jagged stones that prevent anything larger than a rowboat from landing on the island's muddy beach. In fact, even small boats are forced to navigate through a single gap in the stones on the southwest corner of the island if their crews wish to make landfall.

The island measures roughly 65 feet across and is 90 feet long from tip to tip. The monolith rises from the top of the island, requiring an arduous climb up a steep, slimy slope to reach it. Ringing the base of the island mound is a relatively stable beach of sun-baked mud, pierced in places with twisted,

Shadows of the Deep



1 square = 5 feet

basalt boulders and strange bits of masonry. It is here that a group of deep one raiders and a single deep one leviathan lurk, waiting for more foolish humans to land on their island.

If the PCs approach the beach in a boat, they can make a Perception check against the hiding deep ones' Stealth checks to notice the impending danger. The only way the PCs could avoid detection by the deep ones – who have positioned themselves in the perfect spot to attack intruders – is to use magic to hide their presence or to approach from beneath the ocean. However, the latter option, while seemingly attractive, could spell certain doom for the PCs. If the deep ones manage to spot the PCs in the water, they gleefully enter the ocean to do battle with the heroes in an environment where they hold a distinct advantage. If battle does break out in the water, see the rules for Aquatic Combat in the D&D 4E *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

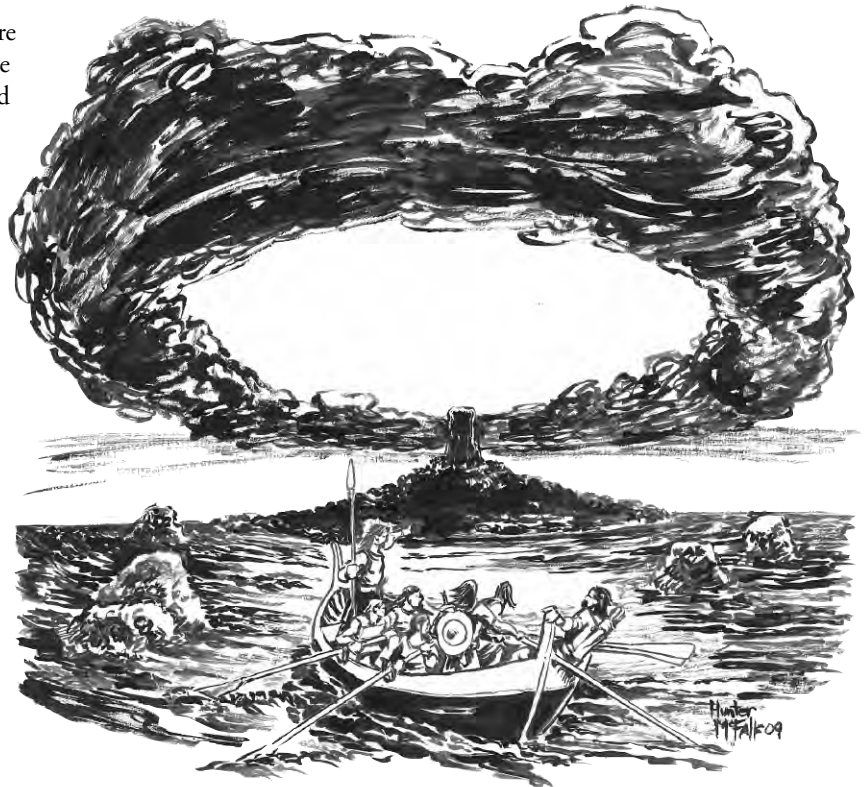
Barring a combat in the water, read the following when the deep ones attack:

Suddenly, a thick, slopping sound emerges from a cluster of jutting basalt boulders, and a loathsome shadow stretches across the muddy beach. Movement in that direction draws your eyes farther down the shore, and as you clutch your weapons in palsied fear, a vast, lumbering abomination steps from behind a gargantuan finger of rock. The beast resembles a giant man in outline, but its form combines fish, frog, and something far viler in a single terrible hybrid. Its throat extends like a bladder, creating a thick croaking sound, and more of the beasts, albeit smaller than the first, creep from their hiding spots and add their own croaking to the horrible chorus.

TACTICS

During their surprise round, the deep one raiders hurl barbed javelins at the PCs, while the deep one leviathan moves to attack. Once combat begins in earnest, however, the deep ones abandon ranged attacks and wade into melee combat with their claws.

Once in melee, the deep one raiders attempt to grab PCs and apply *pacifying grasp*, and then drag unconscious heroes into the water to drown. The leviathan charges at a heavily armored PC with *rending pounce*, it then focuses its attacks on the grabbed PC, using *rending grip* each round until its victim is slain. All the deep ones make frequent use of *leap*, either to gain tactical advantage against the PCs or to escape an opponent when bloodied.



DEVELOPMENT

The deep ones fight to the death, fanatically guarding their sacred site against intruders. The deep ones can speak a rough form of common, but are so devoted to the priests of Cthulhu in the temple complex that no amount of intimidation can persuade them to divulge any information about the island or the temple, should one be captured alive.

AREA FEATURES

Illumination: Bright light (it is assumed that this encounter takes place during the day).

The Beach: The mud on the beach has dried to a consistency resembling hard clay and does not hinder movement in any way.

The Mound: Away from the beach, as the island rises from the ocean in a series of slimy, weed-choked tiers. All squares above the beach are considered difficult terrain, and moving up from one tier to the next costs an entire move action and requires a DC 20 Athletics check. Moving down without falling requires only a DC 15 acrobatics check to remain upright on the slippery surface (failure means the PC moves down to the next tier, but is knocked prone in the space where he ends his movement).

Boulders/Broken Masonry: The beach is strewn with boulders and bits of ancient, cyclopean buildings. These obstacles are considered blocking terrain.

AREA 2: THE TEMPLE BENEATH THE MONOLITH

When the PCs climb to the top of the island mound and approach the monolith, read the following:

The monolith rises from the slime at the top of the island mound like a great black nail. Its size is impressive, but there is something ominous and alien about its design; something that fills you with cold dread as you draw near. A yawning black aperture on the western side of the monolith leads into its interior; the opening is far too large to have been designed with beings such as you in mind....

GENERAL FEATURES

The interior of the monolith actually descends into the bedrock of the island itself and is connected to the ocean via a series of pools. The temple complex beneath the monolith has the following general features.

Light Sources: There is no light within the temple.

Walls: The walls, floor, and ceiling are all made of smooth basalt stone.

AREA 2-1: INTO THE MOUTH OF MADNESS

When the PCs enter the monolith, read the following:

This small room is devoid of any furnishings or decoration. Its sole feature is a square pit in the southeast corner. A strong briny smell rises from the pit, and the faint sound of sloshing waves drifts up from the darkness.

Since the temple was built beneath the ocean, its three levels were accessed by simply swimming up or down through the ceiling or floor. Now, above the waves, each room is separated from the others by a 30-foot drop, requiring the heroes to descend through other means. The deep ones avoid this issue by using the pools in the various chambers, which connect to the deep ocean far beneath the surface.

A DC 25 Perception check made near the pit reveals the following:

Passive Perception: You hear the sound of sloshing waves and beneath that, a faint murmur that sounds like voices.

Active Perception: You hear a voice speaking in common, followed by a pause, and then another voice answers in a thick croak, also in common. You catch just a snatch of the conversation.

First Voice: "...when will the great one arrive, master?"

Second Voice: "It answers the call even now. Have patience; the spawn of the elder ones shall soon be among us."

AREA FEATURES

Illumination: There is no illumination in this chamber.

The Pit: The opening in the floor opens into the ceiling of Area 2-2, although it is a 30-foot drop to the floor (3d10 falling damage). Climbing down requires that the PCs anchor a rope in Area 2-1 and then climb down to Area 2-2. Using a rope in this way requires a DC 10 Athletics check. Alternately, PCs trained in Acrobatics can simply take a move action and jump to the next level, wholly negating the damage with a good roll.

AREA 2-2: CHAMBER OF THE STAR SPAWN

Encounter Level 13 (XP 4,075)

SETUP

1 Deep One Priest of Cthulhu (P)

(See page 24 for complete stat block)

5 Deep One Hybrids (H)

(See page 23 for complete stat block)

4 Deep One Raiders

(See page 24 for complete stat block)

2 Star Spawn Statue Traps

When the heroes can see into this chamber (likely when they are climbing down from Area 2-1) read the following:

This large chamber stretches 60 feet in length and is dominated by three large, circular pools filled with seawater along its southern wall and a raised dais at its eastern end. Upon the dais, a terrible, fish-like humanoid, naked save for a coating of pale green scales, stands in front of a gaping pit. It grips a rod of carved stone crusted with bits of coral and etched with spiraling glyphs. Flanking the creature are a pair of horrible statues, each representing some dreadful tentacled monstrosity whose outline is difficult to discern and utterly disturbing in implication.

In front of the dais stands a motley collection of what appear to be incredibly ugly humans armed with handaxes and crossbows. One of these ugly brutes catches sight of you descending from the chamber above and yells: "Intruders! Slay them!"

Unless the PCs can employ some magical means of obfuscating their presence, it is very likely the deep one priest or the deep one hybrids see them as they descend from Area 2-1. However, since the PCs are likely aware of the deep ones as well (they aren't attempting to hide), there should be no surprise round.

2 Star Spawn Statues

Level 10 Blaster

Trap

XP 500

Trap: The trap attacks when a creature enters a square within its reach.

Perception

♦ DC 25: The character notices the tentacles on the statue move.

Initiative +11

Trigger

When a creature that is not a deep one enters a square the star spawn statue can reach, the trap rolls initiative.

Standard Action

Melee 2

Target: One creature

Attack: +17 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8+3 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Special: Once activated, the star spawn statues gain threatening reach with their tentacles.

Countermeasures

♦ A character adjacent to the statue can disable it with four DC 25 thievery checks before attaining two failures.

♦ The statues have AC 22, Fortitude 23, Reflex 18, and Will 20. Each has 100 hit points. If a statue is reduced to 0 hit points, it is destroyed.

TACTICS

The deep one hybrids open fire on the PCs with their crossbows immediately, initially targeting heroes climbing down from Area 2-1, hoping to make them fall. They switch to their hand axes as soon as the PCs enter melee range. The deep one priest of Cthulhu remains upon the dais during the combat as long as it can, enjoying the protection of the star spawn statues. It opens combat by targeting a likely spell caster with *drowning demise*, switching to *briny blast* on following rounds.

Every round after the first, a deep one raider emerges from one of the pools on the southern edge of the room. Roll initiative for the raiders at the beginning of the combat, and have one emerge each round at the appropriate initiative count. A deep one raider immediately enters melee combat with the nearest PC, attempting to use *pacifying grip* to drag a hero into one of the pools to drown. The deep one priest of Cthulhu attempts to aid the raiders with *lure of the deep* when it can, pulling heroes into the grasp of its allies.

The two star spawn statues attack creatures on the dais or the stairs leading up to the dais. They do not attack deep ones.

DEVELOPMENT

The deep one hybrids and raiders fight to the death; however, the deep one priest jumps down to the next level if it is bloodied, hoping to survive the fall and warn the leviathans and the other priests in Area 2-3.

The corpses of the sailors from the *Sharpsail* have been piled in the northeast corner of this room, saved by the deep ones for later consumption.

PCs listening near the opening can detect the following with a DC 20 Perception check:

Passive Perception: You hear faint rhythmic noises. It sounds almost like chanting.

Active Perception: You here rhythmic chanting in a language you cannot begin to comprehend. The sounds are all wrong, and the tones pluck at the threads of your sanity with the bony fingers of madness.

AREA FEATURES

Illumination: There is no illumination in this chamber.

Dais: The dais rises 10 feet from the floor and can be accessed by a set of steps. A hero can climb up on the dais without using the stairs with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Pools: There are three pools on raised platforms against the southern wall of this room. A set of steps leads up 5 feet to each 10-foot-diameter pool. The pools lead to the open ocean after descending through the interior of the island for 60 feet.

The Pit: The open pit on the dais opens into the ceiling of Area 2-3, although it is a 30-foot drop to the floor (3d10 falling damage). Climbing down requires that the PCs anchor a rope in Area 2-2, and then climb down to Area 2-3. Using a rope in this way requires a DC 10 Athletics check. Alternately, PCs trained in Acrobatics can simply take a move action and jump to the next level, wholly negating the damage with a good roll.

Star Spawn Statues: A character making a DC 25 Religion check knows that these statues depict minions of Cthulhu that are rumored to be the god's spawn.

Treasure: The deep ones have no treasure; however, the corpses of the slain sailors from the *Sharpsail* and their possessions have been piled in the northeast corner of the room. The treasure amounts to 675 gp, 2 small diamond rings (800 gp each), 10 gold earrings (45 gp each), a +3 *lightning rapier*, and a pair of *rogue's gloves*.

AREA 2-3: CHAMBER OF CTHULHU

Encounter Level 14 or 16 (XP 4,800 or 6,800)

SETUP

2 Deep One Priests of Cthulhu (P)

(See page 24 for complete stat block)

2 Deep One Leviathans (L)

(See page 25 for complete stat block)

1 Shoggoth

(See page 27 for complete stat block)

Statue of Great Cthulhu

When the heroes can see into this chamber (likely when they are climbing down from Area 2-2) read the following:

A truly gigantic statue of some horrific tentacled monstrosity overwhelms this massive chamber. Its outline is vaguely anthropomorphic, but its head is a nest of writhing tentacles and two great wings spread from its back, reaching out across the width of the chamber. Behind the statue you can see a huge pool of seawater, its waters dark and glassy.

Standing to either side of the huge statue are two fish-like humanoids, each clutching a coral rod in its webbed hands. In front of the statue are two more fishmen; however, these are massive, standing nearly 10 feet tall. The smaller fishmen seem completely preoccupied with the statue, and each intones a thick, bubbling chant in a language that is completely unintelligible and utterly horrifying. The larger fishmen are not so preoccupied, and they lumber toward you eagerly, talons extended.

Again, the PCs have little chance of surprising the deep ones here, but because of the chanting priests, PCs are not likely to be surprised either. The PCs have arrived near the culmination of the five-day ritual that will draw a shoggoth from the briny deep. The heroes have 5 rounds from the time combat begins to stop the priests and disrupt the ritual; however, the deep one leviathans are positioned to stop the heroes at all costs. In addition, the terrible statue of Cthulhu has horrific mind-altering properties that make the PCs' task even more arduous.

A PC making a DC 30 Arcana or Religion check can deduce that the terrible chanting is likely some kind of summoning ritual. This should give the PCs all the motivation they need to stop the deep one priests from completing their ritual.

Statue of Great Cthulhu Level Elite 12 Blaster
Hazard XP 1,200

Perception

♦ **DC 27:** The character notices a faint tingling in his mind as he approaches the statue.

Trigger

The trap attacks any creatures that are not deep ones or allies of the deep ones who enter or start their turns within a trapped square.

Immediate Reaction

Target: One creature

Attack: +17 vs. Will

Hit: 2d10+6 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the start of its next turn.

Countermeasures

♦ The statue has AC 26, Fortitude 28, Reflex 20, and Will 24. It has 240 hit points. If the statue is reduced to 0 hit points, it is destroyed.

TACTICS

When combat begins, the deep one leviathans interpose themselves between the PCs and the deep one priests, attempting to keep the heroes from disrupting the ritual. They try to stay within the mind-numbing radius of the statue of Great Cthulhu, and use their reach to keep PCs at bay. Each deep one leviathan attempts to grab and rend any PC that gets close enough to a deep one priest to attack, spending its action point to make an additional *rending grip* attack against such a target.

The priests do not engage in combat at all, even if attacked. Only when one of them is bloodied (disrupting the ritual) do the priests join the battle, turning on the heroes with rage-driven fanaticism.

DEVELOPMENT

If the PCs manage to bloody one of the deep one priests before 3 rounds have passed, then they have disrupted the ritual and spoiled the deep ones' chances of summoning a shoggoth. However, if they cannot halt the ritual, 1 round after the priests stop chanting, a shoggoth bursts from the pool at the eastern end of the room and attacks. Roll initiative separately for the shoggoth.

If the shoggoth shows up, read the following:

Like a churning cauldron, the water in the pool suddenly froths and boils. Then, without warning, the roiling water disgorges a towering monolith of glassy black slime, its surface pocked with eyes, mouths, and other unrecognizable organs. The thing exudes horror in choking waves, and worse, a terrible, alien intellect is quite evident in its myriad eyes.



If any of the deep one priests are still alive when the shoggoth arrives, it attacks only the PCs, as directed by the priests. However, if the deep one priests have been slain, the shoggoth attacks everything in the room indiscriminately. The shoggoth is a terrifying opponent, and the PCs will certainly need every ounce of skill and luck they possess to defeat the horror.

Shoggoth Tactics: The shoggoth's tactics are very straight forward, regardless of whether it is attacking the PCs or everything in the room. In the first round of combat, it uses *awful presence*, and then flails at the nearest target with a pseudopod, attempting to grab its victim. In the next round, it moves from the pool and uses *envelop* on the nearest targets, while using *horrific constriction* on the target it is currently grabbing. It repeatedly uses these tactics until it has slain or enveloped every potential target in the room. The shoggoth fights until reduced below 100 hit points, at which time it flees back into the pool and disappears into the murky depths of the ocean.

AREA FEATURES

Illumination: There is no light in this chamber.

Pillars: Moving into a square with a pillar requires 1 extra square of movement. Creatures in squares with pillars have cover.

Pool: The great pool in the eastern end of the room leads to the open ocean after descending through the interior of the island for 30 feet.

Statue of Great Cthulhu: Characters making a DC 25 Religion check recognize this statue as a representation of the elder god Cthulhu.

WRAPPING UP

If the PCs defeat the deep ones before they can complete the ritual, then they have succeeded at avenging the crew of the *Sharpsail*. In addition, the statue of Cthulhu is a vital relic in the plans of the deep ones to raise their slumbering god from its watery tomb. If the PCs destroy the statue, they have, perhaps unwittingly, set the deep ones back decades.

The island itself can remain and become the site of further adventures in your campaign, especially if you plan on using the deep ones again. However, it could just as easily sink back into the waves from whence it came, mercifully hiding the eldritch horrors of the deep ones from the world of men... for now.

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	1	2	3	4	5
			My campaign Sam got the flu		
	8	9	10	11	12
			My campaign 6 PM Joe's wife can't take the kids		
14	15	16	17	18	19
		Get Fantasy Grounds	Try FG with group	Find some games at fantasygrounds.com	
		23	24	25	SW:EX 13-17
		Prep for Monday	Sam playing another FG game		
21	22	23	24	25	
Some space opera @6	My steampunk pitch	HARP weekly starts at 9	Find a game!!		
	29	30	31		
	Steampunk weekly @6 PM	Make character for Joe's game CoC 6 PM	Joe's dungeon crawl w/ FG at 8		
28					
Take kids to Zoo CoC 6 PM -					



PC Pearls

Redeemed Races

By J. Matthew Kubisz

Dungeons & Dragons has always been a game where the light struggles against the dark; perhaps the best example of this is the internal fight against who and what we are. Acting the part of the redeemed villain – a mostly good individual of a mostly evil race – or simply a creature that must resist its bestial nature has long been an intriguing player opportunity. The dark hero is equally captivating; straddling the lines of law and freedom. In Fourth Edition Dungeons & Dragons we saw both the tiefling and the drow, characteristically infamous in origin, enter the limelight as mainstream race options. Iterations of other common monsters have surfaced as playable alternatives as well. While dragons, demons, and even elementals now have their humanoid representatives to venture forth and fight against the role from which they harkened, a few classic villains have yet to see their likeness gracing a good old-fashioned character sheet. So, from behind the cloistered recesses of the Dungeon Master's screen, I offer you the Kel and the Watchkin.



KEL

Wing-clipped harpies who mingle a measure of selfless humility with unscrupulous arrogance

RACIAL TRAITS

Average Height: 5' – 5'8"

Average Weight: 90 – 150 lb.

Ability Scores: +2 Dexterity, +2 Charisma

Size: Medium

Speed: 6 squares

Vision: Normal

Language: Common, Elven

Skill Bonuses: +2 Acrobatics, +2 Diplomacy

Captivating Song: You gain the *captivating song* encounter power.

Glide: When making an Acrobatics check to reduce falling damage, reduce the amount of falling damage by your entire check result, instead of just half of the result.

Sonic Resistance: You have resist thunder 5 + one-half your level.



Hunter
McFalls 09

Captivating Song

Kel Racial Power

You sing a gentle lullaby that temporarily stops enemies in their tracks.

Encounter ♦ **Charm****Standard Action** **Close** burst 2**Targets:** Each enemy in burst

Attack: Charisma +2 vs. Will, Intelligence +2 vs. Will, or Wisdom +2 vs. Will
Increase to +4 bonus at 11th level, and to +6 bonus at 21st level.

Hit: The target is immobilized until the end of your next turn.

Special: At character creation, choose Charisma, Intelligence, or Wisdom as the ability score you use when making attack rolls with this power. This choice remains throughout your character's life.

It is immediately apparent that kels are a race of wingless harpies, though they despise the association. It is also true that kels are the descendants of the elven witch-queen and her offspring who were cursed to be the first harpies. According to kel legend, one of these despicable daughters was named Celaena. Celaena, a spoiled and vain child, was especially distraught over the transformation. Enraged, she attacked her mother, blaming her for the terrible disfigurement. The harpy queen responded with her own curse; she tore the wings from her daughter and darkened her feathers. Instead of the majestic eagle, she would bear the mark of the lowly raven. Celaena fled and was never seen again. Several millennia later, the kel emerged from the shadows. Unlike the harpies, kels had at least gained some measure of humility from being twice cursed. However, this race still harbors the blood of wickedness and is often drawn towards selfish and egotistical endeavors.

Play a kel if you want...

- ♦ to be able to glide from the tops of trees or sing enemies to stillness.
- ♦ to play a character who wishes to prove that a member of an egotistical race with iniquitous origins can be both generous and beautiful.
- ♦ to be a member of a race that favors the bard, ranger, rogue, and warlock classes.

PHYSICAL QUALITIES

Kel are a wickedly beautiful blend of dark fey and raven. They have delicate elven features with slate-gray skin and dark, pupilless eyes. Blue-black feathers erupt from their heads, backs, and arms. While kels have lost their harpy wings, they have well developed flight feathers on their arms and have retained their tail feathers. From their elbows and knees down, their limbs are avian. Each limb ends in crow-like talons. Kels are well adapted to arboreal life, and the species has spent much of its existence hiding in the most remote and dense forests.

Kels hatch from ostrich sized eggs, and they possess a lifespan similar to elves. They have an unusually high proportion of females, who outnumber males three to one.

This disparity among gender populations leads to two important aspects of kel society. First, males are often treated like treasured property. This can be both good and bad for a male. While males often live a pampered life, they are seldom allowed much freedom. Second, kel populations are often terribly small. In tough times, civil war often breaks out among the kel females over viable males.

PLAYING A KEL

Like most fey creatures, kels are prone to whims of intense but fleeting passion. Unfortunately, the legacy of the witch queen still boils in their veins as well. Kels tell stories of love, romance, courage, and passion. Unfortunately, they equally venerate stories of jealousy, pride, arrogance, and selfishness. It is highly acceptable in kel society to think highly of oneself, flaunt wealth and power at those that do not have it, and to savagely protect anything that might be considered property. However, kels also have big hearts that frequently overtake their more base tendencies. Kels are capable of selfless acts of kindness and can show levels of humility that seem entirely uncharacteristic of their demeanor. In essence, they are egotists with a nagging conscience.

Kels also work in harmony with nature, preferring much more verdant surroundings than their harpy kin. The forest is their home, and they ferociously protect it. Kels prefer dwelling in natural structures among the treetops. While they do have a knack for harnessing primal energies, kels' innate talents cause them to lean towards arcane forces. Kels often seek any sort of magic that would enhance their appearance, prowess, or status.

Beauty, song, and dance are among the highest forms of expression for a kel. Natural bards, they revel in music that expresses a story. Each kel has a large repertoire of personal anecdotes: each appropriately embellished and exaggerated to glean the highest amount of entertainment value. A kel can talk about herself for hours, as long as there is a willing listener. While this annoys some, most kel are not without some talent to enthrall their audience despite the obviously self-inflated subject material. Kels are often motivated to adventure by greed or a desire for fame. They may also join a quest to protect their home, property, or to gain the favor of someone they care about.

Kel Characteristics: Arrogant, beautiful, charming, civil, confident, diplomatic, egotistical, eloquent, fierce, friendly, graceful, haughty, helpful, jealous, narcissistic, persuasive, possessive, selfish, territorial

Male Names: Agrathon, Anikatos, Ariston, Carprios, Epafra, Erasmios, Fylon, Kallios, Perios, Theros, Timoton, Zenos

Female Names: Aspasha, Charas, Eudosha, Eufelia, Eumela, Kallistra, Lijeya, Lysindra, Myrrinie, Pelaja, Trifosa, Zosimie

KEL ADVENTURERS

Three sample kel adventurers are described below.

Like most kel, Hekestra was born with a golden voice. At an early age, she began to refine her talent, and quite early she became an effective bard. Combining combat with music seemed very natural to this kel. Unfortunately, her talent also stirred a lot of jealousy from her sisters. Banished from her home, she was discovered by a group of adventurers on a quest to stop an evil green dragon. Eager to prove herself to someone, she joined the hunt. Ever since then, the band's exploits have met with great success. Hekestra now has the admiration and respect that she always craved, and her fellow adventurers have a valuable ally whose song has inspired them all to greatness.

Vosenia gazed into the heavens and heard the exquisite melody of the Far Realm. Her kin called her mad, but this starry-eyed kel pursued the life of the star pact warlock. The voices of

the great beyond led her far from home. In these strange lands, she met up with her fated companions. Convinced she and her new allies will play a hand in the destiny of the world itself; Vosenia lends magic and song to all of their endeavors. She is certain that one of these quests will lead to the stars themselves taking notice.

Pelligon escaped his mistress' clutches almost a decade ago. He traveled to a far-off land and joined a group of adventurers with whom he fights slavery and oppression. While he is a very skilled archer and ranger, Pelligon also venerates Bahamut. He sometimes likens himself to a noble dragon, as only a kel could. He often leads his allies through the thick of the forest, in pursuit of evildoers. Pelligon's fearlessness, devoutness, and pride have earned him the nickname "Paladin of the Wood." However, Pelligon still keeps a watchful eye on the sky; afraid his ex-wife will pounce on him at any moment and drag him back to the nest.

WATCHKIN

Strange, aberrant creatures fleeing the depths of madness, seeking the safety of civilized society.

RACIAL TRAITS

Average Height: 6' – 7'

Average Weight: 250 – 400 lb.

Ability Scores: +2 Constitution, +2 Dexterity

Size: Medium

Speed: 6 squares

Vision: Darkvision

Language: Common, Deep Speech

Skill Bonuses: +2 Intimidate, +2 Perception

Aberrant Origin: Your ancestors were native to the Far Realm. You are considered an aberrant creature for the purpose of effects that relate to creature origin.

Eye Rays: Once per encounter, you can use your central eye ray, your left-handed eye ray, or your right-handed eye ray. At character creation, choose Charisma, Intelligence, or Wisdom as the ability score to apply to all eye rays. This choice remains throughout your character's life. If you are blinded, you cannot use your eye ray powers.

Penetrating Gaze: You gain a +2 racial bonus to Perception checks when attempting to target invisible creatures.

Central Eye Ray

Watchkin Racial Power

Your central eye emits a ray of healing light.

Encounter

Minor Action

Ranged 10

Target: One ally

Effect: One ally within 10 squares gains a number of temporary hit points equal to one-half your level plus your Wisdom, Intelligence, or Charisma modifier.

Left-Handed Eye Ray

Watchkin Racial Power

The eye in the palm of your left-hand shoots a sickening green beam that weakens a foe.

Encounter

Minor Action

Ranged 10

Target: One creature

Attack: Charisma +2 vs. Fortitude, Intelligence +2 vs. Fortitude, or Wisdom +2 vs. Fortitude.

Increase to +4 bonus at 11th level, and to +6 bonus at 21st level.

Hit: The target is weakened until the beginning of your next turn.

Special: You must have your left hand free to use this power.

Right-Handed Eye Ray Watchkin Racial Power

The eye in the palm of your right-hand launches a bolt of fearsome psychic energy at a single enemy.

Encounter ♦ **Fear, Psychic**

Minor Action

Ranged 10

Target: One creature

Attack: Charisma +2 vs. Will, Intelligence +2 vs. Will, or Wisdom +2 vs. Will.

Increase to +4 bonus at 11th level, and to +6 bonus at 21st level.

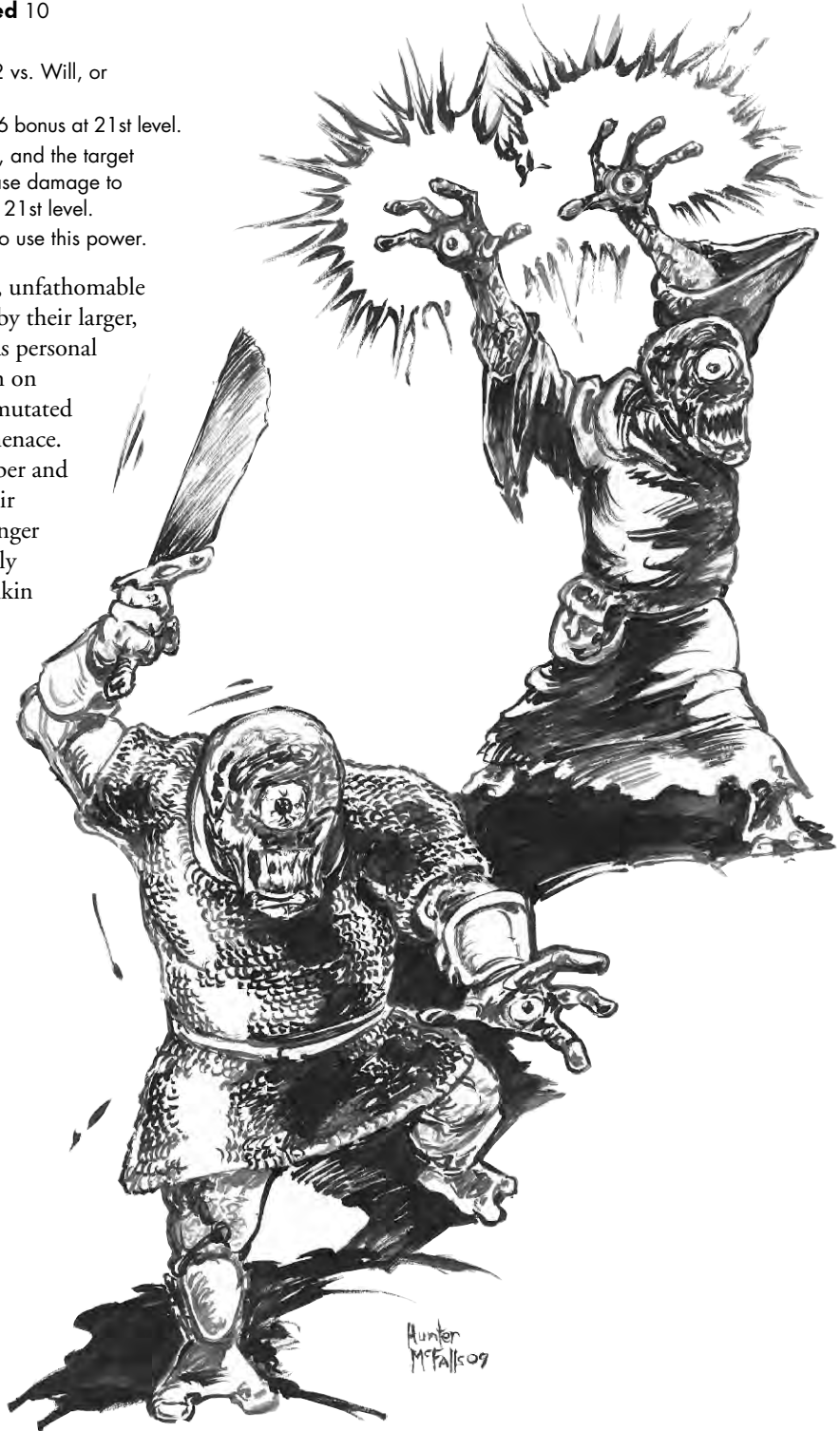
Hit: 1d6 + Wisdom modifier psychic damage, and the target cannot attack you during its next turn. Increase damage to 2d6 + Wisdom modifier psychic damage at 21st level.

Special: You must have your right hand free to use this power.

Weaklings of an aberrant species from deep, unfathomable caverns, watchkin are despised and hunted by their larger, fouler kin. Other aberrants view watchkin as personal affronts to their own image and attack them on sight. Watchkin likely originated from the mutated spawn of some unspeakable subterranean menace. Fleeing toward isolation, they grew in number and developed their own society. Eventually, their population grew such that they could no longer remain in hiding. Generations later, narrowly escaping extermination at every turn, watchkin fled to the surface world where they begged for sanctuary from the civilized races they found there. While desperately trying to fit in despite a propensity towards madness, paranoia, and evil, the watchkin continue to grow in number. Watchkin are not weaklings in the world of men.

Play a watchkin if you want...

- ♦ to be an aberrant creature.
- ♦ to be able to shoot powerful beams from your eyes.
- ♦ to play part of a species that is desperately trying to change its ways or face extinction.
- ♦ to be a member of a race that favors the fighter, rogue, warlock, and wizard classes.



PHYSICAL QUALITIES

In silhouette, one might assume he was seeing a very large dwarf with a thin neck and tiny head. However, in the light of recognition, the truth is a lot more terrifying. This creature is without a doubt a descendant of the Far Realm. From the jagged toothy grin to the large central eye peering out from its bulbous, pebbled-hide body, this being is close kin to the stuff of nightmarish legend. However, there are a few marked differences between a watchkin and the average aberrant cave crawler. First, watchkin move around on stocky legs ending in two-toed feet. Second, they lack the eyestalks and tentacles that are typical of aberrant species. The top of their oblong bodies is crowned with a bulbous sphere on the end of a short, neck-like trunk. In the center of this sphere is a single human-looking eye. To complete their distinctiveness, watchkin have two thick arms. The palms of their three fingered hands each feature another ordinary looking eye. The color of watchkin hide is typically brown, tan, or cream. Their eyes can be just about any color or configuration. No two watchkin seem to have the same color eyes.

Watchkin are egg-laying hermaphrodites. Any two can get together and foster a brood of young. They grow quickly, reaching adulthood in a mere 5 years. Their lifespan is comparable to humans.

PLAYING A WATCHKIN

Watchkin are heavily conflicted creatures. While they instinctively find non-aberrants to be somewhat repulsive, they have little choice but to get along. If they cause conflict among the races of good, they will surely be eliminated. This philosophy is cemented with a heavy dose of paranoia. Most watchkin are sure of a sinister plot to bring about their doom and are always wary. Trust is very difficult to earn from a watchkin, though not impossible. Watchkin, unlike many aberrants, are a social race. They can create meaningful relationships and work together. Their lack of trust is balanced with a strong sense of gratitude. When their life is on the line and they can work together with another successfully, they can be very gracious and even genuinely amicable to that person.

Watchkin are well suited to combat and do not hesitate to take up the sword against any perceived threat, no matter how indirect. While martial combat tends to be their forte, they do have a knack for the arcane as well. Watchkin commonly become warlocks with the star pact, as they feel at ease with the energies of the Far Realm. Conversely, they feel slightly repelled by primal energies and traditionally avoid classes that focus on natural or elemental forces.

Watchkin Characteristics: Alien, conflicted, cooperative, eccentric, fearful, focused, gracious, paranoid, skeptical, suspicious, vigilant, wary

Names: Idok, Lannog, Larof, Lerob, Nardo, Nelor, Noj, Nucol, Onlav, Orad, Orieb, Zobuk

WATCHKIN ADVENTURERS

Three sample watchkin adventurers are described below.

Inevots fights for a living. He found the best way to survive was to live the mercenary life. A few years back, Inevots was hired by a small group of adventurers to provide some fairly scary muscle to their generally harmless-looking lineup. Several adventures later, he is still with the team. Now, the only payment he asks for is his fair share of the loot. While his companions still think he is often creepier than the things they encounter in filth-infested dungeons, they still consider him a loyal friend, a spectacular asset, and someone worth fighting next to.

Ailefos is a talented “dungeoneer,” or so he would introduce himself. The truth is that he spent more time escaping from dungeons than exploring them. While his roguish heart prevents him from making lasting connections, he does adventure from time to time with the same crowd. Ailefos’ powers of observation are undeniable, and he is a priceless resource to anyone who might enter a booby-trapped temple, explore ancient runes, or rescue an ally from a well-guarded fortress. Due to his skills, he is sought after for the most dangerous missions. As long as he can remain anonymous, he’ll often go if the price is right.

Ojom kept an eye or four on a book for most of his life. Obsessed with arcane magic, his quest has been to boost his offensive capabilities. Ojom realizes that to continue his studies, he must keep up the appearance that he is non-hostile to those around him. Surely, if they thought his sole goal was to gain power, they would storm his small study and destroy him. Ah, but he is too clever for that. Ojom periodically ventures from his library to perform a series of publicized good deeds. Rescuing orphans, vanquishing villains, and even helping out the local community with mundane tasks is all in a day’s work for this hideous, four-eyed wizard. He feels it is good practice, in any case, for when they all inevitably come crashing through his door to take his life. In short, Ojom is quite paranoid.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J. Matthew Kubisz has been writing for the RPG industry for over a decade. He is currently the author of Remarkable Races, a series of strange and unique races for the 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons game. The series, produced by Alluria Publishing, is available in electronic format from RPGnow.com.

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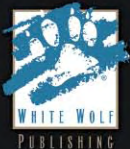
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BLACKDIRGE'S BESTIARY

THE STARS ARE RIGHT

By Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel

The works of H.P. Lovecraft hold a special place in the hearts and minds of gamers; so much so that they have spawned one of the most popular role-playing games of all time. However, sometimes playing a 1920s American investigator is not the Lovecraftian gaming fix you're looking for; sometimes you want to see how old Cthulhu would fare against your 25th-level tiefling warlock (the tiefling would get pulped and eaten, in case you were wondering). Well, that's the point of this installment of *Blackdirge's Bestiary*, to bring two infamous Lovecraftian critters to your 4E gaming table.

In this article I'll provide the tools to give your 4E players a taste of Lovecraft, starting with the relatively benign, but still terrible, deep ones. The deep ones and their legendary elder Dagon should give your low- to mid-level paragon tier party a serious run for their money. The deep ones are also rife with adventure hooks; I mean what party of heroes wouldn't want to thwart the plans of an ancient race of fish people bent on stealing all their women?

After the deep ones, the gloves come off, friends. It's shoggoth time! Yep, one of the few things that actually scared the legendary "Mad Arab" Abdul Alhazred himself can be found in the following pages. If you're in a bad mood, and your high-level paragon party is not kicking down the DM respect you deserve, let them sink their teeth into a shoggoth. I guarantee a fun time will be had by...well, just you, but your players should have a fine time retelling the tale of how they all were crushed, dismembered, and dissolved inside a gigantic protoplasmic mass from beyond space and time.

— BD

DEEP ONE

Deep ones are an ancient race of aquatic humanoids that dwell in strange, cyclopean cities deep beneath the waves. They worship horrible, alien gods with unspeakable rites, and seek to bring these terrible deities back from an eons-long exile. In addition, deep ones are known to raid seaside communities for breeding stock, carrying off men and women in the dead of night to spawn loathsome, half-fish monstrosities.

DEEP ONE LORE

A character knows the following with a successful Nature or Religion check.

DC 15: Deep ones live in the darkest depths of the ocean, dwelling in lightless cities that are home to thousands of the repulsive humanoids. Although aquatic, deep ones can breathe air, and often make forays onto dry land to capture humanoids for breeding stock.

DC 20: Deep ones worship a pantheon of ancient, evil deities whom they venerate with horrific, cannibalistic rites. Chief among the deities worshipped by the deep ones is an entity known as Cthulhu, who legends state is trapped beneath an ocean, buried in an ancient city where the god once ruled. Deep one priests of Cthulhu hold much prestige in deep one society, and they constantly search for artifacts and knowledge that will allow them to free their god from its watery tomb.



It is unknown why the deep ones seek out humans to serve as breeding stock, as they are apparently capable of breeding with each other. The children produced from such blasphemous unions begin life as normal humans, but as they age, they begin to more and more resemble their deep one parent. Eventually, after 30 to 40 years living among humans, a hybrid feels an irresistible pull from the sea, where it completes its transformation into a deep one and joins its brethren in the lightless void of the deep ocean.

Some believe that the deep ones mate with humans at the behest of their dark gods, seeking to corrupt the minds and hearts of the entire race. There are rumors of remote seaside villages that have made secret pacts with deep one cities, offering up their children and young men and women in return for riches dredged from the sea bottom.

DC 25: Deep ones are effectively immortal, but can be killed by conventional means. However, a deep one never stops growing throughout its long years, and the oldest of these terrible humanoids have attained truly epic proportions and are often worshipped as gods themselves. One of these ancient deep ones is a being known as Dagon, a gigantic brute that rules one of the largest deep one cities. Dagon is said to be as large as a whale, commanding physical might on par with mighty dragons. There are likely other ancient deep ones as large or larger than Dagon, but, so far, these awful entities have mercifully remained beneath the waves.

Deep One Hybrid Level 12 Minion Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic) XP 175

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.

AC 26; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21

Speed 6, swim 4

⬇ **Handaxe** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
+17 vs. AC; 8 damage.

Sea Father's Frenzy

A deep one hybrid gains a +2 bonus to damage rolls when adjacent to a full-blood deep one.

Leap (move; recharge 3)

The deep one hybrid shifts 6 squares.

Alignment Evil

Languages Common

Skills Athletics +15, Stealth +14

Str 19 (+10)

Dex 16 (+9)

Wis 14 (+8)

Con 15 (+8)

Int 11 (+6)

Cha 8 (+5)

Equipment handaxe

Description *This ugly human man has curiously ichthyoid features that include goggling eyes, thick lips, and slightly webbed fingers.*

DEEP ONE HYBRID TACTICS

A deep one hybrid resembles an ugly human and is often not seen for the threat it represents until too late. A hybrid attacks with whatever weapon it is most comfortable with, but often does not kill its target, instead dragging the unfortunate victim away to offer up to its deep one masters.

Deep One Raider Level 9 Skirmisher Medium natural humanoid (aquatic) XP 400

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +6; darkvision

HP 99; **Bloodied** 49

AC 23; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 18

Speed 6, swim 6

⬇ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+14 vs. AC; 1d10+5 damage.

⬇ **Slash and Grab** (standard; at-will)
The deep one raider makes two claw attacks against the same target. If both attacks hit a Medium or smaller target, the target is grabbed (until escape).

⬇ **Pacifying Grip** (standard; recharge ☹☹)
Grabbed target only; +12 vs. Fortitude; the target is dazed (save ends). *First Failed Save:* The target is stunned (save ends). *Second Failed Save:* The target is unconscious (save ends, but with a -2 penalty to the saving throw).

Leap (move; recharge ☹☹)
The deep one shifts 6 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common

Skills Athletics +14, Stealth +12

Str 21 (+9) **Dex** 16 (+7) **Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 19 (+8) **Int** 13 (+5) **Cha** 10 (+4)

Description *This gangly humanoid has a terrible fish-like appearance, with an ichthyoid head featuring huge, staring eyes, pulsating gills, and a needle-toothed maw. Its arms are long and powerful, ending in webbed, hook-like talons, and its entire body is covered in dull-green scales, except its belly, which is dead white.*

DEEP ONE RAIDER TACTICS

Deep one raiders sneak into coastal communities in the dead of night to kidnap young men and women. A deep one raider attacks with its claws, seeking to grab hold of a target and use *pacifying grip*. Once a victim is unconscious, the deep one raider often retreats, seeking to carry its prize away into the ocean. A deep one raider typically saves *leap* to escape combat when it has an unconscious target in its grasp.

Deep One Priest of Cthulhu Level 11 Controller Medium natural humanoid (aquatic) XP 600

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision

HP 112; **Bloodied** 56

AC 25; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 23

Speed 6, swim 6

⬇ **Rod of the Deep** (standard; at-will)
+15 vs. AC; 2d6+4 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the deep one priest of Cthulhu's next turn.

⬇ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+15 vs. AC; 1d8+4 damage.

⤵ **Briny Blast** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Acid**
Ranged 10; +15 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 6 acid damage.

⤵ **Drowning Demise** (standard; recharge ☹☹)
Ranged 10; the target's lungs begin to fill with seawater; +14 vs. Fortitude; 1d10+3 damage, the target is dazed and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends both). *First Failed Save:* The target is stunned and takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends both, but with a -2 penalty to the saving throw).

⤵ **Lure of the Deep** (standard; recharge ☹☹☹) ♦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; +14 vs. Will; the target is pulled 3 squares and dazed (save ends).

⤵ **Blasphemous Croak** (standard; encounter) ♦ **Fear, Psychic**
Close burst 3; +13 vs. Will; targets enemies; 3d6+6 psychic damage, and the target is weakened and dazed (save ends both). *Aftereffect:* The target suffers a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Leap (move; recharge ☹☹☹)
The deep one priest of Cthulhu shifts 6 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common

Skills Athletics +14, Religion +13, Stealth +13

Str 18 (+9) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 22 (+11)
Con 16 (+8) **Int** 17 (+8) **Cha** 14 (+7)

Equipment rod

Description *This scaly humanoid has a decidedly fish-like appearance, with pulsating gills, goggling eyes, and a wide fanged mouth. It is naked and sexless, a horrid reminder that it bears no kinship to wholesome, warm-blooded creatures. The monstrosity carries only a strange rod of carved stone festooned with shells, bits of coral, and weird spiraling glyphs.*

DEEP ONE PRIEST OF CTHULHU TACTICS

A deep one priest of Cthulhu begins combat with *drowning demise* on a likely spellcaster, and then follows up with *lure of the deep* on an enemy melee combatant. It uses *blasphemous croak* when surrounded by many enemies, and relies on its *rod of the deep* only when cornered. Typically, a deep one priest of Cthulhu uses its abilities to aid deep one raiders when they invade human villages in search of breeding stock.

Deep One Leviathan Level 12 Elite Brute
Large natural humanoid (aquatic) XP 1,400

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +9; darkvision

HP 300; **Bloodied** 150

AC 26; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 23

Saving Throws +2

Speed 8, swim 8

Action Points 1

⚔ **Claws** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +15 vs. AC; 2d8 +7 damage, and a large or smaller target is grabbed (until escape).

† **Rending Grip** (standard; at-will)
Grabbed target only; +13 vs. Fortitude; 4d8+7 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the deep one leviathan's next turn.

† **Rending Pounce** (standard; recharge Ⓜ)
The deep one leviathan shifts 8 squares and makes a melee basic attack. If the attack hits, the deep one leviathan can use *rending grip* as a free action.

Leap (move; recharge Ⓜ)
The deep one leviathan shifts 8 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common

Skills Athletics +18, Endurance +16

Str 24 (+13) **Dex** 14 (+8) **Wis** 17 (+9)

Con 20 (+11) **Int** 14 (+8) **Cha** 16 (+9)

Description *This towering, fish-like humanoid is covered in thick scales, barnacles, and stray colonies of coral, looking for all the world like a small animate reef. Its arms and legs are long and robust, and the foot-long talons on the tip of its webbed hands and feet look fully capable of rending armor, let alone the puny flesh inside it.*

DEEP ONE LEVIATHAN TACTICS

A deep one leviathan accompanies parties of deep one raiders when armed resistance is expected from a targeted human community. A leviathan begins combat with *rending pounce* against the nearest foe, and then typically spends its action point to use *rending grip* again on the grabbed target. It uses *leap* to maneuver around the battlefield, relying on its reach to keep smaller enemies at bay.

Dagon Level 15 Solo Brute
Huge natural humanoid (aquatic) XP 6,000

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +17; darkvision

HP 760; **Bloodied** 380

AC 29; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 26

Saving Throws +5

Speed 8, swim 10

Action Points 2

⚔ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +18 vs. AC; 3d6+8 damage, and a large or smaller target is grabbed (until escape). Dagon can still attack with a claw while grabbing a large or smaller target.

† **Devour** (minor 1/round; at-will)
Grabbed target only; +18 vs. AC; 3d6+8 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of Dagon's next turn.

⚡ **Briny Spew** (standard; recharge Ⓜ) ⚡ **Acid**
Close blast 5; 3d6+7 acid damage, ongoing 10 acid damage, and the target is blinded (save ends both).

⚡ **Cacophonous Croak** (standard, sustain minor, encounter) ⚡ **Thunder, Zone**
Close burst 3; this power creates a zone of thunderous croaking that remains in place until the end of Dagon's next turn. Any creature entirely within the area (except Dagon or other deep ones) is deafened. Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the area (except Dagon or other deep ones) takes 10 thunder damage.

Earthshaking Bound (move; recharge Ⓜ)
Dagon shifts 8 squares. All large or smaller creatures in squares adjacent to the squares where Dagon ends his shift are knocked prone.

Sea Father
All allies with the aquatic keyword adjacent to Dagon gain a +2 bonus to saving throws and all defenses.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common

Skills Athletics +20, Endurance +19, Religion +16, Stealth +15

Str 26 (+15) **Dex** 17 (+10) **Wis** 21 (+12)

Con 24 (+14) **Int** 18 (+11) **Cha** 17 (+10)

Description *The water suddenly churns with greasy green foam, and a massive, dark shape glides like a loathsome torpedo beneath the waves. Then it breaks the surface, and the sanity drains from your mind in a flood of terrified screams and anguished moans. The thing from beneath the waves stands taller than a building, its vast, squamous flesh coated with thick slime and clinging sea creatures gasping and dying in the alien atmosphere. It turns two vast, squid-like eyes in your direction, and its cavernous mouth opens to reveal thousands of shark-like teeth. It bends over you, blotting out the feeble sun above, and all you can see is the groaning darkness of its mouth and an endless forest of serrated fangs.*

DAGON'S TACTICS

Mighty Dagon begins combat with *briny spew* and then spends one of its action points to begin *cacophonous croak*, which it maintains throughout the combat. Dagon then seeks to grab up the nearest target and use its massive, shark-toothed maw to slowly devour the unfortunate creature. While it has an enemy in its grip, Dagon flails about with its other claw, but does not seek to grab another enemy. When pressed or surrounded, Dagon uses *earthshaking bound* to reposition itself, typically following up with another *briny spew* if the power has recharged. Dagon surrounds itself with deep one underlings to make use of *sea father*, as it can simply reach over its smaller kin to attack enemies.



ENCOUNTER GROUPS

Deep ones often send raiding parties onto dry land, targeting human settlements near the shore. In addition, in the water, deep ones may be encountered with other sea creatures they have subjugated. A deep one leviathan and at least one priest of Cthulhu always accompany Dagon when it is encountered.

Level 11 Encounter (XP 3,075)

- 1 deep one priest of Cthulhu (level 11 controller)
- 4 deep one raiders (level 9 skirmisher)
- 5 deep one hybrids (level 12 minion)

Level 13 Encounter (XP 4,050)

- 1 deep one leviathan (level 12 elite brute)
- 4 deep one raiders (level 9 skirmisher)
- 6 deep one hybrids (level 12 minion)

Level 18 Encounter (XP 10,250)

- Dagon (level 15 solo brute)
- 1 deep one leviathan (level 12 elite brute)
- 1 deep one priest of Cthulhu (level 11 controller)
- 3 deep one raiders (level 9 skirmisher)
- 6 deep one hybrids (level 12 minion)

SHOGGOTH

Shoggoths are horrific ooze-like creatures that resemble giant, viscous globs of black tar. They are the creations of a long-dead race of elder beings that ruled the world eons ago; they served these alien, enigmatic ancients as servitors and beasts of war. Legend states that the shoggoths rose up and slew their masters, and now the few that remain lurk in the crumbling ruins of the elder being's cities.

SHOGGOTH LORE

A character knows the following with a successful Nature or Arcana check.

DC 20: Shoggoths are massive, protoplasmic entities that resemble oozes. However, they are not blind and can create organs for both sight and hearing from their viscid mass. Although by no means great thinkers, shoggoths have a rudimentary protomind that gives them a glimmer of intellect: enough to make them deadly predators. Shoggoths attempt to consume any organic life they encounter, absorbing food into their bodies where it is torn apart and dissolved with powerful digestive fluids. Shoggoths are universally horrible to behold, and their weird, ever-changing anatomy is monumentally disturbing to most humanoid.

DC 25: As servitor creatures, the shoggoths were designed with little to no self-awareness, acting much like organic machines for their elder thing masters. However, over time, they apparently developed a rudimentary consciousness and staged a full-scale rebellion against the elder things, destroying a number of their masters' great cities in a matter of days. The rise of the shoggoths is considered by sages to be the beginning of the long decline into extinction for the elder things, as they never fully recovered from the shoggoth revolt. Although the shoggoths are now independent and self-aware, their original role as slaves and servitors leaves them vulnerable to mind-influencing magic and psychic attacks. In fact, psychic attacks are the only thing that can keep a shoggoth at bay, as they have a great, inborn fear of forced servitude.

ENCOUNTER GROUPS

Since shoggoths view other organic creatures as nothing more than food, they are almost always encountered alone. However, a few evil races have mastered the trick of controlling shoggoths: a risky proposition at best, as nothing infuriates a shoggoth more than forced servitude. Aboleths, grell, and dark elves have been known to tame shoggoths, at least for a short while; however, not even these degenerate minds are foolish enough to attempt yoking a shoggoth for an extended period.

Level 19 Encounter (XP 12,600)

- 1 aboleth overseer (level 18 elite controller)
- 1 aboleth slime mage (level 17 elite artillery)
- 2 shoggoths (level 14 elite brute)
- 4 aboleth servitors (level 16 minion)

Shoggoth

Level 14 Elite Brute

Huge natural magical beast (aquatic, ooze) XP 2,000

Initiative +7

Senses Perception +13; all-around vision, darkvision

HP 356; **Bloodied** 178

AC 28; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 24

Resist 20 acid; 5 against attacks that target AC; **Vulnerable** 10 psychic

Saving Throws +2

Speed 6, climb 6, swim 6

Action Points 1

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Acid**

Reach 3; +17 vs. AC; 2d8+9 damage plus 1d8 acid damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape).

‡ **Envelop** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Acid**

Grabbed target only; +15 vs. Fortitude; a large or smaller target is pulled into the shoggoth's space and takes ongoing 10 acid damage until it escapes the grab. A creature that escapes the grab shifts to a square of its choosing adjacent to the shoggoth. The shoggoth can move normally while creatures are enveloped within it. A shoggoth can envelop up to 6 Medium-sized creatures.

‡ **Horrific Constriction** (minor 1/round; at-will) ♦ **Acid**

Enveloped target only; +17 vs. Fortitude; 3d8+9 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the shoggoth's next turn.

⚡ **Awful Presence** (standard; encounter) ♦ **Fear**

Close burst 5; targets enemies; +13 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the shoggoth's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target is weakened (save ends).

Protomind

A shoggoth has only the barest hint of intellect and can be influenced easily. A shoggoth suffers a -2 penalty to all defenses and saving throws to against powers and effects with the charm, psychic, or sleep keywords.

Alignment Unaligned

Languages -

Str 28 (+16)

Dex 10 (+9)

Wis 12 (+8)

Con 28 (+16)

Int 5 (+4)

Cha 3 (+3)

Description *A roiling orb of protoplasmic tar barrels down the corridor toward you. Eyes, mouths, and flailing, half-formed appendages burst from its glassy, elastic mass in a shuddering, chaotic array, only to quickly disappear in the wake of new, even stranger organs and orifices. The blasphemous thing makes an eerie piping noise as it surges toward you; a staccato rhythm that sounds like horrible, alien words.*

SHOGGOTH TACTICS

A shoggoth is unconcerned with stealth or subtlety, simply barreling toward any creature it encounters. It attacks by striking with a protoplasmic pseudopod, crushing and burning its foes. It attempts to grab up creatures smaller than itself and then thrust them into its bubbling, caustic mass. Any creature unfortunate enough to find itself inside a shoggoth is subject to its acidic digestive process and *horrific constriction*, whereby the shoggoth simply sucks its victim apart. A shoggoth is vulnerable to psychic attacks, and may flee an enemy that can effectively target its mind with psychic energy or compel it to obey.

Deities of Aereth

Lasheeva

By Jeff LaSala

LASHEEVA

(LA-SHE-VAH)

*LADY DISSOLUTION, THE COLD SEDUCTRESS,
THE BLACK DESECRATION, THE DAUGHTER
OF NIGHTMARES*

**EVIL GODDESS OF UNDEATH,
MURDER, AND AFFLICTION**

Nearly every mortal fears death – it is natural to do so – but *all* mortal beings may rightly fear the dead: for the dead do not always remain at rest. When the first sentient creatures of Áereth felt the cold grip of death upon them, it was the goddess Lasheeva who offered the attractive, if macabre, alternative. Granting a blessed few her deathward kiss, it was she who personally introduced the curse of undeath to Áereth. From the mindless, animate corpses of zombies and skeletons to the ravenous, tomb-haunting ghouls; from dread wights and mummies that lurk in the deep subterrene to wraiths and vampires that prowl the night—all such creatures owe their existence, their powers, their misery, and their glory to the Great and Terrible Lasheeva. It is commonly believed that it was she who crafted phylacteries for Áereth's first lichs and

soul weapons for the first death knights, forever changing the world by offering dangerous, power-hungry mortals a dark substitute to mere mortality.

Lasheeva herself is considered undead, the first deity who relinquished her own traditional sense of divinity in exchange for something *else*. She is a seducer among gods, for since her own transformation she has lured some demi-powers into following suit and even enlisted the service of a number of demon princes. Lasheeva also holds dominion over murder and affliction itself, and all who justify or delight in these inevitably offer tribute to her. A common mantra among the faith of Lasheeva states: “Death will claim everyone in its course, but only the blessed will reap the rewards.”

Lasheeva is known foremost as Lady Dissolution, for she aims to burn the naïveté from the world, destroy its heretics, and bring mortiferous enlightenment to all societies. Her dogma is one of death, undeath, and whatever afflictions are required to shape the world according to her vision. She is called the Black Desecration, for her destructive wrath is often leveled against Áereth's self-righteous religions. Lasheeva is also sometimes known as the Cold Seductress, for she lures mortal and immortal alike into her fold, not with promises of loyalty and affection, but of cold, uncompromising power. Despite the stigma undeath holds the world over, none can dispute the supernatural strength and invulnerability it grants its recipients. The Cold Seductress vaunts this like no other, and refers to the power of undeath as the Dark Salvation.

Despite her image as the immortal mistress of undeath, Lasheeva is also known as the Daughter of Nightmares – an epithet that invokes her heritage. According to religious doctrine, Lasheeva was not always a goddess of undeath. In the mythic world where the Sancturn Pantheon originated – and long before Áereth’s own inception – she was a princess, renowned for her cold and astonishing beauty.

As the daughter of Gil’Mâridth, the elder power of fear and torment, Lasheeva was a living avatar of murder, lovely and untouchable. Her mother had reigned over all evils of that world, and Lasheeva had wanted for nothing. But when it became clear that their world had come to an end (an event many theologians attribute to their machinations), both queen and princess enacted an ineffable rite to survive: Gil’Mâridth sacrificed her worldly divinity and escaped into the dreamworld of her nemesis Ôæ, and in doing so transferred much of her power into Lasheeva... even as she sacrificed her daughter. Lasheeva rose from the grave, as desired, a lich-queen ascendant in divine undeath. Together both sovereigns survived – and had been transformed from – the loss of their homeworld.

The faith of Lasheeva maintains that **murder** is not merely an act but part of her very creed. It is the forceful taking of another’s life, mercilessly and without consent, and the Lady teaches that murder is often a necessity. Life may be precious, but it will not endure forever and it must inevitably be extinguished—sooner for some than for others. For enemies of the faith who work against Lady Dissolution or her plans, life must be destroyed as soon as circumstances allow. Not all who serve Lasheeva enjoy killing, but the goddess does not frown on those who relish the work.

In a faith that concerns itself with the loss of life, **affliction** is as inevitable as it is mystical. Pain, distress, and grief cannot be divorced from the mortality that the gods have placed upon all living creatures—which, like death itself, are fetters meant to limit mortals’ accomplishments. Lady Dissolution, of course, offers the means to subvert such mortality. The calamities of life are many, her scriptures teach, and to deny this fact is to magnify its intensity. Lasheevans are taught to accept, embrace, and thereby master suffering. Once controlled, insalubrity and pain are to be employed *against* one’s religious or personal enemies.

A reputation of morbidity and gloom perpetually shrouds the faithful of Lasheeva. Ironically, the same is true of the followers of Soleth, Lasheeva’s greatest enemy, though her tenets place her in stark opposition to that god of dignified death. But where Soleth promises only peaceful repose for those who die, Lady Dissolution offers continuance in the physical or incorporeal world and eternal vitality in undeath. Living Lasheevans revere the state of undeath more than life itself and typically carry macabre ornaments such as bones, canopic jars, and items of human leather to honor their undead brethren and superiors.

Contrary to the stereotypes perpetuated by their enemies, Lasheevans do value life. Even the Lady herself once lived, long and illustriously, before her transcendence. Indeed, while life is yet a pale reflection of undeath, it is a prerequisite to it; one must live before one can die and live again. Life is a necessary state of transition, and one’s achievements in life will determine what death will offer.

Lasheevans observe the cycle of existence as follows:

- *Stage 1 – Life:* Life is vital, for it gives power to a soul and a state of malleability to the body. Life is potential, a time for progress and accomplishment.
- *Stage 2 – Dying:* Dying is necessary but should not be sought until one has earned his worth and is ready to receive the gifts of Lady Dissolution. The circumstances and means of one’s death are of great significance.
- *Stage 3 – Death:* Death itself is a state of inertia, a neutral, transitory state where one’s body is waiting for either dissolution and oblivion – or elevation. To be buried or interred and ignored forever is the saddest of fates.
- *Stage 4 – Undeath:* A state of perfection, a triumph over mortality itself. The powers one possesses in undeath are said to be a measure of one’s worth in Lasheeva’s eyes.

Practicing Lasheevans make use of necronyms – the names of those who have died—to give their children. However, the names they select are taken from notable, intelligent undead in service to Lady Dissolution who have been destroyed. In this way, Lasheevans honor the fallen and establish an obligation to strike against enemies of the faith. For example, a girl who is given the necronym of a vampiress, for example, is expected to one day avenge her namesake by killing the vampire slayer who destroyed her. In Lasheevan culture, no offense goes unanswered, no strike unchallenged. Such systematic tenacity fosters a very clear message to opposing faiths: To kill a Lasheevan is to become a target; the goddess’s faithful will not rest until you have been murdered and reanimated.

While most undead have come into their existences by the administrations of Lasheeva or her servants, only some varieties have a well-defined place in the hierarchy. Mindless undead who are raised by Lasheevan rituals are collectively called the Quiet Legions; in times of great need, high priests can summon these animate dead from across countless miles wherever they lurk. The ravenous and vengeful undead, such as ghouls and wights, loosely serve as soldiers and guardians of the faith. Intelligent undead, such as vampires, death knights, and lichs, are usually considered free-willed agents of Lasheeva (whether they piously serve her or not). Most incorporeal undead, such as ghosts, occupy a unique and often uncertain caste within the faith, for they are denied the physical body that most of the Lady’s faithful hope to retain; in addition, not all ghosts know or care about the goddess at all. Wraiths and specters, hateful

spirits bereft of their mortal memories, are considered the rank-and-file minions of Lasheeva herself. Some sects believe they are the punished, others that they are the *pure*.

CLERGY

City priests of Lasheeva, while universally mistrusted by the common people, are known to be soft-spoken scholars of arcane history and the occult who study esoteric literature and ancient lore. Behind closed doors, clergymen experiment with necrotic magic, scribe ritual scrolls, and organize the ventures of the faith's "field priests." In her greatest temples, far from the prying eyes of opposing faiths, priests ritually sacrifice and reawaken their own—those who have earned the cold kiss of Lasheeva. Captured enemies languish in dungeons, awaiting their inevitable fate: death and reanimation as mindless slaves, eternal servants to eternal captors.

Clerics: Priests and priestesses who have proven their courage and martial skill become clerics and, within the faith, are usually known as Morients. Considered field priests, Morients are charged with the acquisition of holy relics and the ruin of sites consecrated to Aereth's hypocritical, self-righteous deities. At their least, clerics of Lasheeva are dangerous and artful tomb raiders, exhuming mortal remains of nobles, commoners, and even monsters to bolster the Quiet Legions. At their best, clerics are deadly crusaders of Lasheeva's cause, murdering heretics and finding choice souls to lure into her dark fold. Morients adventure to acquire the wealth and power for the coffers of the faith or to hasten their own ascendance

under the watchful eye of their goddess. The greater one's power and lore, the higher in Lasheeva's hierarchy he may rise when death is upon him.

Paladins: Most paladins join the religious order known as the Deathwatch, charged with protecting temples and priests of the faith. Those not assigned to guard holy sites travel abroad as pilgrims of the faith. Some members of the Deathwatch travel alone or in the company of other adventurers unaffiliated with the church in order to recruit more souls to her cause. If they cannot convert their friends, they aim to find those they can.

Monks: The monastic servants of Lasheeva are encountered more often than other clergymen in society – not for greater numbers but for greater visibility. While most priests remain discretely out of sight, researching necromantic magic for the faith, monks serve as modest representatives who live and serve among the common people. Most are unaligned friars who contribute to their communities and preach quietly the ways of their goddess – for those willing to hear of the Dark Salvation. In many cities, Lasheevan monks have earned a softer reputation than the clergymen of Soleth and generally wear less somber garments than their counterparts. Dwelling less on death than their brethren, they cite the need to live a good, productive life in preparation for the latter stages of Lasheeva's proffered cycle. Monks may take to adventuring as a way to increase the resources of their faith, while a smaller percentage are fervent enthusiasts of killing and the spreading of misery. The latter live more like assassins than impoverished friars.



LAYMEN

All men and women who follow Lasheeva respect, fear, or even aspire to join the ranks of the undead. It is the Dark Salvation they serve and hope to achieve, and they live their lives in obedience to her teachings. From jaded commoners who have suffered the ravages of war to estranged scholars who want more from life than service to gods who promise intangible deliverance, to powerful wizards who feel encroaching death will rob them of their life's work, laymen from all walks of society are drawn into Lasheeva's faith.

Lasheeva's followers are scarce compared to those of other faiths, as most mortals share a primal loathing for the undead. Yet it is precisely this dread that Lashevans embrace and strive to overcome. Adventurers in the faith aim to plunder the ruins of the early ages of Aereth and recover the secrets of undeath once employed by their ancient brethren. Rogues, bards, rangers, and warlocks who revere Lasheeva typically become assassins, serving as either freelance agents or sponsored by the church.



SYMBOL

Lasheeva's most recognized symbol is that of a black, jawless skull with vivid eyes gleaming from the sockets. In some instances, the eyes are living, bloody orbs and in others they are nothing more than a hellish red glow. Most holy symbols carried by clerics and paladins are three-dimensional talismans of this symbol carved of black stone, ebony, or dark metal. Venerable priests often carry staves to represent their authority, capping its tip with Lasheeva's symbol in the form of a real skull blackened by fire.

TEMPLES

In cities that will tolerate them, temples of Lasheeva are small chapels that include libraries, worship sanctuaries, and ossuaries. Most include a mortuary in service to the city, bringing it in direct competition with Soleth's local temple, though these are generally shunned by respectable citizens. Well-spoken priests and monks staff these urban temples, offering discretion and silver to those citizens willing to turn over the mortal remains of their friends and relatives to the Lasheevan clergy. Such a monetary offer, they are quick to remind those in doubt, is never made by the insular clergy of Soleth, which does nothing more than consign the dead to ashes or dust. Every formal temple of Lasheeva is discretely overseen by at least one vampire, mummy, lich, or other powerful undead entity. In regions where the faith is most despised, these undead rectors establish their lairs off church grounds but well within reach.

The greatest of Lasheeva's temples are hidden complexes, constructed in deep mountain caves or far below populous cities, where the faithful are free to murder, sacrifice, and experiment with necrotic rituals. It is in such places where her most worthy and eminent priests transform themselves into powerful undead. These temples, resembling elaborate, well-maintained catacombs, draw the greatest ire from the holy servants of Soleth and the goddess Elyr. In some regions, these temples include connecting tunnels to legitimate crypts; those intending to intern their dead in legitimate tombs are unwittingly delivering their loved ones into Lasheevan hands.

Shrines are small affairs, usually established within existing mausoleums of Soleth's church and which are desecrated by a vampire saint of Lasheevan history. In civilization, shrines can be found within cemeteries; in the wild, they are ornately-adorned stone monuments erected near burial grounds and are often watched over by ghouls. Shrines are fixed with fire-blackened skulls, their sockets inlaid with necrotic, "living" eyes that stare at all who approach.

ALTERNATE ASPECTS

Among elves, eladrin, and gnomes, Lasheeva is known as Haristryn, the Wailing Goddess or Lady of the Banshees. She is the harbinger of sorrow and loss, a beautiful ghost queen whose keening voice raises spirits from the grave. These fey peoples believe that without Haristryn, there would be an end to the restless dead. So long as she exists, their souls may be awakened by her song and revolt against the living. While most elves and eladrin oppose Haristryn and her minions, a hated few align with her instead, choosing what they believe is the winning side of the future to come.

Not long ago, priests of Soleth unearthed a cache of ancient Lasheevan scrolls, accounts allegedly penned by a long-dead disciple believed to have communed with the goddess herself. These documents, known as the Scrolls of Regret, claim that Lasheeva is miserable in her state of

undeath, wistful of the life she once knew. These elusive Scrolls have been declared blasphemous by most Lasheevan temples, but they have also become the source of several splintered sects of the faith. One such is the Dreamless Night, a cult comprised of rogue Lasheevans who believe undeath is indeed a curse, not a blessing, and while they avoid it themselves they inflict it upon their enemies. The Dreamless Night aims to slay and reanimate good-aligned heroes of the age to punish their insolence with the misery of undeath, to force them to serve the powers of darkness.

TEXTS

The Sacred Writings of the Black Textuaries – often just the Black Textuaries – are the seminal holy texts of the Lasheevan faith. Millennia ago, during the Reign of Dragons, these sacred teachings were first carved in Aykaesik, the original dragonborn alphabet. It is believed that the first true cult of Lasheeva formed from an exiled dragonborn clan whose members chose the Dark Salvation when they saw their empire crumbling. Although the Black Textuaries are today found in the common languages of Áereth's populous races, some of these ancient tablatures still exist within the oldest temples, relics verily glowing with Lasheeva's divine power. There are even rumors that a few of these dragonborn disciples, mummified and older than the oldest lich, slumber in these dark vaults to guard the tablatures.

FAMOUS RELICS

There are many holy artifacts treasured by Lasheevans, removed from their reliquaries only by those favored by the goddess. Of those that remain unfound, two stand above the rest.

The *Vorian Shroud* is a black, diaphanous cloak that grants a devotee of Lasheeva all the strengths and incorporeal invulnerabilities of a wraith. Said to have been worn by some of Áereth's most heinous assassins, numerous historical records associate the cloak with the murder of kings and prominent theocrats. Named for the vampire lord who first crafted it, the *Shroud* is also believed to grant its wearer enhanced longevity, that he or she might accomplish more in life and thereby reap greater rewards in undeath.

Even more coveted is the *Thanatoran Grimoire*. Believed to have been written by Lasheeva herself, the *Grimoire* is a legendary book of undead mastery. Reputed to contain deific lore banned from mortal knowledge, the *Grimoire* can raise armies of the dead without the costly requirements of a necromantic ritual. It is said that mastery of even a single page might allow one to summon a death knight as a personal bodyguard or animate the skeletal remains of a long-dead dragon. It is commonly accepted that the *Grimoire* was torn asunder ages ago, and now its pages are scattered across the Known Realms. Should these holy writings be recovered and reunited, a new tide of undeath would surely threaten all lands.

VESTMENTS

In civilized company, Lasheevans dress plainly in dark or earthen tones, wearing only a single ornament of bone to represent their devotion. In their own company, or in the field, they prefer more gruesome raiment: tattered cloaks, silken death shrouds, or armor crafted with humanoid leather or bone. Novices and veteran clerics are encouraged to wear *deathcut* armor, while high priests are almost required to procure a suit of *ghostphase* armor as their ceremonial vestments.

ALLIANCES, RIVALRIES & ENEMIES

Lasheeva is the daughter of Gil'Mâridth, and while this forges no official truce between the faiths of both goddesses, their respective clergies never actively hinder one another. Both goddesses remember both what was and what can be, and their domains often compliment each other's quite well. Gil'Mâridth is the matron of nightmares, and few things in life inspire more lasting fear and torment than the undead, bringing noctivagant dreamers ever closer to the goddess's evil realm. In ironic opposition, the undead do not themselves dream, thus denying Gil'Mâridth the minds and souls who have embraced Lasheeva. It is not, therefore, in the mother's interest to allow the daughter to transform all life into undeath.

Soleth, the Silent Death, and Elyr, Maiden of Life, are chief targets for Lasheeva's wrath. Both gods relentlessly oppose her and her faithful, aiming to foil her schemes and destroy the undead. In most societies, followers of Lasheeva merely seek to harm these enemy churches politically, but beneath this civilized veneer, they will do their utmost to destroy them. Less violent laymen attempt first conversion; the lines between life, death, and undeath can be thin.

HOLIDAYS

One of the most anticipated holidays observed by Lasheevan's faith is Soleven (itself derivative of "Solitude's Even"), so named because it immediately precedes the more common religious holiday known as the Day of Solitude. The latter is a day of burials and memorials observed across Áereth and usually overseen by priests of Soleth, god of dignified death. Devout Lasheevans with sufficient power celebrate Soleven by making it a night of murder, killing long-hated nemeses (if possible) or outspoken enemies of the faith as a gesture of irony and spite against Soleth; if Soleth's faithful have made their holiday a day of burials, then Lasheevans are happy to supply them with more bodies.

Across the Known Realms, more murders are committed on Soleven than any other day, either by Lasheevans or wicked opportunists, making it an especially fearful event. Zealous lay followers of Lady Dissolution usually observe their holiday in milder ways, vandalizing cemeteries, digging up corpses randomly, or harassing the newly bereaved. Soleven has been gaining popularity in many cities and towns, inspiring

troublemaking youths who care nothing for religious intent to a night of mischief. Crafty Lasheevans pay attention to these wayward youths and often recruit them into the faith, citing Lady Dissolution's need for intrepid new blood.

ROLE-PLAYING A FOLLOWER OF LASHEEVA

Remember that death is a threshold through which all must pass. It is not an end; do not fear it. Instead, live as long and as well as you can, and trust that your goddess will honor your inevitable demise with a reward far surpassing life itself. Protect and serve with the undead, for they are as your kin; destroy only those who would destroy you. Murder and affliction are necessary tools to see the world take its proper shape. You are not required to enjoy the taking of another's life, but there is no shame in doing so. While your softhearted companions may deliberate the ethics of killing, you do not stand idly by. Servants of Lady Dissolution are not shackled by chains of morality; you will do what needs doing and be the first to strike the lethal blow. You may love and befriend any whom you trust, but do so with discrimination. True allies will be needed against the insolence and ignorance that seeks to stifle the secrets of power and the unknown.

DEATHMASK

Almost every temple of Lasheeva is familiar with the crafting of *deathmasks*, and when not donned in battle, they are used for ceremonial purposes. If worn in conjunction with certain rituals involving the dead or undead (such as *speak with dead*), the component cost is reduced by 100 gp (GM's discretion).

Deathmask

Level 12+

Crafted of lacquered darkwood in the likeness of a grinning skull or rotting face, this half-mask grants you the strength and visage of an animate corpse when you are ready.

Lvl 12 13,000 gp Lvl 22 325,000 gp

Item Slot: Head

Power (Daily): Free Action. You may use this power only when you are bloodied. You immediately drop to the ground, visually appearing to have died from the blow that made you bloodied. On your next turn, you may stand up from prone as a free action and act as normal. You visually appear to be – and in some respects *are* – a zombie, animated from your newly slain corpse. So long as you remain bloodied, and until the end of the encounter, you gain the following properties.

Property: Darkvision, resist 10 necrotic.

Level 22: Darkvision, resist 15 necrotic, immune disease.



FEAT

LASHEEVA'S CLAIM [DIVINITY]

Prerequisites: Channel Divinity class feature, must worship Lasheeva

Benefit: You can invoke the power of Lady Dissolution to use *Lasheeva's claim*.

Channel Divinity: Lasheeva's Claim

Feat Power

Your goddess grants you claim over the undead minions of your enemies who dare to attack one of her servants.

Encounter ♦ **Divine, Necrotic**

Standard Action Ranged 10

Target: One undead minion

Attack: Wisdom vs. Will

Hit: The target is dominated until the end of your next turn.

Special: You must take the Lasheeva's Claim feat to use this power.

PARAGON PATH

DEATHWARDEN

"I do not fear death, for I have already mastered it."

Prerequisite: Cleric; must worship Lasheeva; unaligned, evil or chaotic evil

You have found true favor with Lasheeva for your devotion, and have become privy to the secrets of necromimesis—the art and science of emulating the undead. Other members of the faith hold you in high esteem, for you have glimpsed beyond death and have learned to imitate that which you will one day become. Whenever you deal damage to your enemies with the powers of a Deathwarden, your own skeleton becomes faintly visible through your skin. In old texts, clerics who mastered necromimesis were merely called Deathward ("moving towards death") Priests, but in time the phrase evolved to include one of the definitions of a warden ("gatekeeper").

DEATHWARDEN CLASS FEATURES

Feign Death (11th level): When you are bloodied, your flesh takes on the appearance of death, making humanoids and other natural creatures hesitant to attack you. While you are bloodied, humanoids and beasts with the natural origin suffer a –2 penalty on attack rolls against you. Humanoids and beasts with the undead keyword are not affected by this feature.

Enervating Action (11th level): When you spend an action point to take an extra action, each enemy within 2 squares is weakened until the end of your next turn.

Life Absorption (16th level): When you drop an enemy to 0 hit points or fewer; you gain 5 temporary hit points.

DEATHWARDEN PRAYERS

Wight Light

Deathwarden Attack 11

A seething dart of misty black light coalesces in your hand, ready to be thrown at your enemy of choice.

Encounter ♦ **Divine, Necrotic**

Standard Action Ranged 20

Target: One creature

Attack: Wisdom vs. Reflex

Hit: 3d6 + Wisdom modifier necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of your next turn.

Miss: The target is slowed until the end of your next turn.

Wraithform

Deathwarden Utility 12

Your body dissolves into a shroud of shadows, fading you into incorporeality.

Encounter ♦ **Divine, Healing**

Minor Action Personal

Effect: You assume a misty, insubstantial form until the end of your next turn. In this form you are insubstantial, and you gain a fly speed of 10. You may spend a healing surge.

Wail of Dissolution

Deathwarden Attack 20

You emit the keening of a horrifying spirit from Lasbeev's ghostly domain, terrifying your foes.

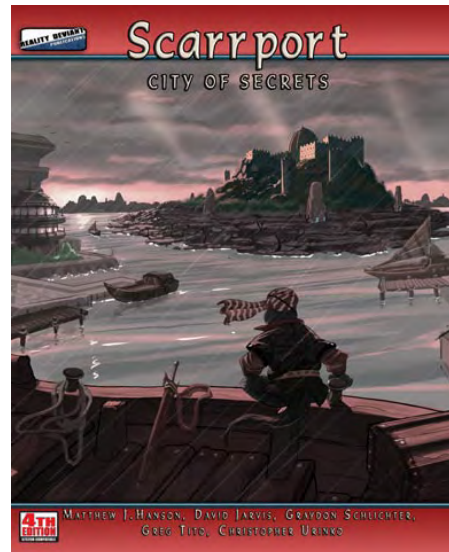
Daily ♦ **Divine, Psychic**

Standard Close burst 5

Target: Each enemy in burst

Attack: Charisma vs. Will

Hit: 4d6 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and the target is pushed 5 squares and immobilized (save ends).



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Azagar's Advice for Adventurers

Choose Your Weapon: Part II

By Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel

From the Journal of Zavius Oakshadow,
Royal Chronicler to His Majesty,
King Ivar Brighthammer

One week ago, I was allowed access to the infamous Azagar Bloodfist, former High General of the Imperial Horde, and now a prisoner of His Majesty King Ivar Brighthammer. My duty, as assigned by his majesty, was to entreat the fearsome hobgoblin to relay some portion of his vast martial wisdom that might be useful to adventurers; those brave, wandering souls that King Ivar himself once called kin.

I must say that my initial enthusiasm at the thought of speaking with such an infamous brute as Azagar was overshadowed by no small amount of fear. The mere idea of spending an hour alone with the fearsome hobgoblin, despite his chains and manacles, was enough to make my pen shake with palsied terror. Hobgoblins despise elves with a passion, as you know, and I have no doubt that Azagar would heartily enjoy choking the life out of one last elf before ending his days on the executioner's slab.

However, despite my fears, Azagar Bloodfist was quite willing to expound upon his expertise in all things military during my last visit. His disgust at speaking to an elf was quite plain, but I think perhaps the months in solitary confinement had left him longing to speak with anyone, even someone as odious as an elf. I was able to fill nearly ten pages with the hobgoblin's words; and, I must admit, there is a crude elegance to Azagar's lecturing that I found quite fascinating. I have no doubt that the utility of his thoughts and lessons on warfare, in the end, may atone for some of the evil he has worked in this world.

Today, I return to Azagar's gloomy cell far beneath Castle Blackfyre to once again fulfill my duty to the king. I pray Azagar is in good spirits...or at least tightly bound.

—Zavius

Ah, feather-britches returns! How delightful! Couldn't get enough of me last time, aye Zavius? I know you elves rarely get a good look at a fine male specimen such as myself, so I don't blame you for coming back for another gander. You know, that perfume you wear is spoiling the piss, dung, and sweat aroma I have so painstakingly acquired over these last few months. Don't wrinkle your nose at me, elf. You think I like living like this? Maybe you could talk one of the guards into giving me a nice sponge bath.

Yes, I'm talking about you, you sons of whores! I see your poxy faces staring through the pass-through. How about a little less phlegm in my beer next time? I thought it was cold stew. Bastards!

You know, lacy-pants, Drusus out there had a brother in the Knight Legions, and I think he might be a tad upset that his brother met a rather messy end on the point of a hobgoblin spear. I'm just guessing that the amount of crushed spiders, spittle, and other bodily fluids I find in my food has something to do with that.

It's okay, Drusus! I'll bet your brother didn't piss himself and cry for his mommy at the end. I'm sure he was a brave little soldier that wouldn't dream of soiling his armor at the mere sight of a single cohort of my legionnaires! Hah!

Oh, right, Zavius, you're still here. I suppose you're back to draw from the limitless well of my expertise once again. Well, it seems I've little else to do than speak with you, so have a seat, dip your nib, and get to scratching – there's genius on the way.

Well, as you know, ladyfingers, I've got plenty of priceless wisdom pertaining to the use of steel and leather. In fact, I'll bet those pages you penned last week have already helped a number of lackwit adventurers survive an attack by a flock of wild sheep or a horde of evil kittens. Hell, maybe with what you write today, one of those "brave" human adventurers King Ivar is so high on might even make himself useful by keeping the kobold and goblin population in check. I won't hold my breath, though.

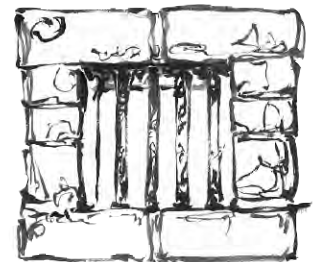
What? Yes, Lady Zavius, keep your knickers on. I'm getting to it. I need to get warmed up, you know; you're the first soul I've spoken with in a week. Okay, last week we covered axes, flails, hammers, and maces. This week I'll try to put a dent in adventurer stupidity by talking about heavy blades, light blades, and picks. That suit you, Your Fussiness?

All right, listen up.

Heavy Blades

What the hell is a "heavy blade?" I mean, beyond one of those silly, arbitrary groups that humans like to put things into. Well, for the few non-humans that might read this, when a human says "heavy blade" what he means is "big sword." There, now isn't that easier to remember? Okay, I consider a heavy blade to be any sword longer than the length of your shoulder to the tip of your fingers. That can be your standard, run-of-the-mill longsword, like those carried by the Knight Legions, or those ridiculous two-handed monstrosities that human footmen use to cut down pikes. That's quite a range, ain't it; but not to worry, there're only a few things you need to know about big swords, and once you've learned those few things, choosing your next meat-cleaver will be as easy as wringing an elf's neck with one hand tied behind your back.

Well, Zavy, it is pretty damn easy to do!



Right, swords like any other weapon lose their versatility once they get beyond a certain size. Two-handed swords are like two-handed anything; they're slow, cumbersome, and not worth their weight in dung. Now that's not to say that you shouldn't ever put two-hands on your sword; you just need to make sure that you can take one hand off again when you need to. In my opinion, and it's the only one that counts, the maximum blade length for a sword that's worth a damn in a fight is about four feet. At that length, you can still manage the blade with one hand, allowing you to use a shield; but you can still fit both your hands on the hilt to add a bit of power to the ol' finishing stroke.

Now that you have some idea of maximum size, let's talk about the advantages of single-edged versus double-edged. A good single-edged sword is typically curved, heavy in the blade, and on the shorter side of what a heavy blade should be. This gives the blade some real chopping power, allowing you to hack through flesh almost as good as an axe, but still retain the balance and speed of a sword. On the other hand, a good double-edged sword should have a thinner blade and be on the longish side, about three and a half to four feet in length. Your typical bastard sword fits this bill, and can do double duty as a hacking weapons and a thrusting weapon, allowing you to slam your blade through mail, or even plate if you're lucky enough to hit a joint or find a chink.

Now you're probably all fired up about big swords, and ready to run down to Gaznag's Weapon Emporium (my brother runs a hell of a smithy) and snatch up the first bit of shiny you see. Well, hold on there, you adventurin' fool. Swords have a few drawbacks you might want to consider before plunking down your hard-earned gold. First of all, swords need a lot of upkeep. You can let your axe, mace, or hammer rust up and it'll still cave in a skull right good. But if you let a sword go to pot...well, then all you really have is an oversized letter opener. In addition, even if you maintain your blade, big swords are fragile, and I mean fragile. In order to do what they do, big swords have to be relatively light, which means there's just not as much iron in a sword blade as there is in an axe head. What does that mean? Well, it means that you could end up like the oni mage Kasuka Firetusk, who thought he could just roll through one of my cohorts with that big sword of his like a damned scythe through a wheat field. Hell, he might have even pulled it off, if his sword hadn't snapped in half on the skull of one of my brave lads. Needless to say, even an oni mage isn't worth a fart in a windstorm with nothing but a broken-off nub as a weapon. Want to know how many javelins it takes to bring down an unarmed oni mage? I don't know; probably just one, but I thought forty-eight would give us better odds.

Heroic Tier Feat

VERSATILE BLADE

Prerequisite: Str 13, Dex 13

Benefit: When wielding a heavy blade (not a polearm) with the versatile property in one hand, you gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls.

Paragon Tier Feat

IMPROVED VERSATILE BLADE

Prerequisite: Str 15, Dex 15

Benefit: When you wield a heavy blade (not a polearm) with the versatile property in two hands, you may treat the weapon as a high-crit weapon.

Epic Tier Feat

SURE REMISE

Prerequisite: Str 17, Dex 15, *sure strike* fighter at-will power

Benefit: When you are wielding a heavy blade and miss a target with a melee attack, if you use the *sure strike* fighter at-will power on your next attack against that target, you gain a bonus to the attack roll equal to twice the weapon's proficiency bonus.

Light Blades

Again, we have a group of weapons stuffed into a neat, little group by those who have probably never even set foot on a battlefield. So what is a "light blade?" Well, to those uninitiated in weapon-grouping stupidity, a light blade is any bladed weapon roughly shorter than two and a half feet. Of course, there are some exceptions to this rule, as most elves, eladrin, and the other "fragile" races couldn't bear the thought of having their precious rapier be called something so brutish as a "heavy blade." Hah! I'll bet you've done some fencing in your day, sissy-ears. Well, let me tell you, fencing is not fighting. No one ever shouted "*rouché*" when I stuck my sword through some fool's innards on the battlefield.

Oh, sorry, I was momentarily overcome with rage at the thought of prancing elf "warriors" and their cute little rapiers. Anyway, light blades actually cover one of the most useful groups of weapons on the battlefield, namely daggers and short swords. Now, there isn't a self-respecting warrior on the planet without a dagger or two in his kit. They're good for cutting up your food, picking gristle out of your teeth, close-up interrogation work, and, hell, you can even throw the damn things when you run out of javelins. I always carry three daggers: one for eating, one for fighting, and one for throwing. I recommend you adventuring blockheads out there follow suit.

As useful as daggers are, I don't recommend the dagger as a primary weapon. You just have to get too damn close to an enemy for it to be any good. However, as a back-up weapon there is nothing better. I once had a hill giant smash my shield and spear to splinters with his greatclub, and then pin me to the ground with one big foot to gloat a bit. Unfortunately for him, standing over me like that put some of his more... tender areas in easy reach of the dirk I had hidden in my boot. I think the poor brute would have rather had his head lopped off than endure the relatively small cut I inflicted on him that day. Hah!

So, you might ask, what if I want to use a light blade as my primary weapon on the battlefield? Then you, my friend, want a short sword. In my not so humble opinion, the short sword is one of the finest weapons under the sun. Let me tell you why. It's fast, it's light, and it's a thrusting weapon. Sure, great big hacking sword and axes are flashy, but the truth is, a slashing weapon rarely inflicts an instantly fatal wound. Now, when you thrust a weapon, like a short sword, into a body, you've got a much better chance of finding something vital... and instantly fatal. If you pair a short sword with a big shield, then you have found one of the most successful offensive/defensive combinations in history. Don't agree? Ask King Ivar Brighthammer how his Knight Legions did at the Battle of Caxus against my heavy foot. Yeah, I'll bet that's a sore subject, frilly-cuffs.

Now, I know Zavy will likely wet himself if I don't at least mention the rapier, as it is, technically a light blade. I can sum up my opinion on the rapier with a single sentence: If I wanted to tickle my opponent rather than kill him, then a rapier would be my first choice.

Heroic Tier Feat

LEGIONNAIRE'S EDGE

Prerequisite: Str 13, Dex 13

Benefit: When you wield a light blade and use a heavy shield, you gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls against targets without shields.

Paragon Tier Feat

WOUNDING THRUST

Prerequisite: Str 13, Dex 15

Benefit: When you score a critical hit with a light blade, the target takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Epic Tier Feat

SPIKY GRAPPLER

Prerequisite: Str 17, Dex 17

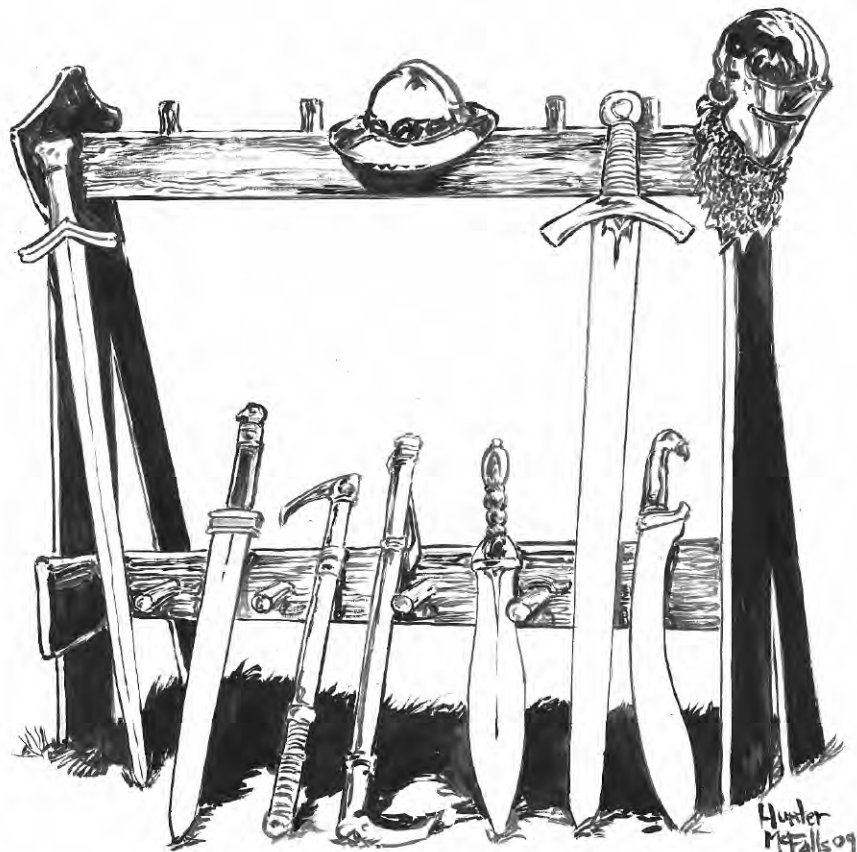
Benefit: When you are grabbed and armed with a light blade, you can make two melee basic attacks as a standard action.

Picks

Now here's an interesting group of weapons, not because they're versatile, or even particularly useful on a day-to-day basis. Picks are interesting because they do one thing better than any other weapon — they pierce armor like nobody's business. Picks, like axes and hammers, are one of the weapons that started life as a tool rather than a weapon. And like axes and hammers, some enterprising and violent individual found that a pick makes a hole in a skull just as easy as it makes a hole in the dirt. Thus, the warpick was born.

Now, as I said, the warpick is good at one thing, piercing armor. Normally, I'm not a fan of weapons that do only one thing, but the pick does what it does so well that I've been known to carry one as a backup weapon. Hear that my adventuring boys and girls? The pick is a backup weapon. Yes, it'll poke a hole in anything softer than adamantium (unless of course you're lucky enough to find an adamantium pick), but it's slow, clumsy, and its shape means that it'll get caught up on your opponent's gear more often than not.

If you must have a pick, make sure you get one that you can wield in one or two hands. The lighter, one-handed picks simply don't have enough penetrating power, and the two-handed ones... well, by now you should know how I feel about two-handed weapons. But no matter how well made your war pick, it's still a situational weapon. Drag it out when you're facing opponents in heavy armor or critters with thick scales, like dragons and bulettes. Be patient when you fight with a pick; you only need one good shot, and, like



I said, the pick's tendency to get caught up on your enemy's gear makes any kind of wild swinging a really bad idea. I once saw a dwarven paladin get his pick stuck in a frost giant's mail hauberk; the blade of the pick slid through one the links and stuck fast. Being a dwarf, the owner of said pick was too stupid, stubborn, or both to let go, so the giant dragged him all over the battlefield until there wasn't much left besides a hunk of dwarf-shaped meat stuck to the haft of a warpick.

Now, one situation where I recommend the pick as an everyday weapon is when it appears on the reverse of a more versatile implement, like an axe or a hammer. In that case, all you have to do is flip your weapon around when you need the pick, and rely on the axe or hammer for your standard bloodletting.

Heroic Tier Feat

PIERCING PICK

Prerequisite: Str 15

Benefit: When wielding a pick, you gain a +1 bonus to damage rolls against targets with a higher AC than you.

Paragon Tier Feat

PERFORATING PICK

Prerequisite: Str 17, Con 15

Benefit: When you score a critical hit with a pick, the target loses a number of points from all its resistances equal to 5 + your Constitution modifier until the end of your next turn.

Epic Tier Feat

DEADLY PUNCTURE

Prerequisite: Str 19, Con 15

Benefit: When you score a critical hit with a pick while wielding it in two hands, increase the damage die for the pick by two steps (1d8 to 1d10, 1d10 to 2d6, etc.).

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GEMS

TREASURES OF THE TYRANT QUEEN'S EMPIRE

By Dwight Hulse

The “Treasures of the Tyrant Queen’s Empire” are a set of related artifacts that were spawned from the irrevocably evil empire of Haro. Her malignant rule was a blight upon all of the lands from here to the horizon, and the resonance of her reign is still felt to this day. The peoples she crushed and enslaved have sent stories of her heinous crimes against all of the races of mortals through their generations via their songs, tales, and oral traditions. And it is said that fragments of her shattered empire survive still, thriving on greed, malice, and hatred, still clawing viciously toward the same ends the Tyrant Queen sought ages ago: to stamp out the sinfully weak, pathetic, and feeble masses and bring the world under the iron rule of the strong and deserving.

The three artifacts detailed herein are meant to be suitable for villains that your heroes might encounter throughout their adventures through each of the three tiers. They might be used by NPC antagonists, or fall in to the hands of PCs (hopefully to be destroyed and not exploited!). Used as such, they will surely add a bit of flavor to your villains and, as their histories are learned by the players, may even help to paint an interesting backdrop to your campaign as the details of an ancient and terrible empire (and possibly seeds for the troubles the PCs face in your world today) become clear.

However, for your campaign and players to appreciate the full potency and purpose of these three evil artifacts, it is highly recommended that they be worked into a storyline together and be united at some point. A heroic-level villain the PCs encounter early in their adventures could possess the true *Torque of the Diamoke*, and his minions could wield a number of copies of it. With these items he constantly summons his lackeys to his side just as the PCs corner him, allowing him to escape. Later, he uses the *Torque* to rally to his superior and thwart the PCs from stopping him! Another lieutenant of the “big boss,” encountered in the paragon-levels of the PCs’ adventures, could wield the *Crook of dur-Kain*, and charm an ally of the party, or one of its members, or use it to turn them against each other. Alternately, the “big baddy” could wield that artifact himself and use it in conjunction with the Bonds of Haro to make a true slave of the PCs and their allies! However you work the artifacts together, you’ll find the *Torque* best suited for a martial, melee brute; the *Crook* would well serve a foe with the lurker or controller role (and some affinity for the arcane, especially charms); and the *Bonds* will ultimately end up in the hands of an elite or solo arch-enemy of arcane influence bent on dominating, enslaving, or otherwise controlling others to serve his own evil designs!

THE TORQUE OF THE DIAMOKE

The *Torque* is appropriate for characters of the heroic tier.

When the Tyrant Queen set her sights upon the Verdant Valley, its steward, the Diamoke, and his elite regiment were the only force standing in her way. The Diamoke was the champion of his people, tasked with the protection of the Verdant Valley, its precious resources, and its Monarch.

Haro ravaged the Diamoke's land, enchained his people, and executed his Monarch while the Diamoke watched, bound and unable to stop her. The implement that Haro employed to restrain the Diamoke was a *Torque*, forged with vile charms meant to twist and break the will of sentient creatures. For a long time afterward, the Diamoke resisted the *Torque's* influence before finally succumbing to Haro's incessant torture and his own broken heart. Thereafter, thanks to Haro's charms and the power of the *Torque*, the Diamoke faithfully served a new monarch: the Tyrant Queen.

One legend tells of Haro's atrocities in the Verdant Valley. It is said by some that she depleted the fruitful land completely and drove its people to toil until their deaths. All of this she commanded so that she could create a number of copies of the *Torque* that broke the will of the Diamoke. Now, they say, these *Torques* are employed by the champions and elite guard of evil rulers in dark corners across the Known World.

Torque of the Diamoke

Heroic Level

Body Slot: Neck

Property: You gain a +2 item bonus to AC.

Property: When you move, you provoke no opportunity attacks if you end your movement in a square adjacent to your charge.

Power (At-Will): Free Action. Choose an ally within 20 squares. By swearing an oath of allegiance and servitude to that ally, you mark him as your charge. Any time your charge takes damage from a melee attack, you may shift 3 squares as an immediate reaction. This shift must place you at least one square closer to your charge than you began. On your turn, you may choose a new ally within 20 squares to mark as your charge as a free action.

Power (At-Will): Immediate Interrupt. When you are adjacent to your charge and your charge takes damage from a melee attack, you may choose to become the target of the attack instead. The attack automatically hits you.

Power (Encounter + Teleportation): Minor Action. You teleport to a space adjacent to your charge. The range of this teleportation is 20 squares, but you need not have line of sight or line of effect to the target square. If all squares adjacent to your charge are occupied, you appear in the next closest open square.

GOALS OF THE TORQUE OF THE DIAMOKE

- Protect the triumphant reign of the Tyrant Queen, or the possessor of the *Bonds of Haro*.
- Prove its mistress to be the dominating force in the world, preferably through force.
- Attach itself to a great and worthy warrior and lay low those who oppose its or its mistress' ends.
- Recruit worthy Champions into the loyal ranks of the Tyrant Queen.

ROLEPLAYING THE TORQUE OF THE DIAMOKE

The *Torque* is stern, disciplined, and of a singular mind. It communicates with its wielder in a simple, empathic manner. Its wielder feels a sense of urgency to protect those the *Torque* deems worthy. When such a being is endangered, he feels panic, and is only relieved when those threatening that being are slain or repelled. When the *Torque* is displeased, its wielder feels it grow heavy, and it chastises him with painful, angry spasms that assault his spirit.

CONCORDANCE

Starting Score	5
Owner gains a level	+1d10
Owner receives acclaim or reward for service to his charge	+1
Owner defeats an enemy that attacks his charge (maximum 1/day)	+1
Owner allows an enemy that attacks his charge to escape (maximum 1/day)	-1
Owner flees from combat, but his charge does not	-1
Owner is disobedient to those deemed as authorities by the <i>Torque</i>	-1
Owner allows his charge to fall to 0 hit points in combat	-2
Owner's charge is slain	-All*

*The *Torque* is Angered and Moves On

PLEASED (16-20)

"The Empire shall stand forever on the deeds I've done in service to the Queen."

The *Torque* can be assured that its mistress' empire will grow to the ends of the horizons under its wielder's capable protection.

Property: If your charge has taken damage since your last turn, your next attack is made with a +5 bonus to the attack roll and damage roll. This supersedes the bonus granted by a lower-level concordance score.

Power (At-Will + Martial, Weapon): Standard Action. When your charge is adjacent to you, you may make a melee basic attack. On a hit, you and your charge may both shift 2 squares.

Power (Encounter + Divine): Minor Action. You can target your charge with *sanctuary* (cleric 1).

SATISFIED (12-15)

"My Queen's reign shall continue so long as I am ever-vigilant."

In its wielder's service, the *Torque* sees its ends advanced. And so long as he does not falter, it will continue to reward him.

Property: If your charge has taken damage since your last turn, your next attack is made with a +2 bonus to the attack roll and damage roll.

Power (Daily + Healing): Minor Action. If you have been bloodied since your last turn and you can see your charge, you may spend a healing surge.

NORMAL (5-11)

"Step to me! I am Champion! You are Challenger!"

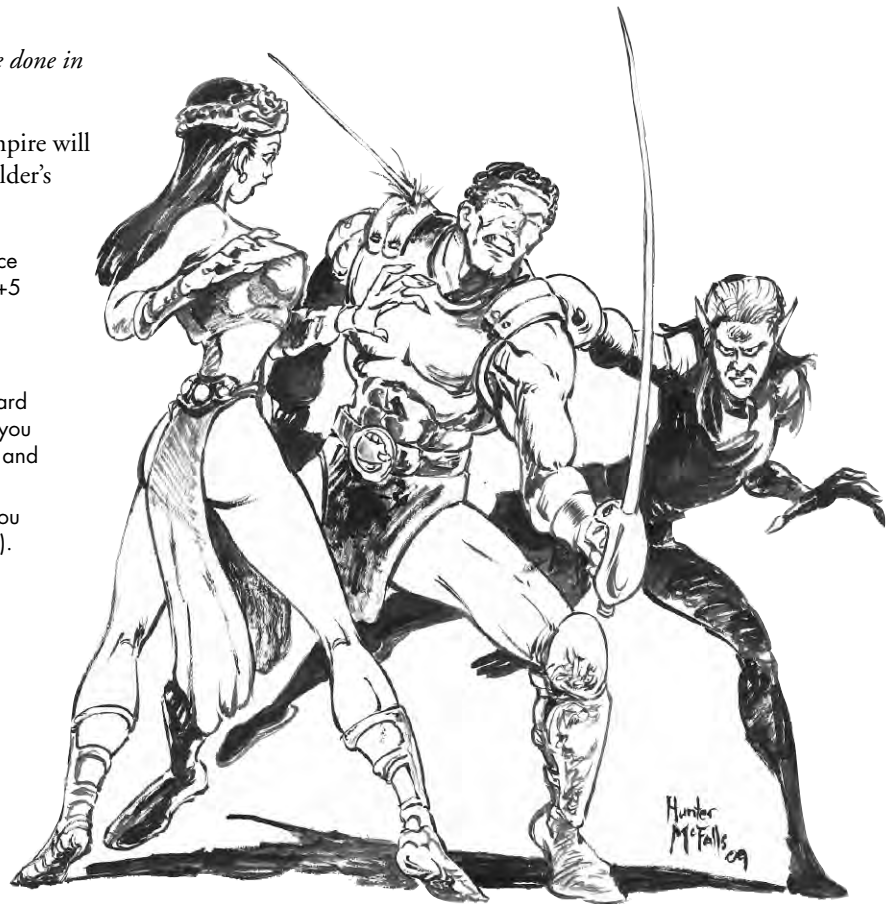
Its wielder must prove itself in service to ends deemed worthy by the *Torque*. The *Torque* places its wielder between the tides of blades and spear points meant for its mistress to test his prowess.

UNSATISFIED (1-4)

"My failure has shaken the foundations of the Empire! I shall not allow it to crumble!"

The *Torque* is sure that this is no Champion. However, vindictive as it is, it will see him thrown up against insurmountable odds before moving on to someone more worthy.

Special: You take a -2 penalty to all attack rolls and damage rolls when not adjacent to your charge.



ANGERED (0 OR LOWER)

"The Queen has fallen! Our Empire is doomed to the same fate!"

The *Torque* wishes to see its wielder meet the only end he deserves. The *Torque* shall watch him die in bloody battle, then move on to find a wielder worthy of championship.

Special: Any melee attack you make against creatures other than those adjacent to your charge deal half damage. This damage penalty supersedes penalties imposed by a higher-level concordance score.

MOVING ON

"All heirs of the Empire will know your deeds."

The wielder has proven to be a champion worthy of renown. The mere mention of his deeds will dissuade as many of the Queen's adversaries as his blade felled in combat. And moreover, his continued loyalty and service to the Queen are assured. The *Torque* seeks out another warrior to defend its mistress' and empire's glory. But more importantly, it seeks to recruit another hero into the Tyrant Queen's ranks.

When the wielder next gains a level, the *Torque of the Diamoke* crumbles into residuum worth 5,000 gp. Also, the wielder gains *unstoppable* (fighter 2) as a bonus daily power. The *Torque* appears elsewhere in the world, in the hands of a promising Champion.

If the *Torque* moves on because it is unsatisfied with the wielder, then the wielder receives a permanent brand around his neck that marks him as a failure and gains him the enmity of those who understand its significance. Against such foes, the wielder suffers a -1 penalty on attack rolls and damage rolls, and on saving throws to end effects imposed by them. The *Torque* crumbles into worthless dust.

THE CROOK OF DUR-KAIN

The *Crook* is appropriate for characters of the paragon tier.

The *Crook of dur-Kain* was a staff wielded by one of the most powerful warlords that stood in opposition to the Tyrant Queen. Dur-Kain led his people against Haro's army, beating

back her horde with a weapon of incredible power. His forces had almost turned the onslaught when a commander of Haro's army himself dismounted and called for parley. He challenged dur-Kain in single combat to resolve the day's battle. Dur-Kain, magnanimous to a fault, and thinking only of sparing his men the atrocities that would befall them should they fall to the Tyrant Queen's forces, accepted the challenge. And little did he know, he had played right in to the hands of the brave Champion of Haro wearing the distinctive *Torque* as a mark of his servitude to his Queen.

After dur-Kain's defeat, he was forced to wear the shackles that had brought so many brave and strong warriors before him to their knees. Dur-Kain's weapon, gaining its own sentience and becoming a thing of legend already, was devastated by his defeat.

In the long years of servitude to the Tyrant Queen that followed, dur-Kain employed his mighty *Crook* in battle against those she sought to enchain. With every subaltern he squashed beneath the heel of Haro's army, he digressed further into madness and despair, and the weapon he wielded became more vile and disjointed from its original purpose. Eventually the *Crook* came to despise its wielder's faltering will and to relish its newfound purpose. The *Crook* sapped all of dur-Kain's power and will before his dying day to empower itself to that end.

When dur-Kain passed, Haro herself took up his mighty weapon and continued to nurture its dark descent. Its powers, combined with those of the *Bonds of Haro*, brought nearly all lands before and beyond the horizon under the Tyrant Queen's sway. Now agents of tyranny and conquest wield the *Crook* in Haro's honor and tradition.



Crook of dur-Kain

Paragon Level

The *Crook of dur-Kain* is a +4 dominating quarterstaff with the following properties and powers.

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +4d6 damage

Property: The *Crook* may be used as an implement by characters who can use a staff as an implement.

Property: You gain a +2 item bonus to attack rolls when using powers with the charm keyword.

Power (Encounter + Charm): Free Action. When you hit an opponent in melee with the *Crook*, the target suffers a -2 penalty to saves made to end a charm effect until the end of the encounter. On a critical hit, the target instead suffers a -4 penalty. Successive hits do not cause this penalty to stack.

Power (Encounter + Charm): Standard Action. You create a burst 2. All enemies caught in the burst suffer a -2 penalty to Will defense until the end of your next turn.

GOALS OF THE CROOK OF DUR-KAIN

- Inflict pain and suffering upon those tainted with weakness.
- Make slaves of its mistress' enemies.
- Kill those strong or idealistic enough to refuse to submit.
- Wed itself to a wielder capable of manipulating the will of others.

ROLEPLAYING THE CROOK OF DUR-KAIN

The *Crook* sends empathetic vibrations through its wielder's person, pushing him to crush his enemies. Those that stand after his assault shall be his thralls. None deserve anything but death or servitude. When the *Crook* is pleased, its wielder is awash in reviling ecstasy. Should he falter in its urgings toward slaughter and conquest, he is overwhelmed by its heavy discontent.

CONCORDANCE

Starting Score	5
Owner gains a level	+1d10
Owner enslaves another creature	+1
Owner defeats an enemy of greater level than itself (maximum 1/day)	+1
Owner is disobedient to those deemed as authorities by the <i>Crook</i>	-1
Owner submits his will to another (succumbs to a charm attack from an enemy) (maximum 1/day)	-1

PLEASED (16-20)

"We are the strong! All shall submit to us... or die!"

The *Crook* relishes the pain and suffering its wielder inflicts upon others. His unrelenting will is an inspiration. The *Crook* will continue to use this vessel for all its worth.

The *Crook's* enhancement bonus increases to +5.

Power (Daily + Arcane, Charm, Implement): Minor Action. When you hit an opponent in melee with the *Crook*, you can make a secondary attack using *delusions of loyalty* (warlock 19).

Critical: +5d6 damage

SATISFIED (12-15)

"If you are not slaughtered, you shall be enslaved. Choose your fate!"

Power (Daily + Arcane, Charm, Implement, Psychic): Standard Action. You can use *crowd of madness* (warlock 5).

NORMAL (5-11)

"How dare the weak stand before me?"

The *Crook* wishes to see if its wielder has strength enough in arms and will to see its ends met. It urges him to crush opposition and demand submission from those he does not slay outright.

UNSATISFIED (1-4)

"I feel the Crook's judgment! It deems me weak!"

The *Crook* doubts that its wielder has the martial prowess or strength of will to carry out the tradition of the Tyrant Queen. Perhaps it will linger long enough to witness this pathetic creature's demise.

Special: You take a -2 penalty to attack rolls and damage rolls. This applies whether you are wielding or even holding the *Crook*.

ANGERED (0 OR LOWER)

"It is certainly the chains for me!"

When a being of suitable stature catches the *Crook's* notice, it is sure to abandon this wielder and set its new owner upon him.

The *Crook's* enhancement bonus drops to +3.

Critical: +3d6 damage

Special: You take a -2 penalty to your Will defense.

MOVING ON

"This warrior shall command the greatest armies the World has yet seen."

When the wielder next gains a level, the *Crook of dur-Kain* disappears, revealing itself to a new wielder who might crush the upstarts and rebels of another realm. If the *Crook* is at least satisfied, it leaves behind a +4 *dominating staff* for its wielder to use in its stead.

Dominating Weapon Level 17+

This weapon glows at all times with a soft golden light.

Lvl 17 +4 65,000 gp

Lvl 22 +5 325,000 gp

Lvl 27 +6 1,625,000 gp

Weapon: Any melee

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d6 damage per plus

Power (Daily + Charm): Free Action. Use this power when you hit a bloodied opponent with the weapon. The target is dominated (save ends).

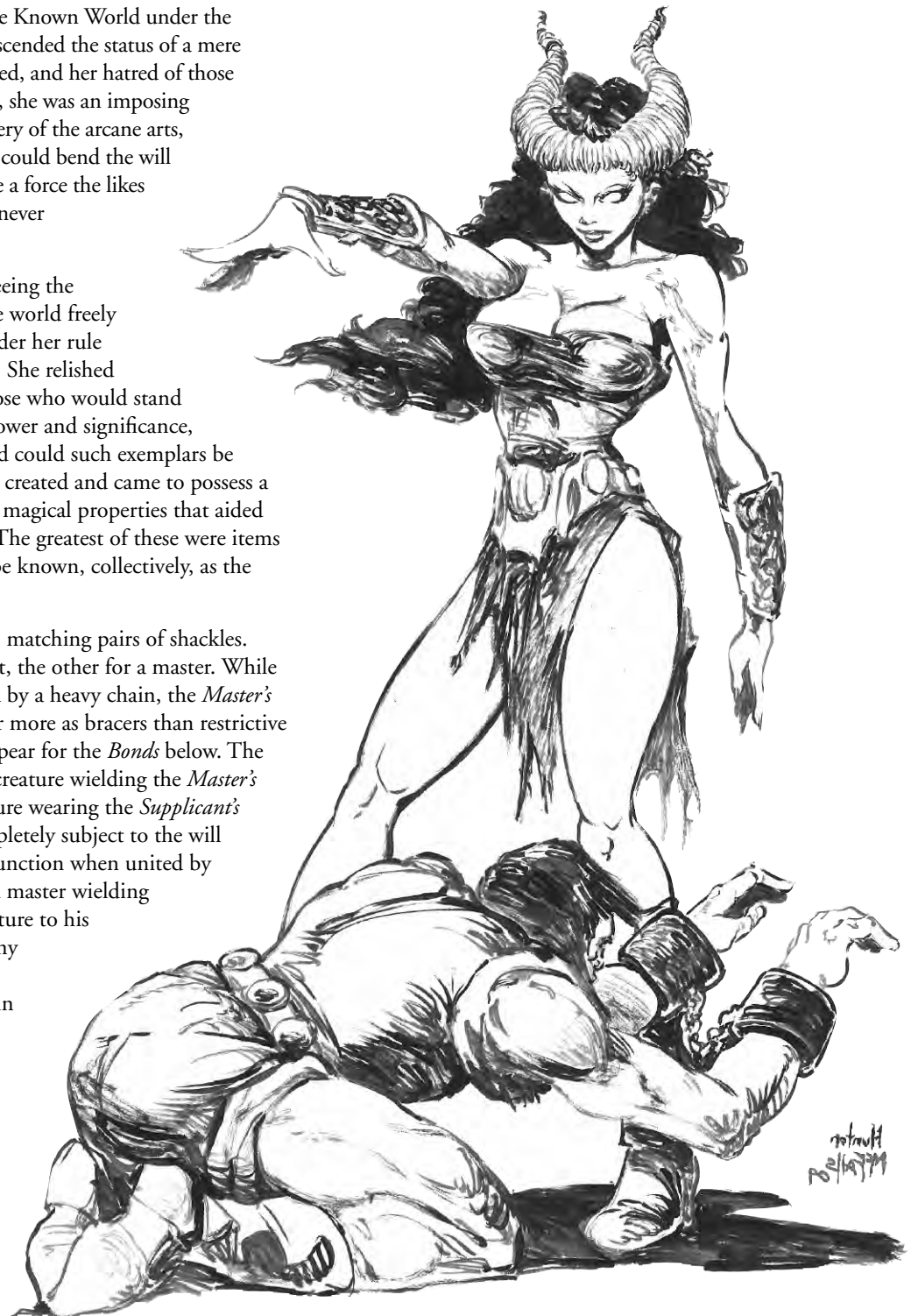
THE BONDS OF HARO, THE TYRANT QUEEN

The *Bonds* are appropriate for characters of the epic tier.

Haro brought so much of the Known World under the sway of her empire that she transcended the status of a mere mortal. With her malice, her greed, and her hatred of those she deemed unworthy of respect, she was an imposing enough ruler. But with her mastery of the arcane arts, and specifically those forces that could bend the will of others to her own, she became a force the likes of which the Known World has never before seen.

She hated nothing more than seeing the meek being allowed to roam the world freely like a rampant plague. Only under her rule could such atrocities be righted. She relished nothing more than bringing those who would stand before her, especially those of power and significance, to their knees. Only by her hand could such exemplars be reined-in. In her life's work, she created and came to possess a number of items endowed with magical properties that aided her in her pursuit of conquest. The greatest of these were items of her own make that came to be known, collectively, as the *Bonds of Haro*.

The *Bonds* always appear as two matching pairs of shackles. One is intended for a supplicant, the other for a master. While the *Supplicant's Bonds* are linked by a heavy chain, the *Master's Bonds* are unchained and appear more as bracers than restrictive devices. Two sets of statistics appear for the *Bonds* below. The wielder is considered to be the creature wielding the *Master's Bonds* ("the master"). The creature wearing the *Supplicant's Bonds* ("the supplicant") is completely subject to the will of the master. The *Bonds* only function when united by a master and his supplicant. If a master wielding the *Bonds* has not bent any creature to his will, they will not function in any manner. As such, the following powers and properties are only in effect if the wielder has forced the *Supplicant's Bonds* upon another sentient creature.



Bonds of Haro

Epic Level

Supplicant's Bonds

Body Slot: Arms**Property:** You are restrained.**Property:** You automatically fail any Acrobatics check made to escape these restraints.**Property:** You automatically fail any saving throw made to end a charm effect imposed upon you by a creature wielding the *Master's Bonds*.**Special:** If you are destroyed (reduced to 0 hit points or below), all powers and properties of the *Supplicant's Bonds* cease to function. If you recover (restored to more than 0 hit points), all powers and properties of the *Supplicant's Bonds* are reinstated.

Master's Bonds

Body Slot: Arms**Property:** You gain a +2 item bonus to all defenses.**Property:** You gain a +2 item bonus to saving throws.**Property:** You gain a +5 item bonus to Intimidate checks.**Property:** When wearing the *Bonds* and making any attack, you may substitute your Wisdom or Charisma score for the attack regardless of the normal ability score noted for the power.**Power (At-Will ♦ Arcane, Healing):** Immediate Interrupt. When you take damage from any source, you may transfer the damage to a creature wearing the *Supplicant's Bonds*. If your supplicant is reduced to 0 hit points, you may no longer use this power. If you transfer damage that brings your supplicant below 0 hit points, you suffer any damage beyond the amount that brought the supplicant below 0 hit points.**Power (Encounter ♦ Arcane, Charm):** Standard Action. Choose any creature you have dominated. Until the beginning of your next turn, you remove its dazed condition. On its turn, you dictate its standard, move, and minor actions. The only powers you can make it use are at-will powers. *Sustain Minor:* You sustain the power's effect until the end of your next turn.**Special:** If your supplicant is destroyed (reduced to 0 hit points or below), all powers and properties of the *Bonds* cease to function. If your supplicant recovers (restored to more than 0 hit points), or if you force the *Supplicant's Bonds* upon another creature, all powers and properties of the *Master's Bonds* are reinstated.

GOALS OF THE BONDS OF HARO

- Inflict pain and suffering upon those tainted with weakness.
- Bend the will of the masses to that of the strong and deserving.
- Enslave beings of great power to prove dominance over all sentient creatures.

ROLE-PLAYING THE BONDS OF HARO

As the *Bonds* lock into place on the wielder's forearms, he is shocked at a sudden surge of power. A subtler notion overcomes him, though. He suddenly finds that common folk turn his stomach and threaten to make his gorge rise. Such folk are no higher than his heel, and should either grovel at it, or be crushed beneath it. Those of a greater ilk suddenly become a threat, but their fates should be no different.

The *Bonds* communicate with their wielder through stern, commanding hisses heard only by him. They urge him to seek conquest, crush or enslave the weak, and bring the strong to their knees to do his bidding. No less will be tolerated. When he is successful, the euphoria he feels is rapture beyond compare.

CONCORDANCE

Starting Score	5
Owner gains a level	+1d10
Owner has or attains a lordly or royal title	+2
Owner enslaves another creature of equal or greater level than itself	+2
Owner enslaves another creature of equal or lower level than itself	+1
Owner defeats an enemy of greater level than itself (maximum 1/day)	-1
Owner commits an act of cowardice, like fleeing from battle against a creature of higher level than itself	-1
Owner commits an act of great cowardice, like fleeing from battle against creatures of lower level than itself	-2

PLEASED (16-20)

"I am lord over all. Give your will over to me, or the Bonds shall wrest it from you!"

The *Bonds* have found a true tyrant to carry out the will and tradition of the Tyrant Queen. They are confident that they shall see these lands grasped within their wielder's iron fist before moving on to further conquest.

Property: You gain resistance 5 to all damage.**Power (Encounter ♦ Arcane, Charm, Implement, Psychic):** Standard Action. You can use *confusion* (wizard 27).

SATISFIED (12-15)

"On your knees when you are in my presence!"

The *Bonds*' wielder has begun to prove his worth. Though the horizon is not yet under his sway, the *Bonds* are content to lend him more of their power, as he is sure to further their ends.

Power (Encounter + Arcane, Charm, Implement, Psychic):
Standard Action. You can use *enthrall* (cleric 17).

NORMAL (5-11)

"I must prove myself one of the strong – the deserving."

When first placing the *Bonds* upon his wrists, the wielder is overcome with an unnerving sense of power... and expectation.

UNSATISFIED (1-4)

"I am tainted with weakness!"

Such cowardice and impotence will not long be tolerated by the *Bonds*. When their wielder does not hear vexatious whispers, he finds himself caught up in fretful pacing, berating himself.

Special: You take a -2 penalty to Will defense and saving throws made to end charm effects.

ANGERED (0 OR LOWER)

"I am undeserving! I am doomed to be a thrall to the strong!"

The *Bonds* regard the wielder as the subject of its utter disdain. He should be wearing the *Supplicant's Bonds* instead of those of the master. The *Bonds* shall see him undone before moving on to find a creature of worth.

Special: You start encounters against opponents of higher level than yourself dazed (save ends) and weakened (save ends). This is a charm effect imposed by the *Bonds*.

MOVING ON

"These realms are completely under my sway."

The *Bonds* are satisfied that the conquest of these lands is complete, and shall be well-tended by the iron fist of the tyrant they have helped to create. But the *Bonds*' work is not yet done, and there is conquest yet beyond the horizon.

When the wielder next gains a level, the *Bonds of Haro* crumble into residuum worth 125,000 gp. Also, the wielder gains a permanent +2 bonus to Intimidate checks, +2 to saves made to end charm effects, and can use *command* (cleric 3) as an at-will power. The *Bonds* appear elsewhere in the world, likely in a place they believe is ripe for conquest.

If the *Bonds* move on because they are unsatisfied with the wielder, then the wielder receives a permanent -2 penalty to Intimidate checks and saves made to end charm effects, and the *Bonds* crumble into worthless dust.



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AMETHYST

OVERVIEW: CHOICES & CONSEQUENCES

By Chris Dias

Art by Nick Greenwood

Amethyst is the new Roleplaying Game from Dias Ex Machina and Goodman Games.

Designed for the new 4th Edition of Dungeons & Dragons, Amethyst features new races, classes, feats, and monsters, all rooted in a new setting in a speculative future.

The 256-page core book, *Foundation*, is due for release soon. Here's a sneak preview...



When you become an adult, you're never told how the world ended, only how it began.

I lived my life imagining what could never be. It didn't matter how amazing the world was; we're born to covet the impossible. We accept the world as it is presented, allow it to become tedious, and desire it to change. Our lives are filled with compromises, victories we accept because our dreams were never fulfilled.

Eventually, we fall into comfortable complacency, settling for the achievable and allowing aspiration to pass into fantasy. We put faith in a parent, an idol, a god, and they tell us the world stretches beyond the reach of our awareness. Perhaps there is more, and you can remain in the dream, no matter the fool others may take you for.

Dreams promise romance without rejection, adventure without anguish. We awaken to our senses because the needs of reality beckon us. We forget the child we were. We forget the conditions we made for happiness.

Now, it doesn't have to be that way.

Faith is no longer needed for miracles; they occur daily without proof or piety. Are we dreaming now or have they been whispering in our sleep to prepare us for their return? They remind us of our dreams, matching to them so well. Would we forget everything, give up everything, to live in it? Would we sacrifice reality for the fantasy?

This is how the world ended... and this is how it began.

Foreword, *The Deification of Truth*
September 2nd, 509 AE

Amethyst is a fantasy world in which mankind hasn't changed – the same old flaws, vices, and virtues. As society grows, increasing globalization will not endorse the tolerances of adverse opinion or reduce the conflicts from countries or ethnic groups. But after civilization has collapsed from a social, environmental, and economic apocalypse, and just before mankind is able to rebuild from mistakes that nearly caused his extinction, something truly miraculous and disastrous occurs. A true-to-book fantasy world overruns the real world, breaking down technology and throwing remaining nations and religions into disarray.

Magic is impossible. There is no scientific basis for its existence in the universe. How could these elves and dragons of whimsy exist and match so closely to mythology and religious canon? How would Christianity and Islam respond given such massive doubts to their dogma? Their very presence short out our cars and computers. Would man embrace a world of wizardry and wonders at a cost of refrigerators, internet, and cable TV? Would they fear or hate those that could harness such power? Would they hide in cities of pipe and steel, lights and heat, or venture in a landscape of goblins, dragons, swords, and sorcery?

For most of humanity, the possibility of losing central heating, electricity, and machines that automatically wash dishes was too much to handle. When the encroaching enchantment occurred, the remnants of mankind gathered together to reconstruct what they had remembered of their past glory. It wasn't fear of the unknown that made them cower. The growing world around them looked all too familiar. They had read about them in books for hundreds of years. Although these faeries and goblins went by their own names, it didn't change how they looked or how they acted. With a hostile environment around them, those humans blessed with technology soon began to build walls to protect

them. Allowed to survive, they eventually began rebuilding the knowledge they had lost.

Is the entirety of man's world bound in this city? The bastion of Angel was enormous, with parks and schools and malls. Atop the tallest tower, you still couldn't see either end of it. We had computers, fluorescent lights, even aircraft and cars. Rules were set in place to govern them. If technology worked, then the science behind it needed to be sound. Science declared magic as myth. You can't throw fire from your hands. You can't fly without proper wings. "There's nothing out there," his brother had said. He lied.

There were dragons.

As monsters of myth and legend stretched to every corner of the world, so did the new rules required to govern them and their power. This power cascaded to the Earth from the new bright star in the sky, the white gate of Attricana. This was not a real star, but a tear in the universe where the potential for magic flowed. This enchantment radiated off those creatures using magic and those that required its presence for their survival. The new rules, though not affecting life that already existed, did change the rules of science essential for technology to function. An elf could never work a computer or drive a car. The limit of their industrial development peaked at glass windows, insulated houses, and indoor plumbing (though the latter was a luxury reserved for only a few). Anything more advanced than a steam engine would eventually seize or break. But where the users of magic didn't exist, the natural enchantment of the area diminished, allowing for the slow resurgence of men and their machines. The walls got bigger, the people more paranoid, and the division between those outside and those inside widened. Soon, these bastions could

pick and choose whom they allowed within their cities. Unless a refugee had some applicable skill, he or she would not be permitted entrance. Regardless, these precious few bastions of technology grew to the scale of small countries, separated from each other, developing at different speeds and in different ways dependant on their populations and the local threats. In what remains of North America (Canam), the two largest bastions, Angel and York, sit on opposite coastlines, with nothing in between but fantasy. To the north is the mountain bastion of Selkirk; to the south sits the underground city of Sierra Madre. The xenophobic humans of Mann, the most advanced bastion on this side of the continent, conspire to return the world back to the dominion of men.

Aiden pulled out of reach of his brother. He orbited the room, and then finally pointed back. "You really have no idea, do you? I'm not fifteen. And I'm not you. Out there," he tried to find better words but failed, "makes sense to me."

Xavier shook his head. "Are you a lunatic? Should I have you committed? Faeries, dragons, magic? This is not a novel by a hack author or the ramblings of kids sitting around a table rolling dice. You're gonna get killed."

For those living in the "wasteland", it was no chaotic wilderness. Despite the threats made to children sleeping behind bastion walls, humans lived and prospered beyond the perimeter of progress. Some made alliances while others went to war; unable to gain a technological superiority, some made by with strength in numbers. Old titles like lords and kings rose up, assumed by rulers with wealth in land and weapons. Meanwhile, the planet's newest residents made their claim. To the fae, the world was theirs before it was mankind's. They had only been gone a short time, having fled million of years ago to escape a great extinction that was fated to fall from heaven. No one knew why the gate reopened, only that it did. Not only that, but Attricana was only one of two gates that plagued this world. It was only one side of the coin.

Where the white gate created chaos and life in all possible ways, a black gate of syntropy and pure order was slowly corrupting the land, expanding its tendrils from its tomb, half buried across the world from Canam. From this black gate flowed the desire to control everything, tranquility in the world without the distractions of independent thought or imagination. The corrupted armies of pagus and demons strike out to those taking pride in their differences. As the majority of mankind pine their lives away in front of LCD screens, the planet wages a desperate battle for its survival.



“Your problem is you’re still thinking like someone who is civilized. I suggest you stop. You believe those adventure seekers that wander the world looking for gold and glory are levelheaded... conventional... contributing members of society? They’re psychotic. The killing of monsters for fame and reward is not practical. You’d have to be insane to think of it as a legitimate profession. If you’re going to survive this, it will happen. You will take lives... often.”

The elves have only recently found allies in the species that replaced them after they left the world. They were surprised at mankind’s variety. To elves, the same species would live and act the same even if separated by hundreds or thousands of miles. Divided, mankind would develop different cultures, beliefs, and even languages, though they would still be human. Not so with the elves. They began as the original fae. After hundreds of generations, they suddenly broke into branching species, each physically different, with broad departures in personality and beliefs. The old fae eventually vanished, replaced with the chaparrans, damaskans, laudenians, and narros – each filling a specific niche in later human fantasy and mythos. Chaparrans and their later branches were connected to nature, wild and carefree. Damaskans were social and scholarly, building cities and expanding empires across open plains. Laudeniens were arrogant and took to the sky to avoid the same fate as their fae ancestors. Narros were short and robust, miners and builders, wanting nothing more than to leave a mark upon the world.

Though these species would all survive, they would branch into other races, each one, slightly more uncontrolled than the last--the influence of chaos slowly overcoming them. The playful gimfen and the blind tenenbri were accepted with open arms. Then the feral boggs appeared--the goblins human children would pull their sheets up and lock their closets over. Boggs begat puggs, a locust swarm of dog-faced vermin eating and destroying everything they encountered. Every branch fell to this curse. The chaparrans branch devolved into the sadistic aquatic dojenn. The narros grew bulkier and larger until monsters befitting the names ogre and troll appeared. Despite their virtual immortality and wisdom, all fae could be fated to this end.

“You have to stop thinking you are manipulating the power from storm clouds. It is not natural. It cannot be bottled. It is not from heaven--not god. It is from you. It appears alive because in ways it is. Everything from Attricana is about life in every possible form. Anything you can think of... thinks for itself. Stop believing it is science. It is not.”

Many humans in bastions believe the world is fated for pure chaos and only by closing these gates could the world start to make sense again, bringing the world back into mankind’s control, as they believe it should be. Bastions focus their hate towards the star in the sky, often oblivious to the

corruption spreading on the other side of the planet. They believe to close one gate would close the other, as one side of a coin cannot exist without the other. Humans reach from their bastion walls, scouring the land for any edge over the enchantment in hopes that mankind will gain dominion once again. There is no way to push the influence of magic away unless those using that power are themselves eliminated. Technology is slowly losing the battle. Even as the bastions grow, more and more people are escaping to the world of fantasy, to take in what they had only dreamed of. Though the world is real and populated by monsters smart and powerful as well as dumb and plentiful, there are also elves, nymphs, faeries and knights and kings of nobility. To these converts, as well as the fae, this world of fantasy has every right to exist, even though it willingly breaks the rules of the universe, which were ironclad since its birth.

“Once you commit to this path, it is binding. It’s forever,” Chen’s words were direct and plain. No poetry and panache to cover his meaning. Aiden had to know what he was doing. Aiden remembered exactly when he did it, July 9th. He was eighteen. He knew that because at exactly 5:45 pm on that day, his watch stopped. Tumbler watches don’t stop. That was the moment--his moment--when his life changed. He abandoned any hope for a life in the bastion, forever tied to the world outside, to that of enchantment. Nothing Xavier had said or would say could ever change it. It was irreversible. Chen was very clear on the consequences before handing Aiden his first spellbook.

For five hundred years, the stalemate between order and chaos, magic and technology, never appeared to budge. Bastions grew larger as did the kingdoms around them. Elves lived their lives while dragons flew overhead. Demons and pagus plotted. There was no sign anything would change, until the lost legend of a dragon god returned with the falling of the amethyst stones.

According to the legends of fae and dragons, the previous age in which they all lived uncontested by man came to be through the will of a dragon god. In his absence, the world waits for his eventual return. The power to control the gates lies in a legend. If true, then the keys to control the world have finally fallen. As this knowledge reaches the ears of those who would act, choices have been made and lines have been drawn. To close the gate would mean the end of magic, allowing the uncontested will of technology to retake the globe, though it would kill all those requiring magic to live. But if the gate were to remain open, mankind would be destined to a stagnant world, fated to never progress past his memory. No more would there be space travel, cell phones, or CD players. Mankind would never know where he would go, how he would get there, and if he would survive it.

Science or Fantasy...

What would you choose?

A Picture Tells 1,000 Words: Sheep's Clothing

An Encounter for Characters of 8th–10th level

By Ken Hart

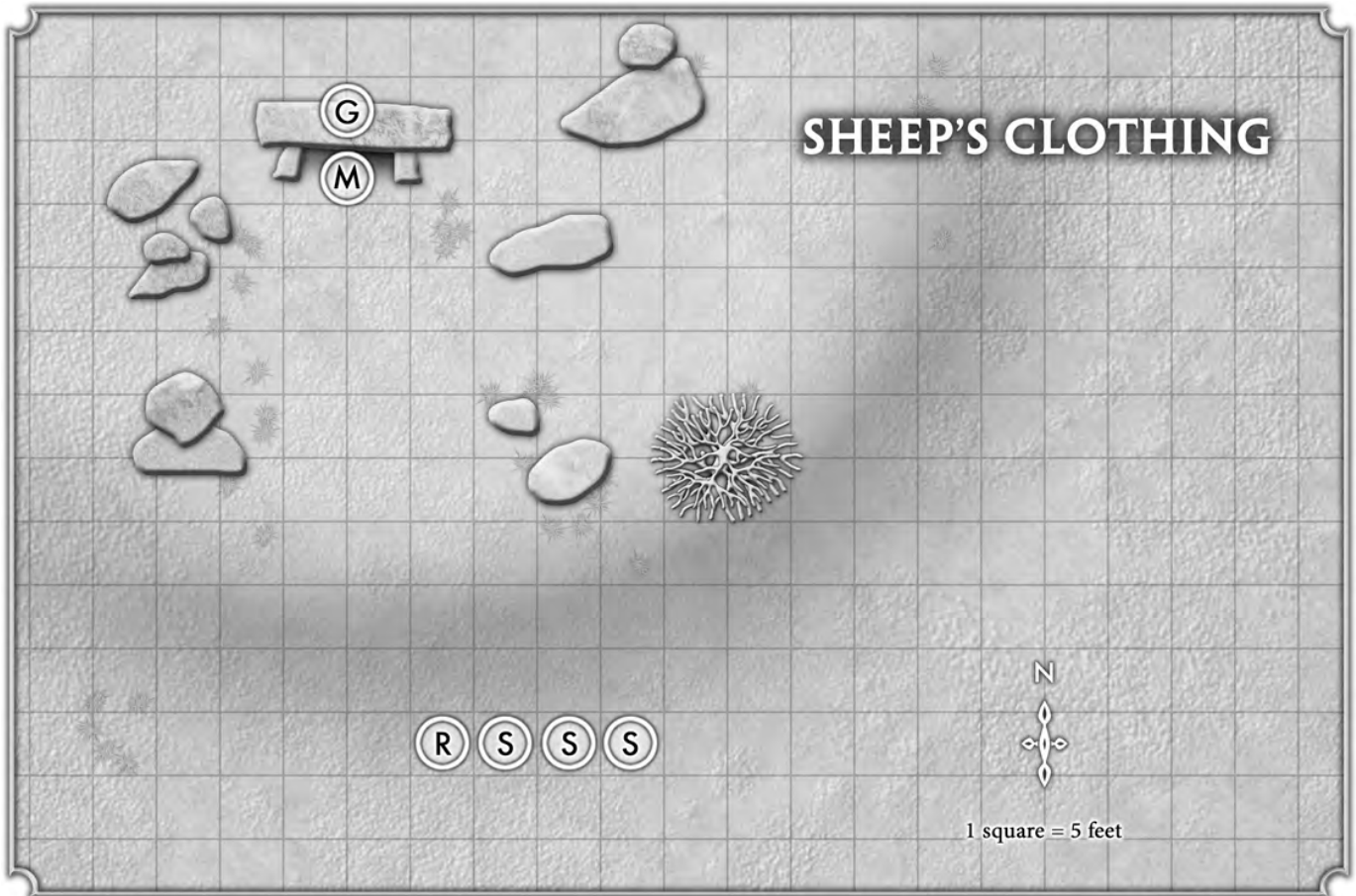


RPGs are full of fantastic, evocative illustrations that can do much more than visually describe a scene or setting. A good illustration can be taken out of its contextual surroundings, and admired on its own strengths; inspiring whole new vistas of creative thought. That's what this feature is all about.

An investigation of outbreaks of murderous insanity leads the heroes to the twisted source: an oni's long-festering scheme of revenge.

In A Picture Tells 1,000 Words, we create a short encounter based on a single fantasy illustration. Each encounter is designed to be easily fitted into nearly any campaign, and can serve as a quick drop in, or even as the beginning of a grand adventure arc. It's all up to you, and we hope that each illustration and encounter inspires you to view fantasy illustrations in a whole new light.





BACKGROUND FOR THE GM

Fifteen years ago, a paladin named Celina Denarre vanquished an oni night haunter that had been preying upon a far-off village. The oni, Ryuu, survived but was humiliated by his defeat at the hands of the female warrior. After years of searching, he has learned that Celina is retired and now serves as the spiritual leader of her community.

Ryuu, intent on getting revenge against Celina, has entered a fragile alliance with Mariuz, a foulspawn seer who lurks in the hills outside town. Working patiently and stealthily, they have introduced a vile arcane mixture into the food supply of the town. When the proper arcane word is spoken near a contaminated person or creature, the victim transforms into a murderous maniac – or worse. The subsequent acts of violence from normally peaceful people and animals over the past two weeks have rendered the town frozen with fear. Even the paladin Celina’s faith has been shaken: Her husband went mad and nearly killed her. He now

lies strapped to a bed, screaming maniacally and refusing to eat or drink, as are the other surviving, contaminated people.

The Hook: The adventurers, either hired by Celina’s church or summoned by the retired paladin herself, launch an investigation. They quickly notice that some of the “maniacs” show physical changes as well as mental ones, such as bluish skin, fangs, or startlingly cold blood. Conversations with townspeople yield two facts: Many of the acts of violence occurred in or near the town’s open market, and a “crazy old hermit” named Henrietta was heard babbling in the marketplace shortly before a couple of the people went mad. She was last seen wandering in the hills south of town, not far from Werden’s Farm and the ruins of a long-abandoned druidic circle and a keep. (“Henrietta” is Ryuu in disguise; he killed the real hermit several weeks ago and has been using her image to utter the arcane trigger word to victims and monitor the chaos.)

The heroes eventually decide to find Henrietta and determine what connection, if any, she has to the madness.

SHEEP'S CLOTHING

Encounter Level 10 (XP 2,500)

SETUP

This encounter includes the following creatures:

1 Oni Night Hunter (Level 8 Elite Controller) [R]

1 Foulspawn Seer (Level 11 Artillery [Leader]) [M]

3 Cacklefiend Hyenas

(mutated sheep; Level 7 Brute) [S]

1 Glyph of Warding (Level 7 Warder) [G]

Before the heroes can proceed, they're interrupted by the gruff voice of an old man, waving his staff aggressively as he yells at them to get off his land. Behind the man, the adventurers can see a small flock of about a dozen sheep, grazing peacefully. The man identifies himself as Werder, a farmer in this area, and he calms down quickly once the PCs state their business.

"Werder" is again the oni Ryuu, disguised using his *deceptive veil*. Ryuu and Mariuz have been using the farmer's crops and livestock to distribute the madness toxin. The real Werder and his wife and son are prisoners inside the hill, where Mariuz is using them as guinea pigs for more powerful versions of his toxin. Ryuu's initial yelling is intended to alert his ally of the party's arrival.

If questioned about Henrietta, "Werder" points to the archway and he says he's seen the hermit go into the hill several times – and there was a "creepy feeling" about her: "She scared me, to be honest, and I'm not ashamed to admit it!" Although he says he's aware of recent events in town, he says he's been too busy on the farm to know the details. Any PC who is suspicious of the farmer's presence can make an Insight check, opposed by Ryuu's Bluff check, to pierce the *deceptive veil*.

Treat the sloping hill as difficult terrain. If the adventurers approach the archway, they risk activating Mariuz's hidden glyph of warding (necrotic variety). Once it's activated or discovered, Ryuu and Mariuz attack.

From Baaaad to Worse: Three of the placid sheep have been contaminated by a new, concentrated form of the arcane toxin. As soon as the trigger word is uttered near them, they immediately transform into monstrous mutations as cold as the void of space. (Treat as cacklefiend hyenas, but replace acid damage with cold.)

Adjustment: To raise this encounter to EL 11, add a foulspawn hulk to aid Mariuz, or give Mariuz the warlock template (see the D&D 4E *Dungeon Master's Guide*).

TACTICS

Mariuz unleashes his *distortion blast* in the first round, and Ryuu speaks the trigger word (free action) to transform the three sheep, then he uses his *hypnotic breath*. The sheep act next, quickly advancing on the party and using their *fiendish cackle* (or more accurately, *soul-chilling bleat*) before engaging in melee. Mariuz stays just inside the opening for maximum protection and grants his *foul insight* to Ryuu and the mutant sheep. Ryuu fights alongside the sheep, but if a hero falls unconscious, Ryuu uses the sheep for protection while he uses *devour soul* on that PC to heal himself. If reduced to fewer than 30 hit points, Ryuu assumes *gaseous form* and flees; he has no loyalty to Mariuz, and vice versa.

DEVELOPMENT

The heroes likely haven't been in town long enough to be affected by the madness toxin. However, if they have been around more than two days, they could have consumed enough to make things interesting. In that case, when the arcane word is spoken, treat it as the foulspawn grue's *whispers of madness* attack (see the D&D 4E *Monster Manual*).

RESOLUTION

Within the hill, the adventurers find Mariuz's workshop, as well as the imprisoned Werder family, who have been driven nearly insane by the mutations forced upon them. The PCs can create an antidote for all the contaminated people with a DC 23 Arcana check (to identify the ingredients), a DC 20 Dungeoneering or Nature check to find a subterranean fungus needed for the mixture, and – for each victim – a DC 14 Heal check to administer the antidote and treat the painful side effects. The DM may wish to expand this into a skill challenge (complexity 2).

Treasure: The ruined keep in the distance had been Mariuz's from decades ago when he was a wealthy human astrologer, before contact with the Far Realm stole his humanity and granted him near-immortality. Within it are items that Mariuz had claimed from previous victims but which he has been unable to use: a *symbol of life* +3 and an *orb of sanguinary repercussions* +2. A search (DC 18 Perception) also reveals a gold-embroidered vestment he used in a failed ritual (worth 1,500 gp) and 200 gp scattered about.

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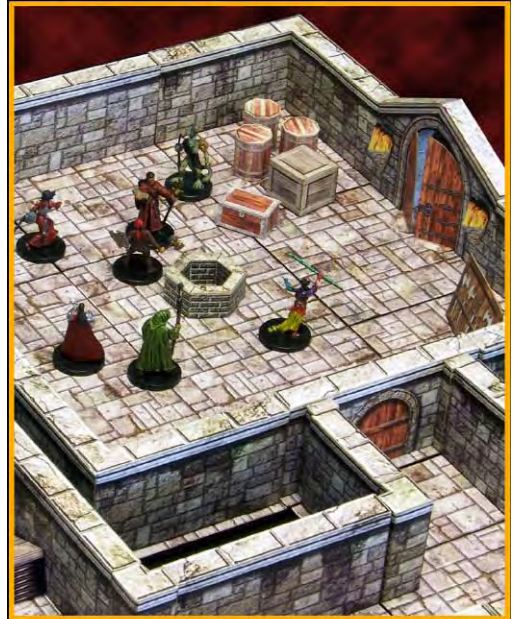
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JACK'S ULTRASHORT REVIEWS

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☆☆☆☆☆☆: If you haven't bought it yet, you are a fool!

CREATURE COLLECTION

FIERY DRAGON PRODUCTIONS

The newest monster book available, *Creature Collection* brings us the horrors that infest the Scarred Lands setting. The art varies from awesome (the breasts on that dryad are just perfection) to dreadful (some of the golems look like something out of an 80's Marvel Comic), but there are definitely more hits than misses. Innovations are few and far between, but there are some, although not all are for the better (just IMO). Endurance checks to resist auras? No thank you; the immediate save mechanics is there and works just fine already. Auras that give a bonus against

attacks with a certain keyword? No thank you even more. Just give the monster some resistance instead, and be done with it. I also do not need to see ritual magic in a stat block. I can decide just fine when my monsters need to have access to ritual magic, without it cluttering up my stat blocks. However, the bloodmist naga is a nice take on how to have elites do more damage without just upping the damage or giving it double attacks. Luckily, it is not a big part of the monsters who "suffer" from the things mentioned above. A lot of monsters are actually cool enough, although a bit low on the power curve (especially the elites), much like those from the original *Monster Manual*. This is one place where I would not mind a little power creep.

The lore/fluff seems more ample (sorry, can't get that dryad out of my head) than what is in the *Monster Manual*, and there is quite a lot of flavor about the setting everywhere. Of course, not all monsters are equal, and some have awesome fluff, while others have very sparse fluff. Some of my favorites include the asaathi (lizard-race); the overghast (okay, sounds like WotC does not have a monopoly on bad names); the legion of one (sheds swarms during the encounter); doom-mite swarm (go home locusts); hags; rat-men (they are the new kobolds, just... you know, more hip!); and let's not forget the blood moth swarm; I mean, cute butterflies that drink your blood? That's like a cake of coolness with awesome-sauce on top (just a pity they didn't make a higher-level version).

Overall, *Creature Collection* is not the second coming of monster books, but it's a good book. I know I will be using quite a few monsters and some of the lore from it.

Rating: ☆☆☆

CRITTER CACHE: FEY FOLK

BLACKDIRGE PUBLISHING & GOODMAN GAMES

Three words for you. I want a Pooka! Okay, that was four words, but it's still true. *Critter Cache: Fey Folk* is full of great (and small) fey monsters that you can use to terrify your players when they visit the Fey Realm, or as WotC calls it, the Feywild (sigh). Highest on every adventurer's kill-list is the boggart. This otherwise fairly harmless creature suffers from having an aura that makes everyone nearby roll twice on attack and damage and use the worst result. Luckily for the poor bugger, it can turn invisible at-will so it might be hard to kill, especially if you have your hands full with its allies. Seriously, every archfiend/demon lord/über-lich should recruit one of these boggarts. Another great monster is the spriggan titan guard. I can't wait to use this and spring it on my players. From Small to Huge in the blink of an eye – that might surprise them.

All is not perfect of course; there is a glaring and horrible mistake: The nymphs (there are 5 of them) are all wearing way too much! Seriously, what is that about? I know the GSL has a grandma clause, but I do not think you have to go that far. Also, I believe that "Prime Material Plane" is a 3E-ism. Nowadays, we live in the natural or mortal world.

Anyway, joking aside. The crunch seems pretty darn solid this time around. There are a few monsters which are a tad low on damage (most notably the *bolg* and *beanne sidhe*) due to their elite status, and also the power of the red cap warrior is a tad odd, considering name and effect. On the other hand, I really like how marking is used by monsters other than soldiers, and it works well.

Overall, *Critter Cache: Fey Folk* is a great product, with great flavor, that complements my (relatively) extensive 4E library well, and many of the monsters therein will definitely be used.

Rating: ★★★★★

PLAYERS HANDBOOK 2

WIZARDS OF THE COAST

Mike Mearls called the *PHB2* his best work to date, and since that comment did draw its share of flames from skeptics and the like, I feel that I need to say this: The man was right. There is no longer any getting around that. It was not empty marketing or hollow words without backup. While you shouldn't exactly expect high literary prose (the writing gets a tad corny at times, but that will have little influence on my verdict), this doesn't matter. *PHB2* is a rules book with a focus on classes. I want rules and classes that work before anything else. And Mearls, Wyatt, and Crawford have pulled off what I thought would be impossible. They have managed to create eight new classes, or rather four remakes – bard, druid, barbarian and sorcerer – and four totally new ones – shaman, invoker, avenger and warden – that are fairly balanced and at the same time look incredibly interesting to play. I love the druid already after playing him for a few levels, and the barbarian is also a lot of fun, although it is probably the closest thing to a power creep in the book.

Regarding the power creep that normally is so common in everything that follows the original core rules, it really seems that WotC has managed to make the *PHB2* classes about equal in power to the eight original ones. No mean feat considering just how hard it seems to be to create balanced, interesting classes with varied powers. I, for one, am really glad they decided to wait with some of these classes until their grasp of the system had improved. It was definitely worth the wait.

Sure, we all know that the CO-boards will find new ways to break the game, but in any game with many options, that will always be possible. What I mean when I say balanced and equal is that, on their own, the classes look and feel right. The *PHB2* also has 5 new races: gnome, deva, goliath, shifter, and half-orc. Crunch-wise these races are fine, and some, like the deva, also hold some interesting aspects that should translate into fun roleplaying. Personally, I am not sure I will use them all in my campaigns, as I was never a huge fan of goliaths and shifters, but to each his own. I am pretty sure there are plenty of people out there who wanted these races, just as some people actually play gnomes.

All in all, this is simply a book that you have to have. Not only does it double the amount of classes at your disposal, but it gives some sweet options for the classes and races in the first *PHB*. I know I have given other books this rating, but the problem with a rating system is that at one point, something better, something more necessary always comes along, and how do you reward that, rating-wise? In short, "If you haven't bought it yet, you are a fool™".

Rating: ★★★★★

JACK'S ULTRA- ULTRASHORT REVIEWS

The following reviews feature a few sentences about new 4E products in both print and PDF. To read Jack's full review on these products, simply visit his EN World blog at: www.enworld.org/forum/blogs/jack99.

ADVENTURER'S GUIDE TO CHTONIA ALEA PUBLISHING GROUP

I must admit, I have been waiting for this one for a while – a setting based on earth during the Dark Ages, but with magic. Buy this book (PDF), but beware of the bad crunch. I still think it is more than worth it.

Rating: ★★★★★

ARCANE POWER WIZARDS OF THE COAST

Yeah, baby, *grease* and *glitterdust* are back! Overall a great book that is already very popular with my arcane casters.

Rating: ★★★★★

THE ARAK SUPERGENIUSGAMES

I will make this short. The crunch is absolutely out of this world horrible. Anyway, as bad as the crunch is, the fluff is just the opposite. Quite awesome. So buying this is definitely not a complete waste of money, but if you want to use it, it needs a little work.

Rating: ★★

CITADEL OF THE CORRUPTOR GOODMAN GAMES

The heroes arrive at an old remote fort in the mountains. There they find a lot of hostile (surprise!) orcs. Overall it's a good adventure, but it's lacking a certain *je ne sais quoi* in order to blow me away. Definitely usable, though.

Rating: ★★★

Jack is the alter ego of Chris Kümmel, an avid 4E fan and reviewer, who has been reviewing pretty much every 4E product under the sun in his popular EN World blogs, Jack99's Ultrashort Reviews of All His 4E Stuff.



Doug Kovacs, in studio

D20 QUESTIONS: DOUG KOVACS

By Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel

D20 Questions is a recurring feature in *Level Up* where we interview people of interest to those of us who roll 20-sided dice. This could be writers, designers, game masters, artists, or all of the above.

In this issue, we speak with Doug Kovacs. Doug is a longtime fantasy artist and illustrator who has worked for Wizards of the Coast, AEG, Slugfest Games, and Troll Lord Games, among others. He has also done a mountain of work for Goodman Games, and is in many ways the artistic faces of our 4E adventures, supplements, and monster books.

Doug has worked on many recent Goodman Games 4E projects, and his art can be seen throughout products such as *Hero's Handbook: Dragonborn*, *Blackdirge's Dungeon Denizens*, *In Search of Adventure*, and nearly every *Dungeon Crawl Classic* module published for 4E.

Level Up: How did you get started working with Goodman Games?

Doug Kovacs: I talked to Joe Goodman a few times at various Gen Cons. It was the fairly standard drill of going around to potential clients with some promotional material and letting them know who I was. I recall running into him in the security line in LAX after what I think was the first Gen Con in Anaheim. At that point, I don't think he had relocated to Chicago. Coincidentally, the first time Joe contacted me specifically to do work on the *Complete Guide to Fey*, we realized that he lived ridiculously close to me, in Chicago, about a block away. We have subsequently gamed together many times.

LU: Which fantasy artists have inspired you? What about RPG illustrators?

DK: Frazetta, Arthur Rackham, and Alan Lee, to name a few. I used to be transfixed by Jeff Easley paintings at Gen Con back when it was in Milwaukee. More recent inspirations are many. When you sit in an artist's booth at Gen Con and look in virtually any direction, if you aren't completely intimidated, you are inspired.

LU: The work you did on *Hero's Handbook: Dragonborn* was really great. What was it like working on that book?

DK: There was a little back and forth about what the Tiamat would look like. It was suggested that she be nontraditional, so I took that and ran with it in the sketches. It was later decided however that I took too much of a surreal "chaos god" angle. The full-page illustration of the dragonborn paladin was loosely based on the "Paladin in Hell" illustration from the first edition *DMG*.

LU: I know you contributed to the 4E *Monster Manual*. What were your contributions to that book?

DK: I worked on the flesh and stone golems, the iron cobra, the eidolon, and the clay scout. I also worked on some concepts for monsters prior to that. I just got my sample of the Ogre Pulverizer and the Ogre Warhulk miniatures in the mail from WotC. They are pretty impressive for pieces of plastic.





LU: In every edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*, the art and illustration has been vital in setting the tone and theme of that edition. How then, in your opinion, does 4E art differ from 3E art?

DK: To start, I would say there has been a lot of highly competent art in both editions, and it is difficult to generalize. Any general opinion of the overall art can likely be amended by comparing specific artists work, or even specific books. That said; 4E art seems to have bent in the high fantasy direction. It appeared 3E had already been heading that way even before 4E was launched. Various other online popular fantasy games, which it would be hard to have not heard of at this point, obviously pushed the overall fantasy art climate that way as well. I think it can also be said that 3E had a wider range of styles in its original form, particularly in the core books. Nods to process appear rarer in 4E.

LU: Having worked on some of the 4E core books, do you think that the artistic changes for 4E were inspired by the mechanical changes? In your experience, has it ever been the other way around?

DK: I believe both the art and mechanics were developed simultaneously, though my small part in the process probably doesn't make me an expert on the topic in any way. I personally was given no additional insight into the direction 4E would take mechanically while working on my bit. Though, it's probably not entirely necessary for an artist to play *D&D* to create the images.

However, for me personally, I think I might have understood the direction the visuals were taking better if I would have understood the changes that had been made in the game. For instance, the focus on contest or combat over other aspects of the game could explain something like the current incarnation of the dryad.

LU: You've been a fantasy illustrator for a long time now, and you have a large list of credits. What were some of your favorite assignments, and why?

DK: One of the first serious jobs I had was work for the original Middle Earth CCG back before the films, when ICE had the license. I was so ecstatic to be working on images of Moria, Golem, Minas Morgol and the like, I somehow made myself sick for a couple of days before I could start. More recently, the concept work I did on the late *Dreamblade* miniatures game was really cool. I really enjoyed the bizarre surreal element. Each art order was a nice surprise; they could include anything from a Victorian woman with the head of a fly, to a demonic steamroller, or an anthropomorphic windmill.

LU: What subjects do you enjoy illustrating the most? Are you a monster guy, or a hot-elven-chick-in-leather-armor guy?

DK: I really can't deny I'm one of the many male artists that love to draw women. Anatomy, male or female, is infinitely interesting because there is always something new to learn. At



the moment, I've got a bunch of pieces in progress featuring my personal version of faeries, which are essentially a surreal combination of women and plants. Monsters are fun probably because it is much easier to draw something that is "ugly." Oddly, some of the things that require a more workman-like mindset – I'm thinking particularly of architecture at the moment – please me more when the images are complete than the actual process of working on them. I'm not sure what kind of a guy that makes me.... a façade-and-portico guy or a tiny-lady-with-tail-made-out-of-vines-and-a-gourd for a head guy?

LU: What gets the creative juices flowing for you? Do you listen to music while you draw or paint?

DK: Believe it or not, I currently have a music schedule I generated randomly. Sunday: country; Mon.: alternative; Tues.: metal; Wed.: classic rock; Thurs.: classical; Fri.: blues; and Sat.: punk. I don't really take it all that seriously, though.

LU: Having talked to you at length at DDXP, I know you've been playing D&D a long time, and I know that you've been the DM for some pretty crazy groups in Chicago. Care to give the readers a taste of some of the infamous Kovacs D&D groups? You can change the names to protect the innocent, if you like.

DK: Haha. You're referring to the 2nd Edition Greyhawk campaign I ran through my late teens and early twenties. Looking back, it's obvious that our gaming group wasn't of the typical variety of immature gamers, but at the time, it didn't occur to me. You had to be comfortable with a certain level of substance abuse during the game, a lot of profanity, and a lot of ball-busting. My players would have been more appropriately labeled miscreants, punks, and metal heads, than nerds. Some real lives were a bit Fafhrd and Mouser, and occasionally some of that intruded on the game. Though most of the time we all got along, I recall one time being threatened with physical force to reverse a call I had made that a player's hand had been severed by a trap. The rest of the players were forced to rally to my support in order to preserve the DM's authority.

LU: Do you ever produce art specifically for your D&D game? You know, character portraits, that kind of thing.

DK: When I do find time to play these days, it's almost inevitable. I've drawn POV landscapes on the dry-erase board, provided sketches of alien archana, and numerous NPC portraits. I think most good DMs have a visual mind, but I might take it a step further.

LU: What are you working on now?

DK: *DCC # 64: Codex of the Damned*, a sci-fi-horror hybrid expansion for the *Battlestations* game by Gorilla Games, and a couple of others RPG books on the illustration front. I've got a number of new faerie/greenmen works progressing on the personal art front.

LU: Where can our readers see more art by Doug Kovacs?

DK: You can visit DougKovacs.com, and I'll be at Gen Con '09 with originals.



Dear Archmage Abby,

There is a new player in my Gaming Group. He is a nice enough guy and a decent player, but he does one thing that drives me crazy: he refuses to buy dice and always wants to share mine! He doesn't see why it's a big deal, but my dice are special. Some of them have been with me since the eighties, making them older than my kids! Am I being selfish, or is he the one with the problem?

Sincerely,
Hot Roller

Dear HR,

The Archmage rules in your favor. Dice are how you interact with the gaming world. Of course, the relationship between a gamer and his dice is sacred – every session they decide if you live or die (Ba dum dum TING!). If the new player was just a once-in-a-while gamer, we would understand his reluctance. However, if he is coming every week, he needs to own his own polyhedrons. Drive him to your hobby shop and help him pick out his first set. Before you know it, he'll love them so much he will squawk at the idea of anyone touching His Precious d20. If he refuses, put together a set of your very worst rolling dice and keep them in a special bag. Let your friend use those and only those. After he makes up three or four new characters, we think he will get the hint.

Dear Archmage Abby,

I am so sick of my GM's Godlike NPC showing up in time to save the day at the end of every session! It's like the only reason our GM agrees to play is so he can make us look stupid by putting us in a situation that we can't handle, then having his uber-wizard pull our butts out of the fire. It's so predictable and maddening I could scream! What's wrong with him?

Sincerely,
Wants To Save The Day Too!

Dear WTSTDT,

The Godlike NPC phenomenon ruins more sessions than Diet Soda. The most common cause is a GM who would much rather be playing. Has your GM been running your game for too long without getting a turn on the other side of the screen? He might just need a few weeks off from running the game to get the PC impulse out of his system. Let someone else take a turn! Another common cause is lack of GM satisfaction with the direction of the game. Is your party constantly going "outside the borders," taking the campaign in random directions that the GM obviously isn't prepared for? That can occasionally cause novice GM's to break out their Godlike NPC to "get things back on track."

If you think your GM can use a break, by all means give him one. But if this is just a part of his style, you should take him aside privately and speak frankly of your concerns. We imagine he will balk and dig his heels in at first, but if he really loves to play, he will come around.

Take responsibility for giving your GM good feedback. That's how you save the day!

Confidential to Mythbegotten Bard: Chalk this one up to personal experience, let it go and move on. The half-elf is just not that into you.

Need some gaming advice? Send queries to Archmage Abby!

We reserve the right to edit letters for size and content. Letters are posted anonymously, and if you do not provide us with a topical nick name for yourself one will be generated for you by rolling randomly on Table 15-9: Archmage Abby's New Names for her Darling Gamers. Sending a letter to the Archmage does not guarantee publication. All content becomes property of Goodman Games.

If you wish a confidential reply, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate you.

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