DRAGON™

Dragon #363

The last 3rd Edition issue of Dragon rolls out in the next several weeks. This issue, we're stretching into the middle of May, when we'll launch the first magazine content for the 4th Edition of D&D. In these next few weeks, get your campaigns ready with a sneak preview of 4th Edition epic destinies, and rules on how to implement them as you wrap up your epic 3.5 campaigns. Plus, more Design & Developments are incoming, featuring more information on a pair of martial classes, more information on monsters, and a preview of how magic item creation will work.

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by Bill Slavicsek

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"Let me begin by saying, this was New DM's idea...." Shelly prepares for a stint behind the DM's screen.
by Shelly Mazzanoble

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by Chris Tulach

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Classic Adventures, 4th Edition Style

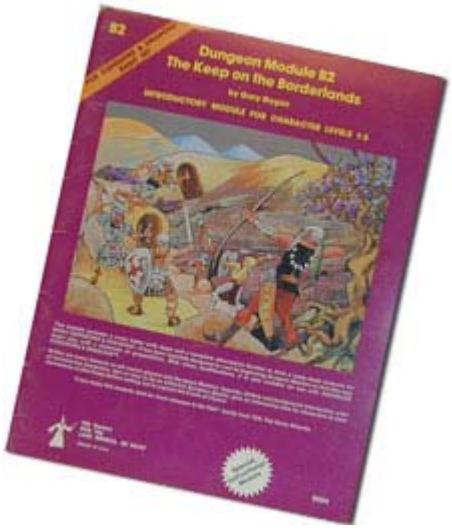
by Mike Mearls

With the release of 4th Edition right around the corner, now is a great time to dust off the classic modules you have in your collection. There's something iconic and exciting about facing the famous **D&D** villains of the past. By the same token, while a new dungeon provides a sense of mystery, a classic dungeon resonates with players new and old alike.

This article takes a look at some of the iconic encounters from classic **D&D** adventures. While it might seem simple to take the stats of monsters from older editions and replace or convert them with stats from 4th Edition, the conversion process requires a little more creativity from a DM. The classic adventures were more than just a series of monsters arrayed in rooms. They featured interesting NPCs, strange vistas, and other elements that go beyond the monsters. Some of 4th Edition's mechanics, such as the rules for traps and skill challenges, give you new tools to present threats to the party.

This article presents two encounters from previous editions with general notes on how to update them. The methods presented here are by no means canonical. Think of it as advice from one DM to another. You might find some of the ideas are perfect fits for your game, others might spur ideas for your own conversions, and still others might not appeal to you. Adventure design is more art than science. Your methods don't matter so long as you and your group have fun!

Keep on the Borderlands: The Minotaur Cave



Within the Caves of Chaos dwells a ferocious minotaur. While he at times serves as a mercenary to a nearby bugbear tribe, he prefers to hunt alone. The minotaur takes advantage of a strange, magical spell that bewitches all who enter his lair. Intruders lose their sense of direction, causing them to aimlessly wander the maze's seemingly endless passages. Meanwhile, the minotaur prowls the maze waiting to pick off lone adventurers or ambush weaker groups. Even worse, stirges and fire beetles infest the dungeon, feasting on the minotaur's scraps.

While *Keep on the Borderlands* breaks the maze down into four encounters, in 4th Edition it's best to bundle the entire maze into one encounter. There are two reasons for this move.

It makes a lot of sense for the minotaur to use hit-and-run tactics. The minotaur knows the maze, the vermin that infest the place avoid the beast, and the characters face a serious disadvantage in a running battle due to the strange spell the maze places upon them. If you think of the maze as one big encounter area, you can better see the possibilities inherent in exploiting the minotaur's mastery of the labyrinth.

Exploring a maze can grow boring unless the characters face a constant threat. The knowledge that a powerful, man-eating minotaur lurks around the corner helps increase the tension in the encounter and makes becoming lost all the more dangerous. The PCs lack a clear escape route against a deadly foe.

The one drawback you face is that, should you map the maze out with dungeon tiles or a battle mat, the place loses some its mystery. When you run the maze, use a combination of narrative description and tactical set ups, particularly if the monsters attack the party, trade a few blows, then retreat around a corner. Once the monsters are out of sight, pull away the tiles and describe the maze without miniatures and tiles. Laying out the map gives the players a sense of perfect knowledge, and that's the exact opposite of what you want in a maze!

The Monsters

Both the fire beetle and stirge have entries in the *Monster Manual*. You can go ahead and use them as presented. While fire beetles are low-level creatures, you can use large numbers of them to harass the PCs.

The minotaur is a trickier subject. The basic minotaurs presented in the *MM* work well enough, but this creature has the potential to become a fun, long-running enemy. In addition, you might want to make him elite so he can better face the party alone. Try using the rules for minotaur NPCs to create a minotaur fighter, probably around 5th or 6th level, along with a template from the *DMG* to make him a ferocious threat. The minotaur from *Keep on the Borderlands* carried a spear, and there's no reason he can't carry a few javelins to harass the characters with long ranged attacks. When allocating treasure, consider spending a parcel on a magic spear or a suit of magic chainmail for the minotaur. Finally, give him a name, some personality traits, and a few distinctive traits. His hit-and-run tactics might allow him to survive a fight with the party and return as a continuing menace. Perhaps he is a servitor of whatever strange gods the priests of Chaos worship.

Curse of Wayward Steps **Level 5 Trap**

Trap XP 200

A sense of timelessness descends on you as you find yourself facing yet another choice of going right, left, or straight ahead.

Trap: The curse is an important part of the uncertainty and fear that the maze causes. The curse confuses its victim's sense of time and direction, causing him to wander aimlessly and blunder into traps, ambushes, and other threats. Even the most iron-willed adventurer suffers some of the curse's drawbacks. Only by leaving the maze can a character escape its effects.

Perception

Characters can't use Perception to detect this trap.

Trigger

Any creature that enters the minotaur's cave is subject to this curse.

Attack

Immediate Reaction Melee

Target: The curse attacks each character in the maze at the start of his turn. The effects apply until the curse's next attack or until the character leaves the maze.

Attack: +9 vs. Will.

Hit: The target is dazed and takes a -5 penalty to Perception checks and a -2 penalty to speed. In addition, when he moves, roll 1d20. On a result of 9 or less, the character instead moves at half his speed in a random direction.

Miss: The target takes a -2 penalty to Perception checks and to speed.

Effect: In addition to the curse's attack, any group moving through the maze has a chance to travel in the wrong direction. When the group decides to take a turn, such as to the right or left, secretly roll 1d20. On a roll of 11 or higher, the group actually travels in the opposite direction.

Countermeasure

The only countermeasure is to leave the maze.

Steading of the Hill Giant Chieftain

Gary Gygax's *G1 Steading of the Hill Giant Chieftain* was the first adventure published for the **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons** game. If you feel like kicking off a 4th Edition campaign in the paragon tier, it's a great choice to begin a campaign with a bang.

The steading requires smart play, careful planning, and the right mix of caution and aggressive action from the players. The hill giants are fearsome foes, and if the characters are too reckless, they risk calling down the wrath of an entire fort filled with them. Since 4th Edition is designed with an eye toward individual encounters, players who bring several encounters worth of monsters on their heads at once are in dire peril. For this reason, the steading is an excellent adventure for a gaming group that prefers tactical and strategic challenges mixed with intense combat.

The hill giant appears in the *Monster Manual*, providing the basic chassis for the party's enemies. In addition, the earth titan, dire wolf, various ogres and trolls, and storm giants all provide useful monsters you can use as you adapt the adventure. You might need to advance some monsters' levels, while the basic hill giant can use character classes to differentiate specific hill giants, lieutenants, and the hill giant chieftain himself, Nosnra. In particular, a template is a good call for turning a basic hill giant into the ferocious Nosnra.

The specific stats for the monsters in *Steading of the Hill Giant Chieftain* are perhaps the least of your worries. The primary challenge presented by the adventure goes beyond a simple series of fights. As the characters venture into the steading, they risk alerting the entire complex to their intrusion. Fighting a few hill giants at a time is moderate challenge, but facing dozens of the brutes at once is a recipe for disaster. The characters must use stealth, careful planning, and a few well-used spells and exploits to avoid drawing the giants' wrath before they can whittle the brutes' numbers down to a manageable size.

You can handle this challenge in several ways. You might simply allow the giants in nearby rooms to make Perception checks if the PCs start a fight. While this solution seems like an obvious choice, it plays counter to one of the primary design conceits of 4th Edition. A single lucky Perception check could bring the entire fort down on the PCs. This binary outcome, either the PCs remain hidden or the giants attack, runs counter to 4th Edition's idea of slowing growing peril, as opposed to save or die spells and attacks.

Ideally, the players feel the tension and fear as their characters sneak through the fort. By tying their success to a single die roll, you deflate much of the drama and uncertainty of the PCs' situation. The characters are either safe, or they are in danger. In contrast, a skill challenge allows you to introduce variable levels of safety and

danger. The characters must fail several checks, or the giants must succeed in several of their own, before the PCs trigger a wide-spread alarm. As the PCs sustain failures in the challenge, the giants become more and more active, forcing the PCs to change their tactics. The characters might become more cautious, or they could decide that acting quickly, decisively, and aggressively is the best response to the giants' growing alertness.

Skill Challenge: Sneaking Through the Steading

This skill challenge models the party's ability to move through the steading, plus battle the guards as necessary, and avoid alerting the place's guards and occupants. The characters can take actions that decrease the steading's level of alertness, such as using Bluff to convince the giants that any noise of combat they heard was simply a scuffle between giants.

Setup: The giants live in an armed camp. While they are lazy and would prefer eating, drinking ale, and napping to standing guard duty, once alerted they are a powerful force. The characters must avoid causing too many disturbances or the giants turn out in force to hunt them down.

Level: Equal to the level of the party.

Complexity: See Special Rules.

Primary Skills: Bluff, Dungeoneering, Nature, and Stealth. Whenever the characters start a fight or do anything that makes a lot of noise, they must come up with a plan to deflate the giants' suspicions. The primary skills represent the best ways to remain hidden, but as DM you should listen to and assess any skill use. If the PCs have a logical plan, allow them to make the relevant check.

While the giants are dense brutes, they are not suicidally stupid. If the party tries to do the same trick multiple times, the check to resolve it takes a -2 penalty for each time after the first. The giants can believe that the guards in the next room decided to fight over a keg of ale, but the second or third fight is likely to arouse suspicion.

> *Bluff:* The characters can make noise to convince the giants that all is well, particularly after a disturbance such as a fight. For example, the PCs can push chairs around, clink mugs together, and mimic the sound of giants speaking or arguing. The giants in nearby rooms assume that the sounds of a fight were merely an argument or a brief brawl amongst the giants, rather than an attack by invading humanoids.
>
> *Dungeoneering and Nature:* Both of these skills allow the characters to determine how best to cover their tracks. For example, the characters could leave a slain giant in a pose that makes it look like the brute fell asleep, slumped in his chair. The giants have poor organization and discipline. A giant guard asleep at his post is nothing new.
>
> *Stealth:* When all else fails, the characters can simply sneak through the steading. The sound of a fight might draw attention to the characters, but the giants are slow to put forth any effort to track down hidden foes.

Special Rules: This skill challenge works a little differently when compared to the typical challenge. The characters gain defeats both for failed checks and for engaging in certain actions in the adventure, such as fighting giants or leaving giant corpses out in the open. In addition, the characters can never completely defeat this challenge. Instead, the challenge tracks the steading's level of alertness. The defeats accrued by the party measure the steading's level of readiness.

> *0-1 Defeat:* Bored and distracted by good food and drink, the giants pay no attention to their defenses. The giants suffer -2 penalties to their Perception checks. They take no special efforts to patrol the steading or search for intruders.
>
> *2-3 Defeats:* A few of the more observant giants worry that someone has entered the steading, but the tribe is not yet on a general alert. Nosnra assumes that any reports of suspicious activities are the result of drunk guards overreacting to nothing. Still, the giants no longer take a penalty to Perception checks and 1d4 hill giants walk the halls for the next hour. If these giants are attacked, they run to warn Nosnra.
>
> *4-5 Defeats:* The giants reinforce their guard posts. They now believe that they face intruders, but are still too lazy and distracted to mount an active defense until they find indisputable evidence of an attack. The giants sent to patrol the halls move through each guard post, making sure the guards are awake. If they find evidence of an attack, such as slain giants, the characters immediately gain two defeats.

6 Defeats: The giants realize that intruders are in the steading and take active efforts to root them out. The giants all gain +2 to Perception checks. Any festivities, such as drinking, wrestling, or other entertainments, come to a halt. The giants ready weapons and armor, while Nosnra organizes active sweeps through the entire steading in search of intruders.

Important: This skill challenge is not meant as a crutch to replace logic or your own judgment as a DM. If the giants uncover clear evidence of intruders, the characters immediately go to six defeats in this challenge. For example, if the characters slaughter several guards and leave their corpses in plain sight, the next giants to enter the room sound the alarm unless the PCs stop them.

General Tips and Thoughts

Hopefully, the examples above give you some idea on how to approach converting classic adventures. Here are some more ideas and thoughts on how to go about adapting adventures from your collection.

NPCs: There are two ways to approach converting NPCs. You can simply create an NPC with the appropriate race and class. This approach works best if the NPC lacks any specific combinations of feats, powers, or abilities she needs to function within the adventure.

If the NPC does need certain spells or effects, you might need to design her as a monster, especially if those abilities lack a clear analog in 4th Edition. In this case, select the NPC's level, give her several powers from her class, and use the guidelines on damage and attack bonus from the *DMG* to adapt her feats, spells, or abilities.

Most spells can adapt directly over, while feats become exploits. You should design spells that eliminate a target so that they inflict a lesser version of the effect, and then the full effect after the target fails a save or two. In any case, avoid any effect that simply eliminates a target.

When converting, it is more important to capture the spirit and flavor of an NPC rather than to duplicate her statistics.

Encounter Areas: For editions before 3rd, most encounter areas throw multiple enemies against the party in each area. 1st Edition modules in particular feature encounters with dozens of orcs or goblins, especially in higher-level adventures. Your best bet is to rebuild these to feature minions led by higher-level NPC humanoids.

For 3rd Edition adventures, look at combining multiple areas into a single encounter to bring enough monsters to bear on the party. 3rd Edition assumed one monster fought the party, forcing you to combine encounters unless you are willing to design many solos. Other than monsters, pay attention to traps and encounter terrain. Traps in older editions tended to zap the party once and were then unable to keep attacking. Again, aim for the flavor of the trap and avoid attacks that instantly kill PCs.

For terrain, read over the encounter area description and think about arranging the terrain so that it becomes a dynamic part of the encounter. Keep on the Borderlands provides some good examples of this idea. In the temple of evil chaos, the whirling sigils that entrance and charm PCs can slowly take effect during a fight. A charmed PC might attack his allies until the PCs break the effect or drag their ally out of the temple.

Encounter Size: 4th Edition's scale of 5 feet to a square can lead to cramped, tiny encounters if you directly convert maps from older editions. Before you run an adventure, sketch out each dungeon or encounter area on graph paper and see how much room is available for maneuvering. Ideally, even when the party and their foes are locked in melee there is still space for creatures to move around the battlefield and threaten either side's back rank.

Large and Huge creatures present trouble, since they usually took up less space as miniatures in older editions of the game. If you have the time, draw encounter areas on your battlemat or set up Dungeon Tiles. Place the miniatures for the encounter on the area, along with minis for the characters, and see how crowded the area is. Big creatures need a lot of room to maneuver. Try to avoid situations where a single fighter or paladin can either lock down all of the monsters or set it up so that only one Large or Huge creature can make melee attacks against him.

Remember, when converting an old adventure the goal is to evoke the adventure's feel, engage the players with

its story, and bring back (or create new) memories of the game. Don't mimic the adventure. Instead, find its most important elements and express them using the 4th Edition rules.

About the Author

Mike Mearls is the dark hope of chaotic evil: young, handsome, well endowed in abilities and aptitudes, thoroughly wicked, depraved, and capricious. Whomever harms Mearls had better not brag of it in the presence of one who will inform the Demoness Lolth! Evil to the core, Mearls is cunning, and if the situation appears in doubt, he will use bribery and honeyed words to sway the balance in his favor. He is not at all adverse to gaining new recruits of any sort, and will gladly accept adventurers into the ranks, but he will test and try them continually. Those who arouse suspicion will be quietly murdered in their sleep; those with too much promise will be likewise dealt with, for Mearls wants no potential usurpers or threats to his domination.

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Epic Binders

by Eytan Bernstein

Epic binders do something that most mortals would find insanity-inducing: bind powerful beings from beyond space and time. These binders travel the world and the planes searching for entities forgotten or banished from reality.

The epic vestiges found below are even more powerful than their nonepic counterparts, since they represent the fractured remnant of a dead god that sacrificed itself for its people, the essence of a continent that an alien creature consumed, the collective souls of the slain firstborn of an empire, or the displaced soul of an alien harbinger of apocalypse. The nature of epic vestiges is similar to that of nonepic vestiges, but they are grander, more tragic, and more terrifying.

Epic binders must take feats to gain access to epic vestiges. These feats represent significant personal exploration and research, and each feat is a special bond with a strange being or presence beyond space and time. Unlike nonepic vestiges, epic vestiges do not have effective levels. The power level of the feats is limited by their prerequisites. For instance, a vestige feat that requires Knowledge (the planes) 28 ranks and the ability to bind 8th-level vestiges can be taken only by a character of 25th level. The number of vestiges known by an epic binder is limited only by the number of epic vestige feats she takes and her caster level.

Epic binders do not automatically gain the ability to bind multiple epic vestiges. For each additional vestige a binder wishes to bind at the same time, she must select the Bind Additional Epic Vestige feat. Thus, the feats of an epic binder are divided between gaining more vestiges, binding multiple vestiges simultaneously, and a variety of other epic feats based on the feats listed in the *Tome of Magic*.

Epic Binder

Epic binders make pacts with the residual presences of beings and cosmic energies so powerful that these energies would drive other beings mad.

Hit Die: d8.

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Vestiges: Epic binders continue to gain the ability to bind additional nonepic vestiges simultaneously. At 25th level, an epic binder can bind five vestiges at the same time. She can bind an additional vestige simultaneously for every binder level beyond 25th (30th, 35th, 40th, and so on). In all other ways, this follows the rules for binding additional vestiges as described in *Tome of Magic*.

Effective Binder Level: Levels taken in epic binder (and prestige classes that increase EBL) continue to improve binding checks, ability DCs, durations, and other abilities based on EBL as described in *Tome of Magic*. Epic vestige DCs are regulated by EBL in the same manner as nonepic vestiges.

Pact Augmentation: At 24th level, an epic binder gains a sixth ability from the pact augmentation list. She gains additional abilities from the list every 4 additional levels (7 at 28th, 8 and 32nd, and so on). This functions in all other ways as the ability of the same name described in the Tome of Magic.

Bonus Feats: An epic binder gains a bonus feat every three levels higher than 20th (23rd, 26th, 29th, and so on). These feats must be selected from the epic binder bonus feats list below.

Epic Binder Bonus Feats: Additional Magic Item Space, Augmented Alchemy, Bind Additional Epic Vestige*, Bind Additional Vestige*, Bind Amun-her Khepeshef "Desecrated Scion"*, Bind Gaia "Soul of the Land"*, Bind Tkhaluuljin "the Cephalopocalypse"*, Bind Zuriel "the Bronze God"*, Damage Reduction, Dexterous Fortitude, Dexterous Will, Energy Resistance, Epic Expel Vestige*, Epic Favored Vestige*, Epic Favored Vestige Focus*, Epic Rapid Pact Making*, Epic Rapid Recovery*, Epic Skilled Pact Making*, Extended Lifespan, Fast Healing.

*New feat described in this article.

Epic Vestige Feats

Each epic vestige feat requires an epic binder to have a certain number of ranks in a skill (always one from the binder class list). These feats often have other esoteric requirements based on the nature of the feat -- the acquisition of a certain relic, visiting another plane, paying respects at the site where the vestige died, or other similar requirements. None of these esoteric requirements require additional feats -- maintaining the idea that binder magic is supposed to be "the easy way to power;" they might require special quests or adventures.

Designing Epic Vestiges

Creating epic vestiges is more an art than a science. The guidelines presented in *Design & Development*: Designing Your Own Vestige, Part 1, are still helpful, though epic levels are an entirely different playing field.

- At will or constant abilities should be the equivalent of 7th-9th level spells, though some lower level spells are still appropriate.

- Abilities with a 5-round delay should be about as useful and powerful as a high-level spell cast by an epic wizard. This does not refer to epic spells. Rather, it compares to epic spell slots used to cast nonepic spells with metamagic effects (such as an *empowered, maximized, quickened magic missile* spell). This is just an approximation, but it is a good guideline for the power level of these abilities.

- Abilities that grant class features from another class (such a turning undead, sneak attacks, or rage) should be about four levels behind what a character from that class gains. At the end of the day, the design is more about how the whole package feels than a specific formula. If it seems much more powerful than what another epic-level character of the same level can do, it probably is (and should be adjusted accordingly).

Bind Additional Epic Vestige [Epic]
You can bind an additional epic vestige.
Prerequisites: Ability to bind two or more different epic vestiges; effective binder level 21st.
Benefit: You can bind an additional epic vestige.
Special: This feat can be taken multiple times. Each time you take it, you can simultaneously bind an additional epic vestige you know.
For example, Peltaria, a 30th-level binder, has taken the Bind Gaia, Bind Amun-her Khepeshef, and Bind Zuriel epic feats. Without the Bind Additional Epic Vestige feat, she can bind only one of those vestiges at a given time. Peltaria has taken this feat twice, allowing her to bind all three of her epic vestiges simultaneously.

Bind Additional Vestige [Epic]
You can bind an additional nonepic vestige.
Prerequisites: Ability to bind 8th-level vestiges; effective binder level 21st.
Benefit: You can bind an additional vestige.
Normal: The number of nonepic vestiges you can bind simultaneously is limited by your class level.
Special: This feat can be taken multiple times. Each time you take the feat, you can add one to the maximum number of nonepic vestiges you can bind simultaneously.

Bind Amun-her Khepeshef "Desecrated Scion" [Epic Vestige]
Once the firstborn heir to his people's kingdom, Amun-her Khepeshef represents the souls of the firstborn sons of the empire, whose lives were tragically extinguished by the god of their slaves. The collective will of the spirits begged the death-god for oblivion, becoming the vestige known as Amun-her Khepeshef. Amun-her Khepeshef

grants the ability to continue to act while dead, protection from death effects and the attacks of undead, bonuses on strategic checks in battle, and the ability to release a powerful burst of positive energy.
Prerequisites: Ability to bind 8th-level vestiges; Knowledge (history) or Knowledge (nobility and royalty) 29 ranks.
Benefit: You can bind Amun-her Khepeshef "Desecrated Scion."
Legend: Amun-her Khepeshef was the heir to the throne, son of the current king, and leader of the army. The empire kept thousands of slaves, who they used to build numerous pyramids, tombs, and palaces. When the slaves revolted, the empire imposed harsh strictures, limiting their religious freedoms. Eventually, the people rebelled, calling on their long suppressed god to smite their captors. Furious, the god struck the empire with numerous plagues -- fire, vermin, disease, drought, and worse. The final plague was the most terrible even in the empire's history -- the foreign god struck down the firstborn sons of each family in the empire, including Amun-her Khepeshef.

The loss of the first-born sons was tragic, bringing an entire generation to its knees with depression and desperation. To make matters worse, grave robbers and rival invaders desecrated the numerous new tombs, destroying the sanctity of the afterlife of the dead sons. These spirits became furious: angry at the foreign god and his people, enraged at those who betrayed them in their complacency, livid at the tomb robbers who interrupted their after-life, the spirits appealed to the god of the dead, who agreed to banish them beyond space and time, so that they would suffer no longer. These spirits were removed from existence as a single bound entity known as Amun-her Khepeshef.

Special Requirement: You cannot bind Amun-her Khepeshef if you are currently suffering from any level drain, negative levels, ability drain, or ability damage dealt by undead or by spells and spell-like abilities from the necromancy school. Only living creatures can bind Amun-her Khepeshef.

Manifestation: When Amun-her Khepeshef manifests, a handsome tanned male warrior appears in a sarcophagus, his body resplendent in gold and gems and surrounded by ritual accoutrements. The lid of the stone sarcophagus lies broken on the floor several feet away. Suddenly, the warrior bolts upright in the sarcophagus. He wails a scream of pain that sounds like the collective voices of men and boys. His body explodes into overlapping images of thousands of men and male children of all different ages, their faces jaundiced, their cheeks sunken, and their skin reeking of rotting death. They wail in unison for but a moment, and then the forms merge back together into that of the warrior. The warrior lies back down into his sarcophagus, still and dead.

Sign: You take on the look of the dead: jaundiced skin, sunken cheeks, bags under the eyes, and stiff movements. You exude a faint odor of decay and preservative chemicals.

Influence: You cannot abide the presence of undead, necromancers, and death spells and effects. You seek any opportunity to slay undead, and you refuse to work with anyone who you feel uses necromancy and death effects. You are easily provoked by such individuals, seeing reasons to fight them that many miss.

Granted Abilities: While bound to Amun-her Khepeshef, you can release a powerful burst of positive energy that heals the living and harms the dead, can function even while dead or dying, are immune to numerous death effects and undead attacks and can grant this immunity to allies, and can generate an aura that enhances the battle tactics of you and your allies significantly.

Burst of Life: As a standard action, you can release a 30-foot burst of positive energy centered on yourself. All allies in the area (including you) receive the effects of a *heal* (healing 250 points of damage as well as receiving the other benefits of the spell) and *greater restoration* spell (without an XP cost). Undead (and other creatures harmed by positive energy) take damage from the *heal* effect. Once you have used this ability, you cannot do so again for 5 rounds.

Delay Death: For a total time per day of 1 round per effective binder level you possess, you do not die when you have taken enough damage to put you below -9 hit points, as if under the effects of a *delay death*(*SpC*) effect. This effect occurs automatically as soon as it applies, lasts until it runs out or is no longer needed, and can operate multiple times per day (up to the daily limit of rounds). In addition, while affected by this power, you can continue to act normally, without suffering any of the limitations normally faced by a character at -1 hit points or lower. If the duration of this power has elapsed and you are between -1 to -9 hit points, you stabilize at your current hit point total. If it has elapsed and you have less than -9 hp, you instantly die.

Firstborn Guardian: You are immune to fatigue, exhaustion, ability damage and drain, energy drain, death spells, magical death effects, and negative energy effects (such as from *inflict* spells or *chill touch*). You are also immune to special attacks and abilities of undead that cause fear, disease, paralysis, or poison. All weapons you wield (as well as natural attacks) are considered to have the ghost touch weapon quality. You gain a +4 sacred bonus to AC against the attacks of undead. This is constant and does not require an action to activate. As a swift action, you can extend the same protections to one ally per 5 effective binder levels you possess. This protection lasts for 1 round/level. When it runs out, you must wait 5 rounds before activating it again.

Scion of War: You project a 60-foot aura that enhances the battle prowess of your allies (including yourself). All

allies within 60 feet receive double your Charisma modifier as a bonus on all bull rush, disarm, grapple, overrun, sunder, and trip checks.

Bind Gaia, "Soul of the Land" [Epic Vestige]
Once the soul of a continent, Gaia grants her summoners the ability to feel the pulse of the land, allowing them advantages against unnatural creatures, senses derived from the land, immunity to elemental forces, the ability to speak with and influence the attitudes of creatures, and the capacity to regenerate wounds.
Prerequisites: Ability to bind 8th-level vestiges; Decipher Script, Knowledge (geography), Knowledge (nature), or Knowledge (the planes) 25 ranks; special.
Special: To learn to bind Gaia, an epic binder must find and decipher the *Tome of Continental Lore*, an ancient gith text of geological science and history. Understanding the text requires at least 25 ranks in one of the skills listed above.
Benefit: You can bind the epic vestige known as Gaia, "Soul of the Land."
Legend: Gaia was both the nature goddess of a lost continent and the body of that land itself. She was the patron of all creatures and the defender of sacred life. When the land was injured, she too was hurt, her life-essence pumping in time with the earth. When Tkhaluuljin, a mammoth alien squidlike entity, attacked the land, Gaia fought, hoping to sacrifice her essence to protect the lives of her beloved residents. Her attempts were a failure and Tkhaluuljin swallowed her along with all life that lived on her surface.

Even in the gargantuan stomach of the alien squid, Gaia continued to fight for her people, raking Tkhaluuljin with sharp branches and rocks and inciting her surviving followers to use their magic against the entity. Gaia and those that lived upon her could not save themselves, but they did destroy their captor. After a long drawn-out fight, Tkhaluuljin was so injured that it could no longer control its flight. It plummeted into the ocean, killing itself, Gaia, and her charges in the process.

Special Requirement: You must summon Gaia outdoors. She does not answer your call if you cannot see the sky.

Manifestation: When Gaia manifests, a large green sphere appears where the sun (or moon) should be. The surface of the planet slowly becomes more illuminated, its land masses and oceans more distinct. The light intensifies until it is as bright as the sun. The planet explodes in a ball of fire and plasma, sending flaming meteorites in all directions. In the afterimage of the explosion, the silhouette of a beautiful green-skinned woman appears briefly, and then winks out. Left in the image's place is the ethereal silhouette of a vaguely female figure.

Sign: The hair on your face, head, and body takes on a greenish hue, as do the eyes and skin.

Influence: Never allow cruelty toward living creatures to occur in your presence. Seek out every opportunity to destroy aberrations, constructs, oozes, and undead.

Granted Abilities: While bound to Gaia, you can gain potent advantages against unnatural creatures, gain a connection to the land that enhances the senses, speak with and enchant living creatures, become immune to an element, and regenerate wounds.

Earth's Fury: Your attacks and powers are more potent against aberrations, constructs, oozes, and undead. All spells, powers, and abilities you possess have a +4 bonus to their DCs when used against creatures of these types. You can freely use sneak attacks, critical hits, and precision damage against creatures of these types and automatically confirm critical threats against them. Finally, you receive a +4 bonus to your AC and saving throws against attacks made by creatures of these types.

Earthsense: You gain potent senses derived from your connection to the land. You gain darkvision with an unlimited range, allowing you to see through both natural and magical darkness to the limit of your normal vision. You gain scent and can track opponents by scent as if you had the Track feat. You receive blindsight out to 120 feet and tremorsense out to 60 feet.

Earth's Voice: You gain the Polyglot epic feat. You can also speak with plants (as *speak with plants*) and animals (as *speak with animals*). These abilities are constant and require no activation. Any living creature that can hear your voice must make a Will save or be considered to have an attitude of friendly toward you until you do something to change this.

Elemental Fortitude: When you bind Gaia, choose one element from among the following: acid, cold, fire, or electricity. You are immune to that element for as long as you are bound to Gaia. Once every 5 rounds, you can spend a full round action to change your immunity to a different element.

Planetary Healing: You gain regeneration equal to 1 per 4 caster levels you possess. Thus, a 28th-level binder has regeneration 7. You take normal damage from fire and acid. By touching an ally, you can grant her any or all of your regeneration as a standard action. You can split your regeneration up among multiple allies, though each additional ally requires an additional standard action. At any time, you can recall any or all points of regeneration you have granted to your allies as an immediate action. Granting and recalling your regeneration does not provoke attacks of opportunity.

For example, Leila is a 28th-level binder who has bound Gaia. This grants her regeneration 7. As a standard action, she touches her companion Dinah, granting her regeneration 3. Three rounds later, she grants the remaining 4 points of regeneration to her ally Rainer, keeping none for herself. When a great wyrm blue dragon enters the fight, Leila decides that she needs all of the regeneration. She spends an immediate action, recalling all of the points of regeneration for her own protection.

Bind Tkhaluuljin "the Cephalopocalypse" [Epic Vestige]
A gargantuan alien squidlike entity, Tkhaluuljin traveled the planes, devouring whatever blocked its path. It was not malevolent; rather, it was the embodiment of pure hunger -- the insatiable need to consume all. When you bind Tkhaluuljin, you project an aura of madness, gain exceptional abilities of flight, can stun enemies, and can summon a *sphere of annihilation*.
Prerequisites: Ability to bind 8th-level vestiges; Knowledge (history), Knowledge (nature), or Knowledge (the planes) 30 ranks.
Benefit: You can bind Tkhaluuljin "the Cephalopocalypse."
Legend: No one knows where Tkhaluuljin came from. In the language of the gith, its name roughly translates as "living armageddon." Scholars of planar lore believe that it may have emerged from some sort of rift or black hole and that it is a being of pure nihilism that serves no purpose beyond indiscriminate destruction.

When Tkhaluuljin attempted to devour the land known as Gaia, it had no expectation that this land would be any different than the others. It never really thought about what it was eating. Then, as it devoured that land, it could no longer control its flight, so it plummeted into the ocean where it was torn apart from within. When it finally exploded in a supernova, it destroyed everything within hundreds of miles.

Manifestation: When Tkhaluuljin manifests, a black rift opens in the air, absorbing all light in the area. All the matter in the area -- trees, rocks, plants, animals, and even people -- appears to get sucked into the portal. A strange slurping sound begins, followed by a flash of dark magenta light. When the light dissipates, the tentacle-mawed head of an enormous squidlike creature emerges, followed by a bulbous translucent body. As the rear half of the creature emerges from the rift, dark magenta light flashes again. When the light dissipates, you see the rift hurtling toward you, imbuing you with the essence of destruction.
Sign: Your veins appear spidery and more pronounced, emitting a pulsing magenta light.

Influence: You can never pass up the opportunity to eat. This does not require you to eat food that you would normally consider inedible, but you must consume 5 times the amount of food you would normally eat when not bound to Tkhaluuljin.

Granted Abilities: While bound to Tkhaluuljin, you can project an aura of madness, fly with incredible speed and accuracy, release a blast of stunning energy, and summon a dreaded *sphere of annihilation*.

Aura of Madness: As a standard action, you can project a 10-foot aura that drives others mad. All living creatures who pass within the aura must make a Will save or become confused for 1 round per 5 caster levels you possess. A creature that makes its saving throw cannot be affected by this power for 24 hours (though that creature can still be affected by another binder's use of this power or by other forms of confusion). This is a mind-affecting effect. You can suppress this ability as a standard action. If you suppress this ability, you must wait 5 rounds before you reactivate it.

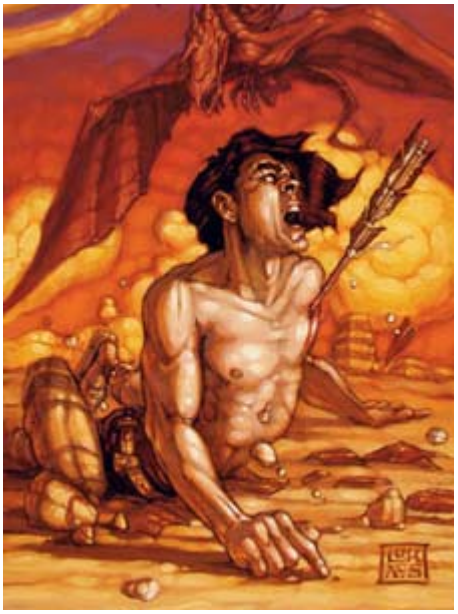
Flight of the Alien: You can fly extremely fast and with perfect accuracy, gaining a fly speed of 150 feet with perfect maneuverability. You also gain the Flyby Attack, Hover, and Wingover bonus feats (*MM* 303-304). Your flight is graceful, but alien since it consists of a series of bizarre angles and undulating arcs.

Mind Blast: You can release a 120-foot-cone *mind blast* effect. Anyone caught in the cone must succeed on a Will save or be stunned for 12 rounds. You must wait 5 rounds between uses of this ability.

Sphere of Annihilation: You can summon a *sphere of annihilation* (*DMG* 279) as a full-round action. You can use it for a total number of rounds per day equal to your effective binder level, though these need not be consecutive. You can use your Charisma modifier on your control check in place of your Intelligence modifier if you wish. You can use a *talisman of the sphere* to augment your abilities as normal (and the sphere doubles your Charisma modifier instead of your Intelligence modifier should you choose to use Charisma for control checks). You must still make control checks to control the sphere as normal though you are immune to the effects of a sphere you summon. This does not protect you from spheres summoned by others. If you summon the sphere, you cannot summon it again for 5 rounds (regardless of the number of rounds you used it).

Bind Zuriel "the Bronze God" [Epic Vestige]
Zuriel was a just deity of war who sacrificed his life and divinity in vain when githyanki invaded his land. Zuriel grants you the ability to augment your fighting prowess, employ powerful force effects with the speed of thought, fortify your pacts, and absorb damage suffered by allies.
Prerequisites: Ability to bind 8th-level vestiges; Knowledge (history)

27 ranks.
Benefit: You can bind Zuriel "the Bronze God."
Legend: Zuriel was the deity of just and reasoned war, a stalwart force that spoke for and defended the people of his land. When the githyanki invaded the land after reawakening long-dormant portals, Zuriel organized the defensive front. During the war, thousands of citizens and several gods perished under the assault of the elder evils, but it was not enough. Zuriel was the last defense between the innocent citizens and slavery to the Lich Queen. He sacrificed his divinity and his life to create a force field that would block the invaders, but during the ritual, he was overcome by the githyanki and the land was taken. It was too late to halt the ritual, and his life force dissipated into the ether. Since his death and dissolution, he has been a frustrated and resentful vestige, but he still possesses a basic sense of decency and kindness. This paradox carries to any who bind him.



Special Requirement: You cannot bind Zuriel if you are evil-aligned.

Manifestation: When Zuriel manifests, a 10-foot-tall, bronze-skinned, male figure with a perfect, athletic body stands before you. He wears an expression of proud dignity, as if he is ready for some momentous occasion. Suddenly, he looks up, seeing images of githyanki riding yrthaks, and screams. The bronze covering his body shatters, revealing an athletic mortal, his heart pierced by a githyanki arrow. He leans forward and whispers in your ear, "Do not let the city fall," then topples over dead.

Sign: Your skin takes on a bronze sheen, your muscles expand and tighten, you appear more athletic overall, and your posture changes as you hold your carriage proud and upright.

Influence: You must always intercede on the behalf of innocents when their lives are threatened. You also must slay githyanki on sight and hunt them down whenever the opportunity presents itself. You never retreat from a fight if you feel that leaving it would endanger innocents.

Granted Abilities: When you bind Zuriel, you can become a skilled warrior, employ powerful force effects, enhance your existing pacts, and absorb the wounds of your allies.

Bronze Body: You can employ a *Tenser's transformation* effect for a number of rounds per day equal to your effective binder level. Activating this ability requires a swift action that can be spent only at the beginning of your turn before you do anything else. You can split the duration into multiple uses, however you desire. You can end the effect as a swift action that must be spent at the beginning of your turn before you do anything else. If you end this effect, you must wait 5 rounds before beginning it again.

Forceful Speed of Thought: You can create several powerful force effects with the speed of thought. You can use a *quickened empowered maximized magic missile*, *quickened wall of force*, or *quickened force cage* as the spells of the same names. If you use this ability, you must wait 5 rounds before using it again. You can only have one of these effects in place at a time. For example, if you have employed a *wall of force*, you can't use the other two abilities until the spell's duration elapses or you have dismissed its effect. You cannot use this ability while under the effects of the bronze body ability.

Pact Fortification: Zuriel intensifies the bonds you've forged when making pacts. All benefits you receive from pact augmentation abilities are doubled. Thus, if you have selected +5 hit points three times, you receive +30 extra hit points. If you have taken DR 5/-- (by selecting DR 1/-- five times), you receive DR 10/--.

Ultimate Sacrifice: You can absorb the wounds suffered by an ally. As an immediate action, you can take all damage suffered by a single willing creature from one attack, spell, power, or ability. You suffer all the damage and your ally is unharmed. You must be able to see the ally, but gain no special information about the nature of the attack or how much damage it has caused. You can employ this power even if the attack would kill you.

Epic Expel Vestige [Epic]
You can expel vestiges whenever the need arises.
Prerequisites: Effective binder level 21st, Expel Vestige.
Benefits: You can expel vestiges as often as desired. This replaces the once per day limitation imposed by the Expel Vestige feat. In all other ways, it functions the same way as the Expel Vestige feat.
Special: Binders with the Expel Vestige feat can expel a vestige only once per day.

Epic Favored Vestige [Epic]
You are extremely adept at using the abilities of a particular vestige.
Prerequisites: Effective binder level 21st, Favored Vestige.
Benefits: Your effective binder level increases by 3 when you use the abilities granted by your chosen vestige. This replaces the ability granted by the Favored Vestige feat.
Special: You can take this feat multiple times. Its effects do not stack. Each time you take this feat, it applies to a

new vestige (for which you must have the Favored Vestige feat).

Epic Favored Vestige Focus [Epic]
The abilities you manifest from a particular vestige are extremely potent against enemies.
Prerequisites: Effective binder level 21st, Favored Vestige Focus.
Benefits: The DC of each supernatural ability granted by your favored vestige increases by 1. This replaces the ability granted by the Favored Vestige Focus feat.
Special: You can take this feat multiple times. Its effects do not stack. Each time you take this feat, it applies to a new vestige (for which you must have the Favored Vestige Focus feat).

Epic Rapid Pact Making [Epic]
You can make pacts with powerful beings very quickly.
Prerequisites: Effective binder level 21st, Rapid Pact Making.
Benefits: You can bind vestiges as a full-round action.
Special: Binding vestiges normally requires 1 minute.

Epic Rapid Recovery [Epic]
You can use the abilities of your favored vestige even more frequently than before.
Prerequisites: Effective binder level 21st, Rapid Recovery.
Benefits: You can activate abilities of your favored vestige once every 3 rounds rather than once every 4 rounds. You must be bound to the vestige to use its abilities with this feat.
Special: You can take this feat multiple times. Its effects do not stack. Each time you take this feat, it applies to a new vestige (for which you must have the Favored Vestige feat).

Epic Skilled Pact Making [Epic]
You are exceptionally skilled at making pacts with powerful entities.
Prerequisites: Effective binder level 21st, Skilled Pact Making.
Benefit: You gain a +10 bonus on binding checks. This replaces the bonus granted by the Skilled Pact Making feat.

About the Author

Eytan Bernstein hails from exotic Long Island and spends his days writing and editing projects for numerous game companies. In addition to his work on *Dragons of Faerûn*, the *Magic Item Compendium*, and numerous other projects, Eytan serves as a partner and PR & Marketing Manager for Silven Publishing. Eytan enjoys hunting for gems and minerals in rock quarries, studying religion and theology, composing music, and playing with his many pets. For more information about Eytan, check out www.eytanbernstein.com. Send questions and comments for Eytan here.

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Epic Destinies in D&D 3.5

by Logan Bonner, Art by Eric Deschamps and John Moriarty

One of the new concepts of 4th Edition D&D is the epic destiny, which determines what you are fated to become, your role on the stage of history, and how people across the planes will remember you for all time. Epic characters are incredibly powerful, but those with epic destinies go beyond what normal people can even imagine attaining. With an epic destiny, you might bind powerful artifacts to your will, fight back danger that would destroy the world, attain divine power, find your place in a cycle of great heroes, become a force of nature, or become a ghost story that gets told forevermore.

Immortality

Every epic destiny gives you immortality -- either true everlasting life or a legacy that will live forever. One way or another, you will move beyond mortal affairs. You might leave the world, be reincarnated as a new hero, die a glorious death, or enter the realm of the deities and assume divine power. This is the end of your adventuring career, and it provides a satisfying ending to your character's story. Which is not to say that your story might not have an epilogue . . . there are many ways you might return and find adventure once again. The forms of immortality listed here include ways in which the DM might incorporate the legacy of your epic hero into a future campaign.

Destiny Quests

You don't fulfill your epic destiny by chance or by gaining experience. Your final adventure, carefully crafted by your DM, takes you on to immortality. If everybody in the group has an epic destiny (which is recommended if you're using epic destinies in your campaign), the DM can end the campaign with one extraordinary adventure. You'll be working toward your destiny quest in subtle ways long before you reach 30th level. Keep an eye out for clues that might point toward your destiny quest.

Forge Your Own Destiny

You have many options when using epic destinies. Not every group wants to end the campaign at 30th level, and not every DM wants to end a campaign in a way that will mesh with your destiny. All the details for immortality and suggestions for destiny quests are entirely optional. What happens to you when you finish your destiny quest (or if you just keep playing) is up to you and your DM.

Gaining an Epic Destiny

Normally, you can gain an epic destiny by taking the Epic Destiny feat. Doing so takes up your 21st-, 24th-, 27th-, and 30th-level feat slots. (You gain bonus feats from your class normally.) Your DM might decide that, if everybody in the group is taking an epic destiny, the epic destiny doesn't use up any feats. Ask your DM how epic destinies work in his campaign.

An epic destiny has four parts:

- One or more 21st-level features
- A 24th-level feature that makes you harder to kill
- A 27th-level special power
- A 30th-level feature

Epic Destinies in 4th Edition

As a part of the core 4th Edition rules, epic destinies are an iconic facet of epic play. The epic tier of play is built to have an endpoint, unlike 3rd Edition's epic levels. Usually, this means taking on an immense threat to the world, such as Orcus, or perhaps even an evil deity.

See if you can guess which of the epic destinies in this article is also featured in the 4th Edition *Player's Handbook*!

Any effect that applies to class features also applies to epic destiny features.

> **New Feat: Epic Destiny**
>
> You have a destiny beyond that of other adventurers.
>
> **Prerequisite:** 21st level, any other requirements listed in the epic destiny's description.
>
> **Benefit:** Choose an epic destiny. You gain that epic destiny's benefits at 21st, 24th, 27th, and 30th level. When you have this feat, you do not gain additional feats at 24th, 27th, or 30th level.

Artifact Lord

The power of magic items lures you, and you learn to command them with great ease. When you hold an item, you can trace the paths of the magic that formed it, and understand it like no one else -- not even its creator,

unless the creator also is an artifact lord -- is able to. The more you use magic items, the closer your connection to them, and you gain the ability to protect them and even place your very soul within them. Eventually, even artifacts consider you their master.

Requirements: 21st level.

Artifact Lord Level	Benefit
21st	Impossible activation, charge item
24th	Disjunction ward
27th	Soul transfer
30th	Artifact dominion

Impossible Activation (Ex): At 21st level, you disregard effects that prevent you from activating magic items. For example, you can speak a command word even when *silenced*, or activate a mental command item while dominated or unconscious. This does not apply to items for which you don't meet the requirements, but you automatically get a result of 20 on all Use Magic Device checks.

In addition, you never provoke attacks of opportunity for activating a magic item.

Charge Item (Ex): At 21st level, you get the most out of your magic items. Once per day as a swift action, you can add one charge to an item that has charges or get an extra use out of an item that has a limited number of uses per day. If the item has multiple functions that have charges (such as a staff) or multiple functions that have a number of uses per day, you choose which one to increase or restore.

Disjunction Ward (Su): At 24th level, magic items you possess are protected against magical disjunction. If an effect (such as *Mordenkainen's disjunction*) would cause an item you hold, wear, or have on your body to become nonmagical, you can choose to negate that effect (for your items only) and to cause the effect's caster (if within line of effect) to suffer the effect himself. This feature also offers some protection to items you own, but don't have with you. An item you own that is not being worn or held by someone else gets a bonus on its saving throws equal to half your level.

Soul Transfer (Su): At 27th level, you can transfer your soul to an item when you die. This ability functions once per day. When you are reduced to 0 hit points, choose a magic item you possess. Your body blazes with cold blue light, then transforms into adamantine as the object becomes your soul's new home. As the object you have a fly speed of 30 feet (perfect), though if you transfer into an item your body's wearing, you won't be able to move. You can cast spells in this form, activate the item, and attack with it if it's a weapon (or similar item). Anything you do using this item functions as it normally would, and you still count the bonuses for magic items your body's wearing.

In this form, you can be attacked only as an item, not a creature (mind-affecting effects are an exception). If the item is destroyed, you die.

Artifact Dominion (Su): At 30th level, you can call upon the power of various artifacts. An artifact called by artifact dominion appears, assists you briefly, then returns to the location from which it came. Choose three of the options from the list below. You can activate each effect once per day as a swift action. If at any time you possess one of these artifacts, you gain one extra use of the listed effect (and the artifact dominion effect doesn't prevent you from using the artifact normally).

Book of Exalted Deeds: You can use this effect only if you are lawful good, neutral good, or chaotic good. For 1 hour, you cast good spells and use good abilities at +2 caster level. During this time, you can also make a melee touch attack that deals 1d6 points of damage per character level to an evil creature.

Book of Vile Darkness: You can use this effect only if you are lawful evil, neutral evil, or chaotic evil. For 1 hour, you cast evil spells and use evil abilities at +2 caster level. During this time, you can also make a melee touch attack that deals 1d6 points of damage per character level to a good creature.

Olidamarra's Dice: Choose a creature within 20 feet (or yourself). Roll 1d6 and consult the table to determine the effect upon the creature. There is no saving throw.

Roll	Result

1	-1 penalty on attacks, saves, and checks for 1 hour
2	-4 penalty to AC for 10 minutes
3	+1 morale bonus on attacks and on saves against fear for 10 minutes
4	Gain effects of blur for 10 minutes
5	+1 insight bonus on all attacks, saves, and checks for 1 hour
6	Gain effects of freedom of movement for 1 hour

Sphere of Annihilation: Duplicate the effects of disintegrate, caster level 20.

Staff of the Magi: You gain spell resistance equal to 10 + your level for 1 hour, and you're invisible (as the greater invisibility spell) for 5 rounds.

Immortality of Metal and Stone: With your destiny complete, you can rest in a new form that can survive for eons, through any sort of calamity. You disperse your essence into artifacts of your own design. Perhaps you transfer fragments of your persona to twelve amulets that wait to be picked up by the next generation of epic heroes. Or you could become an adamantine vessel that travels the skies, using supernatural senses to seek out danger and end it. Maybe your bones become artifacts, imbuing those who come upon them with some of your power. And if your next campaign is a 4th Edition game, you can use the artifact rules (in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) to model your character's new incarnation.

Blade of Ragnarok

When powerful forces desire to end the world or to snuff out existence, you will be there. With power that is destined to be under your command, you can fight off any threat. There is no danger you cannot face, and on the battlefields where the fate of everyone and everything is decided, you will stand victorious. You can fight the most powerful of creatures -- those regarded as invincible by almost everyone.

Requirements: 21st level.

Blade of Ragnarok

Level	Benefit
21st	Unbreakable body, weapon of ruin
24th	Slayer's fury
27th	Unstoppable tenacity
30th	Destiny strike

Unbreakable Body (Ex): At 21st level, you gain damage reduction 5/--. Unlike most damage reduction, this stacks with all other DR. You automatically succeed on saving throws when you take massive damage.

Weapon of Ruin (Su): At 21st level, your attacks have abilities that let them bypass some damage reduction. You gain the aligned strike (corresponding to your alignment), epic strike, and magic strike qualities (*Rules Compendium*, pages 100-101).

You can also emulate a material or damage type on all your attacks. Only one can be in effect at a time, and changing it is a move action. The effect is continuous. You can treat your attacks as bludgeoning, piercing, slashing, adamantine, cold iron, or silver (with no damage penalty).

You also gain the ability to make a Sense Motive check (opposed by the target's Bluff) to determine the damage reduction type (but not amount) of a creature you can see.

Slayer's Fury (Su): At 24th level, you gain the ability to make devastatingly accurate attacks. Twice per day as a swift action, you gain a +20 luck bonus on all attack rolls you make on your current turn, and your critical hit range is doubled. Furthermore, you suffer no miss chance on the attacks and can re-roll any 1 you roll on an attack or damage roll.

Unstoppable Tenacity (Ex): At 27th level, you can fight when you should be dead. You don't die when you reach -10 hit points. Instead, you die when you have negative hit points equal to half your full normal hit points.

Furthermore, you can keep fighting when you are below 0 hit points. When reduced to -1 or fewer hit points, you automatically become stable and can choose to keep fighting. If you keep fighting while below 0 hit points, you take a -1 penalty on attacks, saves, and checks.

Destiny Strike (Su): At 30th level, you can make attacks that strip away the defenses of powerful enemies. You can use this ability three times per day. Before making an attack, you can declare it to be a destiny strike (a free action). If you hit, the DM lists all of the following the hit creature possesses: damage reduction, fast healing, immunities, miss chance (including from incorporeality), regeneration, resistance to energy, spell resistance, and turn resistance. You can suppress one of those benefits for 3 rounds. If it has multiple types of immunities or resistances, choose only one. The DM lists only the types, not the amounts. For example, the DM would tell you a monster has fast healing, fire resistance, and spell resistance, not that it has fast healing 23, fire resistance 10, and spell resistance 35.

The Long Wait of Immortality: Your destiny quest has been fulfilled. Most likely, you fought off an evil that could have destroyed your world, your plane, or all of creation. Your work done, you pass into hibernation in an unknown place, sleeping until you are needed once more. You've become a legendary, godlike figure. The one who is prophesied to return when needed once again. When another threat arises that is as powerful as the last, you might rise to stop it . . . but you might need to be awakened. A group of adventurers could seek you out to tap into the deep well of your martial power. And perhaps your new character can be one of these brave souls.

Demigod

Over the course of adventuring, you have attained some small degree of inherent divine power. This initial spark is different from what divine spellcasters tap into, because it comes from within, not through worship or from the great deeds you have accomplished. As you travel through this epic destiny, you gain a small following of worshipers, which grows with each level until you become a full-fledged deity, and enhances your inherent divine power.

Note that the demigod epic destiny does not use the demigod traits outlined in Deities and Demigods. This is to keep the demigod's abilities more in line with the rest of the party, and for simplicity's sake.

Requirements: 21st level.

Demigod

Level	Benefit
21st	Divine spark, death denied
24th	Regenerative touch
27th	Divine surge
30th	Miracle

Divine Spark: At 21st level, you gain either a +1 inherent bonus to each of two ability scores or a +2 inherent bonus to one ability score.

Death Denied: At 21st level, you become resistant to attacks that would instantly kill you. You gain a +5 luck bonus on saving throws against necromancy effects and saving throws against massive damage. If you roll a 1 on one of these types of saving throws, you can re-roll the die. If you succeed on a save against a necromancy spell, you suffer no effect, even if you would normally suffer a partial effect.

Regenerative Touch (Sp): At 24th level, you gain the ability to use regenerate at will (caster level 20).

Divine Surge (Su): At 27th level, you can restore yourself to fighting form. Once per day as an immediate action, you can use this ability to restore yourself to full maximum hit points and gain the benefit of *greater restoration*.

Miracle (Sp): At 30th level, you can use *miracle* once per day. You choose what happens, using your own divine power instead of making a request of a deity. You must still pay any XP and component costs required by the miracle spell. Use your character level to determine the caster level.

Divine Immortality: When you reach the end of your destiny quest, you become a true deity (if a minor one). Perhaps you create your own divine domain and portfolio, or perhaps a deity you had a close connection with gives you a piece of his power in respect for your incredible service. You might want to design a divine portfolio, holy symbol, and other trappings of your own faith before the campaign ends, and share those with the group when you finish your destiny quest. When you reach godhood, the adventuring life seems quaint compared to the power you wield. Your character's need to travel and battle mortal threats is finished, but her influence on other adventurers might not be. Perhaps the deity you've become will even be a major player in your next campaign.

Eternal Hero

Over many eons, in many bodies, with many names, you have adventured and conquered. In an endless cycle of death and rebirth, you have attained the name "hero" in many lands and many incarnations. When you die, you always return again, as a new hero. You might be very different in each form, but a common thread binds one soul to all these manifestations. You learn to draw on the strength and resolve of your past selves to fight off death itself.

Requirements: 21st level.

Eternal Hero

Level	Benefit
21st	Continual resurrection, death denied
24th	Quickening
27th	Eternal renewal
30th	Nexus of many lives

Continual Resurrection: At 21st level, you gain the ability to return from the dead. At dawn each day, if you are dead, you are restored to life (as *true resurrection*). You can set a place where you want to be resurrected. (You must be standing in that place when you make the choice.) When you are resurrected, you can choose to be resurrected in the place you choose or in the place you died. You can choose a new location for your place of resurrection once per level.

Death Denied: At 21st level, you become resistant to attacks that would instantly kill you. You gain a +5 luck bonus on saving throws against necromancy effects. If you succeed on a save against a necromancy spell, you suffer no effect, even if you would normally suffer a partial effect.

You gain a +10 luck bonus on saving throws against death attacks and saving throws against massive damage. If you roll a 1 on one of these types of saving throws, you can re-roll the die.

Quickening: At 24th level, your body begins to heal at an amazing rate. At the start of your turn, you gain a number of temporary hit points equal to your level. If you already have any temporary hit points when you gain these temporary hit points, they do not stack -- use only the higher value.

Eternal Renewal (Su): At 27th level, you gain the ability to immediately come back from death's door. When you take damage that reduces you to below 0 hit points (even if you go below -10 hit points), you can use this ability as an immediate action. You go to 0 hit points, then regain a number of hit points equal to half your maximum hit points. You can use this ability twice per day, increasing to four times per day at 30th level.

Nexus of Many Lives: At 30th level, you can tap into the power of one of your past incarnations. You can use this ability once per day. When you do, choose which incarnation to activate and use the effect listed. Upon gaining this class feature, you must choose a weapon type for the warrior incarnation, the arcane spell for the arcanist incarnation, the divine spell for the disciple incarnation, and up to three options for the traitor incarnation.

The Warrior (Su): Make a full attack as a standard action. For the purpose of this attack, you have a +25 base attack bonus, a +11 Strength modifier, and a magic weapon with up to a +8 enhancement bonus and special properties equaling up to a total +5 bonus equivalent (you must choose the weapon's bonus and properties when you gain this epic destiny feature). You can apply any spells affecting you or feats you have to these attacks.

The Arcanist (Sp): Duplicate the effect of any 7th-level arcane spell from any class list. Your caster level is equal to your character level for this spell. While casting this spell, you do not suffer arcane spell failure, you automatically succeed on Concentration checks, and you gain a +10 bonus on caster level checks to overcome spell resistance.

The Disciple (Sp): Duplicate the effect of any 7th-level divine spell from any class list. Your caster level is equal

to your character level for this spell. While casting this spell, you automatically succeed on Concentration checks and you gain a +10 bonus on caster level checks to overcome spell resistance.

The Traitor (Sp): Duplicate the effect of any 8th-level evil spell from any class list. This can include spells that can attain the evil descriptor if used in certain ways, such as *summon monster* spells, but must be cast as the evil version if used in this way. When you use the traitor manifestation, you might become evil if you are not already. Make a Charisma check (DC 20) after you use the manifestation. If you fail and are good, change the good axis of your alignment to neutral. If you are not good or evil, change neutral to evil. Your caster level is equal to your character level for this spell. While casting this spell, you automatically succeed on Concentration checks and you gain a +10 bonus on caster level checks to overcome spell resistance.

Immortality in Rebirth: Despite your ability to avoid it, you will eventually face death. It might be from a foe too powerful to overcome, but whom you might face again in another life. Or, you might have finished your destiny quest and realized your work is done in this body and it is time to move on. In either case, your soul returns to its true essence, and you experience, briefly, knowledge beyond all mortal ken. Then, you find yourself once again in a new body. Does this manifestation know anything about its past lives now or will it learn more later on? Does this form resemble the last or are they far different? All these might be questions to explore with your next character.

Force of Nature

Your connection to nature has always been strong, but now it grows deeper still. Wherever you go, your essence infuses the landscape all around you, and you are likewise affected by your surroundings. You can manifest the power of the weather and call upon all the animal and plant life of the terrain to defend you or strike your foes. The strength of stone, the fluidity of water, and the life force of the trees are all a part of you. In time, it becomes difficult to separate you from the land, as it and your soul merge into one.

Requirements: 21st level, wild shape class feature

Force of Nature

Level	Benefit
21st	Boon of nature
24th	Improved boon of nature
27th	Storm suffusion
30th	Environment shape

Boon of Nature (Su): At 21st level, you gain a continuous benefit that gets better in certain types of environments. You have access to two of the different boons listed below (chosen when you acquire this class feature), and can swap out boons as a swift action. The benefit applies in both your normal form and when wild shaped (or otherwise in an alternate form).

Boon of Life: At will, you can use a swift action to heal a creature within close range (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels). This effect cures a number of points of damage equal to half your character level. While you are in an area where plant growth is pervasive (such as a forest or meadow), you have fast healing 10.

Boon of Stone: You have DR 3/adamantine while this boon is active. If you have the ability to wild shape into an elemental, you can wild shape into any elemental with the earth subtype (within the normal size and HD restrictions). If you're in an area where stone is common (such as a mountain or stone-walled structure), you can trigger a minor tremor as a swift action. The range is long (400 ft. + 40 ft./level) and affects any creature standing on the ground within a 30-foot-radius spread. An affected creature must make a Reflex save (DC 20 + your Wisdom modifier) or fall prone.

Boon of Storms: At will, you can use a swift action to tap into the power of lightning or wind. You can call down a streak of lightning against a creature within medium range. It requires a ranged touch attack to hit and deals 1d6 points of electricity damage per two character levels. If you have the ability to wild shape into an elemental, you can wild shape into any elemental with the air subtype (within the normal size and HD restrictions). If you're under an open sky, you gain concealment (20% miss chance) while this boon is active.

Boon of Water: While this boon is active, you gain DR 3/magic and resistance to fire 10. If you have the ability to wild shape into an elemental, you can wild shape into any elemental with the water subtype (within the normal size and HD restrictions). While you are in an aquatic environment, you gain the benefits of *freedom of*

movement and *water breathing*.

Improved Boon of Nature: At 24th level, you gain access to one additional boon of nature.

Storm Suffusion (Su): At 27th level, you take on the form of an immense storm when you are in danger of dying. When you are reduced to 0 hit points or fewer, you become a storm. This duplicates the effects of a *storm of vengeance*, with the radius of the effect centered on the square where you were. Use your character level for the caster level and your Wisdom modifier for the ability bonus. This effect lasts for 5 rounds (it's not dismissable when used this way), at which time you return to your natural form at 0 hit points and become stable. You can use this ability once per day.

Environment Shape (Su): At 30th level, you can assume the form of the terrain around you when you wild shape. When you do so, choose one of the forms listed below that is applicable in your current environment. You fuse with the terrain, taking up a 15-foot cube of space within the terrain type you choose (this cube must be adjacent to you when you change shape). This makes you fill the same amount of space as a Huge creature, and attacks against you can target any square in that space (though you don't take any of the modifiers for being Huge).

You can "move" at your normal speed, though you're actually moving your essence from one part of the environment to another. Consequently, this movement doesn't provoke attacks of opportunity.

Unlike with other uses of wild shape, your physical ability scores do not change and gear you wear still functions, though you can't activate items. If you are targeted by a spell that would affect the terrain (such as *transmute rock to mud* or *whirlwind*), you get a Fortitude saving throw. If you fail, you return to your natural form in a square adjacent to the space you occupied as the terrain.

Form of Life: You must be in an area where plant growth is pervasive. You gain the benefits of boon of life (see above). You can make a grapple check as a swift action that doesn't provoke attacks of opportunity. You can use a slam attack as a swift action or a standard action. You can use *control plants* and *entangle* at will, as supernatural abilities.

Form of Stone: You must be in an area where stone is common. You gain the benefits of boon of stone (see above). You gain a melee touch attack that knocks the target prone. You can use this attack as a swift action or a standard action. You can use *earthquake* as a supernatural ability, using your character level as the caster level. You can do this once while in this form (returning to normal form, then using wild shape to return to form of stone allows you to use *earthquake* again). You can also cast spells with the earth descriptor normally while in this form (as the Natural Spell feat), and you use them as though you were three caster levels higher.

Form of Storms: Only while under an open sky, you gain the benefits of boon of storms (see above), plus the following additional features. You gain a slam attack that deals 2d8 (plus your Strength modifier) points of damage and knocks the target back 20 feet. You can use this slam attack as a swift action or a standard action. You can use *call lightning storm* as a supernatural ability while in this form. This is an at-will ability, but you can have only one in effect at a time. You can also cast spells with the air or electricity descriptor normally while in this form (as the Natural Spell feat), and you use them as though you were three caster levels higher.

Form of Water: You must be in an aquatic environment. You gain the benefits of boon of water (see above). You gain a slam attack that deals 2d10 (plus your Strength modifier) points of damage and knocks the target back 10 feet. You can use this slam attack as a swift action or a standard action. You can use *waterspout* (*Spell Compendium* 236) as a supernatural ability, using your character level as the caster level. This is an at-will ability, but you can have only one waterspout active at a time. Unlike the normal spell, this waterspout has a 10-foot radius and can suck in Large and Huge creatures. You can also cast spells with the water descriptor normally while in this form (as the Natural Spell feat), and you use them as though you were three caster levels higher.

Immortality of the Earth and Planes: Your life force pulses with the rhythms of the natural world, and in time you can no longer tell which is which. Your essence flows from place to place in the world, and from plane to plane. You see many things, but care little for events that don't harm the plants and animals of the planes. Over the eons, your name becomes forgotten -- heard only in the rustle of leaves, the crash of thunder, and the babbling of brooks.

Mythic Shadow

Legends of your exploits have traveled the world, but they seem so unreal that most consider your very existence a rumor. An enemy might, if he's lucky, catch a glimpse of you in the shadows before he feels your blade in his back. Those who bring the fight to you find you an elusive opponent -- almost impossible to keep in one place or to hit effectively. Being a mythic shadow means you won't get all the glory you deserve, so you'll have to take comfort in being the one person who knows how good you really are.

Requirements: 21st level

Mythic Shadow Level	Benefit
21st	Improved precision damage, phantom visage
24th	Spectral stride
27th	Spurn death
30th	Shadow strike

Improved Precision Damage (Ex): At 21st level, any attack you make that gets extra precision damage (because you're able to strike a vital spot with an ability such as the rogue's sneak attack, ninja's sudden strike, or scout's skirmish) becomes more powerful. Increase the size of your precision damage dice by one step.

Phantom Visage (Su): At 21st level, you are under a constant *greater invisibility* effect. You can suppress or resume this effect as a swift action.

Spectral Stride (Su): At 24th level, you gain the ability to move through solid objects. Doing so requires you to have a 10-foot running start. Additionally, you treat these objects as difficult terrain (each square of movement counts as 2 squares, each diagonal square counts as 3), and you can't end your movement inside a solid object. This movement provokes attacks of opportunity normally, but you have concealment (20% miss chance) against such attacks.

Spurn Death (Su): At 27th level, you can usually avoid being killed or disabled. If you would be reduced to 0 hit points or fewer by an attack or die from massive damage from an attack, you can use an immediate action to attempt to spurn death. You have a 50% chance to avoid all damage from the attack.

Shadow Strike: At 30th level, your attacks with weapons, natural weapons, or unarmed strikes become touch attacks.

Immortality in the Shadows: Many characters who achieve their epic destinies leave the world, but you might not want to. Ageless and always concealed from sight, you can find out many things you're not supposed to know. There are still so many places to go and things to see that you might not tire of earthly delights for some time. Occasionally, you might even hear a story about yourself and your exploits. Perhaps you'll even spread a few rumors of your own. There's something satisfying about watching tales of your legendary deeds grow and become well-known legends, and if there are a few exaggerations here and there, who does it hurt? When the bards sing tales of your first adventures, even if you're actually 3 feet shorter than they say and you didn't really kill 800 orcs with one swing of your blade, it still feels like old times. In time, as your tale becomes taller and taller, you can no longer remember whether you're a real person, or just an old story.

How to Implement Epic Destinies

If you decide to use epic destinies in your campaign, you'll need to dedicate yourself to working closely with your players, and you may possibly need to give up some of your control as a DM (but if you're playing epic level, you've probably gotten used to that anyway). The epic destiny a player chooses gives you a good idea of what she expects to get out of the final stages of a campaign.

As a DM, epic destinies are a great tool for crafting the last adventures of your campaign. If you've already plotted out the endgame, try tying destiny quests into the story. Let's say you're using Atropus from *Elder Evils* as a threat in your game (either a version you've modified to epic levels or one you're fighting using the "Non-Epic Epic Destinies" variant). This undead planetoid can obliterate all on an entire world if it's not stopped. A blade of Ragnarok character thrills at the prospect of a battle to decide the fate of the world. The force of nature must stop the destruction of natural life. The demigod sees the failure of the deities to stop the incoming destruction, and vows to become a deity who will be prepared for such extreme dangers. The eternal hero's previous incarnation is the one who inadvertently called Atropus to your world, and must stop the creature to redeem himself.

The immortality section of each epic destiny also includes ways you can create continuity between campaigns. By linking the epic characters from previous campaigns to your next campaign, you can give players a sense of a larger world and give their characters a more important role within it. This approach works especially well if you plan to do multiple campaigns in the same world.

Here are some suggestions for engaging characters who are using epic destinies in your campaign.

Artifact Lords in Your Campaign

Item-related hooks can draw in the artifact lord player. You can use an artifact lord character to bring artifacts into your game.

- The party finds a deck of cards that looks much like a *deck of many things*. However, instead of the normal faces, each of the 22 cards has a message scrawled on it describing a mission. The PCs find that if they complete a mission, the message transforms into a single letter. What could the 22-letter message be?
- One of the artifact lord's items, which seemed to be a normal magic item, suddenly becomes intelligent. Its personality seems benign, even helpful at times. But soon, other party members' items gain sentience, too, and they all share the same personality. As it spreads, the items grow rebellious, but you can't get rid of them. What is this being, and why is it taking over your items?

Blades of Ragnarok in Your Campaign

Combat and world-ending threats are compelling to a blade of Ragnarok. Only the biggest threats draw the notice of such a powerful warrior.

- Signs of deadly portent abound. The night sky is filled with strange phenomena, and a scourge upon the land brings drought, famine, and disease (see "Signs of Apocalypse," *Elder Evils* pages 7-10). The signs are clear, but there are so many. Is it possible many evils rise against the world at the same time?
- There is not just one blade of Ragnarok, and their numbers are split. A blade of Ragnarok sits on the throne of a small empire in the Outlands, far from other civilized life. He kidnaps beings from across the planes and brings them here to serve as slaves. All manner of creatures from solars to titans to great wyrm dragons toil, bound magically to his command. They carry out many schemes, and if the PCs can follow them to the Outlands and slay the corrupt blade of Ragnarok, they can greatly influence the apocalyptic battle.

Demigods in Your Campaign

Adventure hooks for demigods usually deal with existing deities and danger in good deities' domains.

- Becoming a true deity requires great sacrifice and dedication. The existing deities devise challenges for one who might join their number, and there's no guarantee that Ehlonna or Pelor will be any more lenient than Hextor or Gruumsh. These challenges can be folded into other adventures (and much of the difficulty lies in discovering when you are being challenged). Theme these challenges to the deities who chose them. Kord might demand a test of courage in battle. Vecna might want the demigod to infiltrate the power structure of one of his followers he suspects of deception. Fharlanghn might send the demigod traversing across the planes, gathering dust or useless trinkets from every corner.
- A deity needs to travel to a distant place. Perhaps it is beyond all the planes, in a place difficult for anyone but a deity to fathom. Perhaps the deity needs to assume a less powerful form for some time. In any case, it's too dangerous to let others know of the deity's absence. The demigod character must impersonate the deity, see to the affairs of the divine domain, and generally maintain appearances. This "trial run" for godhood might come with unwanted surprises . . .

Eternal Heroes in Your Campaign

Since eternal heroes all have deep histories, it's easy to incorporate them into your campaign. Here are a few plot hooks related to eternal heroes.

- The PCs find a magic item or artifact that belonged to a previous incarnation of the eternal hero. Inscribed on it is writing in a secret language only the eternal hero can understand. It warns of impending danger.
- The eternal hero hears about a villain that gives her an odd mental image. She discovers she encountered this villain in a previous incarnation. Perhaps this was someone the eternal hero was unable to defeat, an undead form of the original, or even an "eternal villain" who will always return to plague the hero.
- The party encounters a descendent of one of the previous incarnations of the eternal hero. This descendent wields some of the power of that incarnation. This could even be one of the PCs, if the players are game.

Forces of Nature in Your Campaign

The secrets of the natural world are known to the force of nature, and they can be a source of adventure ideas.

- The grass, the animals, and the rock of the earth speak to the force of nature. Every place of evil, and every dungeon in which aberrant creatures live, is like a disease in nature's body. Nature's life force is growing dim and could be snuffed out. Eons ago, shards of a vast, green crystal -- a heart of the earth -- were wrenched from the earth and scattered into hidden places across the planes by vile beings. If the PCs can recover the pieces and reform this nexus of nature's power, nature's resurgence can blot out the grotesque mockeries that dot the surface of the world.
- A powerful group of mind flayers (similar to the mind flayers of Thoon, *Monster Manual V*, pages 104-125) seeks a mysterious substance called "quintessence." It exists in many places, and the mind

flayers are willing to extract it even from living creatures. Every time they extract it, the earth -- and the force of nature -- feel pain. The mind flayers are ruled by a thoon elder brain (*MM5* 144, advanced to 30 HD). The leaders of the group are ulitharid sorcerers (*LoM* 158), who aspire to gain even more power by becoming alhoons (**LoM** 157) kept alive with quintessence. You can use advanced versions of the thoon creatures as rank and file.

Mythic Shadows in Your Campaign

When a mythic shadow hears about an impenetrable fortress or well-guarded secret, she considers it a challenge. Sometimes, the reward for pulling off an unlikely scheme is just being able to say you could do it.

- The city of Sigil (*Dungeon Master's Guide* 167) is vast, and no one knows all its secrets. Several centuries ago, a sage began recording every door in the city, and he actually almost completed his list. However, he met with a messy end. His assassins failed to account for all his magical countermeasures, and his vast folio of maps landed in the hands of the mythic shadow, for unknown reasons. It seems like someone wanted to keep the sage from completing the list. Can the PCs discover why that is, and how the mythic shadow became involved?
- The mythic shadow walks the thin line between reality and legend, as does the Mazraghar Fortress. Tales bandied about between epic adventurers say that the fortress was formed with giant bricks carved from the substance of different planes and serving as a window into each. One brick is a slice of Arboria, another a chunk of the Negative Energy Plane, and so on. The fortress was created by a great dragon, and all his friends and allies died while building the fortress. When it was done, the dragon went inside and hasn't left. He now sits, watching all areas on all the planes, but with no companionship. Stories about the fortress are assumed to be fables, illustrating moral concepts about how ambition and power bring only solitude. But the mythic shadow character is not so sure they aren't true. What kind of power rests in Mazraghar Fortress? How can the PCs get there? And how does one get past a dragon who can see all places?

Variant: Non-Epic Epic Destinies

Despite the name, it's possible to use epic destinies at non-epic levels. If you don't feel like playing in an epic campaign, you can change the prerequisite of the Epic Destiny feat and the levels at which you replace feats with epic destiny features.

Epic Level	Non-Epic Level
21st	12th
24th	15th
27th	18th
30th	20th

*The 20th-level feature doesn't replace a feat.

Keep in mind that the epic destiny features are much more powerful below epic level! Your game automatically has a higher power level than normal, and the power between characters is very unbalanced unless every character has an epic destiny. You can use tougher monsters to compensate, though you can give XP as though the monsters were lower CR to keep advancement at the rate you want.

About the Author

Logan Bonner joined Wizards of the Coast as in 2006 as an editor on **Dungeons & Dragons**. He had no experience in the industry prior to joining Wizards, and marvels that his clever ruse has lasted this long. After doing some class design work for 4th Edition on the side, he joined the mechanical design team. His previous editing products include *Magic Item Compendium* and *Monster Manual V*, and he wrote about half of the *Eberron Survival Guide*.

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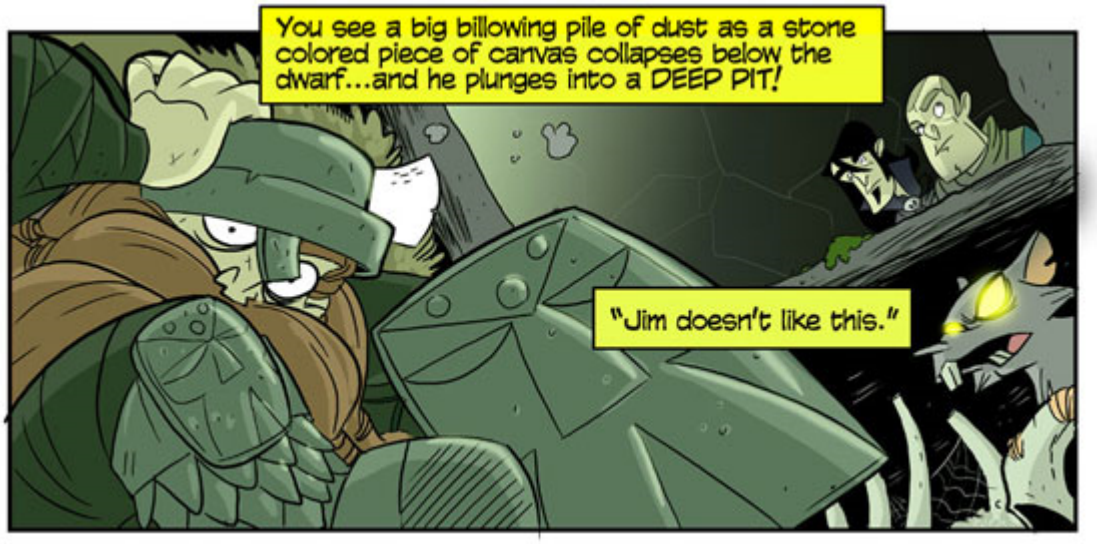
Penny Arcade/PvP Podcast

Episode 1

The folks at *Penny Arcade* and *PvP* sat down with R&D's Chris Perkins to play 4th Edition **Dungeons & Dragons** (for some of them, it was their very first game of **D&D**). How did it go? Well, they recorded the entire session—which we're thrilled to offer in episodic podcasts, along *Penny Arcade* comics commemorating the game!

In this episode, the players make their most difficult decision: What to name their characters. And although they don't quite meet the infamous rat king, they do experience the horrors of a rat swarm.



Warning: This podcast contains strong language.

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The Havoc Orb

by the D&D Community (final stats by Robert Wiese)

*Based on the results of the "You Craft the Creature" feature on the **D&D** website.*

Shifting cogs and shining spindles comprise the body of this creature, but as they revolve to grip the surrounding trees they become . . . unnatural. They ripple like flesh, passing through each other like smoke. And in the middle of it all is a single glaring eye.

Havoc Orb CR 16
hp 204 (24 HD); **DR** 10/--

LE Large aberration
Init +3; **Senses** blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft., geometric vision; Listen +29, Spot +29
Aura wild magic
Languages Common, Fey

AC 20, touch 19, flat-footed 27; Dodge, Mobility
(–1 size, +3 Dex, +11 natural, +7 Int)
Resist acid 30, cold 30, electricity 30, fire 30, force 20, sonic 20, all other typed and untyped energy 20; 20% chance to have evasion and mettle against any other spell, spell-like, or supernatural effect; SR 30
Fort +12, **Ref** +11, **Will** +16

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)
Melee 2 claws +19 (1d8+2)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Base Atk +18; **Grp** +24
Atk Options Combat Reflexes, Elusive Target
Special Actions eldritch blast 9d6 at will (+20 ranged touch, range 60 ft., can empower 3/day and maximize 3/day)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th):
At will -- *suggestion* (DC 20)
3/day -- *quickened greater dispel magic* (dispel check +20), *phantasmal killer* (DC 21)
1/day -- *displacement*, *good hope*

Abilities Str 15, Dex 17, Con 18, Int 25, Wis 14, Cha 22
SQ blasphemous geometries, geometric vision, that won't work on me twice, wild magic aura
Feats Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Elusive Target, Empower Spell-Like Ability (eldritch blast), Leadership, Maximize Spell-Like Ability (eldritch blast), Mobility, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*greater dispel magic*), Supernatural Transformation (*eldritch blast*)
Skills Bluff +24, Concentration +29, Diplomacy +32, Disguise +6 (+8 acting), Intimidate +8, Knowledge (arcana) +31, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +19, Knowledge (nature) +19, Knowledge (the planes) +29, Listen +29, Sense Motive +29, Spellcraft +36, Spot +29, Survival +2 (+4 on other planes, underground, and in aboveground natural environments)
Advancement 25–48 (Large)

Blasphemous Geometries (Ex) Being an outsider from another dimension, the havoc orb's form does not translate well on the Material Plane. It appears to be composed of obscene angles and planes, which makes it difficult for natives to perceive. As a result of its alien nature, the havoc orb's body reacts strangely and unpredictably to native objects traveling in normal vectors toward it. It gains a bonus to AC equal to its Intelligence modifier (if positive). Also, any targeted ranged attack is automatically redirected to a random creature within 100 feet of the creature (including the creature, and the originator of the attack if in range). Add up the number of foes within 100 feet of the creature, add the creature, then randomly select a target. Area effects are not redirected.

Geometric Vision (Ex) Since the havoc orb is from another dimension, its lines of vision are not direct. It can see around corners and behind objects. Effectively, cover does not exist for purposes of hiding from the havoc orb or for granting an AC bonus to the creature's attacks.

That Won't Work on Me Twice (Ex) Any time an effect or attack is used against the havoc orb, its internal chemistry changes to stop such an attack from hurting it again. This ability grants it resistance 30 to acid, cold, electricity, and fire, resistance 20 to sonic and force, and resistance 20 to all other typed and untyped energy damage. Further, the havoc orb has DR 10/-- because it has adjusted to make itself resistant to weapon and natural attacks. Lastly, there is a 20% chance that it has been targeted or affected by any other spell, spell-like, or supernatural effect. If so, the creature is treated as having evasion and mettle (*Complete Divine* p50) against that effect, whether the effect allows spell resistance or not. Additionally, during a current combat, it gains these benefits against any magical effect used against it.

Wild Magic Aura (Su) The havoc orb is a natural conduit for wild magic. Anyone within 120 feet of the havoc orb

must make a DC 25 caster level check when casting a spell or using a spell-like ability. Failure means the spell is affected as if it had been cast in a wild magic zone (see table on page 150 of the *DMG*). The havoc orb's spell-like abilities are not affected by this aura.

The havoc orb is a living mechanism from a distant plane that leads retinues of evil fey creatures in a great effort to eliminate all chaos from the multiverse, including life. It resents even the chaos of its fey retinue, but it suffers them until all other chaos is eliminated because it plans to destroy them last of all.

Strategies and Tactics

The havoc orb draws attention by striking directly and openly, and it employs powerful defenses that protect it from most attacks. This frees its minions to harass opponents. It begins with its *good hope* ability, and then makes a direct attack on the most potent enemy creature, usually with *eldritch blast* but sometimes with *phantasmal killer*. It uses its quickened *greater dispel magic* ability in the second and following rounds against enemies that are likely to have spells on them. Against fighter types it employs its Elusive Target feat every round to confound Power Attack, and it relies on its significant defenses to occupy foes while its minions attack the foes. After a few rounds using spell-like abilities, it begins using maximized and empowered *eldritch blasts* to weaken the enemy healers and spellcasters before confronting the fighter types.

The minions, most of whom have rogue levels or abilities, flank and harass foes, gaining maximum damage and disrupting spellcasting attacks if they can. Due to the creature's Leadership score (25), it has at its disposal (and usually nearby) a group of 135 fey composed of evil grig rogues, jaebrin (*Monster Manual V*), and evil hybsils (*Monsters of Faerûn*), 13 domovoi (*Frostburn*), 7 shadar-kais (*Fiend Folio*), 4 shaedlings (*Monster Manual V*), 2 spriggans (*Fiend Folio*), and 2 6–HD redcaps (*Monster Manual III*) as followers. Its cohort is a powerful fighting fey, such as a banshrae (*Monster Manual V*) with a couple of monk or rogue levels or a 12–HD elder redcap (*Monster Manual III*) with 5 ranger levels. None of these add to the havoc orb's CR.

Sample Encounters

A havoc orb and its retinue travel from place to place in the forests, and they have no fixed lair. In this way, it serves as a moving ravager monster. Sometimes additional fey join the creature for short periods, so it can be encountered with more powerful fey than normally found in its retinue.

Devastated Fey Grove (EL 16): A havoc orb and its retinue have overrun a grove where good fey, including dryads, grigs, hybsils, nymphs, and satyrs were at play. Now the good fey are in a fight for their lives, and losing rapidly. Their only hope might be the PCs.

Lunar Madness (EL 17): Instead of its usual retinue, a havoc orb is using twelve lunar ravagers (*Monster Manual IV*) to wreak destruction on a humanoid settlement at the edge of a forest. Perhaps the PCs are staying the night there on their way to some other adventure.

Roving Rage (EL 18): Two ragewalkers (*Monster Manual III*) have joined with a havoc orb and serve as its advance warriors. The ragewalkers attack first, followed by the more powerful members of the retinue, while the havoc orb launches eldritch blasts at foes to draw them toward itself.

Havoc Orb Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (dungeoneering) can learn more about the havoc orb. When a character makes a successful skill check, the following information is recalled (including that for lower DCs).

Knowledge (Dungeoneering)

DC	Result
26	This creature is a havoc orb. It is a bizarre creature from a distant plane that loathes all life. It leads groups of evil fey creatures and relies on powerful defenses. This reveals all aberration traits.

31 A havoc orb has a variety of spell-like abilities that it can quicken, empower, or maximize.

36 A havoc orb is well protected against most attacks, having damage reduction, spell resistance, and a special ability to make itself immune to new attacks that affect it. Attacks directed at it are warped by its strange geometry and sometimes redirected at its opponents.

41 Havoc orbs are conduits for wild magic, and spells cast at the creature can be warped in unknown ways if the caster is not well focused.

Ecology

The havoc orb is a living mechanism. It is created in a factory on some distant lawful plane through an unknown process. To create one, the very fabric of chaos from Limbo is taken and carefully urged into an order that is metastable. It is because of this metastability that havoc orbs go mad when confronted with a non-ordered reality that they must compute, calculate, and model internally.

Environment: The havoc orb is attracted to areas of higher natural chaos, such as forests. It also attracts chaos to itself, which is why the fey are so enamored of it. Thus, it prefers forests and mountainous areas of wilderness on the Material Plane. The creature perceives an inherent order in water, and so avoids lakes and seas, but a havoc orb can easily adapt to living underwater, and in rare cases one might find one of these creatures under a sea leading aquatic fey.

Typical Physical Characteristics: A havoc orb is a creature of spinning gears and spindles that moves with precision. About 12 feet tall, its claws change as they come into contact with other creatures or matter to mimic that material. The effect is hard to see because the appendages seem to ripple and vanish into whatever it is touching. The creature's limbs phase through each other so that it can move perfectly, if slowly, without getting tangled in its own legs. The limbs also phase through the central eye, which does not become insubstantial at all. The central eye is the anchor for the creature on whatever plane it is on; without that anchor the creature would reorganize its body to become part of the multiverse.

Alignment: These creatures are always lawful evil. They begin existence as lawful neutral creatures on their home plane, which is a place of perfect order easy for them to understand. As soon as they experience any other reality, they go mad and twist to evil. This may seem a stark contradiction to its body, but it is a creature of perfectly ordered chaos and thus coexists with its own incongruity.

Society

No societies of havoc orbs exist. Each has its own retinue of evil fey followers, but they never associate with others of their race because each is mad in its own unique way. Within that circle the society functions like any other fey group would. The havoc orb does not pay any real attention to its retinue other than to shepherd it along and lead it into combat.

Typical Treasure

Because havoc orbs don't have lairs, their treasure is all made up of jewels or magic items that can be carried around. This treasure is always found on the members of the fey retinue, since the creature itself doesn't care about or use magic items. Thus, the powerful members of the retinue usually have items that make up the value of a standard treasure for EL 16 (28,000 gp). These usually include magic weapons, protective items, and *ioun stones*. For some reason, *ioun stones* gravitate toward a havoc orb.

Havoc Orbs in Eberron

Creations of powers on Daanvi, these creatures are too lawful even for the Plane of Perfect Order. The essence that powers them comes from Dal Quor itself, from deep within the dream-filled depths. Because of this, one sage put forth the idea that the creatures are actually creations of the Quori.

The havoc orbs cross into Eberron when Daanvi is coterminous and then move to the forested regions of the Eldeen Reaches and Karrnath. They are a constant source of worry and activity for the Gatekeeper druids.

Havoc Orbs in Faerûn

Havoc orbs and their fey retinues live in the deepest forests of Faerûn, such as the Jungles of Chult, the High Forest, and the Chondalwood. In the last few years, more and more of them have appeared, and they have spread to smaller forests as they run into conflict with each other.

The Red Wizards, on learning of the existence of these creatures, have started experimenting on a small number. Shorn of their fey retinues, they have little offensive power and are somewhat safe to keep in captivity.

Additional Feats

These feats are not presented in the core rulebooks.

Elusive Target (*Complete Warrior*): The Elusive Target feat enables the use of three tactical maneuvers.

Negate Power Attack: To use this maneuver, you must designate a specific foe to be affected by your Dodge feat. If that foe uses the Power Attack feat against you, the foe gains no bonus on the damage roll but still takes the corresponding penalty on the attack roll.

Diverting Defense: To use this maneuver, you must be flanked and you must designate one of the flanking attackers to be affected by your Dodge feat. The first attack of the round from the designated attacker automatically misses you and may strike the other flanking foe instead; the attacking creature makes an attack roll normally, and its ally is considered flat-footed. If the designated attacker is making a full attack against you, its second and subsequent attacks function normally.

Cause Overreach: To use this maneuver, you must provoke an attack of opportunity from a foe by moving out of a threatened square. If the foe misses you, you can make a free trip attempt against this foe, and the foe does not get a chance to trip you if your attempt fails.

Maximize Spell-Like Ability (*Complete Arcane*): Choose one of your spell-like abilities (subject to the restrictions below) to use at maximum effectiveness up to three times per day (or the ability's normal use limit, whichever is less). All variable, numeric effects of the spell-like ability are maximized, dealing maximum damage, curing the maximum number of hit points, affecting the maximum number of targets, and so on. An empowered maximized spell-like ability gains the benefit of each feat separately (getting the maximum result plus one-half the normally rolled result). The spell-like ability you wish to maximize can be chosen only from those abilities that duplicate a spell of a level less than or equal to 1/2 your caster level (round down), minus 2.

Supernatural Transformation (*Savage Species*): One of your innate spell-like abilities becomes a supernatural ability. It is no longer subject to spell resistance, though it can still be suppressed in an *antimagic field*. Using this ability does not provoke an attack of opportunity. The number of uses, if limited, does not change. The effective caster level equals your total Hit Dice or the effective caster level of the original ability, whichever is higher.

About the Author

Robert Wiese has been playing **D&D** since 1978 after he watched a game played in the car on the way home from a Boy Scouts camping trip. He was fascinated, so he delved into this strange world of dragons and magic and sourcebooks. Years later, he was hired to edit tournaments for the **RPGA Network**, and from there he progressed to running the network after his boss was assassinated in the great Christmas purge of 1996. Times were tough, but he persevered and brought the **RPGA** into a shining new era. Eventually he met a girl who liked to play **D&D** too, and he left Renton for the warmth and casinos of Reno, Nevada. Now, he works in the Pharmacology department of UNR, where he studies mouse foot muscles and the effects of RF emissions on same, and teaches physics at Truckee Meadows Community College. He spends as much time as possible with his wife Rhonda, son Owen, and daughter Rebecca.

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The Oligarchy of Mavet Rav

by Uri Kurlianchik
Art by Drew Baker
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"Death is the thin line that separates the nobility from the common rabble."
-- Senator Ben Gufot

Sooner or later every adventurer has a brush with the authorities, whether they work for them to defeat some great evil, flee the law after being framed for a foul murder, or simply pay their taxes. In most cases we assume the government to be a benevolent monarchy or republic and the people to be normal and generally good folk. But what if interacting with the government and the people is the hardest part of the adventure? What if simply walking down the street is as challenging as surviving a trap-infested dungeon? This article explores such an unorthodox regime and presents four NPCs for inspiration or immediate usage in your campaign.

The Reign of the Dead: Building a Necrocracy

There are two types of necrocracies: direct and indirect. In direct necrocracy, high offices and positions of power are held by undead. This is most often found in evil, death-worshiping societies and frequently goes hand in hand with the worship of demon lords and evil gods. A more subtle form of necrocracy is when all important decisions are made after a consultation with the spirits of the dead. This type of government is most often seen in primitive tribal societies where the spirits of the ancestors are revered as gods. In rare and desperate occasions a good-aligned monarchy or democracy may seek the guidance of some legendary hero or ruler. Such consultations are a dangerous business, however, since death changes the mind of even the greatest heroes in deadly and unpredictable ways. . . .

A necrocratic city is constructed much like a normal city (see page 107 in *Dungeon Master's Guide II* for more details) except for one major difference: the abundance of powerful supernatural beings, usually encountered only in the deadliest of dungeons, eliminates many basic needs such as food, resources, defensible positions, or even water. Why bother when you can simply conjure all these, or have your horde of mindless undead fetch them from anywhere in the region? Keeping this in mind, you can place a thriving metropolis in the middle of a lifeless desert; what nature lacks, the dead can provide with their magic and special abilities. In such a city, the living citizens are completely dependent on the undead elite. The undead ruling class not only provides magical guidance and protection, but also makes life possible in a hostile environment that would otherwise be uninhabitable. However, these boons often come at a terrible price . . .

Most necrocracies are normal cities that for some reason (usually faith or occupation) are ruled by undead and should abide by the rules presented in the *Dungeon Master's Guide II*. The status of the living inhabitants can range anywhere from little more than cattle to equal citizens, although usually they are closer to the former. Vampires need living people to guard them during the day and they need to feed on living inhabitants during the night. Other undead, lacking the vampires' many weaknesses, still need mortals for various purposes: Mummies feel that it is their duty to rule the living as intermediates between the gods and mortals; liches require mortals to aid them in their magical research, more-often-than-not as expendable test subjects; and death knights simply like to be surrounded by "fragile humanity" just to feel even more superior. In death-worshiping societies, the living consider it a great honor to serve, or even be sacrificed, to their undead masters, believing that the living are inferior and fragile and that undeath is the only true aim in life.

Cities ruled by undead against their will, on the other hand, are extremely oppressed and miserable, and they resemble huge prisons or labor camps more than towns. A resistance movement of brave paladins and priests aided by desperate citizens is as likely as a vicious secret police battling the popular resistance and keeping the populous in the dark. It's important to remember that although most undead are evil, they are also usually extremely powerful and inhumanly intelligent. They can prove a vital resource for any city willing to suffer the company of unholy walking corpses. An army of undead almost always defeats any living army of equal size (and uses the bodies of the slain to bolster its might). Politicians and diplomats who are likely to "live" for centuries can develop plans of such complexity and intricacy that few mortals could ever hope to grasp them, let alone foil them. Ageless wizards and priests can construct weapons and items of unspeakable potency, not caring for the decades and life-force invested in creating them.

With such great prizes, even nations who don't worship death gods could be tempted to live alongside (or rather under) sentient undead, even if it means putting their sanity and place in the next world at risk.

Lastly, it is important to note that different types of undead strive to create different societies and treat their living subjects in different ways:

- *Vampires*, prone to decadence, like to view themselves as the "aristocracy of the night" and the living as "dumb sheep" to play with and later devour mercilessly.

- *Mummies* see themselves as intermediates between the mortals and the gods and expect absolute obedience from their worshipers. The faithful receive great boons, while faithless suffer the tortures of the damned.

- *Liches* usually delve into their magic studies and ignore their subjects while slowly sinking into madness. If something is required of them, it is as likely to be met with genuine aid as with a *finger of death*.

- *Ghosts* rule from the shadows, using their malevolence ability freely and treating their subjects like simple "meat puppets." Spreading subtle fear and paranoia are likely to be their chief tools of oppression.

- *Death knight* rulers, far rarer then other types of undead, are murderous tyrants who rule through violence and intimidation. They create extremely militaristic societies bent on conquest and destruction of all that is holy.

Below is an example of one of the most successful necrocracies in the world: the Oligarchy of Mavet Rav.

About Mavet Rav

In most societies, death is considered a natural part of the cycle of life. Not so in Mavet Rav, where it is considered simply vulgar and passé.

In Mavet Rav, there are two classes of citizens: the living Haim and the undead Almetim. The poor and underprivileged Haim are those who cannot afford or fear the transformation to undeath. They cannot vote or be elected to the Senate and can never receive public or military commissions. The best they can hope for is to excel in their simple craft and die moderately wealthy. The Almetim are the rich and powerful nobility that holds all positions of power and enjoy many legal privileges such as lower taxes and the right to own lands, study necromancy, and bear arms. The rationale behind this discrimination is simple: The living are too fragile and short-lived to make responsible decisions. How can you bravely command an army when a single stray arrow can end your existence? How can you lead a nation if you can't expect to live more than a mere century?

Instead of families or clans, the Almetim have political parties, each with its own representatives in the Senate and the army. New members are usually well-to-do and ambitious Haim who earned enough money and reputation to join the parties or are living relatives of current Almetim who came of age.

The state religion is the cult of Wee Jas but most people are indifferent worshipers at best. Other religions are permitted as long as they do not preach against undeath or necromancy. The church of Pelor is strictly outlawed and its members are a hunted and persecuted minority.

Mavet Rav (Metropolis): Necrocracy; AL LE; 100,000 gp limit, no asset limit*; population 120,000; Mixed (Almetim 17%, Haim 83% [96% human, 3% halfling, 1% other]).
*Under Mavet Rav laws, it is illegal to sell weapons, armor, or any noncurative magic items to living creatures.

Notable NPCs: The Living and the Dead

This section provides basic information about key NPCs in Mavet Rav, and the entries are limited to their names, alignments, genders, races, classes, levels, and positions or roles in the city. Other details are left for the DM to create so he can customize the NPCs as needed for his particular campaign. Note that some of these NPCs are discussed in greater detail below.

Prominent Senators

- Lokh Shov (LE male lich human necromancer 17), chairman of the Senate, oldest undead in the city.
- Gami Bekh (TN female ghost rogue 4/diviner 11), head of Crypt Corruption Investigation sub-committee.
- Adon Nadiv (CN male mummified human sorcerer 3/cleric of Wee Jas 5/true necromancer 6), advocate of equal opportunity for undeath, leader of the opposition.
- Col. (Ret.) Doker Believ (CE male death knight human fighter 12), deeply bigoted extremist who advocates a crusade against all nonnecrocracies, has a phobia of holy symbols.
- Hiroah Tazor (LE female vampire half-elf ex-paladin 6/blackguard 6), chief justice.
- Ben Gufot (CE male vampire human bard 7/dirgesinger 4), national poet and rising flamboyant politician.
- Dr. Anikhma Odim (TN female vampire human wizard 1/cleric of Boccob 7), pacifist and advocate of equal rights for the Haim, married to Overseer Gamor Odim.
- Prof. Tamid Rakhok (NE male ghost elf expert 7), in charge of budget distribution.

Prominent Overseers

- Borlan Eviscus (LG male elf bard 5/ranger 4), chairman of the Overseers and liaison to the Senate, oldest Haim in the city.
- Naval Afel (CE male human fighter 7), secretly hates Haim and wants to become Almetim by finding out which of the Overseers smuggles in refugees.
- Gamor Odim (NG male human expert 7), pacifist and advocate of equal rights for the Haim, married to Senator Dr. Anikhma Odim.
- Seraphina Widehill (CG female halfling cleric of Yondalla 6), uses her position to illegally smuggle halfling (and other) refugees into the city.

The Vigilant

- Commissioner Akhen Zaduk (LN male human fighter 6/rogue 6), commander and brilliant investigator.
- Capt. Devar Nil-Kham (TN male half-orc fighter 11), commander of the Night Watch, ex-con.
- Dr. Kosem Ragil (NE male lich human wizard 9), head of Special Investigations Unit, reports on his commander to the Crypt and vice-versa.
- Capt. Khoker Boker (NG male half-elf rogue 10), head of Criminal Investigations Unit, always competes against Kosem's unit.
- Capt. Yom Balman (LG male human fighter 9), commander of the Day Watch.

- Tatvev Kurbadion (LE male gnome expert 7), in charge of hiring outside help for the Vigilant and conducting "unofficial investigations," corrupted and treacherous but gets the job done.

- Zomofil Sobon (LN male half-orc warrior 6), chief warden.

The Crypt

- Lt. Gen. Yodekh Kola (CE male ghost human rogue 3/cleric of Nerull 3/master of shrouds 10), commander, secret cultist of Nerull.

- Col. Oosa Gadvar (LE male mummified fighter 6/blackguard 6), head of Almetim Crimes Investigation department, often hires outside help.

- Faceless (NE female human vampire rogue 5/Master of Masks 5), head of Counterintelligence department, controls a vast network of agents both in the city and abroad.

- Maj. Gen. Rosh Kaatan (LN male human vampire fighter 10), unambitious but loyal second-in-command.

Clergy

- Matriarch Galeena Kugel (LE female lich human cleric of Wee Jas 14), high priestess of Wee Jas.

- Golger Ze'el (LE male lich cleric of Hextor 10), high priest of Hextor, brother of Bar Ze'el.

- Alina Littlebush (NG female halfling cleric of Yondalla 11), high priestess of the halfling community, known for her lavish charity events that attract merchants, politicians, and Almetim alike.

- The Scythe (NE male ghost cleric of Nerull 8), an insane prophet despised by Haim and Almetim alike.

Pelor's Shadow Guard

- Father Abon (LG male human cleric of Pelor 13), high priest of Pelor and head of the Shadowguard.

- Gibor Gadol (LG male half-orc paladin 9/shadowspy of Pelor 6), the Shadow Guard's chief executioner.

- Nakhima Patan (NG female half-elf paladin 7), Shadow Guard's chief recruiter and agitator.

Other Notable Citizens

- Prof. Aben Lahud (NE male ghost elf diviner 15), rector of the Mavet Rav Arcane Institute, a famous scholar and patron of adventurers.

- Lt. Gen. Bar Ze'el (LE male death knight half-orc fighter 6/blackguard 6), commander of the Mavet Rav Army, brother of Golger Ze'el.

- Korin the Hammer (LG dwarf expert 13), legendry weaponsmith, one of the wealthiest and most respectable Haim in Mavet Rav.

- Shoalina Gr'destina (CE female drow cleric of Lolth 13), drow ambassador.

- Madam Agony (CE female banshee), heads an elite brothel offering any kind of unnatural entertainment, rumored to be a Crypt agent and assassin.

- Gurdum Shield-Biter (CE male orc barbarian 9), orc ambassador.

Life and Death in Mavet Rav

Although the past of this strange city-state is intentionally shrouded in mystery by its undead rulers, most sages believe it to have started as a small community formed away from civilization by a cabal of undead scholars wishing to escape persecution at the hands of their paladin enemies. In time, the cabal's wealth and power began to attract local savages; some came because they viewed the newcomers as gods to be worshiped, others were curious to taste the fruits of civilization, and still others came searching for an easy, albeit shackled, life.

Rumors of this safe haven began to spread across the world, whispered by madmen in dark street corners or dreamed by lunatics in nightmarish temples until it became a beacon of darkness for all those who wished to practice necromancy in peace. Many of the newcomers brought with them vast treasures and loyal henchmen, who, in turn, brought their families or married the local "savages" who, by now, were quite civilized. By the time the adjacent nations learned of this abomination it was too late -- what began as a simple experiment by a group of undead was now a political and military force with which to be reckoned.

Today, Mavet Rav is a somber city of gigantic marble mausoleums and narrow streets paved with old, moldy tombstones. A slight smell of decay always hangs in the disturbingly still air and even the living that crowd the streets look somewhat pale and lifeless, as is dictated by the latest Almetim fashion. Because time is not an issue for its undead rulers, Mavet Rav boasts some of the world's most breathtaking architectural monuments (notably the various political parties' headquarters, the temples of Wee Jas and Hextor, and the Senate, which is constructed from the bones of slain patriots). Despite its moribund appearance, Mavet Rav is a vibrant and thriving society that attracts many specialists and adventurers from far-away lands in search of quick wealth or simple sight-seeing. This success is partly the result of the abundance of powerful wizards and clerics in the city, but mainly of the high level of discipline and organization of its living citizens, most of whom consider living under the reign of undead a blessing rather than a curse.

Although the absolute majority of Mavet Rav's population is a pale, dark-haired human race descended from the savages that once lived around the city, there are two notable minorities: a small but audible halfling community calling itself Flower-on-the-Grave and about a thousand half-orcs, mostly employed in the city's military and police forces. The government and law enforcement agencies of Mavet Rav are described in Exploring Mavet Rav.

Exploring Mavet Rav

The remainder of this article explores Mavet Rav in great detail. You can use it as described, or you can pick and choose locations, NPCs, and adventure hooks for use in other cities, whether they are necrocratic or more conventional.

Note that each of the four NPCs presented below can serve as a master villain or patron (depending on the PC's alignment) regardless of whether the Mavet Rav setting is used or not.

1-4. The Wall and the Gates
The famed walls of Mavet Rav boast some of the most artful and intricate bas-reliefs in the world, although most would find the motifs of death and undeath somewhat disturbing and gloomy.

There are four entrances to the city, and each one is named after each of the major undead factions and suitably decorated. Many retired generals demand that a fifth, death knight, gate be opened somewhere in the wall. However, since priceless art adorns every inch of the ancient walls and there are fewer than a hundred death knights in the city, the chances for their demands to be met are slim.

5. The Senate
Forty senators control Mavet Rav, and they are elected from the Almetim elite once every twenty-five years. Only those who have been undead for a century or more and have a spotless past can be candidates for this prestigious position. The Senate passes laws, heads the state, and appoints all military and public officials.

The Laws of Corruption

Mavet Rav has a highly developed judicial system that, in theory, guarantees a fair trial for any citizen, no matter how poor or underprivileged. In reality the Almetim judges tend to favor their own and almost always rule in favor of their political or business allies. Two laws, however, are considered sacred and are upheld without exceptions:

Creation of Undead: Undeath must never be granted for free. Only Mavet Rav citizens can gain it, and those so gifted must have reached puberty at least.

The Right to Retain Sentience: Unintelligent undead must never be created from Mavet Rav citizens. Breaking these rules guarantees destruction, no matter how powerful or influential the offender is.

Punishments include fines, jail, forced labor (often abused by rural Almetim to gain free workers), symbolic scarification, execution, and, in rare cases, forced resurrection for Almetim (humorously called "Haination").

Adventure Hook: A living necromancer from a foreign land animates people as intelligent undead under his command and uses them to spread his influence among the Almetim. A senator who suspects something is wrong with the new party hires the PCs to investigate its origins and possibly uncover the necromancer.

Senator (Vampire) Ben Gufot CR 13

MM 250, *LM* 43
hp 77 (11 HD); fast healing 5; **DR** 10/silver and magic

Male vampire human bard 7/dirgesinger 4
CE Medium undead (augmented humanoid)
Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +8, Spot +8
Languages Common

AC 26, touch 14, flat-footed 22; Dodge (+4 Dex, +5 armor, +1 shield, +6 natural)
Immune ability damage (Str, Dex, Con), ability drain, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning, any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects or is harmless), death from massive damage
Resist cold 10, electricity 10, turn +4
Fort +3, **Ref** +10, **Will** +9
Weakness vampire weakness

Speed 30 ft. (10 squares)
Melee *+1 rapier of wounding* +13/+8 (1d6+5/18-20 plus wounding) or
slam +12 (1d6+4 plus energy drain)
Base Atk +8; **Grp** +12
Atk Options Combat Reflexes, Improved Feint
Special Actions bardic music 9/day (countersong, *fascinate* 3 creatures, inspire competence, inspire courage +1, *suggestion* [DC 17]), blood drain, children of the night, create spawn, dirgesong 9/day (song of sorrow [DC 22], song of bolstering, song of grief [DC 22], song of horror [DC 22]), dominate (DC 20)
Bard Spells Known (CL 7th):
3rd (1/day) -- *deep slumber* (DC 18), *haste*
2nd (3/day) -- *alter self*, *darkness*, *hold person* (DC 17), *mirror image*
1st (5/day) -- *charm person* (DC 16), *expeditious retreat*, *Tasha's hideous laughter* (DC 16), *undetectable alignment*
0 (3/day) -- *dancing lights*, *daze* (DC 15), *detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *lullaby* (DC 15), *mage hand*

Abilities Str 18, Dex 19, Con --, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 20
SQ alternate form, bardic knowledge, gaseous form, spider climb
Feats Alertness[B], Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes[B], Dodge[B], Improved Feint, Improved Initiative[B], Lightning Reflexes[B], Requiem, Run, Quick Draw
Skills Bluff +27, Concentration +14, Disguise +15, Hide +22, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (religion) +10, Listen +8, Move Silently +22, Perform (recital) +19, Search +8, Sense Motive +12, Spot +8
Possessions *+2 studded leather armor*, masterwork buckler, *+1 rapier of wounding*

Fast Healing (Ex) Ben heals 5 points of damage each round so long as it has at least 1 hit point. If reduced to 0 hit points in combat, it automatically assumes gaseous form and attempts to escape. It must reach its coffin home within 2 hours or be utterly destroyed. (It can travel up to nine miles in 2 hours.) Any additional damage dealt to a vampire forced into gaseous form has no effect. Once at rest in its coffin, Ben is helpless. It regains 1 hit point after 1 hour, then is no longer helpless and resumes healing at the rate of 5 hit points per round.

Damage Reduction (Su) Ben has damage reduction 10/silver and magic. Ben's natural weapons are treated as magic weapons for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.

Energy Drain (Su) Living creatures hit by Ben's slam attack gain two negative levels. For each negative level bestowed, Ben gains 5 temporary hit points. Ben can use its energy drain ability once per round.

Blood Drain (Ex) Ben can suck blood from a living victim with its fangs by making a successful grapple check. If it pins the foe, it drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained. On each such successful attack, Ben gains 5 temporary hit points.

Children of the Night (Su) Vampires command the lesser creatures of the world and once per day can call forth 1d6+1 rat swarms, 1d4+1 bat swarms, or a pack of 3d6 wolves as a standard action. (If the base creature is not terrestrial, this power might summon other creatures of similar power.) These creatures arrive in 2d6 rounds and serve the vampire for up to 1 hour.

Create Spawn (Su) A humanoid or monstrous humanoid slain by a vampire's energy drain rises as a vampire spawn (see the Vampire Spawn entry, page 253) 1d4 days after burial. If Ben instead drains the victim's Constitution to 0 or lower, the victim returns as a spawn if it had 4 or less HD and as a vampire if it had 5 or more HD. In either case, the new vampire or spawn is

under the command of the vampire that created it and remains enslaved until its master's destruction. At any given time Ben may have enslaved spawn totaling no more than twice its own Hit Dice; any spawn it creates that would exceed this limit are created as free-willed vampires or vampire spawn. A vampire that is enslaved may create and enslave spawn of its own, so a master vampire can control a number of lesser vampires in this fashion. Ben may voluntarily free an enslaved spawn in order to enslave a new spawn, but once freed, a vampire or vampire spawn cannot be enslaved again.

Song of Sorrow (Su) Ben can evoke sorrow and lament in his enemies. To be affected, an enemy must be able to hear Ben perform. The effect lasts for as long as the enemy hears Ben and for 5 rounds thereafter. An affected enemy takes -2 penalty on Will saving throws and a -2 penalty on attack rolls and weapon damage rolls. A successful DC 24 Will save negates the effect and makes the character immune to Ben's song of sorrow ability for 24 hours. Song of sorrow is a mind-affecting ability.

Song of Bolstering (Su) All undead within 30 feet of Ben gain a +11 bonus on their turn resistance. The bolstering lasts for as long as Ben performs and for 10 rounds thereafter. Ben can bolster himself in this manner.

Song of Grief (Su) Ben can inspire maddening grief in a living creature. The creature must be within 60 feet of Ben and able to hear him. Unless the target succeeds on a DC 24 Will save he becomes confused for as long as Ben perform and for 5 rounds thereafter. Song of grief is an enchantment (compulsion), mind-affecting ability.

Song of Horror (Su) Ben can strike a horrifying chord in the hearts of his enemies. Any enemy within 60 feet who can hear Ben must succeed on a DC 24 Will save or take 1d6 points of Strength damage and 1d6 points of Dexterity damage. A creature that is affected by Ben's song of horror or a creature that successfully saves against this effect cannot be affected by Ben's song of horror for 24 hours.

Dominate (Su) Ben can crush an opponent's will just by looking onto his or her eyes. This is similar to a gaze attack, except that Ben must use a standard action, and those merely looking at it are not affected. Anyone Ben targets must succeed on a Will save or fall instantly under Ben's influence as though by a *dominate person* spell (caster level 12th). The ability has a range of 30 feet.

Alternate Form (Su) Ben can assume the shape of a bat, dire bat, wolf, or dire wolf as a standard action. While in its alternate form, Ben loses its natural slam attack and dominate ability, but it gains the natural weapons and extraordinary special attacks of its new form. It can remain in that form until it assumes another or until the next sunrise. (If the base creature is not terrestrial, this power might allow other forms.)

Gaseous Form (Su) As a standard action, Ben can assume gaseous form at will as the spell (caster level 5th), but it can remain gaseous indefinitely and has a fly speed of 20 feet with perfect maneuverability.

Spider Climb (Ex) Ben can climb sheer surfaces as though with a *spider climb* spell.

Skills Vampires have a +8 racial bonus on Bluff, Hide, Listen, Move Silently, Search, Sense Motive, and Spot checks.

Notes: Ben Gufot first became famous after writing an award-winning epic poem praising undeath and cursing the cowardice and wretchedness of those who choose to die and rot. After the immense success of his poem, Ben's life has been a meteoritic ascent from a humble tavern bard, to a respected member of the Crimson Society, vampirehood, and, finally, the Senate.

Few know that the delicate and melancholic poet, whose works are widely read by Almetim and Haim alike, is a sadist and a psychopath who enjoys terrorizing poor and defenseless citizens with a gang of like-minded vampire spawn thugs. Since it is obvious that the crimes are being committed by Almetim and the victims so far were only homeless and prostitutes, neither the Vigilant (which isn't supposed to meddle in undead affairs) nor the Crypt (where Ben has many friends) investigates these terrible crimes.

6. The Crypt

The crypt is the secret police and intelligence agency designed to deal with crimes involving Almetim or "national interests." This shadowy and powerful organization is commanded by the equally mysterious Lieutenant General Yodekh Kola (see below) and its operatives are all Almetim (mostly ghosts and vampires). Unlike the Vigilant, the Crypt is a secret organization acting above the law and often in the interests of its leadership rather than that of the state. While dealing with matters of "national importance," its officers don't flinch from torture, framing innocents, illegal imprisonment, and sometimes even outright murder disguised as an accident or a crime of passion.

The Crypt is as much a tool of political oppression as it is an efficient police force dealing mainly with political or supernatural crimes. Rumors of terrible deeds and unspeakable rituals taking place in this imposing building's basements have spread, but all investigations into these claims ended with the investigator's unexplainable disappearance.

Adventure Hook: The Crypt arrests the PCs for an imaginary crime, and they find themselves locked in a cell with a Haim political activist. The warden hints that the PCs are supposed to murder him in "self-defense" during the night or be tried next morning. Will the PCs choose to murder an innocent man, risk their lives in an attempt to escape from the well-guarded Crypt headquarters, or try to prove their innocence before the Mavet Rav court?

Lt. Gen. Yodekh Kola CR 18
MM 116, *LM* 46
hp 109 (16 HD)

Male ghost human rogue 3/cleric 3/master of shrouds 10
CE Medium undead (augmented human)
Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +20, Spot +20
Languages Common

AC 24, touch 15, flat-footed 24 (manifested) (+9 armor, +5 deflection) or
AC 19, touch 10, flat-footed 19 (incorporeal) (+9 armor)
Immune ability damage (Str, Dex, Con), ability drain, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning, any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects or is harmless), death from massive damage
Resist evasion, turn +4; SR 15
Fort +11, **Ref** +11, **Will** +23

Speed fly 30 ft. (6 squares, perfect)
Melee *+2 keen scythe of ghost touch* +14/+9/+4 (2d4+4/19-20/x4) or
draining touch +12/+7/+2 (1d4 points from any ability, +5 hp to self)
Base Atk +11; **Grp** +12
Atk Options sneak attack +2d6
Special Actions death touch (3d6), draining touch, malevolence, manifestation, rebuke undead 9/day (+4, 2d6+18, 13th), spontaneous casting (inflict spells), trapfinding
Combat Gear 2 *divine scrolls of implosion*, 3 *divine scrolls of finger of death*, *divine scroll of blasphemy*
Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 12th):
6th -- *greater dispel magic*, *harm* (DC 26), *mislead*[D], *word of recall* (Crypt office)
5th -- *commune*, *flame strike* (DC 23), *slay living* (DC 27)[D], *spell resistance*, *true seeing*
4th -- *confusion* (DC 22)[D], *discern lies*, *divine power*, *sending*, *spell immunity*, *tongues*
3rd -- *animate dead* (2), *bestow curse* (DC 25), *blindness/deafness* (2) (DC 25), *nondetection*[D], *speak with dead*
2nd -- *bull's strength*, *death knell*[D](DC 22), *desecrate*, *hold person* (3) (DC 20), *owl's wisdom*
1st -- *command* (2) (DC 19), *deathwatch*, *disguise self*[D], *divine favor*, *obscuring mist*, *protection from good*, *shield of faith*
0 -- *detect magic* (3), *detect poison*, *read magic* (2)
D: Domain Spell. Domains: Death, Trickery
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th):
8/day -- *summon undead* (see below)

Abilities Str 12, Dex 10, Con --, Int 10, Wis 26, Cha 21
SQ horrific appearance, improved summoning, incorporeal traits, rejuvenation (see below), trap sense
Feats Augment Summoning, Combat Casting, Ghostly Grasp*, Greater Spell Focus (necromancy), Improved Initiative[B], Spell Focus (conjuration), Spell Focus (necromancy)
Skills Bluff +13, Concentration +15, Diplomacy +7, Hide +3, Gather Information +13, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (local) +7, Knowledge (religion) +15, Listen +20, Search +8, Spellcraft +15, Spot +20
Possessions combat gear plus *+1 ghost touch full plate of spell resistance 15*, *+2 keen scythe of ghost touch*, *cloak of resistance +4*, *periapt of Wisdom +4*
* Feat from *Libris Mortis*

Draining Touch (Su) A ghost that hits a living target with its incorporeal touch attack drains 1d4 points from any one ability score it selects. On each such successful attack, Yodekh heals 5 points of damage to itself. Against ethereal opponents, it adds its Strength modifier to attack rolls only. Against nonethereal opponents, it adds its Dexterity modifier to attack rolls only.

Malevolence (Su) Once per round, an ethereal ghost can merge its body with a creature on the Material Plane. This ability is similar to a *magic jar* spell (caster level 16th), except that it does not require a receptacle. To use this ability, Yodekh must be manifested and it must try move into the

target's space; moving into the target's space to use the malevolence ability does not provoke attacks of opportunity. The target can resist the attack with a successful Will save (DC 20). A creature that successfully saves is immune to Yodekh's malevolence for 24 hours, and Yodekh cannot enter the target's space. If the save fails, Yodekh vanishes into the target's body.

Manifestation (Su) Every ghost has this ability. Yodekh dwells on the Ethereal Plane and, as an ethereal creature, it cannot affect or be affected by anything in the material world. When Yodekh manifests, it partly enters the Material Plane and becomes visible but incorporeal on the Material Plane. A manifested ghost can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, magic weapons, or spells, with a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. A manifested ghost can pass through solid objects at will, and its own attacks pass through armor. A manifested ghost always moves silently. A manifested ghost can strike with its touch attack or with a ghost touch weapon (see Ghostly Equipment, below). A manifested ghost remains partially on the Ethereal Plane, where is it not incorporeal. A manifested ghost can be attacked by opponents on either the Material Plane or the Ethereal Plane. The ghost's incorporeality helps protect it from foes on the Material Plane, but not from foes on the Ethereal Plane. When a spellcasting ghost is not manifested and is on the Ethereal Plane, its spells cannot affect targets on the Material Plane, but they work normally against ethereal targets. When a spellcasting ghost manifests, its spells continue to affect ethereal targets and can affect targets on the Material Plane normally unless the spells rely on touch. A manifested ghost's touch spells don't work on nonethereal targets. A ghost has two home planes, the Material Plane and the Ethereal Plane. It is not considered extraplanar when on either of these planes.

Summon Undead (Sp) One dead wraith, two greater shadows, four specters, four wraiths, or four shadows. Duration is 15 rounds.

Horrific Appearance (Su) Any living creature within 60 feet that views Yodekh must succeed on a Fortitude save or immediately take 1d4 points of Strength damage, 1d4 points of Dexterity damage, and 1d4 points of Constitution damage. A creature that successfully saves against this effect cannot be affected by Yodekh's horrific appearance for 24 hours.

Improved Summoning (Ex) Summoned undead gain +2 enhancement bonus on attack rolls and damage rolls.

Rejuvenation (Su) Yodekh became a ghost because of his undying desire to gain strength through blackmail and manipulation. In order to permanently destroy Yodekh, the PCs must make his myriad dark and terrible secrets known to the wide public.

Notes: Yodekh Kola has been the commander of the dreaded Crypt for longer than anyone, living or undead, can remember. His network of incorporeal spies and agents is so vast that many wonder if he serves the state or the state serves him. Such speculations are never voiced, however, because just about anyone -- be it a poor fish monger or a respected senator -- can be his informant . . . or victim. No one, however, not even his loyal and patriotic second-in-command Rosh Kaatan (LN male human vampire fighter 10) knows the true scope of his ambitions and foul treachery. For the glory of his true master, Nerull, Yodekh is planning to overthrow the oligarchy and become a tyrant over a desecrated land of mindless undead. To further this purpose, he has been secretly acting to weaken the Oligarchy and sow restlessness among the Haim for decades, all the while strengthening the cult of Nerull in the countryside.

Because of his immense network of living and undead minions, nigh indestructibility, and the epic scope of his vile machinations, Yodekh Kola is the ideal recurring villain for a campaign set in Mavet Rav.

7. The Vigilant

The Vigilant is the official state police force of the Oligarchy of Mavet Rav. It is headed by the brilliant Commissioner Akhen Zaduk (LN male human fighter 6/rogue 6) and its members include about 3,000 Haim veterans and a few dozens of Almetim wizards or sorcerers who aid in especially difficult cases.

The Vigilant's tasks are to keep the peace inside the city and countryside, be the first line of defense in case of a sudden attack on Mavet Rav, and to investigate crimes perpetrated by or against the living. Arresting or questioning any Almetim is outside of the Vigilant's jurisdiction as it is argued that a Haim, no matter how talented or educated, can never fully grasp the complexity of even the least of the Almetim's actions. As soon as it becomes clear that Almetim are involved in a case, the hated Crypt comes into the picture, which often brings the two organizations into conflict.

Adventure Hook: A corrupt Vigilant investigator is bribed by Ben Gufot to frame the PCs for his latest murder spree. Now, hunted by both mortal Haim warriors and mystical Crypt agents, the PCs must prove their innocence and, hopefully, bring the real murderer to justice in a case that will truly shake the nation.

8. Overseer Offices

Haim interests are represented by ten Overseers elected annually in democratic elections in which every Haim has the right to vote and be elected. In theory, the Overseers have equal administrative powers to the Senate, but in reality their legal rights are sometimes trampled by oppressive senators when it concerns their political or

economical interests. Nevertheless, the Overseers are a powerful force in Mavet Rav politics and their views are usually taken into account. Most Overseers are successful artisans or decorated veterans.

Adventure Hook: Mavet Rav suffers from a rain of holy water that leaves dozens of weaker undead destroyed and hundreds damaged. This brings a wave of brutal repressions and riots against all the legal good religions in the city, chief of which is the pacifistic cult of Yondalla. Fearing for her people, Overseer Seraphina Widehill hires the PCs to investigate the case and discover the truth before it is too late. The true perpetrator of the attack is Yodekh Kola who wishes to weaken the Almetim elite and draw the state into anarchy before starting his overt revolution.

9. White Shroud Society Headquarters

Adon Nadiv is the founder and leader of the small but very provocative "White Shroud Society." The White Shroud believes that undeath is the basic right of any humanoid and should not be deprived from anyone, no matter how base or strange his origins might be. The organization includes primarily necromancers who wander the land, granting free undeath to any adult for the symbolic cost of a burial shroud. The White Shroud's political power grows quickly, since every new Almetim it animates becomes a loyal supporter and a sure voter in the next elections. The organization has powerful enemies, too, in the form of conservative Almetim who are loathe to share their privileges with the "unwashed masses." They argue that Adon's activates will eventually drag the nation into a civil war between the "false" and "true" Almetim. It is not rare for a White Shroud necromancer to mysteriously disappear or for a regional base to suddenly catch on fire.

Unlike most Almetim, undeath has not deprived Adon of his vigor and enthusiasm, nor made him haughty or decadent. Adon lives in a modest but heavily guarded mansion that also serves as the organization's headquarters.

Adventure Hook: Because he is not wholly evil, Adon may serve as a perfect patron for a group of undead PCs who do not wish to play evil characters.

Senator Adon Nadiv CR 18
LM 51, 110
hp 96 (13 HD); **DR** 5/--

Male mummified human sorcerer 3/cleric 5/true necromancer 6
CN Medium undead (augmented human)
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +5, Spot +5
Aura zone of desecration
Languages Common, Infernal

AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 21 (+2 deflection, +10 natural)
Immune ability damage (Str, Dex, Con), ability drain, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning, any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects or is harmless), death from massive damage
Fort +7, **Ref** +3, **Will** +17
Weakness vulnerability to fire

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)
Melee *+1 heavy mace of disruption* +11/+6 (1d8+7 plus disruption) or
slam +10 (1d8+4 plus disease)
Base Atk +7; **Grp** +11
Atk Options despair, mummy rot
Special Actions rebuke undead 13/day (+6, 2d6+12, 12th)
Combat Gear 3 *potions of cause moderate wounds*
Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 8th; effective caster level 10th for necromancy spells):
4th -- *divine power*, *imbue with spell ability*[D], *inflict critical wounds* (2) (DC 20)
3rd -- *animate dead*[D], *dispel magic* (2), *magic vestment*, *protection from energy*
2nd -- *bull's strength*, *death knell*[D] (DC 18), *hold person* (2) (DC 17), *spiritual weapon*
1st -- *cause fear*[D] (2) (DC 17), *detect undead*, *divine favor*, *magic weapon*, *protection from good*, *shield of faith*
0 -- *detect magic* (2), *guidance*, *mending*, *read magic*, *resistance*
D: Domain Spell. Domains: Death, Magic
Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 6th; effective caster level 8th for necromancy spells):

3rd (4/day) -- *deep slumber* (DC 19)
2nd (7/day) -- *command undead* (DC 19), *resist energy*
1st (8/day) -- *charm person* (DC 17), *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*
0 (6/day) -- *acid splash* (DC 16), *daze* (DC 16), *detect magic*, *disrupt undead* (DC 17), *light*, *mage hand*, *read magic*
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 14th):
2/day -- *create undead*

Abilities Str 19, Dex 9, Con -, Int 8, Wis 20, Cha 23
SQ necromantic prowess +2
Feats Combat Casting, Extra Turning, Improved Initiative, Improved Turning, Negotiator[B], Spell Focus (necromancy)
Skills Concentration +9, Diplomacy +8, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Knowledge (religion) +7, Listen +5, Spellcraft +0, Spot +5
Possessions combat gear plus *+1 heavy mace of disruption*, *ring of protection +2*, *rod of splendor*

Despair (Su) At the mere sight of Adon, the viewer must succeed on a DC 22 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 1d4 rounds. Whether or not the save is successful, that creature cannot be affected again by Adon's despair ability for 24 hours.

Mummy Rot (Su) Supernatural disease -- slam, Fortitude DC 22, incubation period 1 minute; damage 1d6 Con and 1d6 Cha.

Necromantic Prowess +2 When Adon rebukes undead, casts a necromancy spell, or uses a spell-like ability that mimics a necromancy spell, her effective caster level increases by 2.

Zone of Desecration (Su) Adon is continuously surrounded by a 20-foot-radius aura of negative energy identical to the desecrate spell.

10. Church of Pelor Hideout
Pelor's Shadow Guard in Mavet Rav is a secret organization dedicated to the utter destruction of all undead in Mavet Rav and the establishment of a benevolent theocracy. The Shadow Guard numbers a few dozens of clerics, paladins, and elite shadowspies whose activities include assassinating necromancers and death clerics, preaching for Haim revolution, and gathering intelligence for the enemies of Mavet Rav in hope of a successful invasion by one of the neighboring states. Since desperate times require desperate measures, the organization is often ready to sacrifice innocent lives to hurt the Almetim oligarchy. Most Haim view Pelor's Shadow Guard as a dangerous terrorist organization that has strayed from its lofty principles too far to bring the long-awaited salvation.

Adventure Hook: The PCs protect a harmless-looking merchant from a bunch of thugs only to find out that the "harmless" merchant is a vampire and the "thugs" were Pelor's paladins. Suddenly, the group finds itself hunted by Pelor's shadowspies, who consider them treacherous collaborators that must be destroyed. Ending the hunt includes somehow arranging a meeting with the father of the church and possibly performing some quest to atone for this misunderstanding.

Gibor Gadol CR 15
CC 75, 105
hp 90 (15 HD)

Male half-orc paladin 9/shadowspy of Pelor 6
LG Medium humanoid
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +2, Spot +8
Aura anonymity, courage, good
Languages Common

AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 16 (+3 Dex, +6 armor)
Immune blindness, disease, fear
Fort +10, **Ref** +12, **Will** +11

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee *+1 warhammer of undead bane* +18/+13/+8 (1d8+5/x3) or

+1 warhammer of undead bane +20/+15/+10 (1d8+7/x3) against undead
Base Atk +13; **Grp** +17
Atk Options Cleave, Power Attack, Strength Devotion, Sun Devotion, smite evil 2/day (+1 attack, +9 damage)
Special Actions lay on hands (9 hp), radiance of Pelor 2/day, turn undead 4/day (+1, 2d6+7, 6th)
Combat Gear *divine scroll of prayer*, 3 *potions of cure moderate wounds*
Paladin Spells Prepared (CL 7th):
3rd -- *cure moderate wounds*
2nd -- *bull's strength*, *resist energy*
1st -- *detect undead*, *protection from evil*
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 15th):
At will -- *detect evil*, *undetectable alignment*
6/day -- *zone of truth*
2/day -- *remove disease*
1/day -- *greater invisibility*

Abilities Str 19, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 12
SQ personal eclipse
Feats Cleave, Deceitful, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Disguise), Stealthy[B], Strength Devotion*, Sun Devotion*
Skills Balance +5, Diplomacy +3, Disguise +9, Forgery +3, Gather Information +13, Hide +17 (+20 when light is present), Listen +2, Move Silently +17, Sense Motive +8, Spot +8, Tumble +9
Possessions combat gear plus *+1 glamered elven chain*, *+1 warhammer of undead bane* (disguised as a walking cane), *gloves of Dexterity +2*, *periapt of Wisdom +2*

Aura of Courage (Su) Beginning at 3rd level, Gibor is immune to fear (magical or otherwise). Each ally within 10 feet of him gains a +4 morale bonus on saving throws against fear effects. This ability functions while the paladin is conscious, but not if he is unconscious or dead.

Aura of Good (Ex) The power of a Gibor's aura of good (see the *detect good* spell) is equal to his paladin level, just like the aura of a cleric of a good deity.

Shadow Apostle Gibor has attained the rank of Shadow Apostle within the Pelor's Shadow Guard. He gains a +2 bonus on Intimidate checks against evil foes and a +2 circumstance bonus on Bluff and Diplomacy checks when interacting with clerics and paladins of Heironeous and Pelor. Also, his effective caster level for spells from the Good, Healing, Law, Strength, Sun, and War domains is 8. He also gains the ability to use *greater invisibility* once per day (noted above).

Radiance of Pelor (Su) Twice per day as a swift action, Gibor can augment any or all light sources within 60 feet (including torches, lamps, lanterns, and campfires, as well as objects that are the target of a light spell and magic weapons that glow). The range of any light source so affected doubles, and the effect lasts for 6 hours, or until the light source is extinguished, whichever occurs first.

Aura of Anonymity (Su) When Gibor is walking in a crowd of ten or more individuals, he gains a divine bonus equal to his shadowspy level on Disguise and Hide checks.

Personal Eclipse (Su) Beginning at 4th level, Gibor can manipulate the direction and intensity of light. By redirecting and dimming ambient illumination, Gibor can cast shadows around his body to better conceal his presence. Doing so grants him a circumstance bonus equal to one-half his shadowspy level on Hide checks. This ability can be used at will but is effective only in areas where light is present.

* Feat from *Complete Champion*

Notes: Gibor Gadol is the Shadow Guard's chief executioner, a tired and bitter man who has seen so much death and destruction that he no longer cares about his church's high ideals or noble aspirations. Killing the dead is all he knows. Lately, however, his conscience awoke when he was ordered by his superiors to slay Adon Nadiv, the most prolific creator of undead in Mavet Rav. Although Adon is obviously nongood and has deprived hundreds of people of blessed afterlife in Pelor's heaven, Gibor feels some strange respect and kinship to the energetic mummy whom he has been stalking for years. Perhaps he can be talked into going through a voluntarily resurrection. After all, Adon is not evil, only misguided. Maybe creating undead is not really as evil as the church teaches. Meanwhile, Gibor watches and abides, slowly drifting away from Pelor and his high ideals and into the realm of corruption and madness.

11. Army Staff
The Mavet Rav army is considered by many to be among the deadliest forces in the world. What it lacks in size, it makes up with dark sorcery and extremely well-trained and well-equipped warriors (usually Haim wishing to join the Almetim or start political careers). When advancing, the army often animates enemy noncombatants to serve as cannon-fodder and demoralize the enemy. This, more than anything else, is the reason few nations dare to

challenge the reign of the dead over the land.

The abundance of priests and wizards in the army guarantees that all those slain in the line of duty will be either raised from the dead or animated as intelligent undead (depending on the deceased's will), which considerably raises the troops' morale by removing the fear of death.

When fully mobilized, the Mavet Rav army includes more than 25,000 mortal soldiers and about 4,000 undead officers and specialists, most of whom have at least limited casting abilities. Hordes of mindless undead and monsters are usually summoned before major campaigns or during sieges.

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Remembering the Dungeon Master

by Bill Slavicsek

Last week, as I was sitting in my office poring through almost a thousand pages of galleys, I heard the sad, sad news that Gary Gygax had passed away. The news left me a little shaken, a little melancholy, and quite a bit nostalgic.

All of us in any way associated with **Dungeons & Dragons**, computer games, or fantasy in general owe an amazing debt to Gary. We wouldn't be here having this dialog if he hadn't come this way. As for me, I think very highly of his work. **D&D** is the game that started it all, that gave me and my original gaming group thousands of hours of fun and excitement, that opened and expanded my imagination. It was groundbreaking, innovative, new ... in short, for me and my players, it was amazing. It was everything I had ever imagined, given life and rules and structure. It was story and game. It was -- pure and simple -- fun. Gary helped make that happen, and its creation contributed mightily to my passion, my career, and the course my life has taken.

And it's been a good life. Thank you, Gary.

As I think about Gary's passing and recall my earliest memories of **D&D**, other memories well up and also demand attention. They're all intertwined that way, I guess. I remember my old gaming buddies, lifelong friends that time and distance have scattered to the four winds: Curtis Marz, Rich Odermatt, Charlie Adams, John Hardy, Scott Trantel, John Colon, and Paul Balsamo, among others who came and went over the years.

I remember other creators and their creations, whose work was just as important and influential to my life: Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, John Romita, Chris Claremont, John Byrne, Stephen King, Terry Brooks, and George Lucas, among others.

I recall other names associated with the earliest days of **D&D**, many of whom later became colleagues and friends, including Dave Arneson, Zeb Cook, Jeff Grubb, Tracy Hickman, Harold Johnson, Frank Mentzer, Kim Mohan, Jim Ward, Margaret Weis, Skip Williams, and Steve Winter.

I remember my first colleagues in the industry, the team at West End Games that taught me my first lessons as a professional game designer, including Greg Costikyan, Eric Goldberg, Paul Murphy, Jeff Briggs, Doug Kaufman, and Greg Gorden.

I think of Gary and my discovery of **D&D**, and all these other memories flow out. Memories of exciting adventures. Memories of wonderful products. Memories of names on covers and in credits. Memories of meeting many of those people and never losing the awe and wonder (but always struggling to remain professional, even while the kid inside me shouted with glee).

And then I think of how it takes something like the passing of a friend to bring all these memories to the forefront. That's why I decided to write about not only Gary, but all the other names I associate with him because of where they all sit in the photo album of my mind. And I want to send out a thank you to all of them. All those I mentioned, all those I left out but whose memories fill just as many pages in my virtual album. I want to thank them for inspiring me, entertaining me, challenging me, and for being my friends and companions. I want to thank them now, while I still can, because you never know what tomorrow will bring.

Thank you, Gary. And thank you, friends past and present and future. And thank you, everyone who ever inspired me and entertained me and challenged me and made a difference in my life.

I remember you all.

Keep playing!

--Bill Slavicsek

About the Author

Bill Slavicsek is the R&D Director for Roleplaying Games, Miniatures, and Book Publishing at Wizards of the Coast. All of the game designers, developers, editors, book editors, and **D&D Insider** content managers working on **Dungeons & Dragons**, ***Star Wars***, and the WotC Publishing Group report into Bill's R&D team.

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The Scoop on D&D Insider

by Bill Slavicsek

D&D Day is fast approaching, and along with the cool analog products we're releasing for 4th Edition (game books, miniatures, dungeon tiles, novels, etc.) comes the initial rollout of **Dungeons & Dragons Insider**. We've been talking about this exciting suite of digital offerings since the announcement last August, and now the first stage of the project is about to kick into high gear.

It all starts with the switch from preview content and 3.5 content, to all-4th-Edition all-the-time in our online magazines, *Dragon* and *Dungeon*. New articles, features, and adventures will roll out every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and then the entire month's content will be collected into a full-sized digital magazine. Between the two online magazines, that's the equivalent of an extra full-sized **D&D** game supplement every month—and that's just for starters! **D&D Insider** will eventually also include an ever-expanding suite of player and DM tools, a game table, and other features that make it a compelling destination for all **D&D** fans.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Back to the initial rollout…

D&D Insider's free beta period coincides with the launch of 4th Edition. You get to try out the first digital components without paying the subscription fees, and you can provide feedback to help us improve your experience. The initial rollout includes *Dragon* and *Dungeon* online magazines, and the **D&D Rules Compendium**. This powerful online resource for players and Dungeon Masters alike will be updated with each new **D&D** release (whether it's an analog game product or a digital magazine), making it the place to go in order to find what you need, when you need it.

As other components become available, including client-based applications such as the **D&D Character Builder** and the **D&D Game Table**, they will be added to the mix. I'll talk more about these digital offerings in my next column.

When the initial beta period comes to an end, subscription rates will go into effect. Initially, we're going to roll out a special, limited-time introductory pricing offer. Those who get in on the ground floor will be able to take advantage of some great deals to gain access to **D&D Insider** and all its great features. After this introductory period, the regular subscription pricing that we've previously announced will go into effect: $14.95 per month, with discounts for longer subscription commitments.

So, get ready to sign up for your free **D&D Insider** beta account. Read the articles, use the material, experiment with the **Rules Compendium**—and provide us with the feedback we need to make these components even better.

Online Magazines

With the launch of **D&D** 4th Edition, the analog products and the digital offerings combine to make for a more intense and extensive **D&D** experience. This is initially most clearly seen in *Dragon* and *Dungeon* online magazines. If the analog book product is the first disc in the two-disc DVD that is **D&D**, then the online magazines are the bonus disc. The book (say, the *Player's Handbook*) is the movie, the feature film. *Dragon* and *Dungeon*, then, are the extras—the deleted scenes, the documentaries, the alternate endings, the commentaries. Of course, this is just an analogy, the reality is even better.

Each online magazine includes material written by a combination of my in-house design and development staff, well-known freelancers, and talented newcomers from among the **D&D** fan base. That material is then subjected to the rigorous development process that all of our analog products go through, a process headed up by Mike Mearls and the **D&D** developers. When we reveal an article or an adventure, it stands side-by-side with our analog products as official, fully developed **D&D** canon.

Both magazines have been artistically redesigned to mirror the look of the 4E analog products while maintaining a magazine feel. In their new format, every article can be downloaded as a PDF or opened in a browser window for immediate viewing. Then, an issue's worth of content is compiled into a collected PDF.

Dragon will be the place for players and DMs to find behind-the-scenes features, design and development secrets, product expansions and extras, and new rules mechanics. *Dragon* content also focuses on adding new elements and options to your game. We're even going to use *Dragon* to show off new classes and races before they appear in a future *Player's Handbook*, basically revealing them in playtest mode so that you can help us get them ready for wider distribution. That's one of the perks of being a **D&D Insider**—you get to help shape the future development of the game.

Dungeon will be mostly the purview of Dungeon Masters, featuring side treks, adventure hooks, and full-length adventures to supplement our analog adventures and your own creativity. The goal of *Dungeon* is to make the DM's life easier. I've seen some of the stuff that Chris Youngs has planned, and I can't wait to try it out on my gaming group.

What you've seen since the announcement has been just the tip of the iceberg. The magazine content has been geared toward teasing and previewing the upcoming edition. When the new edition arrives, everything changes. The magazines take on all the depth and crunch we've been promising, and the cycle of **D&D** 4th Edition really kicks into high gear. It's a cycle of analog products complemented by digital offerings that, in turn, influence organized play and are reflected in a vibrant community that provides feedback and suggestions—that leads to the next analog product, and the ongoing cycle of 4th Edition.

This is the vision I pitched three years ago. This is the vision that my team and the support teams throughout Wizards have been working to bring to fruition. This is the vision that's about to become reality… at least, the first stage!

I can't wait.

Keep playing!

--Bill Slavicsek

About the Author

Bill Slavicsek is the R&D Director for Roleplaying Games, Miniatures, and Book Publishing at Wizards of the Coast. All of the game designers, developers, editors, book editors, and **D&D Insider** content managers working on **Dungeons & Dragons**, ***Star Wars***, and the WotC Publishing Group report into Bill's R&D team.

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Traveling Show

by Bill Slavicsek

You may have noticed that my column is a little late this month. That's because things have been even crazier as we get closer and closer to the launch of **D&D** 4th Edition. I spent a lot of this past month on the road. It started in early April with a trip to I-CON at Stony Brook University in Long Island, New York. Mike Mearls and I gave a 4E Preview Seminar to a packed hall, ran a bunch of demos, and talked to very enthusiastic fans. We had a wonderful time, met lots of wonderful people, and had a lot of fun showing off the new game system.

Then I traveled to Los Angeles with The Rouse and Chris Youngs, to hold a series of press conferences with various media outlets including the gang from G4's MMO Report. We talked all about 4th Edition, including the physical products and the digital offerings, and showed off the latest versions of the **D&D Game Table** and **D&D Character Visualizer**. These components are getting closer and closer to completion with each iteration, and I can't wait to start playing for real with the release versions. Soon, soon.

Finally, last week I was at the GAMA Trade Show in Las Vegas, showing off the first production copies of the three core rulebooks (*Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, *Monster Manual*), *H1: Keep on the Shadowfell*, and the new **D&D** *Dungeon Master's Screen*. I'm happy with the finished products, and everyone who came by and spoke to me seemed enthusiastic and excited as well.

This month, I also ordered the **D&D Insider** team to ramp up the preview content and show off the system. We've been releasing artwork and key sections of the core rulebooks three times a week, and the response continues to be great. We're closing in on **D&D 4E Release Day** (June 6th) and **D&D Game Day** (June 7th) -- and I can't wait for the products to hit the stores and for people to start playing! Soon, soon.

Campaign Settings

I wanted to take a few moments to clarify what I said at GTS last week. In regards to campaign settings, our goal for this edition is to make each setting we release unique and exciting on its own while still making it usable in any **D&D** campaign. Now, what exactly does that mean?

You wouldn't believe how many times over the years I've heard people say "I play in [insert favorite campaign setting here] so product X is of no use to me," or "I only play Core **D&D** (whatever that means) so I can't use that [insert campaign setting here] product." I plan to change that under 4th Edition by getting the word out that it's okay to mix and match. Go ahead. Get peanut butter in the chocolate. Some of the best campaigns I ever ran or had the pleasure to play in had a little bit of [insert campaign setting here] mixed with a smattering of [insert other campaign setting here] and combined all that with homebrew ideas to create something totally new and different.

So under 4th Edition, we're making every product look like a core product. The ***Forgotten Realms*** *Campaign Guide* releasing in August, for example, is a separate and unique setting on one hand, while being totally core **D&D** on the other. That means you can play a strictly **Forgotten Realms** campaign, or you can borrow the bits you like best to use in whatever **D&D** campaign you're playing in. This has always been true, but you wouldn't believe how many players were reluctant to cross the streams like that. I say cross away! (At least as far as your personal campaigns are concerned.) Why not use the best ideas, powers, feats, monsters, villains, and plot hooks from any product -- regardless of the campaign world your game is set in?

This means we won't be producing campaign lines, per se. For the **Forgotten Realms**, for example, you'll get the *Campaign Guide*, *Player's Guide*, and an adventure as physical products, as well as our ongoing line of bestselling novels, and plenty of ongoing support via **D&D Insider**. If a product idea comes along later that makes sense, we'll do it, but there won't be an ongoing regular release schedule of **Forgotten Realms** game products. Why not? Because every **D&D** product we do is a **Forgotten Realms** [or insert your favorite campaign setting here] game product. This is a subtle but significant change in philosophy geared toward making all players **D&D** players. It just makes the products and the brand stronger if every player is using the same material.

This is significantly different than what has occurred in the past. We won't be making the mistakes of line proliferation that helped sink TSR, and we won't be actively segmenting our audience. Instead we'll be providing all kinds of options and ideas through the core line of **D&D** RPG products. It's all **D&D**, all the time.

The model described above will be used every year, and we'll focus on a different campaign setting. Next year, we'll give this treatment to **Eberron**. After that? Well, we'll be exploring the best worlds from our vault, as well as creating new worlds as warranted. I can't guarantee which worlds will see this treatment as of yet, but chances are that your favorite campaign setting is on my list for consideration. And for all of them, in addition to the physical products we do, you'll see novels and novel lines (as appropriate), and ongoing support that continues to explore the worlds through **D&D Insider**. This plan makes **D&D** stronger, without sacrificing the heart of any campaign setting.

Next month… *H1: Keep on the Shadowfell* releases, complete with **D&D** Quick Start Rules and ready-to-play characters. Everyone will be able to start playing 4E!

Keep playing!

--Bill Slavicsek

About the Author

Bill Slavicsek is the R&D Director for Roleplaying Games, Miniatures, and Book Publishing at Wizards of the Coast. All of the game designers, developers, editors, book editors, and **D&D Insider** content managers working on **Dungeons & Dragons**, ***Star Wars***, and the WotC Publishing Group report into Bill's R&D team.

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Busted Character

by Shelly Mazzanoble

Once upon a time, I was at a company-wide meeting listening to a presentation about a mysterious acronym: D&DI. It promised to revolutionize D&D as we know it. Game with groups from all corners of the globe! Run players through a customized online dungeon! Bring your game to life with an interactive game table! Slice through a tin can, get out tough stains, and shape your buns and thighs in just three minutes a day!

But wait, there's more?

This was all very exciting, even for someone who can just shout an invitation over a cubicle wall anytime she wants to play D&D. My interest was piqued, however, the second I heard the words "character" and "visualizer." By this time I was fully involved with Astrid, who was a piece of paper and a plastic mini. The character visualizer promised a new level of character immersion -- your character in 3D. I could change her hair color (if she needs to go incognito) and her wardrobe (no white robes after Labor Day). I could pose her in front of different backdrops as if she was a high school senior at the prom. I had visions of a serene blue sky. Or maybe a rustic farm with bales of hay and a wagon wheel. Perhaps a billowing American flag. Oh yes, I was definitely interested in this little offering.

I saw myself hunched over my laptop. "At last!" I would shout, rubbing my hands frantically over the keyboard. "Astrid's *alive*!"

(Cue lightning and maniacal laughter.)

Perhaps my coworkers pictured it too; I heard several whispers of, "Oh no, she's gonna really lose it now" and "Is she weeping? I think those are tears!"

Much of the following months was spent eavesdropping on Scott's phone conversations. (Inadvertently, I might add, because he's only one cubicle away. He hears me talking to my mom about how to roast asparagus, and I hear him talking to R&D about top-secret digital advances.)

"So, how's that character thing going?" I'd ask, all feigned disinterest. "Need a playtester?"

"Cool your jets, Dr. Frankenstein," he'd say. "It's going, okay?"

And going it went, secretly moving along. I kept hearing whispers of "It's so cool!" from coworkers privy to the magic and many more shouts of "Just leave us alone and let us work!" from others, until the (unfinished) internal alpha version was finally unleashed in all its digital glory.

(Cue more lightning and maniacal laughter.)

I still love Astrid, but I already see her every day staring back from the cover of *Confessions of a Part-Time Sorceress*. (And for those not yet disappointed -- that's Astrid on the cover, not me. Sorry.) But Tabitha -- she was just a figment of my imagination and some basic stats on a character sheet. Eager to digitize her, I tugged on the shirtsleeves of New DM like a toddler at the Sweet Factory: "I want the alpha version, pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeease!"

He obliged -- sort of -- granting me a supervised visit with the Character Visualizer. I could use it on his computer while he watched me. "Think of it as your learner permit," he said. "You can create characters as long as there's someone more mentally stable than you in the passenger seat. And no creating characters after dusk!"

Deal.

On a Friday afternoon, New DM and I sat down at his desk to take a stab at bringing Tabby the tiefling to life. I could barely contain myself. Is this what the families left behind on *Extreme Makeover* feel like before the grand reveal of their loved one? Maybe. Only the families aren't told, "Sorry, your daughter isn't ready yet, so we're going to show you someone else's!"

"You can create a male tiefling wizard or a female human wizard," New DM explains. "But not a female tiefling wizard -- yet. She'll be ready for launch."

I resist the urge to revert back to the sleeve-tugging toddler and throw a hissy fit, since I know New DM is already doing me a favor and could revoke my permit. Well, that and I'm just too excited to wait any longer.

Ever see those TV shows like *Made* or *Make Me a (insert very unlikely career here)*. No? Well, you're a better person than I am. I don't actually watch those shows, but I have skimmed by them. You take a regular human and turn them into their favorite celebrity. That's what we'll do here with the celebrity being Tabitha.

"It's either that or I do a male tiefling in drag," I tell New DM. (And really, is there a higher compliment?)

New DM resolutely refuses to take part in putting a male tiefling in a dress.

"I'll get beat up in the parking lot," he says. "In fact, I'd beat myself up."

New DM clicks on the female human, and we both snap backward and gasp like grandmas at a Snoop Dog concert. "Nice . . . orbs," I say.

"This is the alpha version, don't forget," he says. "Soon we'll have a bust slider. That way, men will be able to depict the female characters they want, and women will be able to depict the female characters *they* want."

"This girl needs a visit to Dr. 90210 before she does a face-plant onto your keyboard."

New DM turns every shade on the top row in a Crayola 64-pack, and honestly, I'm also uncomfortable with him seeing human Tabitha like this.

"They're fake," I tell New DM. "You know that, right?"

"Whatever you say," he says. "Can we move on?"

Of course, but before we do, I ask him to show me one more thing: male humans.

The male counterpart is a brawny, statuesque Armani model who looks as if he'd be just as comfortable poaching goblins as he would be oiled and shirtless, tangled in a pair of satin sheets on the set of *Days of Our Lives*. That works.

After I have selected my race, I select a customized background. The dwarves are depicted before majestic peaks and a mountain fortress. The dragonborn are set amid their ancient ruins. My faux Tabitha teeters on a barren mountaintop looking across the vast ocean to volcanic ranges. It's quite beautiful. But there will probably be a Wal-Mart here the next time I visit.

I can adjust my height and weight using a sliding scale. If only life were that easy. The height option lets you squish your character like a marshmallow or stretch them like taffy. And no, you can't be a 6-foot-3 halfling. Each race is preprogrammed with a realistic range.

The Portrait feature is my favorite. Here you can customize the look of your characters with everything from the chisel of their cheekbones to the arch of their eyebrows to the color of their skin. With so many distinguishing details at your fingertips, you can't help but feel like the head lifeguard overseeing a gigantic gene pool. I'm especially fond of the glow option, instantly giving your alter ego the radiant shimmer only promised by the hundreds of dollars worth of lotions under my bathroom sink.

We give the human Tabitha a reddish skin tone, attempting to give her a demon-from-another-plane look. She kind of resembles me after spending nine hours in a swimming pool on a vacation in Orlando, minus the blisters and eyes swollen shut. My mom still insists I was old enough to apply my own "damn sunscreen." I was six. But I digress.

No offense to tieflings, but this human is too pretty to pass as Tabitha. We fix that soon enough by morphing her face into hardened, square-jawed toughness: "I went through hell just on my way to the coffeemaker this morning, and I ain't afraid of going back for more." We give her a green-eyed glower with glowing black pupils, which follow us around New DM's cubicle. (Yes, I know tieflings don't have pupils, but this looked really, really cool. So, she wears contacts.)

What are you looking at, punk?

"Yikes," New DM says. "What's her problem?"

"Not sure," I say. "Considering you're probably the first guy to notice she has a face, you'd think she'd be thrilled."

We complete the look by choosing her hair color and style. I opt for the dark, blunt-banged bob because . . . well . . . okay. It's just a coincidence.

You can dress her up *and* take her out when she's loaded up on weapon choices. As a wizard, she can choose from any of the wizard implements: orb, staff, or wand. One for each hand! I give her an iridescent orb for her left and an ornately designed wand for the right. New DM geeks out a little when he then shows off one of the coolest features the visualizer has to offer. You can have your character make a fist so she can adjust her grip by opening and closing her hand. (Okay, I geek out a bit too.) We spend the next fifteen minutes making the digital Tabitha open and close her fist as if she's trying out a new "now you see it, now you don't" trick. If she were alive, she'd make us both disappear.

Finally we get to the important stuff: wardrobe. Any adventurer worth her rations wouldn't be caught unconscious tromping through town in those starter clothes. Please! You couldn't fend off fog in those duds.

New DM and I scroll through the clothing choices. I feel like I'm one of the hosts on *What Not to Wear*

Adventuring.

Miniskirt and crop top?

Not appropriate for anyone over the age of 140.

Lara Croft catsuit? Too confining and way too unforgiving.

Bikini?!

"Whoa!" New DM says, fumbling with the mouse.

"Put some clothes on, young lady!" I shout. "You are not going adventuring like that!" My mom wouldn't even let me go out wearing dangly earrings.

Tabs gets comfy in a pair of skinny jeans, a T-shirt, and a pair of knee-high boots. And you can choose the colors for every item. New DM suggests we give her pants a glow, but I decline. What message would *that* send?

Something's missing. Oh yes -- accessories. I choose a pair of bracers for her forearms taking her outfit from day to evening. She also gets a pouch to strap onto her belt loop for all those pesky incidentals like house keys, ID, and scrolls.

"It's not a fanny pack!" I argue. "It's a practical piece of adventuring gear."

"Maybe she'd like a pair of hot pink leggings and a T-shirt with a basket full of kittens on it."

Being a poser is never a compliment, but it is another cool feature. Sure, miniatures are a great visual for a game around the table, but I find it amusing how they are usually posed for a fight even when they are supposedly meditating or kicking back in a pub. With the visualizer, you not only get to create your physical character, your character can get physical. Stand them battle-ready like a goalie posing for a hockey card, or give them a pensive warrior pose (which set against the scenic human landscape looks like someone's Hawaiian honeymoon photo). If you switch between the poses fast enough, they look like a flipbook.

With her wand brandished above her head and her orb driven in front of her, Tabitha is ready for action. She's a force to be reckoned with, an accomplished wizard. She's crouching Tabitha, hidden dragon. We do a 360-degree view before I'm satisfied. New DM takes a snapshot of Miss Tabitha -- another feature the visualizer has to offer.

One of the best features for someone obsessive -- I mean, creative -- is the multiple save slots you get per character. That's multiple versions of your character in different poses, with different backgrounds, and with a variety of wardrobe options (or if you want, multiple characters). Better yet, you can save every image and turn them into a slideshow screensaver -- I mean, if you were fanatical enough to do something like that.

Seeing Tabitha all armored up and pissed off, knowing she wears that scowl because of the backstory I created, makes me even more excited for Tuesdays, when I play her. I carry around human Tabitha's snapshots and show them around the office.

"Look at my character!" I insist. "Isn't she pretty?"

And when the rest of my group creates their characters, we can sit around the conference room table showing off pictures, like new parents at a Gymboree class.

"Oh, Marty," I'll say. "He has your eyes!"

"Oh, Shelly," he'll say. "She has your haircut."

Best of all, when Scott calls her a cream puff, I can tell him to say it to her face.

About the Author

Since creating Imposter Tabitha, **Shelly Mazzanoble** has created 112 more characters. Three of them are named Precious.

The Secret Lives of Dungeon Masters

by Shelly Mazzanoble

Let me begin by saying, this was New DM's idea.

"Why don't you try DM'ing a game sometime," he suggested.

"No, that's okay," I said. "You're doing a great job."

"Umm… not in place of me," he smiled. "I meant for fun."

For fun? Ha! *Dungeon Mastering is fun?* Come on, New DM. I didn't fall off the longship yesterday.

I like to think New DM suggested this believing I might actually have what it takes to run a successful game, but I suspected it was more like penance for all the hell I put him through. Of course he'd be in my "for fun" game, contradicting me, inventing spells, trying to pass as 3rd level when I know he's only 2nd (I read ahead in the *PH*, okay? Tabitha has some cool spells coming her way.) He'll master that same heartbreaking look as his Boston Terrier, Tulla, when I tell him his character takes damage. That same look I try to give him when my character gets in the way of some arrows.

"Tabitha takes 5 points of acid damage."

"She does?"

"Yes, she does."

"Really? She does?"

"Yes, really."

"She had her *shield of acid protection* up. Is it still five points?"

"Oh. Right. Make that 10 points."

I'd also like to believe we're all created equal, but I can't. I think certain people are better suited for certain things. Some people are lousy athletes but exceptional spectators. Some have a good eye for art but couldn't draw a blank if their life depended on it. Some people can master a dungeon, but simply aren't cut out to Dungeon Master. Sadly, I think I'm the latter in all of these examples.

I also know I'm not alone. I've heard from countless people the reason they won't take a turn at Dungeon Mastering is because of the belief it's just too hard. *You have to know every rule. It takes weeks, even years to prepare for a campaign! You have to invest a lot in the tools a DM needs to run a really good game.* A lot of games don't ever get off the ground because no one wants to be the Dungeon Master. It's more like **D&D** Show & Tell or **D&D** therapy where they just sit around a table and talk about what you would do if someone were running a game.

I, too, was under the impression that Dungeon Masters are players who have graduated through some elaborate, decades long, physical and mental rules-heavy competition like a jujitsu master climbing the ranks to black belt. Misconception? Maybe. But there must be some truth to the difficulties of DMing to inspire R&D to make some changes. 4th Edition is supposed to make Dungeon Mastering easier. Digital tools, restructured rules, more of what the players want, so you—the DM—look even better. (The virtual dungeon does look cool, even if it will call us all out on who really is packing a light source.)

I would be remiss to get this close to the launch and not try out *all* of 4th Edition's features, and like it or not, that includes being a DM. I admit I was curious. I had one Dungeon Mastering experience that turned into a fiasco where I tried running my five unsuspecting, **D&D**-phobic, somewhat belligerent, and mostly tipsy girlfriends through the basic game. It… didn't quite go as planned, as they couldn't seem to get past the notion that they had to roll a die to find a door (it was a *secret* door!). This time I would play with people who already play **D&D**, which should make things easier, right? And let the record show I have absolutely no motive for wanting to kill any of my friends.

But why am I so hesitant? I like telling stories. Just ask me about The Great Zeldini or that time in Florida when my brother drank too much and flipped off his mattress into the closet. Oh yes! That was a good one! But that still doesn't qualify me to run a game. I only own two sets of dice and a handful of minis. I know DMs don't just show up to games with a handful of dice and a dog-eared book opened to the page we left off on and start reading. Teddy, our old DM, literally had suitcases of props for his games. He'd wheel them around the office like a London Underground busker preparing for a performance. New DM has several plastic chests of drawers filled with minis at his desk. Each drawer is labeled "Humans," "Dwarves," "Bad Guys," etc. There's a lot of pre-game groundwork, which is evident from the way New DM ditched me midsentence in the hallway the other day.

"Yikes!" he said after looking at his watch." I've got to prepare for the game!" And he was out of there, beating a dusty path over the carpet, Scooby-Doo style.

Prepare? For two hours? Maybe I could offer to wheel one of his cartfuls of minis to the conference room.

And then there's what happens during the game. Like poor Teddy trying to tell us a story about how we managed to safely stowaway on a ship without Captain Biem or his men finding us.

"Captain BM?" someone would question and that was it. We were reduced to eight-year-old boys. "I hope we're not on the poop deck!"

And there Teddy would be, staring us down from the helm, like a high school librarian glaring at a table full of senior jocks at study hall.

Come on, Teddy! That was funny, wasn't it? No? Teddy?

"It's your two hours," he'd say. "We can play or we can make fun of the NPCs."

Unlike the senior jocks, we would choose to get back to the task at hand if for no other reason than out of respect for Teddy. And because we were scared of him.

All those dungeon tiles New DM schleps around like a St. Bernard get laid out before us with the precision and craftsmanship of a stonemason in ancient Italy. Before he can admire his handy work and salivate over the monster crouching in the newly designed corners, we decide we don't actually want to be in this room after all.

"We're going to turn around and go back to that other room," we say.

"You mean the room I didn't build because you said you wanted to come into this room?" New DM asks.

And thus the process begins again. New DM and his dungeon tiles chase us around the conference room like a nanny hunts her wayward charges. If I were running the game, sweating over the maps and measurements, I'd make my players stay put and at least appreciate the scenery. And if they insisted on leaving, I'd drop a chandelier on their heads. I did some research, Jane Goodall-style, around the office, minding the habits and behaviors of all the DMs I know. There has to be a common trait that I can knock off. Here are notes from my research:

Some have theater backgrounds. (Not surprising.)

Some were teachers. (Again, not surprising.)

*Some have played **D&D** since the 70's. (That's not a big shock either, I guess.)*

Some have good handwriting. (Or really just Chris Perkins, but it's good enough to mention.)

Some have brown hair.

Some always park on the left side of the parking lot.

A lot have dogs.

Some are vegetarian.

This is not helping at all.

I need something tangible, so New DM emails me a PDF of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Masters Guide*. It's not intimidating in its attachment form, but when I open and start printing the sucker I'm tempted to call in sick until November. It's a lot of pages. A *lot* of pages (224, to be exact). And I'm starting to get weird looks from the Market Research department, which has a PowerPoint presentation to give in about seven minutes. It's bad enough to be hogging the printer and even worse when every page you're printing has the words **CONFIDENTIAL** and **DO NOT DISTRIBUTE** stamped in big, black letters.

As the pages spring forth from Letter Tray #2, I catch glimpses of charts and sidebars and pluses and minuses and acronyms. Holy cow, it's a lot of pages! And it's not just Market Research giving me weird looks. There's a line forming behind me.

"Sorry," I say. "Kind of a big file. Shouldn't you all be at lunch?"

Printing complete and all is forgiven, but now I'm left with a stack of papers thicker than a Manhattan phone book. R&D wouldn't write this many words if they weren't all important, right? I'm weak. I think I'm feverish. In fact, I'm sure I have mono. But at least I'll have plenty of time to read this thing.

By the following Monday I read 90% of the *DMG*. Maybe, 85%. 70%. Whatever. It's an interesting education into what goes on behind the screen, but then I noticed two little words on the cover of the *DMG* that could potentially put my mind at ease—James Wyatt.

In ninth grade when I had a paper due on *Lord of the Flies* I did not have the good fortune to sit down with Mr. William Golding and ask him to please elaborate on the significance of what the breaking of Piggy's specs represented to the decline of the boy's mock civilization. (And why, why, why kill off the chubby, charming kid? I loved Piggy!)Fortunately for me, one thing all good DMs have in common is their ability to consume mass amounts of coffee. On a schedule.

Is stalking a good trait in a DM? Because if it is, I have nothing to worry about. I ambushed James one morning at 11:24 AM while he was waiting in line for his double tall white chocolate mocha.

"James! Wow! Weird running into you here!"

"We… uh… work here."

Right, right. He's observant *and* he's got a reputation for being one of the nicest guys in the building so no surprise he graciously accepts my plea for a one-on-one Cliffs Notes version of the new *DMG*. He does leave me with one piece of advice to hold me over.

"Just have fun and your players will too."

Of course! There's my hang up! It's the same reason I say I'm never writing another play or having another Christmas party or planning someone's birthday dinner. What if no one has fun?

Teddy once told me he can think of little else that pleases him more than hearing us talk about the game days later. He loved the premature wrinkles on our foreheads brought out from plotting our escape from imminent demise, and our yelps and whimpers when he dropped a throng of zombies in our path. New DM loves making up stories. He also likes beating down his PCs because he laughs hysterically every time Adam's halfling drops unconscious on the playmat (and Tabitha has to save him yet again.) Come to think of it, we all laugh a little hysterically. Why was the halfling alone with the deathjump spider in the first place?

While maybe my first roll as a DM was mostly a failure, there were a few things that did work in my favor, like the amount of food I stuffed in my friends' gullets before I induced them into playing. People are much more amendable to playing nice with a full belly. I should turn this second DM experiment into a dinner party and yes, perhaps, have a few cocktails, but not too much. There's a fine line.

I labor over who will be my practice group the way a socialite might agonize over a benefit dinner. First things

first, my practice group needs to consist of people who already know how to play **D&D**. Mistake #1: When forcing—I mean, introducing—my girlfriends to **D&D**, I was trying to take on the role of DM and teacher. (Mistake #1.5 was giving them too much to drink before we played. Tipsy toddler moms with bastard swords is not as fun as it sounds.) Second, the practice group should be experienced but not hardcore. And definitely not include rules lawyers. Sound effects are welcome but antagonizing is not. I could not stand the thought of someone in my game for the sole purpose of raising my hackles. While I've never seen a DM being provoked by a player, I know it happens. Especially when you're in a one-off game, without characters you're invested in, and you really, really, really want someone to include you in their article.

Social dynamics don't just matter on the playground. They count on the playmat too. My practice group should get along not just with me but with each other as well. I don't need any personal vendettas acted out in my game. Not on my dessert plates you don't! So my practice group needs to fit, but not so tight they'll end up staging a coup. They should hold me in place and support me, but they also need to be forgiving, because it's very likely things won't go as planned. If (when) we hit a snag they shouldn't run. Apparently, I should give up on people and find a nice group of pantyhose to play with.

It occurs to me that none of this will matter if no one can come. Seeing as though my game will take place after hours, this eliminates those with kids, school, or a social life. My **D&D** group naturally comes to mind. I know them. I like them. I've even saved a couple of their lives (in game) before. I know they are invested in their characters (with the exception of maybe Adam.) If I scored a TPK (by accident, of course) I could always end the encounter by saying, "and then the sounds of Chris de Burgh's *Lady in Red* waft through the air. You roll over onto your sword, let out a yelp, and realize you just had the strangest dream." Most importantly, with the exception of one, maybe two people, I'm pretty sure they wouldn't want to see me crash and burn for their own enjoyment. Just as I'm starting to look forward to this, Scott walks over to my desk.

"Hey Dungeon Mistress," he says. "I heard you're going to DM sometime. Did you know one of the new rules in 4th Edition says that if your DM isn't doing a good job you can steal their shoes?"

Clearly my prep work is nowhere near done.

Help me Mr. James Wyatt. You're my only hope.

To be continued…

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble practices Dungeon Mastering wherever she goes. She has learned pigeons make good NPCs and women with full bladders will not roll for initiative to determine who goes first.

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Dispel Magic

The Power of Editing

by Michele Carter and Jeremy Crawford

*Welcome to Design & Development, your primary source of **D&D** 4th Edition insights and revelations! While you're here, keep in mind that the game is still in a state of flux, as refinements are made by our design and development staff. You're getting a look behind the curtain at game design in progress, so enjoy, and feel free to send your comments to dndinsider@wizards.com.*

***Dispel magic* in 3rd Edition:** 125 lines of text
***Dispel magic* in 4th Edition:** 10 lines of text

Behold, the power of editing!

Creating such a concise version of the wizard spell *dispel magic* was more than a matter of wielding our red pens and cutting away. In many ways, **D&D** 4th Edition has involved rebuilding the game from the ground up, and *dispel magic* needed to be reconceived alongside the rest of the game system. The new edition's *dispel magic* was developed during the process of editing the *Player's Handbook*.

To begin with, the number of magical effects that might be dispellable had narrowed since 3rd Edition. Most arcane powers and divine powers -- called spells and prayers respectively -- create effects that are instantaneous or that last for 1 round, so the days of having numerous spells that last for many minutes or hours are over. Instantaneous and 1-round magical effects aren't intended to be dispellable, which left us considering the game's persistent magical effects. Most of the persistent spells and prayers in 4th Edition last no more than one encounter. Rituals can create magical effects that last for hours, days, or years, but it would take more than a spell or a prayer to dispel the effects of most rituals. Similarly, magic items -- which are created by rituals -- are designed so that their magic can't normally be suppressed by a spell or a prayer.

With these things in mind, we focused our attention on the spells and the prayers that create magical effects that last longer than 1 round. Some of those powers grant bonuses to or impose penalties on a target, but like 1-round effects, they aren't intended to be dispellable, and the game provides other ways of counteracting them.

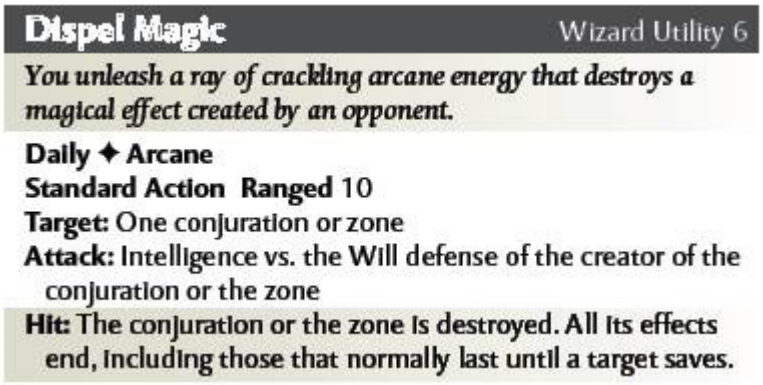
So with all of these magical effects in the new edition that *dispel magic* wasn't intended to apply to, what purpose could it serve? To destroy magical effects created by powers and persisting in the environment, whatever their power source.

When the editors received the classes and powers chapter of the *Player's Handbook*, we found a number of familiar spells like *Bigby's grasping hands*, spells that conjure forth things made of magical energy. We also found persistent areas of effect, such as the cleric's *blade barrier* and the paladin's *righteous inferno*, which could be sustained for many rounds. Over the course of a few conversations with the development team -- okay, more than a few -- we settled on two keywords to describe these powers: conjurations and zones.

Conjurations create objects or creatures out of magical energy and are often movable. The wizard's Bigby spells and the cleric's *spiritual weapon* are examples of powers that have the conjuration keyword. Zones are areas of effect that persist for several rounds. For example, the cleric's *consecrated ground* and the wizard's *stinking cloud* have the zone keyword. Conjurations and zones allow their users to add new elements to an encounter or to reshape a battlefield in their favor.

With the definitions of conjurations and zones in place, the role of *dispel magic* became clear. Useful for dispelling persistent effects: check. Useful across power sources, as defined by keywords: check. It doesn't matter whether an effect is the creation of a wizard or a warlock spell or a cleric or a paladin prayer -- if it's a conjuration or a zone, it can be dispelled. Good news for PCs caught in an enemy warlock's *tendrils of Thuban*!

So here's the new *dispel magic*, in all its short-and-sweet glory:



Dispel Magic Wizard Utility 6

You unleash a ray of crackling arcane energy that destroys a magical effect created by an opponent.

Daily ✦ Arcane
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One conjuration or zone
Attack: Intelligence vs. the Will defense of the creator of the conjuration or the zone
Hit: The conjuration or the zone is destroyed. All its effects end, including those that normally last until a target saves.

About the Author

Michele Carter first came to Wizards of the Coast with TSR, and is now the editing team lead in RPG R&D.

Jeremy Crawford joined Wizards of the Coast as an editor in 2007.

Their red pens are mightier than any designer's sword or developer's mace. Editing rules!

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The Warlord

Three Commandments

by Rob Heinsoo

*Welcome to Design & Development, your primary source of **D&D** 4th Edition insights and revelations! While you're here, keep in mind that the game is still in a state of flux, as refinements are made by our design and development staff. You're getting a look behind the curtain at game design in progress, so enjoy, and feel free to send your comments to dndinsider@wizards.com.*

Number One: Directing Damage

Don't play the warlord if your only idea of a good time is personally wreaking havoc on your foes. I love the name of the warlord class. I supported using the name instead of the original "marshal" name we'd drafted from 3rd Edition. But some players' first impression on hearing the name "warlord" is that the class must be tougher than all the other characters, the nastiest battlefield hack-and-slasher in the game. The warlord can hold his own in melee and will frequently save the day thanks to outright combat mojo, but every warlord is more effective as a commander than as a lone hero.

For example, the warlord's 1st-level daily attack power, *pin the foe*, does as much damage as the best of the fighter's 1st-level daily attack powers, *brute strike*. *Pin the foe's* advantage is that it locks down the target's movement whether the attack hits or misses. This pin effect only functions if the warlord has allies with him to team against the enemy. So the power might be a big enough hit to slay the enemy outright. But against an extremely tough foe, or when *pin the foe* misses, the power creates a tactical advantage that depends on teamwork between multiple party members to keep the target from shifting freely around the battlefield.

At that stage, with an enemy who is pinned and fighting to the last breath, the warlord isn't as likely to be the party member who gets in the killing blow. Take a look at the fighter's *brute strike* power again. While the warlord's cool 1st-level daily exploit sets up a teamwork benefit, *brute strike* has the keyword "Reliable," meaning that the power isn't expended if the attack misses. Eventually, as long as the fighter is alive to swing, that *brute strike* is going to connect -- the warlord doesn't have that certainty. If you're the player who always wants to be finisher, the party's sword-wielding ass-kicker, play a rogue, ranger, or a fighter who uses two-handed weapons.

Pin the Foe Warlord Attack 1
No matter where your foe turns, one of your allies is waiting for him.
Daily
Martial, Weapon
Standard Action
Melee weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier damage.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the target cannot shift if at least two of your allies (or you and one ally) are adjacent to it.

Brute Strike Fighter Attack 1

You shatter armor and bone with a ringing blow.
Daily
Martial, Reliable, Weapon
Standard Action
Melee weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier damage.

Number Two: Play Well with Others

This is the shiny-happy side of the previous commandment. Fourth edition has fundamentally selfish classes that care only about their own combat tricks and successes. Fourth edition also has extremely unselfish classes, and that's where the warlord fits in. Different players at the table are likely to take a different approach to the combat encounter portion of the game. If you enjoy cooperative games like Reiner Knezia's **Lord of the Rings** boardgame or **Shadows over Camelot**, you're much more likely to enjoy playing a warlord. For example, your warlord can provide the entire party with an extra movement option with a power such as *white raven onslaught*.

During the early stages of design, we often used a sports metaphor, casting the warlord as the quarterback. Now that I think about it, I'm not sure quarterback is the right analogy -- after all, quarterbacks tend to land a huge percentage of the glory, MVP awards, and Hollywood girlfriends! Basketball point guard may be a more apt comparison. Not every combat depends on the warlord/point guard, but they distribute benefits the rest of the party thrives on. Without the warlord's assists, the party is often left only to its own devices, which might not be enough to triumph in a given encounter. You can operate without a warlord, but when you get to the playoffs against powerful competition, parties that don't have a warlord (or possibly some other to-be-designed tactical leader) have a rougher time of it. If you feel a glow of accomplishment when your assists combine with your attacks' damage to help the party succeed, the warlord is for you.

White Raven Onslaught Warlord Attack 1
You lead the way with a powerful attack, using your success to create an opportunity for one of your allies. Each of your comrades in turn seizes on your example and begins to display true teamwork.
Daily
Martial, Weapon
Standard Action
Melee weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier damage, and you slide an adjacent ally 1 square. Until the end of the encounter, whenever you or an ally within 10 squares of you makes a successful attack, the attacker slides an adjacent ally 1 square.
Miss: Choose one ally within 10 squares. Until the end of the encounter, the ally slides an adjacent ally 1 square after making a successful attack.

Number Three: Order Up!

If you often find yourself suggesting a tactical course of action to your fellow players, the warlord might be for you. Back when we designed the original version of the marshal class for the *Miniatures Handbook*, the marshal owed a good deal to the vision and example of Skaff Elias. Skaff is famous for having excellent suggestions for what other players should be doing with their turns. The warlord class, as a descendant of the marshal, is partly an exercise in turning that sometimes annoying habit into a positive contribution that will be appreciated by other players, rather than resented.

Iron dragon charge is an example of how we're trying to make this type of guidance a welcome addition to another character's glory. Getting to charge as an immediate reaction when it's not your turn is a fantastic addition to any melee character's life, not an onerous order that forces your ally to spend their turn following your commands. Few players complain when the warlord in the party uses a well-timed exploit to give their PC a charge, another basic attack, or the chance to shift away from encroaching foes. Ditto for warlord powers that simultaneously allow the warlord to attack and inspire his allies to attempt a saving throw or recover hit points.

The warlord doesn't have unlimited license to boss other players around. Taken to extremes, that style of gameplay is still annoying. But if you're the type of player who loves studying tactical situations and trying to puzzle out the best way to get everyone through alive, the warlord provides roleplaying hooks and flexible powers to support your play style in a way that will endear you to your allies.

Iron Dragon Charge Warlord Attack 9
Like a rampaging iron dragon, you hurl yourself at your adversary, landing a terrific blow that inspires

your allies to charge as well.
Daily
Martial, Weapon
Standard Action
Melee weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Special: You must charge as part of this attack.
Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier damage.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, as an immediate reaction, an ally of your choice within 5 squares of you can charge a target that you charge.

About the Author

Rob Heinsoo was born in the Year of the Dragon. He started playing **D&D** in 1974 with the original brown box. More recently, he designed *Three-Dragon Ante*, *Inn-Fighting*, and a couple incarnations of the **D&D** Miniatures skirmish system. He's the lead designer of 4th Edition and captains the **D&D** mechanical design team.

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Class

Fighters: Choice of Weapons

by Rob Heinsoo
Art by William O'Connor

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Here's a highly probable conversation lifted from the future, one year from today, as two players who've just met at a convention discuss their PC choices for their upcoming **D&D** game.

"I'm playing a 3rd-level human fighter named Graelar."

"Cool. Is he weapon and shield or two-hander?"

"He's sword and board, man."

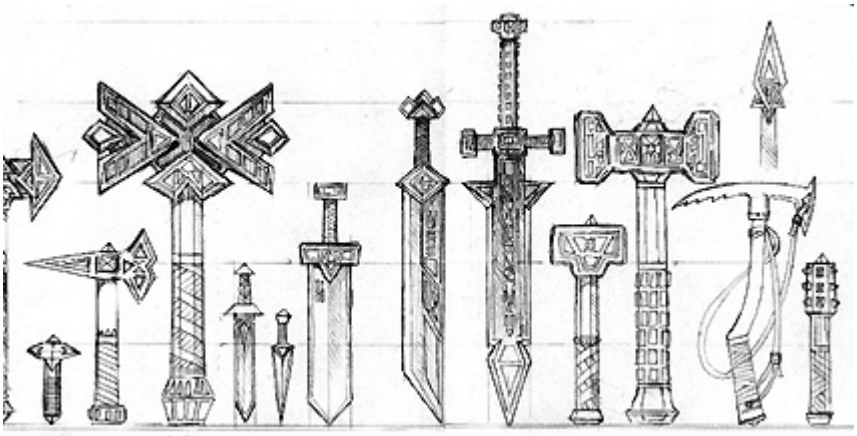
"Longsword?"

"Yeah. I thought about going high Con and using a hammer, but I wanted to start with the chance to make a couple of attacks, so I'm using rain of blows as my good weapon attack, and I went with high Wis so that I can switch to the better oppy powers later."

"My elf fighter uses a spear. I like the speed and the option to go past AC. But you've got the fighter covered. I'll play a halfling rogue."

The names and destinations of the powers mentioned above might have changed by the time the game is in your hands. What won't change is that fighters care about which weapons they use much more than other characters. Other character classes have specific weapons and weapon types that they tend to rely on while still maintaining access to a larger chunk of the weapon chart. The fighter is the only current 4th Edition class with capabilities that depend on the weapon they have chosen to train the most with. Even at 1st level, a fighter who uses an axe has a different power selection than a fighter who relies on a flail or a rapier or a pick. In the long run, fighters can diversify and master powers related to a few different weapons, but most will opt to focus on the weapon that suits their personal style, helps their interactions with the rest of the PCs in the group, and carries all the magical oomph they've managed to acquire.

Many fighters will opt for swords. Swords have the most flexible assortment of powers. In a fighter's hands, the longsword is the queen of the battlefield and the greatsword is the queen's executioner. But each of the other significant melee weapons offers the fighter unique advantages and opportunities. For the first time, you'll be able to say "I'm an axe fighter" or "I'm a flail fighter" and that will mean something cool.



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Power Source

Martial Power Source

by Mike Mearls
Art by David Griffith

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Power sources are an important part of 4th Edition. They answer the question, "How does your character do what he does?" Wizards tap into arcane magic. Paladins and clerics call on the power of the gods. For classes such as these, the answer is self-evident. Pose the same question to a fighter or rogue and the answer becomes more difficult. What separates the fighter who marches into the dragon's lair from the local village militia? In a world of mighty gods and boundless magic, what marks the line between an average guy with a sword and a *fighter*?

In 4th Edition, the martial power source provides the answer. Some people, through intense training, dedication, or just plain old toughness, rise above the rest of the pack. The fighter might walk into the dragon's lair out of a noble sense of duty or a selfish drive to prove himself mightier than a mere wyrm. He lacks the ability to control arcane magic or the dedication needed to gain power from the gods. Instead, he has his toughness, self-discipline, and supreme mastery of his fighting skills. Other characters seek to master energies from other planes or beings. The martial character seeks to master his potential—to convert it to a fully realized mastery of a fighting form.

A martial character is much like a world class athlete. An Olympic sprinter doesn't have any special muscles or super abilities. Through a mix of inborn talent and supreme dedication, she pushes herself to achieve speeds that no other human can match. In the same manner, a fighter achieves skill with weapons and armor that soar beyond a typical person's abilities. Like a skilled athlete, a fighter draws on his intense dedication, relentless training, and supreme focus. Potential isn't enough, as the sports world is filled with talented people who fail to apply themselves, as well as physically limited individuals who use a combination of dedication and smarts to outplay their opponents. A martial character draws his strength from within.

In terms of flavor and description, the martial character/athlete analogy guided many decisions about the way martial characters push themselves beyond the limit. At low levels, martial characters have abilities that are impressive but don't stretch the boundaries of what is or is not possible. Only at the highest levels do we see martial characters verging into the truly impossible acts of agility and strength attainable only in fiction.

Weapons and how fighters use them provided a blueprint for their design. A skilled halberdier can hack a foe with his weapon's blade and spin around to smash a second foe with the haft. A fighter with a longsword disarms her foe with a flick of her wrist, while a battle hungry axeman cleaves through shields, armor, and bone. The design for fighter maneuvers came down to looking at weapons, figuring out how a fighter could use one, and deciding on special effects that felt cool for the weapon and proved useful for the class. Check out the *Design & Development* column on fighters and their weapons for more on this concept.

Rogues have a similar relationship with skills. A nimble

rogue dives through the air to tumble past an ogre, while a charismatic one tricks an enemy into looking away just before she delivers a killing blow with her dagger. Just as fighters do more with weapons than any other character, rogues push skills beyond the limits that constrain other PCs.

The martial power source is about taking resources and abilities that have clear limits for other classes and demolishing those limits through focus, training, and skill.

About the Author

Mike Mearls is found only in subterranean places, as he detests sunlight. He is greatly evil and considers the bulk of humanity (and its kin) as cattle to feed upon. He speaks only his his own arcane language and several other weird tongues -- purportedly those of terrible races of things which dwell in regions of the subterranean world far deeper than mankind has ever ventured.

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Monster: Dragons

What Can a Dragon Do in a Round?

by James Wyatt

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4th Edition dragons are among the most dynamic, exciting monsters in the game—as they should be. They're different from each other, across categories (the metallics aren't like the chromatics), across colors (reds and whites don't have all the same attacks), and across age categories (fear the ancient dragons). Here's just a taste of what a fight against an ancient dragon might feel like:

- On the dragon's turn, the first thing it does is burst out in an inferno of flame, searing every PC within 25 feet—a free action. Then, with a standard action, it slashes out at the fighter and the cleric with its two front claws (even though they're both 20 feet away). As another free action, it uses its tail to slap the rogue, who was trying to sneak up behind it, and pushes her back 10 feet. It's getting angry at the wizard, so it uses a special ability to take another standard action: it spits a ball of fire at the wizard, setting him on fire. It has a move action left, which it uses to fly into a better position for its breath weapon. That ends the dragon's turn.

- It's the fighter's turn. He charges the dragon and manages to land a solid blow, dropping the dragon down below half its hit points. Oh—that gives the dragon the opportunity use its breath weapon as an immediate action. A huge cone of fire bursts from the dragon's mouth, engulfing all four PCs. But at least the dragon is below 500 hit points!

- Now the rogue moves around to flank with the fighter. Ordinarily, that would let the dragon use its tail slap again as an immediate action, but the dragon has used its immediate action already. That's lucky for the rogue, who actually gets to make an attack this round! Unfortunately, she fails to hit the dragon's AC of 49.

- The wizard fails to put out the fire, so he takes more damage. Worse yet, the dragon's breath scoured away the wizard's fire resistance, so he takes the full amount. He blasts the dragon with a ray of freezing cold, but this isn't 3rd Edition. The dragon takes normal damage, but it's not enough to slow it down.

- Finally, the cleric is up. Calling on the power of her god, she swings her halberd at the dragon—a critical hit! The damage isn't bad, but even better, the wizard gets a nice surge of healing power.

  He's going to need it—it's the dragon's turn again.

Dungeon Design in 4E

by Mike Mearls

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The year 2000 was a heady time for **D&D** players. 3rd edition was finally released after a year of previews. A game that had almost fallen off the radar of gamers everywhere came back with a bang. There was a tangible sense of energy in the air at Gen Con that year. People were excited about the toys they read about in their shiny new *Player's Handbook*s and, better yet, the toys were incredibly fun.

Thus, it was with some surprise that, when I returned home from Gen Con and set to work on my first adventure, I was a little unhappy. According to the rules, a 1st level party could face a single Challenge Rating 1 monster, or an Encounter Level 1 group of beasts. That seemed reasonable, until I started designing adventures. The rules presented the following possibilities:

- One gnoll
- One troglodyte
- Two orcs
- Two hobgoblins
- Four goblins

None of these really excited me. Four goblins on the map might be fun, but a fighter with the Cleave feat put that thought to bed. I wanted *Keep on the Borderlands* and the moat house from *Village of Hommlet*. My dungeons felt boring because I couldn't fit many monsters into each room.

Admittedly, 3rd Edition brought some sense and standardization to encounters that other editions glossed over, but that didn't change a simple fact—I wanted lots of humanoids running around my dungeon rooms, and 3rd Edition said I could do that only if I wanted a TPK.

Over the years, my initial frustration with the game never faded. By the time the party was of a high enough level to handle a fight with six orcs, the poor orcs' AC and attacks were too low to pose much of a threat. In the end, I just fudged my encounters to create the excitement and variety I was. Despite what the game told me, a low-level party could take on three or four orcs without a massacre (for the PCs, at least).

The 4E Way: Monsters, Monsters, Monsters!

In 4th Edition, your dungeons are going to be a lot more densely populated. The typical encounter has one monster per PC in the party, assuming that the monsters are about the same level as the PCs. An encounter's total XP value determines its difficulty, allowing you a lot more freedom to mix tougher and weaker monsters. Even better, the difference between a level X monster and a level X + 1 monster is much smaller. You can create an encounter using monsters that are three or four levels above the party without much fear. Add in the rules for minions (which will be described in a future *Design & Development* article), and you could (in theory) match twenty goblins against a 1st-level party and have a fun, exciting, balanced fight.

This shift in encounter design means a lot for dungeons. With all those monsters running around, you need to give them a fair amount of space for a number of reasons:

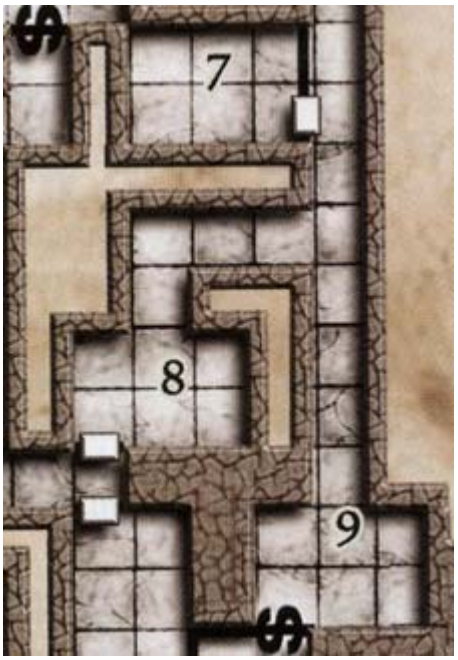
- The monsters need to bring their numbers to bear on the party. Wider corridors and rooms allow the monsters to attack as a group. A monster that's standing around, waiting for the space it needs to make an attack, is wasting its time.

- Multiple avenues of attack make things scary for the PCs and

make it easier to get all the monsters into the action. The typical dungeon room where the PCs are on one side of the door and the monsters are on the other grows dull after a while. The PCs kick open the door, form a defensive formation in the doorway, and hack the monsters to pieces. There's little tactical challenge there.

- Reinforcements need a route to the battle. With more monsters in a fight, you can design dynamic encounters where the orcs in the room next door come barging into the fight to see what's going on. An extra door or passage in the encounter area is a convenient route for the rest of the encounter's monsters to show up on the scene. Just because the encounter calls for five orcs doesn't mean that all five start the encounter in the party's line of sight.

Example: Dungeon of the Fire Opal



As part of an early playtest, I dug up a map that 1st and 3rd Edition veterans might recognize. Here's an example of an encounter I built using the basic philosophy outlined above.

Notice that the map marks these rooms as separate areas, three 20 foot-by-30 foot rooms. Measured in squares, that's 4 by 6, small enough that even a dwarf could stomp from one end of the room to the next in one move action. That's doesn't make for a very interesting encounter. If I tried to squeeze four or five monsters into each of those rooms, there would be barely enough room for the party and their foes to fit. The fight would consist of the two sides lining up and trading attacks for 3–4 rounds. Few inherently interesting tactical options can even come into play.

Even worse, the map offers few strategic events. The monsters might flee out the secret door in area 9 or one of the doors in area 8, but with such small rooms it would be easy for the PCs to block the exits or move next to any of the monsters before they could run.

When I went back and used this map to design a 4th Edition adventure, I combined all three rooms into one encounter area. Area 9 was a torture chamber staffed by four goblin minions. Area 8 was a guard room manned by two hobgoblin warriors, while the bugbear torturer lounged in his private chamber, area 7. In play, the party walked south toward area 9, ignoring the door to area 7 for the moment. The rogue and ranger tried to sneak up on the hobgoblins in area 8, but the monsters spotted them and attacked. When the hobgoblins yelled for help, the goblins charged from area 9 and the bugbear emerged from his chamber to attack the party's wizard from behind.

The fight was a tense affair in the T-intersection between areas 8 and 9. Caught between three groups of monsters, the party had to constantly move to protect the vulnerable wizard, heal PCs who fell to the combined attacks of the hobgoblins and bugbear, and spend precious actions hacking down the goblin minions.

I didn't do anything fancy with the map or add any magical elements to the fight. It was simply a tough melee in close quarters with attackers coming in from three directions at once. The dungeon was a dynamic environment, with three groups of connected monsters responding to the PCs' intrusion into their area.

So, that's the first rule of 4th Edition dungeon design. Now that you have more monsters to throw at the party, you can create encounters that spill over greater areas. Opening a door in one area might cause monsters to come from other areas of the dungeon to investigate. With the emphasis switched from one party against one monster to one party against an equal number of foes, you can throw a lot more critters at the PCs.

Homework Assignment

4th Edition is still a ways off, but it's never too early to start thinking of the dungeons you're going to design. Here's a little homework assignment for all of you: Pick two or three closely linked encounter areas on the sample dungeon map. While you obviously don't have access to the new rules, you can still come up with ideas for encounters. Assuming that you can use four or five monsters, pick two or three encounter areas on the map and turn them into a single

fight. Post your ideas in the 4th Edition forums and see what other gamers come up with.

About the Author

Mike Mearls is found only in subterranean places, as he detests sunlight. He is greatly evil and considers the bulk of humanity (and its kin) as cattle to feed upon. He speaks only his his own arcane language and several other weird tongues - purportedly those of terrible races of things which dwell in regions of the subterranean world far deeper than mankind has ever ventured.

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Points of Light

by Rich Baker

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The **Dungeons & Dragons** game assumes many things about its setting: The world is populated by a variety of intelligent races, strange monsters lurk on other planes, ancient empires have left ruins across the face of the world, and so on. But one of the new key conceits about the **D&D** world is simply this: Civilized folk live in small, isolated points of light scattered across a big, dark, dangerous world.

Most of the world is monster-haunted wilderness. The centers of civilization are few and far between, and the world isn't carved up between nation-states that jealously enforce their borders. A few difficult and dangerous roads tenuously link neighboring cities together, but if you stray from them you quickly find yourself immersed in goblin-infested forests, haunted barrowfields, desolate hills and marshes, and monster-hunted badlands. *Anything* could be waiting down that old overgrown dwarf-built road: a den of ogre marauders, a forgotten tower where a lamia awaits careless travelers, a troll's cave, a lonely human village under the sway of a demonic cult, or a black wood where shadows and ghosts thirst for the blood of the living.

Given the perilous nature of the world around the small islands of civilization, many adventures revolve around venturing into the wild lands. For example:

- Roads are often closed by bandits, marauders such as goblins or gnolls, or hungry monsters such as griffons or dragons. The simple mission of driving off whomever or whatever is preying on unfortunate travelers is how many young heroes begin their careers.

- Since towns and villages do not stay in close contact, it's easy for all sorts of evils to befall a settlement without anyone noticing for a long time. A village might be terrorized by a pack of werewolves or enslaved by an evil wizard, and no one else would know until adventurers stumbled into the situation.

- Many small settlements and strongholds are founded, flourish for a time, and then fall into darkness. The wild lands are filled with forgotten towers, abandoned towns, haunted castles, and ruined temples. Even people living only a few miles away from such places might know them only by rumor and legend.

The common folk of the world look upon the wild lands with dread. Few people are widely traveled—even the most ambitious merchant is careful to stick to better-known roads. The lands between towns or homesteads are wide and empty. It might be safe enough within a day's ride of a city or an hour's walk of a village, but go beyond that and you are taking your life into your hands. People are *scared* of what might be waiting in the old forest or beyond the barren hills at the far end of the valley, because whatever is out there is most likely hungry and hostile. Striking off into untraveled lands is something only heroes and adventurers do.

Another implication of this basic conceit of the world is that there is very little in the way of authority to deal with raiders and marauders, outbreaks of demon worship, rampaging monsters, deadly hauntings, or similar local problems. Settlements afflicted by troubles can only hope for a band of heroes to arrive and set things right. If there is a kingdom beyond the town's walls, it's still largely covered by unexplored forest and desolate hills where evil folk gather. The king's soldiers might do a passable job of keeping the lands within a few miles of his castle free of monsters and bandits, but most of the realm's outlying towns and villages are on their own.

In such a world, adventurers are aberrant. Commoners view them as brave at best, and insane at worst. But such a world is rife with the possibility for adventure, and no true hero will ever lack for a villain to vanquish or a quest to pursue.

About the Author

A former officer in the US Navy, **Rich Baker** has been a game designer since 1991. He has written or contributed to more than 70 game products, including 3rd Edition **Dungeons & Dragons** and **Axis & Allies Miniatures**. He is also the author of eight *Forgotten Realms* novels, including the New York Times bestseller *Condemnation*.

PC Roles

by Rob Heinsoo

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Let me tell you about my character, Nils, and how he contributed a few grace notes to 4th Edition's concepts of character class roles.

Nils isn't a 4th Edition character; he's my old 3.5 character from Mark Jessup's "Nine Chords" campaign. There are nine deities in Mark's homebrew world, one deity each for the nine alignment slots. Each of the gods is a great bard whose personal pleasure and cosmic power flows from ritual bragging in front of the other gods about the kickass accomplishments of their worshippers. (Perhaps this arrangement will seem even more fitting when I mention that Mark is the director of marketing here at Wizards of the Coast…)

In a world like this, someone in the party has *got* to play a bard. But when the character class draft went down, everyone stepped back toward fighter or cleric or wizard or rogue, and nobody was willing to jump on the lute grenade. Mark was disappointed with us. I hate to see a disappointed DM, so I vowed to detour into bard-land just as soon as I was comfortable with Nils as a fighter.

Four greatsword-swinging levels of fighter later, Nils entered the path of lute-n-flute. My roleplaying opportunities increased because I was now the spokesman and PR agent for the PC group. But in encounters that focused on combat instead of roleplaying, Nils was forced into a mold pro basketball analysts call a "tweener," too wimpy to play power forward alongside the ranger and the barbarians, and not capable of long-range shots like the wizard.

The PC group appreciated the singing bonuses Nils provided, and they appreciated his eventual *haste* spell, but supplying those bonuses meant that I spent at least two rounds at the start of combat making everyone else better without doing much of anything myself, except maybe moving around. Once I entered the combat, I survived by making judicious use of the Combat Expertise feat.

By the time the campaign slowed down to once or twice a year sessions, I'd played Nils for seven bard-only levels and obtained a much clearer perspective on the problems faced by **D&D** characters who don't feel a clear niche. Fighters, rogues, clerics, and wizards all occupy pivotal places in a **D&D** PC group's ecology, while the bard is singing from offstage reminding everyone not to forget the +1 or +2 bonuses they're providing to attacks and saves against fear.

When Andy (Collins), James (Wyatt), and I put together the basic structure of 4th Edition, we started with the conviction that we would make sure every character class filled a crucial role in the player character group. When the bard enters the 4th Edition stage, she'll have class features and powers that help her fill what we call the Leader role. As a character whose songs help allies fight better and recover hit points, the bard is most likely to fit into a player character group that doesn't have a cleric, the quintessential divine leader.

Unlike their 3e counterparts, every Leader class in the new edition is designed to provide their ally-benefits and healing powers without having to use so many of their own *actions* in the group-caretaker mode. A cleric who *wants* to spend all their actions selflessly will eventually be able to accomplish that, but a cleric who wants to mix it up in melee or fight from the back rank with holy words and holy symbol attacks won't constantly be forced to put aside their damage-dealing intentions. A certain amount of healing flows from the Leader classes even when they opt to focus on slaying their enemies directly.

Does every group need a Leader class? Not necessarily. Is it worth having more than one Leader in a party? Maybe.

We settled on crucial roles rather than on necessary roles. 4th Edition has mechanics that allow groups that want to function without a Leader, or without a member of the other three roles, to persevere. Adventuring is usually easier if the group includes a Leader, a Defender, a Striker, and a Controller, but none of the four roles is absolutely essential. Groups that double or triple up on one role while leaving other roles empty are going to face different challenges. They'll also have different strengths. That's the type of experiment you'll be running in eight months. Before then, we'll have more to say about the other roles.

One last thing before I go, since I started this note off by talking about Nils. This time, let me say a few things to Nils directly: "Nils, it's been fun playing you. But I'll see you again in a future incarnation, and this time around when Al-Faregh the wizard and Jum the barbarian are chopping up beholders, you're going to be fighting on the same playing field instead of handing out Gatorade cups and singing the national anthem."

About the Author

Rob Heinsoo was born in the Year of the Dragon. He started playing **D&D** in 1974 with the original brown box. More recently, he designed *Three-Dragon Ante*, *Inn-Fighting*, and a couple incarnations of the **D&D** Miniatures skirmish system. He's the lead designer of 4th Edition and captains the **D&D** mechanical design team.

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Elves

by Bruce Cordell

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A thousand birdsongs resound through the cool depths of the primeval forest. These ancient, virgin, and primary woodlands have never felt the metallic sting of axe or the unnatural heat of fire stoked so hot it burns more than detritus and undergrowth. Living, bark-wrapped pillars hold aloft layers upon layers of mounting canopy that filters the high sunlight through more hues of emerald and gold that could ever be imagined.

The secrets of the deep, old woods are closely guarded, and few know of the many wild things that walk amid the shadowed boles. Silver stags, wise hares, unicorns, butterflies the size of hawks, and tree owls who've survived a hundred or more winters shelter in the forgiving hollow of a grandfather pine.

Few indeed, but for the elves.

Most elves are wild, free forest-dwellers, guarding their lands with stealth and deadly arrows from high boughs. Though fey in origin, elves have lived so long in the world that they have become almost inured to its difficulties. Hardened by the unruly savagery of nature and seasoned by the hard lessons that orcs, humans, and other creatures of the world are only too happy to teach, elves have gone a different route than their cousins, the eladrin. Elves rely on hard-won intuition and senses tuned to an arrow's point instead of reason, intellect, or debate as eladrin are more wont to do. However, like eladrins, they possess a pure hate for their shared distant drow relatives.

Elves are people of deeply felt but short-lived passions. They are easily moved to delighted laughter, blinding wrath, or even mournful tears. Elves possess a profound, intuitive connection to the natural world they inhabit, and often perceive things others have not the skill or aptitude to notice. They are inclined to impulsive behavior in preference to long deliberation, though they would say they prefer to act in the moment.

Elves, sometimes also called wood elves, wild elves, or sylvan elves, usually gather in tribes or bands composed of three or more families. These tribes are less concerned with relationships or lineages than with proven forestcraft and hunting prowess, and usually choose the wisest and most perceptive member of a tribe to lead. In very large tribes, this "elf chieftain" is instead described as an "elf king" or "elf queen." However, in most tribes, even the lowliest member doesn't feel beyond his station in speaking his mind to any other elf, regardless of station, up to and including the tribe's leader.

Most elves revere the natural world, but they love forests most of all. They never cut living trees, and when they create permanent villages, they do so by carefully growing or weaving arbors, treehouses, and catwalks from living branches. They prefer the magic of the natural world to arcane magic. Elves are drawn to the worship of both the fey god Corellon and Obad-Hai, the god of the wild. Both spiritual and practical, elves embody the most peaceful and the most violent aspects of the natural world.

About the Author

Wizards and Wizard Implements

by Bruce Cordell

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Magic saturates the world and all the extraordinary realms beyond the world, an intrinsic force present in literally all things. Magic transforms and alters the natural world, sometimes actively and with sudden effect, other times subtly and over long centuries.

This arcane energy source is difficult to understand and even tougher to master. Wizards do so through years of study, practice, and apprenticeship to accomplished masters.

Wizards wield arcane magic, and they recognize reality for what it is: a thin veneer of structure supported and energized by a force that is ultimately malleable, to those who know its secrets. Though research and study, wizards learn esoteric rituals that allow them to alter time and space, hurl balls of fire that incinerate massed foes, and wield spells like warriors brandish swords. They call upon lesser and greater spells to unleash raging torrents of cold, fire, or lightning, confuse and enthrall the weak-minded, or even turn invisible or walk through walls.

What sets wizards apart from others who wield arcane magic are wizards' unique **implements**. Most people recognize the three most common tools associated with wizardcraft: the **orb**, **staff**, and **wand**.

Any wizard can use an implement to increase the effectiveness of his spells. Just as a warrior gains a benefit when attacking an enemy with a magic sword, so does a wizard benefit from using a magic orb, staff, or wand with his spellcasting. In addition, each implement focuses magic of a particular discipline or tradition more effectively than the wizard would be able to accomplish otherwise. As a result, wizards are rarely without at least one of these tools.

The **orb** is favored by the Iron Sigil and Serpent Eye traditions. Serpent Eye cabalists use orbs to focus powers of enchantment, beguiling, and ensnaring. The mages of the Iron Sigil, on the other hand, employ orbs to guard themselves with potent defenses when invoking spells of thunder or force.

The **staff** is best suited to the disciplines of the Hidden Flame and the Golden Wyvern. Servants of the Hidden Flame wield fierce powers of fire and radiance through their staves. Golden Wyvern initiates are battle-mages who use their staves to shape and sculpt the spells they cast.

The **wand** is a perennial favorite for wizards who favor accurate, damaging attacks. Emerald Frost adepts use wands to help channel powers of cold and deadly acidic magic, while Stormwalker theurges channel spells of lightning and force through their wands.

A wizard without an implement is like a slightly near-sighted man with glasses: The man can still see, but without his glasses, he can't read the road sign across the way. Likewise, while wizard traditions are associated with a particular implement, a wizard need not possess or hold a given implement to use a power belonging to that tradition. For instance, a wizard belonging to the Hidden Flame order can cast the fire spell *cinder storm* even if he doesn't own, has lost, or is not holding a magic staff. But if he does have a magic staff, it aids the accuracy of his attack, and his mastery of the Hidden Flame technique allows him to deal more damage with the spell.

Monster: Demons & Devils

Dividing Demons and Devils

by Chris Sims

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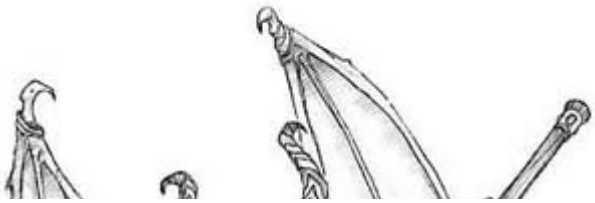
In the real world, "demon" is synonymous with "devil." "Abyss" and "hell" have a similar relationship. **D&D** designers have struggled with these facts since 1977 when the **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons** game depicted demons and devils, the Abyss and the Nine Hells. The original basis for the division was alignment. Aligned planes existed to provide a meaningful afterlife for similarly aligned characters, and a need to fill those planes with natives resulted in demons being distinct from devils. As the game evolved, the original division remained, but too many similarities persisted. The advent of 4th Edition lets us accentuate the differences between the two primary species of fiends.

Throughout demons' and devils' existence in the **D&D** game, resemblances between them have been stronger and more numerous than differences. Both species are extraplanar forces of evil that seek souls to supplement their numbers. Each breed has wretched and implike creatures at the bottom of the hierarchy and godlike archfiends at the top. Each member of both species has a wide array of similar (and often superfluous) supernatural powers. Most demons and devils are superior to members of typical PC races in every way, including incredible intelligence. Their purposes in the material world have always been similar.

In the original **AD&D** *Monster Manual,* Gary Gygax admitted that devils "somewhat resemble the demons both in their characteristics and abilities." **AD&D** 2nd Edition kept the planar structure of the original game. Demons and devils became tanar'ri and baatezu, respectively, but little made them distinct other than their categorical names. Only a conflict called the Blood War kept them from overrunning the material world. However, this evil-on-evil fight didn't expand the possibilities for typical **D&D** play. On the contrary, the Blood War brought the motivations and hierarchy of demons and devils closer together. The 3rd Edition of **D&D** retained so many of 2nd Edition's concepts that it did little to clarify the situation until the release of *Fiendish Codex I*. 4th Edition changes all that.

In 4th Edition, the Nine Hells are an astral dominion among other deific abodes in the Astral Sea (more on that in an upcoming *Design & Development* column). The resident deity is Asmodeus, who as an angel in primeval times, led an army of his fellows against his celestial master and murdered that god. Although Asmodeus gained divine might from his foul deed, he and his followers also suffered their victim's dying curse. Under the power of that malediction, all the rebellious angels twisted in form and became devils. Worse still, the murdered god's words transformed Asmodeus's dominion into a nightmarish place and bound the newborn devils to it. To this day, devils plot to escape their prison, weaving lies and corruption to ensure their eventual freedom and to seize even greater power.



Asmodeus rules Hell with despotic pride, and all devils conform to his strict hierarchy or face destruction. Within the chain of command, lesser devils use whatever power they have to mimic their ultimate leader. Devils work to gain influence in the cosmos, especially among mortals in the world. They eagerly respond to any summons and readily form cleverly worded pacts. They plan and build to meet their needs, making and using all sorts of devices, tools, and

weapons. A devil might be supernaturally potent, and it might possess incredible magic items, but its greatest assets are its shrewdly calculating mind and eternal patience. Devils want to impose a sort of order -- specifically theirs -- on the cosmos.

Not so with demons.

In the Abyss, which gapes like a festering wound in the landscape of the Elemental Tempest, demons teem, eternally divided among themselves simply by their insatiable lust for ruin. Legend says that the Chained God, Tharizdun, found a seed of evil in the young cosmos, and during the gods' war with the primordials, he threw that seed into the Elemental Tempest. There, the evil seed despoiled all that came into contact with it (some say it tainted Tharizdun himself) and created the Abyss as it burned a hole in the very structure of the plane. Elemental beings that came too close to the Abyss became trapped and warped. Any desire they have turns to the longing to obliterate the gods, creation, and even one another. They became demons.

Most demons are savage and fearless engines of annihilation. Although sometimes driven by unspeakable yearning or by horrifying demon lords to gather in groups, demons have no real organization and no singular aim. Demons don't negotiate, and they build nothing lasting. Most use tooth and claw rather than artificial weapons. They care little or nothing for souls. Even the mightiest demon lords manipulate other demons by using threats, direct violence, or the promise of more destruction through affiliation. Although the lords of the Abyss that veteran **D&D** players know and love to hate still exist, no monolithic hierarchy supports any demon's influence. Although a demon might want to destroy another creature and take that creature's power, success only results in the winning demon using and squandering what it has seized. Demons have no regard for the responsibilities of authority, and they care little for keeping what they acquire. They're forces of unmaking, and a universe under them would reflect the horror that is the Abyss, if that universe survived at all.

What does a clearer distinction between the two major species of fiends mean for your game? If you need a devious fiend that cares about souls and works on long-term schemes, use a devil. However, wholesale slaughter, pointless suffering, and terrifying devastation call for a demon. A villain or even a player character might bargain with devils, but those who conjure demons do so only to wreak havoc on their enemies. In short, the unambiguous division of the fiends is another way 4th Edition makes the game easier to design for and to play.

About the Author

Chris Sims started out working for small **d20** System companies in 2003, then became a freelance editor for Wizards RPG R&D. Wizards finally got annoyed enough by his constant applications for positions to hire him as a card game editor in 2005. From there, Chris wheedled his way into RPG R&D as an editor, and finally became a story designer after masterminding a few choice assassinations. His credits include *Monster Manual V, Secrets of Sarlona, Rules Compendium,* and *Eberron Survival Guide.*

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A Technical Look at D&D Insider Applications

by Didier Monin

The Design & Development *article series premiered on the **D&D** website back in September 2005, and has been a staple ever since. With the approach of 4th Edition, and our designers and developers focused on the new edition, this column will be the primary vehicle for 4th Edition coverage. We'll not only give you peeks at what's forthcoming, but also the "how" and "why."*

Keep in mind that the game is still in a state of flux, as refinements are made by our design and development staff. You're getting a look behind the curtain at game design in progress, so enjoy, and feel free to send your comments to dndinsider@wizards.com.

As part of the 4th Edition announcement, we've discussed the online component (collectively known as **D&D Insider**). To quote directly from Bill Slavicsek's latest *Ampersand* column:

> "With **D&D Insider**, we're offering an optional online component to 4th Edition **D&D**. It consists of magazine content, player aids, Dungeon Master tools, and a **D&D Game Table** that allows you to play the pen-and-paper **D&D** game over the Internet. These features are in addition to our regular selection of analog products. They don't replace them."

While we've introduced **D&D Insider**'s contribution to the new edition, we haven't gone into too much detail about the tools themselves… until now. Didier Monin, producer for the **D&D Insider** client applications, provides the following overview of what we can expect from these online tools, with future articles looking at the following areas in even closer detail.

D&D Insider features a variety of resources that will help players and DMs if they choose to subscribe. **D&D Insider** is part client applications and part web resources. The client applications will be rich Windows clients, with some functionality only available when the user is online and identified as a **D&D Insider** subscriber, and others available even when the user is offline.

D&D Insider and 4th Edition

D&D Insider will launch in June 2008 with the new *Player's Handbook*, but is not required to play **D&D** 4th Edition; it simply provides extra options that you can unlock with the subscription. These digital tools are by no mean necessary to play the game, but are designed to facilitate some of the game's aspects.

System Requirements

The **D&D Insider** client applications are developed for the PC platform. Two of the **D&D Insider** applications (the **D&D Game Table** and the **D&D Character Creator**, both demoed in their prototype versions at Gen Con) use a 3D engine based on DirectX.

Our recommended specs for the PC platform includes Windows XP SP2, 512MB RAM, AMD XP 2400 + or Intel P4 2.6Ghz, and a graphic card with 128 MB RAM and support of Shader 2.0. These recommended specs allow you to experience the full range of lighting and Shader effects our 3D engine offers.

There are at least two reasons why we chose the PC/DirectX route. The first one is related to market research indicating that PC users are a much larger user base than Mac users, and the second is the fact that we already had a DirectX-based 3D engine in-house, and there was no point reinventing something we already had available. The other applications will be designed for Windows, but will not rely on this 3D game engine so that they can be used on lower-end PC platforms. We have not yet established our minimum specifications at this time. We'll post those as soon as they become available.

Because the other **D&D Insider** applications are not DirectX driven, they should also be usable on Mac computers using the dual boot system.

The D&D Game Table

A rough prototype of this DirectX 3D application was demoed in the first part of the **D&D Insider** teaser movie. The **D&D Game Table** is meant to be an online meeting space, allowing players that can't gather together the means to play **D&D**. The overarching goal is to create an experience as close to the tabletop game experience as possible.

We are designing the **D&D Game Table** to be as flexible as we can make it, to accommodate even non-**D&D** games. The **D&D Game Table** will not adjudicate game rules any more than your kitchen table adjudicates rules for you. DMs and players decide what they can and can't do. DMs and players can communicate their rules adjudication through voice interaction provided by the VOIP (Voice-Over Internet Protocol), the text chat window, and the DM's settings. We do plan to offer integrated functionalities from the VOIP to allow Dungeon Masters to manage their communications and channels with their players the way they want.

In the movie prototype, dice were shown rolling on the screen. There is a special connection between the gamers and their dice, and we all feel this connection is fully a part of the **D&D** experience. However, visible dice rolling is a feature that can be turned off. Random numbers can be generated without having to see the dice rolling, if that's what you prefer. Lastly, DMs will be allowed to "fudge" dice rolls if they want to; players will not have this power, however.

The **D&D Game Table** allows DMs to decide for themselves how things will be done in their games. For example, some DMs allow players to draw on the game map, while others prefer to do so themselves. There is no "good" or "bad" approach to this; it will be handled by the DM's settings. Another thing that DMs can set is the speed at which figures move on the game table. There's the "slow" motion of the miniatures seen in the **D&D Insider** prototype movie, or the DM can speed things up so the miniatures are moving from location to location quickly.

The D&D Character Creator

The **Character Creator** has two parts: the character visualizer and the character sheet. The character visualizer was demoed at Gen Con in its prototypical form, a DirectX 3D application that allows players to customize the visual aspect of their characters. Snapshots of portraits, full-screen wallpaper, and virtual miniatures of characters will also be made available to **D&D Insider** subscribers.

We want this tool to be as flexible as possible. Consequently, the 3D engine allows players to experiment with all sorts of tints, and lighting. They can personalize everything from a character's build, face and pose, to the coloration and variations of their characters' armor and weaponry.

The character sheet portion of the **D&D Character Creator** is a data-driven Windows rich client application designed to facilitate character sheet creation using the **D&D** 4th Edition rules. **D&D Insider** subscribers will be able to create characters using content from any published book. To get access to the full details of the relevant rules and mechanical elements, though, you will need to own the E-version of the physical book where these rules or mechanical elements were published. When you purchase the printed book, a code will grant access to the E-version of the book for a nominal fee. As a subscriber, ownership of the E-version gives you access, when you are online, to the rules content while you're filling out or updating your character sheet. Without the E-version, however, the character sheet will give you only the barest information (such as the names of feats and such) and refer you to the appropriate published books.

The D&D Dungeon Builder

The **Dungeon Builder** will help create tactical maps for your games. This Windows rich client application is improving on the dungeon tile builder that is currently available for download on the **D&D** site. Using dungeon tiles or basic drawing tools, Dungeon Masters and players can create tactical maps that can be used on the **D&D Game Table**.

The D&D Encounter Builder

This application is designed for Dungeon Masters, and it allows them to build encounters quickly, and then link them together to form a ready-made adventure. The **Encounter Builder** uses a format that allows DMs to take their encounters and play them on the **D&D Game Table**. It has been mentioned in the Gen Con seminars that 4th Edition encounters are not necessarily combat encounters, but also social encounters and other type of challenges; the **Encounter Builder** will enable DMs to create these as well. Like the character sheet, the detailed stat blocks of the monsters will be available online, for the owners of the E-version of the book where the specific monster was published.

Character Vaults

This part of **D&D Insider** lives online. The **Character Vault** is the place where you store your characters (both visual images and character sheets) so that they can be used in the **D&D Game Table**. The number of

characters you can store will be finite, and we are still working on the exact details of that storage space. As a player, you will also be able to present your vault of characters to the world, and publishing a journal of your adventures (via tools like blogs). You can make your character files accessible so that other players can use them in their own **D&D Insider** applications suite, assuming you allow this.

Some of the **Character Vault**'s functionalities, such as blogging, are tools that the Gleemax infrastructure provides to anyone with an account, even if they have not subscribed to **D&D Insider**.

Campaign Vaults

Like the **Character Vault**, this part of **D&D Insider** lives online. As a DM, you will be able to store your encounters and maps, so that they can be loaded in the **D&D Game Table**. You will also be able to showcase your campaigns, keep track of what is going on there, present background information to selected friends (your gaming buddies certainly, but you will be free to expand or restrict viewing as you see fit). You will have access to tools such as campaign wikis, and can also upload information taken from the **D&D Insider** applications suite (the **Dungeon Builder** and the **Encounter Builder**, for example) for others to use, always with the ability to choose what you want others to see and have access to.

Some of the **Campaign Vault**'s functionalities are basic tools that the Gleemax infrastructure provides to anyone with an account, even if they are not **D&D Insider** subscribers.

***Next time*:** A look at digital objects, including the virtual mini, tiles and tokens!

About the Author

Didier Monin has settled in Seattle, and has been working for Wizards of the Coast for the past 12 years, first in France then in the USA. He has been a world traveler, has lived on a boat, and has been a **D&D** gamer since 1980 and favors Dungeon Mastering. He also plays as much online strategy and simulation computer games that he can. Above all, he is married and father of two super nice kids, who enjoy gaming too. He is currently the producer for the client applications parts of **D&DI**.

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Part 3: Living Fever

by Chris Tulach

The first two articles in this series talked about the beginnings of massive shared-world roleplaying game play and the granddaddy of it all, **Living City**. This time, we'll talk about "Living Fever" that spread throughout the **RPGA** during the 1990s and early 2000s, and the challenges the **RPGA** faced with the burgeoning number of programs.

It was clear by 1994 that **Living City** had become very successful and the future of the **RPGA**'s programming was moving in the direction of "bring-your-own-character." Classic-style adventures in the vein of the old tournaments in which you were given your character were losing popularity. Work began on other programs to follow the success of **Living City**.

The first of the spin-offs was called **Living Jungle**, and it released in 1995. Set in a primal land known as Malatra with no trappings of standard medieval fantasy, **Living Jungle** was a reaction to the culture that had developed around **Living City**. It was decidedly light on treasure and magic. The campaign featured non-standard character race options, like shapechanging animals and intelligent apes. It was one of many spin-offs that had a "cult" following -- maintaining a small but dedicated player base. **Living Jungle** lasted a couple years into the 3rd Edition era and weathered conversion much better than **Living City** due to its de-emphasis on certified magic items.

The next campaign developed also took a minimalist approach to magic and treasure. Inspired by **Ravenloft** and drawing directly from the **Masque of the Red Death** boxed set, **Living Death** was launched at Winter Fantasy, 1996. The world of **Masque of the Red Death** was TSR's most ambitious stretch of the 2nd Edition rules system. It was set in the "real" world of the 1890s and featured elements of gothic horror, intrigue, and suspense. **Living Death** took characters around the globe as part of a secret organization known as the White Rose; adventurers investigated mysterious goings-on and attempted to stop an otherworldly menace from insinuating itself further into the fabric of our reality. Targeting some players' love for history and intrigue as well as traditional horror elements, **Living Death** was the first campaign to have a planned life cycle. Each year of the campaign world held a direct analogy to the years in the real world, and once the bell tolled on the end of 1899 in the campaign world, the **Living Death** campaign came to a close at **D&D Experience 2007**.

Other campaigns soon followed the first two spin-offs. **Virtual Seattle** was a Living-style campaign set in the **Shadowrun** cyberpunk/fantasy setting of mid-21st century Seattle. **Living Verge** was the sci-fi campaign for the **Alternity** rules. **Living Spycraft** utilized the **Spycraft** rules engine, stressing modern espionage and action. **Living Rokugan** was a **Legend of the Five Rings** roleplaying campaign, using Asian-themed fantasy as a backdrop. There were other short-lived attempts to create Living campaigns through the **RPGA** using other rules sets as well.

A new version of the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game**, updated to the **d20 System**, was released in 2001. With its release, the **RPGA** began the **Living Force** campaign, set in the **Star Wars** Episode I era. Blending the cinematic action of **Star Wars** with the structure of a Living rules system, **Living Force** created many adventures in trilogies, which were designed to emulate the movie experience.

D&D alternatives to **Living Greyhawk** also appeared soon after the launch of 3rd Edition. **Living Arcanis**, set in a world published by Paradigm Concepts, Inc., continued the **Living City** approach of a certificate-based magic system and eventually blended a regional system similar to **Living Greyhawk** in its programming. **Living Kingdoms of Kalamar** (based on the Kalamar world published by Kenzer & Co.) also used a certificate-based system for treasure allocation, but took a more minimalist approach to leveling characters and treasure distribution.

By 2001, the **RPGA** had no fewer than ten Living campaign programs. Many of them were member-run -- that is, outside the direct supervision of Wizards of the Coast (only **Living City**, **Living Greyhawk**, and **Living Force** were directly administered through Wizards, and **Living City** left the fold before it actually concluded). The **RPGA** simply acted as a "distributor" for these member-run campaigns. While the membership of the **RPGA** had many choices, it also started to fractionalize the core player base -- **D&D** players -- into a variety of small subgroups. It was becoming harder to find groups of players to play the smaller-populated campaigns, so they began to stagnate due to a downturn in membership.

Some programs reach a "critical mass" of players at some point -- that is, the program has enough players to make it easy to find games and acquire new players. This usually results in steady growth of the player population. **Living Greyhawk** had that advantage; anytime in this decade, someone attending an **RPGA** event would likely have no problem finding a **Living Greyhawk** game. The unfortunate circumstance was that most of the programs launched never really achieved that "critical mass" on a widespread scale, so pockets of activity would appear where a few enthusiastic volunteers would champion their favorite program. However, if a volunteer moved away from the area or started spending less time organizing and coordinating events, play would dry up quickly. Games would become hard to find; as a result, interest in the program would wane. The **RPGA** was still attempting to devote time and effort to these very small campaigns, but it was simply a matter of

resource allocation and impact. Supporting a smaller-scale program took resources away from a program that benefitted a much larger number of players.

By the mid-2000's, the **RPGA** began to make a concerted effort to consolidate its programs. This was an attempt to conserve resources for the programs that were seeing the largest amount of play. A re-alignment occurred, and the **RPGA** began to conclude relationships with programs that were already essentially independent. In 2007, **Living Arcanis** was handed off completely to Paradigm Concepts, Inc. In early 2008, **Living Kingdoms of Kalamar** moved in the same direction to Kenzer & Co.

Now, as of April, 2008, the **RPGA**'s sustainable shared-world programming includes **Xen'drik Expeditions**, set in **Eberron**, and the massive program that is **Living Greyhawk**. Next time, we'll talk about these programs, their history, and the end of the 3rd Edition era.

About the Author

Originally thought to have been raised from a humble Midwestern family, **Chris Tulach** actually fell to Earth in a meteorite-shaped capsule flung from a planet far outside our galaxy. While under the yellow rays of Sol, Chris's nerdity far surpasses that of any normal human. Using this precious gift only for good, he has recently become the **RPGA** Content Manager, responsible for the development and deployment of **Dungeons & Dragons** organized play programs.

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The People of Taer Valaestas

Expeditionary Dispatches

by Keith Baker

Tasker is a myth among explorers. According to the tales, this brilliant gnome was driven from House Sivis when he sought to expose secrets that had been sealed by his house. Some say he was killed at this time. But others claim that he wanders the world, passing his knowledge to those who need it. This dispatch could be found under a rock where the party chooses to make camp. It could be found tied to the leg of a bird. Is it sheer coincidence that the party acquires this knowledge? Or is Tasker pointing them toward their destiny?

When the PCs acquire the parchment, read the following:

This weathered parchment bears the arcane mark of the winged eye.

If a PC can make a successful DC 15 Knowledge (nobility and royalty), Knowledge (local), or Knowledge (arcana) check, read the following. This is a continuation of the text found in the second part of Tasker's missive.

Those versed in the lore of the dragonmarked houses recognize this symbol as the sigil of Tasker, excoriate of House Sivis.

In my previous missives, I have discussed the challenges you will face in your journey to Taer Valaestas. Now let us speak of what you can find when you pass through the bronzewood gates and into the seat of the Darkwood Crown.

The streets of Taer Valaestas are wide, and the buildings within the walls are spaced far apart. If you are used to the urban chaos of Sharn, you may find the open space disturbing; the space within the walls could easily support ten times its current population if it was fully built out. But the Tairnadal prize mobility. The streets are wide enough for warbands to move freely, and the narrowest alley is still broad enough to allow the comfortable passage of a horse and rider. After the space, you'll likely be struck by the greenery. Taer Valaestas was founded by a druid, who set his city at the heart of a manifest zone to Lamannia; it is this magic that sustains the great wall of thorns. It also encourages the growth of other plants, and the streets of Taer Valaestas are lined with grasses and wildflowers. These add color to the city and serve as provender for the Valenar horses -- the magic of the manifest zone restores them at a remarkable rate. Many of the buildings within the city have rooftop gardens; despite the relatively small space, the energies of Lamannia allow these urban farmers to produce a surprising yield over the course of a year. The scent of the flowers helps conceal the smell of horse manure, but this remains a constant threat for pedestrians; if you are wearing footwear of any quality, you would be wise to watch your step.

The Elves

One of the first things you see is the relatively small number of elves on the streets of the city. The Tairnadal are nomads and warriors, with no love for sedate urban life. Valenar warriors found on the streets are typically on active police duty or else have come in pursuit of a specific goal: acquiring a new weapon, seeking aid for a sick horse, searching for religious guidance, or something similar. But a few elves are settled within the city -- those who support the soldiers instead of fighting on the front lines. These are primarily divided into three groups. The Keepers of the Past perform religious duties and tend to the spiritual needs of the people. While most Tairnadal children are raised on Aerenal, the Keepers also tend to the education of the young. The Siyal Marrain are elf druids; while some assist with the defense of the city, their primary duty is to care for the horses raised and quartered in this place, and to help match horse to rider. Finally, the most numerous of the settled elves are the zaelantar, Tairnadal artisans whose honored ancestors were crafters as opposed to soldiers. These elves work with teams of humans and Khoravar, producing weapons, armor, and other goods for the Host of Valenar. While some of the zaelantar are fledgling artisans who hope to prove their skills in the new land, others are among the finest smiths and laborers of the Valaes Tairn. The best of them are rarely interested in selling their services to outsiders . . . however, someone who earns the respect or favor of a Valenar smith could gain access to goods or services of far greater quality than the size of the city would suggest.

Elves of other cultures live and work in Taer Valaestas. Phiarlan entertainers, Aereni sailors, and traders from the Five Nations all work or wander in the marketplace. Such elves are generally treated with more respect than members of other races, but any Valenar soldier can still call them to account for themselves.

Whether priest, druid, artisan, or soldier, the Tairnadal lead ascetic, martial lives. As such, few of the Valenar maintain private residences. Soldiers are billeted in one of the garrisons spread around the city, but usually only return to eat, meditate, or spar. Keepers of the Past live in the temple known as the Cenotaph, which stands next to the Darkwood Palace. The Siyal Marrain camp among their herds in the Green Quarter, while the zaelantar live in the buildings where they do their work.

The Khoravar

While half-elves have been in the region since the destruction of the line of Vol, most of the Khoravar of Taer Valaestas have migrated to the region since the Valenar claim. The storm sentries wouldn't allow me to enter the vast Lyrandar enclave, but from what I could pick up in conversation, I gather that the house has transferred much of the administration of the Windwright's Guild to Taer Valaestas, along with the top arcane researchers of Lyran's Gift. In addition, they have established a shipyard just outside the river. While I have often been accused of undue suspicion, it seems to me that this enclave is fully capable of serving as the headquarters of the house should the matriarch decide to abandon Stormhome. And I can't help but wonder if Lyran's Gift is working on cracking the secrets of elemental binding -- if they are relying on the Valenar to protect them as they seek to end their dependency on Zilargo.

While many of the Khoravar in the city work for the house, not all are associated with traditional house businesses. The Valenar have little interest in urban administration, and over the course of the last four decades House Lyrandar has assumed control over the municipal tasks of most major cities. Agents of Lyrandar oversee taxation and assistance, monitor matters of agriculture, and administer justice to the lower echelons. Viceroy Shyrrala d'Lyrandar was in attendance when I dined at the Darkwood Palace, seated alongside the High King himself; I know some Khoravar hope that Shyralla might one day sit on a throne. But while we've seen the ruler of Karrnath wed to an Aereni elf, I cannot believe that a Tairnadal king would so break with the traditions of his ancestors. Still, Shyralla is a capable administrator; she has done well for her people and maintained the trust of the Valenar.

House Lyrandar is a powerful force, and most Khoravar I spoke to have great respect for Shyralla and her sister Esravash. But not all of the half-elves work for the House of Storms. House Medani has increased its presence in recent years, and from what I hear Viceroy Jolan has become fast friends with the high king; my personal suspicion is that the viceroy wants to ensure that the Khoravar of Valenar don't end up being tools of Lyrandar ambition. Other half-elves have no ties to either of the houses, and they have simply traveled across Khorvaire to be part of the Khoravar community. Some seek to emulate the Valenar, while others see this as an opportunity for a true homeland for their people. Most are artisans working under zaelantar artisans, while a few have become farmers. What struck me during my time here was the strong sense of camaraderie between them. These people may have come from Thrane, Breland, Karrnath -- nations that might still just as well be at war. But most have left those prejudices behind, choosing to stand together. I saw a half-elf who had just arrived in the city receive invitations to three unity dinners within his first hour. The land may be ruled by the Valenar . . . but it does seem to be a home for their children.

Khoravar can be found throughout the city, but most live in or around the Lyrandar enclave in the eastern quarter. Their homes are typically a mix of densewood buildings in the Aereni style and the baked clay structures of the khunan humans. I saw a range of religious beliefs among them, including followers of the Blood of Vol, the traditional Sovereign Host, the Firstborn faith of House Lyrandar, and even those who sought to emulate Tairnadal ancestors, but much like my cousins in Trolanport, they seem to be willing to accept the divergent beliefs of their kin in the name of peace. As a Khoravar in the city of thorns, you will likely receive a warm welcome from others of your race; however, you may see some resentment in the eyes of the humans.

The Humans

If a human of the Five Nations sought to trace his ancestors back to the Sarlona, he'd likely find a trail leading to the ancient kingdom of Rhiavhaar or Nulakhesh. The rituals performed in Sharn's Pavilion of the Sovereign Host were born in the Sarlonan nation of Pyrine. The humans of Valenar -- the people of Taer Valaestas -- come from different stock. Their ancestors came from Khunan in the southwest of Sarlona, fleeing fierce magewars and the coming of the Inspired. Where the people of Galifar have let go of their Sarlonan past, the khunan folk of Valenar hold fast to the traditions of their ancestors. The Cyrans forced the Common tongue upon them, but you can still hear Old Common spoken in the taverns of Taer Valaestas, and find makeshift shrines to unfamiliar deities scattered about. They are not as unified in their ways as the people of Aundair or Thrane; in wider Valenar, every village has its own unique traditions, and those who have come to Taer Valaestas have brought all of these customs together. But every khunan takes pride in the past of her family.

Khunans live in the farming communities that ring Taer Valaestas, and they labor in the orchards and rooftop gardens within the city walls. Most of the menial work in the city is performed by khunan laborers; someone has to clean the manure. While you might expect this to breed bitterness and resentment, many of the khunan people I spoke to seemed more optimistic than angry; what anger is there is usually directed at the people or the west, or more locally, the Khoravar immigrants who are sometimes seen as stealing opportunities that would otherwise fall into human hands.

Honestly, I was surprised by the overall acceptance of elven rule. The common sentiment was that taxes were no worse than they'd been in the past -- and that the elves generally left the khunans alone, allowing them to pursue their old customs. More than that, I saw a combination of pride and deep-rooted resentment of the "thrones" -- a term drawn from "Throneholder," applying to the people of the Five Nations. Despite being farmers and laborers, many of the khunans I spoke to seemed to feel that they had some stake in Valenar -- and that they were partially responsible for "defeating" the thrones. A few among these compare their own time under Cyran rule to the slavery suffered by the ancestors of the Tairnadal. Personally, I see the work of gifted Tairnadal bards and clever Lyrandar agents in this. Propaganda is another sort of warfare, and the Tairnadal had decades to sow dissent. Whatever the truth, this kingdom survives because the khunan peasants accept elf rule. So in that, maybe they did play a role in defeating their enemies.

While the khunan people form the bulk of the human population and the labor force, there are also humans from other lands, including merchants and ambassadors. While there is little need for Deneith mercenaries in Taer Valaestas, the house does a considerable amount of business with Vadallia, and it has a small but luxurious enclave. House Cannith has established an outpost, undoubtedly offering weapons of war to the king and seeking to draw on the skills of his zaelantar. House Vadalis is notable in its absence, and would-be horse thieves are publicly executed in gruesome displays. And while the other Thronehold nations haven't been allowed to build individual consulates, each maintains offices and quarters in the Distant Palace, a large building in the western quarter of the city.

The khunans have largely held to their traditional architecture, which uses bricks of baked clay. While the Khoravar have brought the traditional faiths of the Five Nations to Valenar, the khunan people have their own religions, including a form of ancestor worship not unlike that of the Tairnadal, though tied to human spirits and more peaceful in nature. No love is lost between the khunans and the people of the Five Nations; Cyrans in particular would be wise to keep their homeland to themselves.

Other Races

Most of the other races found in Taer Valaestas are drawn by business. Dwarves maintain the Kundarak vault, and Mror lords negotiate the prices of ore and jewels. A Sivis message tower carries messages on the wind. Most numerous are the halflings, since the population includes employees of Jorasco and Ghallanda along with native halflings who migrated south from the Talenta Plains long before the elves arrived. But the foreign population is relatively small. While Taer Valaestas serves a center for trade and diplomacy, it is also a fortress, and High King Vadallia has no desire to allow a fifth column to grow within the walls of his city. This has also resulted in a hostile attitude toward changelings, due to their natural talent for espionage; changelings passing through Taer Valaestas would do well to be wary.

Taer Valaestas: Demographics and Gold
Taer Valaestas (Large City): Conventional (Monarchy); Nonstandard (House Lyrandar); AL N; 40,000 gp limit; Assets 320,000,000 gp; Population 19,060; Integrated (48% humans, 38% half-elf, 10% elf, 2% halfling, 2% other races).

Taer Valaestas isn't a typical large city. It is the seat of the Valenar king, and home to the largest Lyrandar enclave outside of Stormhome. The purchase limit reflects goods that can be obtained through the marketplace, though the selection should be limited; while Cannith and the other dragonmarked houses have a presence in the city, this is no match for what you could find in Passage or Wroat. With that said, the best of the zaelantar are among the finest smiths and armorers in Khorvaire, though they of course specialize in the light armor and weapons commonly used by the Valenar. Someone who earns the friendship of a master zaelantar swordsmith could potentially commission a weapon with a value greater than 40,000 gp; but he would have to find that

smith, gain his confidence, and wait until there is time in the smith's busy schedule.

In addition to the tricks of the market, the demographics of Taer Valaestas are also unusual in terms of level. The Valenar are few in number but they possess remarkable skill, and the city of thorns is home to some of their best. In general, level demographics should conform to what would be expected of a large city. However, the typical Valenar possesses four levels in a player character class (or five levels of commoner, expert, or magewright for a zaelantar) . . . and exceptional Valenar are limited solely by the needs of the story. Due to its interests in the region, House Lyrandar may have deployed some of its top operatives in the city, which could include anything from experts and dragonmarked heirs to swashbucklers with levels in the storm sentry prestige class.

Adventure Hooks

- Any half-elf who comes to Taer Valaestas receives a warm welcome from other Khoravar, including invitations to meals with neighborhood communities. This is a way for the half-elf to learn about current events and possible adventures. If the half-elf has relatives in the city -- a strong possibility considering the growth of Khoravar immigration -- her kin may ask her for help with family troubles.
- Lyrandar heirs are being murdered on the streets of Taer Valaestas. Viceroy Shyralla believes House Medani is trying to break her growing influence in the city, and she intends to take vengeance against Jolan d'Medani. The PCs' role depends on the house to which they have ties. If they are Medani, they must expose the true culprit before the war cripples both houses. If they are Lyrandar, they may be employed in strikes against Medani. And if they have no connection to either house, they may simply be caught in the middle of the deadly Khoravar feud.
- Jhaer Varedi is the finest swordsmith in Taer Valaestas, a living legend among the Valaes Tairn. He has come to Khorvaire to fulfill a vision, which he believes has been handed down from his patron ancestor -- the creation of a weapon that will change the course of history, a blade for a great champion. To identify the one worthy to bear the blade, he has set up a series of tests . . . and he has chosen to let both Khoravar and khunan compete alongside Valenar warriors. If an elf PC wins the challenges, he gains great recognition among the host. If a human or half-elf wins, she has the opportunity to raise the status of her people in the eyes of the Tairnadal. But any victor could make many enemies in the process. And what is the destiny of the blade itself? Is Jhaer's prophecy true -- or is a dragon, rakshasa, or quori behind his visions?

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the ***Eberron*** *Campaign Setting* and *Shadows of the Last War,* he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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Dangers of Taer Valaestas

Expeditionary Dispatches

by Keith Baker

Tasker is a myth among explorers. According to the tales, this brilliant gnome was driven from House Sivis when he sought to expose secrets that had been sealed by his house. Some say he was killed at this time. But others claim that he wanders the world, passing his knowledge to those who need it. This dispatch could be found under a rock where the party chooses to make camp. It could be found tied to the leg of a bird. Is it sheer coincidence that the party acquires this knowledge? Or is Tasker pointing them toward their destiny?

When the PCs acquire the parchment, read the following:

This weathered parchment bears the arcane mark of the winged eye.

If a PC can make a successful DC 15 Knowledge (nobility and royalty), Knowledge (local), or Knowledge (arcana) check, read the following. This is a continuation of the text found in the second part of Tasker's missive.

Those versed in the lore of the dragonmarked houses recognize this symbol as the sigil of Tasker, excoriate of House Sivis.

You have seen the walls of Taer Valaestas. You have walked the streets and seen its face in daylight. Now it is time to discuss the dangers -- the hidden thorns of Taer Valaestas.

The Law of the Land

In Taer Valaestas, and indeed in all of Valenar, you have two forces of law: the Tairnadal military and the civilian justiciars. Mounted soldiers patrol the major roads, and stealthy rangers hide in the shadows, hoping to find challenging prey. However, needless cruelty and unnecessary violence are frowned upon. The taer is a military fortress, and the soldiers of the Valaes Tairn are expected to maintain order. As long as you don't start any trouble, you are likely left alone.

The soldiers do an excellent job of bringing a swift and decisive end to any violence or obvious crime. However, they have little interest in hearing civilian disputes. The justiciars handle these matters. While the justiciars are technically civil servants, the fact of the matter is that House Lyrandar appoints them, and that the inquisitive arm of the department includes many heirs of House Medani; with the exception of a few zaelantar diplomats and mediators, all of the justiciars are half-elves. The justiciars hear pleas and conduct investigations. In purely civil cases, the justiciars are authorized to set punishments and dispense justice. If the matter involves members of the Valenar host, a zaelantar mediator discusses the matter with the officers of the warclan in question.

All Valenar stand above civilian law and are governed by military hierarchy; a *thaliaen* is expected to maintain order among his troops, and a thaliaen can be disciplined only by an officer of *raethalast* or higher rank. There is no assurance of justice in a case involving a Valenar soldier, but if an officer feels that the soldier was at fault (most likely because he dishonored his ancestor) or that the incident has a chance of causing considerable unrest, he may punish the soldier or order reparations to maintain goodwill. However, Valenar does not operate under the Code of Galifar; the soldiers have even more freedom than those who enforce the Code of Kaius in Karrnath. There is no presumption of innocence and no trial by jury. If a Tairnadal soldier has the blessing of his commanders, he may act as he deems necessary with no fear of the consequences.

Violent crime is met with violence. Otherwise, a lucky foreigner may be fined and exiled from the land via the first ship leaving for the west. Criminals who draw less sympathy from the justiciars may be scarred, maimed, or executed in a colorful manner, depending on the severity of the crime. Incarceration is rarely used as a form of punishment, but you could be assigned a stay in the arena, in which case you are forced to fight other criminals or thrill-seeking Valenar; if you can survive your sentence, your crime is forgiven.

I advise you to do what you can to avoid contact with the law of Valenar. This is not a place to start a fight. If you must challenge the rule of the High King, just remember that you aren't in Breland any more. It may not be as dangerous as Zilargo, but the city of thorns is a bad place to be a criminal.

This may seem obvious to you. Taer Valaestas is not only a city, it is an armed camp; naturally the law is enforced, and severely. So let us turn to subtler dangers. I cannot promise these tales are true; given the harsh guardians of the law, if these threats were easily uncovered, they would have already been eliminated. These forces may hide in the city of thorns; you will have to find the truth of these stories yourself.

Spectral Knives

The wars between the Valaes Tairn and the Empire of Dhakaan were long and bitter. One to one, the elves were superior warriors with arcane magic on their side. But the Dhakaani forces possessed discipline and courage, and far outnumbered their elf foes . . . and while the typical Tairnadal ranger had more experience than his short-lived Dhakaani counterpart, champions among the goblinoids could match any elf. These included the goblin assassins known as the *shaarat'khesh*, the "silent knives" of Dhakaan.

Though Taer Valaestas was placed under siege multiple times, its walls broke only after the Valaes Tairn returned to Aerenal. The greatest Dhakaani victory at Taer Valaestas was one of stealth, not open warfare. A little over a century after the first conflict between elf and goblin, a band of skilled shaarat'khesh assassins succeeded in penetrating the walls of Taer Valaestas. These goblins had one goal, and they achieved it: the murder of Maezan Shal, the mighty druid who had crafted Taer Valaestas itself. It was a terrible blow to the Tairnadal host, and to this day none of the Siyal Marrain have ever matched Maezan's skill. But the bards say that Maezan had his revenge on his killers -- that he cursed them so that their souls would be bound to defend the fortress.

The Dhakaani themselves chose not to hold Taer Valaestas after the elves abandoned it. And in the thousands of years that followed, the khunans and others who inhabited the region always kept their distance from the fallen fortress . . . despite the fertile soil, blessed as it is by the energies of Lamannia. I've spoken to khunan storytellers, and their old tales claim that the city is haunted, and that anyone unfortunate enough to encounter one of these "hungry children" will die. There's no way to know, but I think these "children" are in fact goblin ghosts -- the ghosts of Maezan's assassins. The druid may have ordered them to defend the fortress, driving the Dhakaani from the region, but they would have no reason to see humans or Khoravar in any more favorable light. Perhaps the passage of ten thousand years has finally laid these spirits to rest. But ghosts may wander in the night -- the spirits of the deadliest assassins known to the Empire of Dhakaan.

Serpents in the Shadows

Many interesting chapters are buried in the history of Sarlona. These include the magewars that destroyed the southwestern nations, including the kingdom of Khunan. Lhazaar and her followers came from the northwestern nation of Rhiavhaar, but the native humans of Valenar largely trace their ancestry to the refugees of Khunan. Study the tales of Khunan, and you may uncover a more disturbing fact. This land was said to be the birthplace of the race of corrupt serpentfolk known as the yuan-ti. According to legend, the Inspired hunted these creatures to extinction. But dig deep enough and you can find stories of yuan-ti survivors in Xen'drik. These creatures were said to be cunning deceivers, possessing both mental and arcane power. Is it so hard to believe that a few could have slipped across the Sea of Rage with the other refugees? And if so, what powers have they amassed in the intervening centuries?

According to the tales, these yuan-ti are creatures of true darkness -- just as their cousins, the feathered humanoids known as the shulassakar, are touched by pure light. If yuan-ti are in Valenar, they are surely scheming and working to gain greater power and influence. A yuan-ti cabal has many ways to sink its fangs into Taer Valaestas. The city is far from the seat of the Twelve or the Five Nations, and it would be easier for a

yuan-ti to take the place of a diplomat or dragonmarked heir in this distant land. While it's bad enough to imagine a serpent in such a position of power, worse yet would be if the serpentfolk seized control of the Lyrandar enclave. Viceroy Shyralla is quickly becoming one of the most influential Khoravar on Khorvaire; what would a yuan-ti do if she became de facto ruler of a half-elf nation? And possibly the greatest risk of all: Could a yuan-ti replace High King Vadallia himself? Could this have happened already . . . in which case the seemingly provocative behavior of Valenar troops may be the opening gambit of a far more sinister game?

The Blood of the East

As I've said before, propaganda is a form of warfare . . . and the Valenar have specialists in all manner of conflict. Valenar bards helped rally the khunan people to the elf banners when they first seized control of the territories; these wordsmiths fanned the hatred the people felt for the "thrones" into a raging flame. This anger served the Valenar well, but it's not so easy to extinguish such a blaze. Today, many among the khunans still bear bitter resentment against the thrones, and Cyrans in particular. I've heard tell of a group that takes this hatred even further, seeking payment in blood for the crimes they believe we have done to their ancestors. This movement is called the Blood of the East, and if you are from Cyre, you may be their next target. If you believe that khunan peasants can't possibly pose a threat to an adventurer of your skills, I advise you to think again. Not all of the khunans are farmers or laborers. As I said in my previous missive, every khunan family has its traditions -- secrets carefully held since their ancestors crossed the Sea of Rage. Some may know secrets of magic lost in the magewars. Others could have powers of the mind -- psychic abilities rivaling those of any kalashtar. And ancient tales of Sarlonan warriors say they can work magic with a sword and thereby perform feats of arms no simple soldier could replicate.

I can't prove that any of this is true. The name is out there on the wind; surely some call themselves the Blood of the East. You will only discover the extent of their powers if you cross their path. But if you hear of Cyran murders, or if tensions grow between the khunans and the Khoravar immigrants who have prospered so in this new land . . . watch for the Blood of the East, and be wary of their ancient ways.

House Tarkanan

According to the tales, Halas Tarkanan could shake the earth with a wave of his hand, and the Dreambreaker could shift reality with his thoughts. It has long seemed that the power of the aberrant dragonmarks was broken in the War of the Mark. Despite the fear and superstition, for centuries the most powerful aberrant mark that has been seen has been the ability to float instead of fall, or produce a tiny spurt of flame -- nothing like the firestorms attributed to Darya Blaze. But I have traveled the world, and I have seen many things. Aberrant births are on the rise -- random and unpredictable, often concealed or even extinguished by fearful parents, but increasing with each generation. And the powers are growing. I've seen a man who could kill with a touch, and a woman driven mad by the voices she could hear. I don't know if I'll see the next War of the Mark in my lifetime, but I know some already prepare for it. House Tarkanan is gathering aberrants, protecting them and teaching them to use their abilities. The random nature of the aberrant mark means that the heirs of Tarkanan can come from many backgrounds. They can be beggars or priests, farmers or nobles. They can even be Valenar warriors hidden in Taer Valaestas itself.

None can predict when a dragonmark -- aberrant or otherwise -- will manifest. A Valenar soldier could have served in the Last War for three decades before her mark appeared. As disturbing as this is for a human, it is far worse for the Valenar. The religion of the Tairnadal is based around serving as an anchor and vessel for the spirit of a heroic ancestor . . . but none of the champions of Xen'drik carried such marks. In the eyes of her fellows, an aberrant Valenar is a broken vessel, doomed never to know true kinship with the heroes of the past. And yet she is still one of the deadliest soldiers on Khorvaire, all the more dangerous because of the touch of Khyber.

In the Five Nations, members of House Tarkanan often establish themselves as thieves or assassins. In Valenar, you may find something quite different. The rumors I've heard speak of entire warbands of aberrant Valenar. Some yearn for vengeance against a society in which they can no longer take part. Others have brought their love of warfare to bear against the dragonmarked houses. And some are simply driven by the madness and pain that lingers around those who are marked by Khyber. Perhaps it's just another myth, like the tales of aberrants being branded by demons at birth. But whenever I see a Valenar warrior with her veil drawn up across her face, I can't help but wonder what that mask might conceal.

Adventure Hooks

- A warband of aberrant Valenar believes that they can develop bonds to the champions of the War of the Mark, becoming vessels for the spirits of Halas Tarkanan, the Lady of the Plague, and other aberrant lords. They are searching for relics of the fallen aberrants in order to fashion *zaelshin tus* (*Player's Guide to Eberron* 145) -- amulets that provide the spiritual link. Such an amulet might greatly increase the power of a character with an aberrant dragonmark . . . but there is the risk that it could truly allow the champion to live again, assuming full control of the wearer's body. Adventurers could clash with these corrupted Valenar anywhere that might have held some significance during the War of the Mark. And should a Valenar become an avatar of one of the aberrant champions, it could spell trouble for the Twelve.

- A small sect of the Blood of the East holds an ancient secret: the skills of the swordsage. For generations, those few who could master this art have served as secret champions of the khunan people. These warriors could prove to be deadly foes to Cyran PCs or others deemed to be enemies of the land. Alternatively, this is a possible background for a PC who wishes to follow the path of the swordsage -- a khunan who takes her skills across the Blade Desert in pursuit of a higher calling.

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the ***Eberron*** *Campaign Setting* and *Shadows of the Last War,* he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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The Wailing Dwarf

Realmslore

by Bruce R. Cordell

An enormous vertical slab of rock 4,000 feet high in the western portion of the Troll Mountains in Amn is carved to resemble a dwarf. Named after the sound of the wind blowing through its hollow eyes and mouth, it marks the site of an abandoned dwarven city.

At least, that's the common wisdom. The foregoing is all most know about the Wailing Dwarf, if they've heard of it at all. Many assume the site is an abandoned dwarven city, probably haunted by opportunistic monsters and lonely dwarven ghosts. A few have even taken the time to describe away the noise made by the image: Some learned sages in Amn have it that the wailing winds result from temperature differences between air inside the caverns hidden behind the open eyes and mouth, and the air outside. When it's colder inside, air rushes in, and when it's colder outside, air rushes out, wailing and whining through the narrowed apertures of the carved dwarf's face.

The truth is a little stranger.

General Description

Consider the vast size of the vertical slab on which the dwarven image is carved -- the relief sculpture is nearly a mile tall! Dry words on a page do little to convey the surprising awe one feels upon first encountering the Wailing Dwarf in person. The great stone helm of the carven image surmounts the image like a king's crown, thick with forgotten dwarven script and pitted where ancient gemstones may once have glittered.

The empty eyes and mouth are black shadows, but the braided beard reaches a full thousand feet, where its stone tips are tucked into the image's belt. The graven image grips a fantastically large double-bladed axe in both hands, as if ready to break from the mountain, shake the residual rubble from its shoulders and beard, and give battle to another being as titanic as itself.

Next, there is the haunting sound that issues from the relief sculpture's empty lips and vacant orbs. Sometimes as quiet as a lover's whisper at midnight, other times as brash and grating as a shrieking cyclone uprooting a farm house, the wail of the dwarf is nothing if not extraordinary. Upon hearing the dwarf's exhalation, one comes away with the sense that it is hardly likely the noise could have anything other than an unexpected explanation.

Previous Exploration

Noted explorer Bryam Lancameth of Amn financed an expedition to determine the truth behind the unnatural sound of the Wailing Dwarf, though it's likely he also wished to liberate any remaining dwarven treasure yet potentially lingering in the abandoned city inside. Many know or have heard the lay Lancameth's Last Expedition, though few realize that it was within the dark byways behind the Wailing Dwarf's black eyes that Captain Lancameth and his companions, all celebrities in their own right, met their ends. Certainly Last Expedition takes many liberties with the reality of that final adventure; however, the lay does accurately sum up the expedition with the refrain:

. . . lost, past all hope of the return,
they perished, tombless and alone.

What is known for certain is that Lancameth's last expedition numbered five principles.

First was Captain Bryam Lancameth himself, famous for his many long years of notable service in Amn's merchant marine fleet. Lancameth, a human youthful for all his forty years, wielded the storied *Clockwork Blade of Venom*.

Next was Lady Starthorn, an elf ranger out of the Aglarond's Yuirwood. Lady Starthorn was famous both for her

silvery voice and her night-black *Bow of Death's Rain*.

Nhair Ebendar, a halfling scoundrel from the streets of Athkatla, was never far from Lancameth, cracking wise with quips and stories. Ebendar somehow acquired the *Punching Dagger of Quar-Shan*, a relic whose mere possession put Ebendar in constant danger of assassins from Calimshan.

No historical account records Dog Wizard's true name. Dog Wizard is the only name he answered to, in any event, when he answered at all. Dog Wizard's greatest claim to fame was his magic implement, the *Jagged Staff of Hellgate*. Dog Wizard always hid his features in a hood, but some say he was a tiefling.

Though Lancameth led all their expeditions, the touchstone of the group was Matron Iremar, a priestess of Oghma. Knowledgeable in almost every circumstance and ready with healing magic when things turned rough, Matron Iremar was also a doughty warrior, and she wielded the *Astral Mace of Blasting*, supposedly a gift given by one of Oghma's angels directly into Iremar's pious hands.

For all their bravery, cunning, experience, and luck, all five famous heroes fell within the bleak, wind-washed caverns behind the Wailing Dwarf. Regardless of whether Lancameth's hope concerning dwarven treasures was true or merely optimism, it is certain at the very least that the dangerous ruins behind the graven image contain the powerful magic relics each expeditioneer carried with them to their ends.

Behind the Face

The presumption that opportunistic monsters lair within the cavities behind the sculpted slab are accurate. Lightless shafts shelter spiders, fungi, oozing slimes, and even the spirits of mourning dwarves.

However, in more recent times, an unusually clever tribe of trolls partly colonized the hollow mountain. They did so only in part because they found the access into the heart of the ruined city beyond the First Antechamber contested by immortal guardians set there to keep secret the Wailing Dwarf's windy heart.

After a running conflict that lasted decades, the trolls were mostly wiped out, though pockets still persist in hidden corners of the ruined city past the First Antechamber. Also, the immortal guardians captured a few alive and set them up in the First Antechamber as a warning to the future.

Created expressly by secret makers, the immortal guardians in the Wailing Dwarf take the form of guardian nagas. All nagas are fascinated by knowledge, and most eventually assemble a formidable understanding of rituals and arcane spells, as well as collect powerful magic items. The guardians in the Wailing Dwarf (whose total number is not known) are obsessed with the continued acquisition of magical knowledge and the final resting place (or current wielders) of storied magic items, legacy items, and relics.

Though the guardian nagas in the Wailing Dwarf devote themselves fiercely to their appointed task, they also thirst for new knowledge and are not quick to attack intruders. In fact, they may offer to spare intruders' lives if the intruders can teach them a new ritual or spell, or if they give up a magic item. A naga is compelled by its very nature to guard its appointed secret or object with its life, and thus it never negotiates away access to the windy heart of the abandoned dwarven city. Still, one might be willing to allow intruders to turn back with their lives -- especially if they can offer something worthwhile for its mercy.

Gaining Entry

At first glance, those seeking entry are faced with a vertical climb up the flatiron slab upon which the Wailing Dwarf is carved. However, investigation higher up the mountainous shoulder behind the east-looking side of the dwarf reveals rough but navigable terrain, including a natural rock shelf 5 feet in width that curls around across the slab's front, through the stony braids of the Wailing Dwarf's beard, to the open cavity of its vacuous mouth.

Here explorers face their first potential danger. Sometimes, an erratic howling wind bursts from the mouth (and both eyes) of the stony façade. When this happens, all objects and creatures not staked into the stone are either sucked in or blown out. Those sucked in tumble roughly into the First Antechamber, where they fall prone and are dazed. Those blown out are flung off the carved slab face into open air, where they face a fall of nearly 4,000 feet to the rocky gorge floor below.

Those lucky enough to avoid a wind surge or who take precautions against the howling winds find a wide circular tunnel beyond that leads, after a hundred feet or so, to the First Antechamber.

First Antechamber

Behind the façade of the Wailing Dwarf and past the long throat is the wide and high First Antechamber. Here the shackled bodies of four regenerating trolls are strapped across walls and ceilings. Completely insane from their years-long captivity, they now serve both as a warning to would-be interlopers, as well as self-renewing hors d'oeuvres for the guardian naga that has taken up her position here.

The guardian naga in the First Antechamber deals newcomers who enter the chamber, whether troll, adventurer, or dwarf claiming to be a long-lost heir of the city that lies beyond, as described above under Behind the Face.

Abandoned Dwarven City

Beyond the First Antechamber is another tunnel, which opens onto a great rift at the mountain's heart, from which the winds emerge or sometimes plunge. The ruined dwarven city is carved into the stone of both sides of a great rift, cliff-dwelling style. Countless bridges, suspended roads, and other stone paths provide access back and forth between the two sides, though most of these stone spans are untrustworthy at best in their neglected antiquity.

Thousands of empty chambers lie within the abandoned city, whose name is one more secret hoarded by the guardian nagas who patrol the city's upper edges. Mournful dwarven ghosts, lurking trolls, patrolling guardian nagas, the powerful items once wielded by Lancameth and his fallen band, and other secrets are here kept, not least of which is the reason for the near constant inhalation and outrush of air from somewhere deeper. . . .

About the Author

Bruce Cordell is a D&D designer, but during his twelve years in the game industry, he has dabbled in miniatures, board games, collectible card games, d20 games, and more. Bruce has over a sixty listed credits to his name, including the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, *Libris Mortis*, and *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*. His body of work also includes three published **Forgotten Realms** novels (*Lady of Poison*, *Darkvision*, and *Stardeep*), with more on the way.

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Zhent Headless Horseman

Realmslore

by Bruce R. Cordell

Terrified Dalelanders describe seeing the Zhent Headless Horseman galloping through forest crossings and charging through night mists. The Horseman rides the twisted woody forest trails at full speed, trailing mist and mad laughter in his wake. Attempts to waylay the horseman have failed, and the body of would-be heroes are discovered when the mists clear, sans head.

Visitors to the area sometimes dismiss the tale of the Zhent Headless Horseman. After all, a similar story of a mysterious rider lacking a head haunting the Golden Way in Thesk turned out to be a ruse contrived by bandits who enriched themselves by demanding tolls, until they were found out.

However, in retrospect, perhaps the Golden Way bandits conceived of their ruse only after hearing of the Zhent Headless Horseman. All attempts to "unmask" the headless, mist-enshrouded rider have ended in the grisly deaths of the would-be debunkers, who are later found somewhere along the road with their own heads missing.

The Zhent Headless Horseman seems real enough, and the story of his origin can be traced by those with the means and might to get all the way to the truth.

Trials of the Zhentarim

The Zhentarim's Black Network of merchants, spies, and assassins began suffering unexpected reversals several years ago, though few enough realized it. High-ranking Zhentarim wizards covered up the specifics of each disaster, but rumors leaked out nonetheless. Even interested outsiders heard a tale or two about sudden raids on established Zhentarim merchant caravans, the loss of at least two supposedly secret cells in the Silver Marches, and the assassination of at least one important official in Zhentil Keep itself.

Though unsubstantiated, most believe the Zhentarim can trace their trouble to the appearance of shades in Anauroch, shades who claim kin to ancient Netheril now transfused with shadow's grim vitality. What complaint the Netherese have with the Zhentarim is a complete mystery.

Regardless of whether the Shadovar are to blame for the Zhentarim's recent tribulations, one fact is certain: a small Zhentarim garrison northwest of the Dalelands revealed itself, declaring its intentions to act as a source of mercenary might to any with the coin to pay for Zhentarim know-how and Zhentarim connections.

A surprising move to be sure -- when had the Black Network ever before showed any interest in advancing anything but their own schemes? Most suspect the Zhents made the offer in bad faith. Word in the Dales was that even while taking mercenary coin, the Zhents would report their activities all the way to Zhentil Keep, describing what they learned while supposedly pursuing commissions.

Other students of the Zhentarim believed such behavior was simply not in keeping with the egotistical dogma driving the organization. No, proclaimed these naysayers; the Zhentarim must face some sort of real, as yet unrevealed threat for the organization to take actions so at odds with their standard dealings. They suggested the network was attempting a full-on campaign to fill its war chest by hook, crook, and even "legitimate" means.

Gnoll Marauders

The "Zhent Mercs" as they came to be known, initially failed to find patrons. Dalelanders had no reason to hire others to deal with the threats gathering on their borders, especially if the cure seemed worse than the cause.

That is until a tribe of particularly vicious gnoll marauders from out of The Ride passed across the River Tesh, and melted into hiding within the green boughs of western Cormanthor.

Unexpectedly, terror gripped the Dales in the form of hyenalike humanoids that smelled of filthy wet dog and blood. The gnolls were either uncannily lucky in timing, choosing to invade while the storied defender of Shadowdale was absent, or else some higher agency sent them when the Dales were vulnerable.

Calling themselves the Beasts of Butchery, this aggressive gnoll tribe personified mindless slaughter. For them, existence was one long, wild opportunity for rapine and pillage. They claimed to be the mortal instruments of Malar, he that personified inhuman savagery. The Beasts took nearly demonic pleasure in causing fear before death, and in causing sorrow and hopelessness through vicious acts of destruction and torture. According to the few gnolls captured alive and at great cost, the Beasts worked toward a day when the entire world would be a wasteland populated only by gnolls feasting upon the heaped bodies of the dead.

When the gnolls struck a small hamlet, they consecrated the place of slaughter and destruction in Malar's name. When they burnt down a village and killed its inhabitants, they feasted amid the blazing buildings and decorated the ruins with the bodies of the fallen, impaling the remains on standing spears or hanging them from high places.

The beasts didn't bargain or parley. They attacked those who tried such weak methods.

In a fit of terror, a group of Dalelanders hired the Zhent mercenaries to track down and wipe out the gnoll infestation once and for all.

Zhent Mercs Against Gnolls

The Zhentarim garrison mercenaries answered to a wizard named X'fas Oleg, whose strangely red-hued flesh and tiny horns curling up from his brow marked him as a tiefling.

The field commander of the garrison was a tall man named Astin Lesander who had the trust of those beneath him, a rare thing in Zhentarim circles.

One thing seems clear, if nothing else: The mercenaries took their first commission seriously. They desperately wanted the coin promised them if they were successful. Within days, the Zhents swept away three outlying gnoll encampments, leaving only the central gnoll den, still hidden somewhere in Cormanthor.

Eager to claim the full commission promised by the Dalelanders, X'fas Oleg knew he had to clear out the original lair quickly, before the nearly defeated Beasts of Butchery slunk back across the River Tesh. As demanded by the contract he had signed, the Zhents had to produce the head of the demonic gnoll adept who led the Beasts as proof the Dales would never be bothered again by this particular horrific gnoll tribe.

X'fas Oleg took the sword of the Zhent mercenary field commander and drew upon it an infernal rune, something X'fas had been saving since he had seen it in a nightmare. He told the commander that when the rune was triggered, his sword would briefly gleam with vorpal appetite, and remove the head from a single enemy with the merest touch.

Thus armed with a secret trick provided by X'Fas, Astin Lesander and his mercenaries struck out by night, following a twisted, muddy track into a tangled stretch of trees the local foresters had long avoided.

And ... that's all that is known for certain concerning Astin, his rune-scribed sword, the other mercenaries, and the remaining gnolls.

True, the gnolls were never seen again. Then again, neither were any of the mercenaries, including their field commander, Astin Lesander.

Or, then again, perhaps he did return, after a fashion.

Zhent Headless Horseman Rides

Nearly three tendays after the disappearance of the mercenaries, on the dark of the moon, the Zhent Headless Horseman first rode. Like a demon in human shape, it raced down tree-lined lanes, trailing fog and bitter laughter in its wake. Witnesses say the headless form wore the uniform of a Zhentarim field commander. With one hand it clutched the reigns of a steed that seemed more canine than equine. In its other hand was a sword on which blazed a fell rune, a single letter of an infernal script.

The next day, the body of X'Fas Oleg, the Zhentarim garrison leader, was found in the otherwise empty compound without his head.

Ever since that night, the Zhent Headless Horseman rides forth, sometimes on the dark of the moon, other times when cloud cover seals away all the lights in the sky. Those who quail before the rider usually survive. Those who seek to bar the horseman's path are decapitated, and their heads are never found again.

Lair of the Zhent Headless Horseman

Most Dalelanders accept the reality of the Zhent Headless Horseman, and simply move aside when it appears at

the end of the path and thunders forward. Others, less quick to evade the charging steed, or perhaps somehow marked ahead of time by the Horseman as prey, are not so lucky. Several people each year, at least, are felled in just such fashion.

Perhaps the time has come to put a stop Horseman's terrifying rides. Are you up to the challenge? Many questions want answers. In putting a stop to the Zhent, perhaps you will answer them.

Is the Zhent Headless Horseman some sort of reanimated remnant of Astin Lesander? Does the Horseman wield the blade prepared by X'fas Oleg the tiefling to shear the head from a single gnoll adept? Where do all the heads harvested by the Horseman end up, and why does the horseman reap heads in the first place? Does the Horseman return, month after month, because the original commission was never paid?

Look first to the old, twisted, muddy track that leads into a knotted stand of trees the local foresters avoid ...

About the Author

Bruce Cordell is a D&D designer, but during his twelve years in the game industry, he has dabbled in miniatures, board games, collectible card games, d20 games, and more. Bruce has over a sixty listed credits to his name, including the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, *Libris Mortis*, and *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*. His body of work also includes three published **Forgotten Realms** novels (*Lady of Poison*, *Darkvision*, and *Stardeep*), with more on the way.

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