ISSUE 423 | MAY 2013

DRAGON®

A Dungeons & Dragons® Roleplaying Game Supplement

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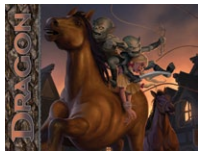

ON THE COVER: *Mark Winters shows a duo of goblins who came to steal horses from the Inn of the Welcome Wench. Surprised by Ostler Gundigoot's daughter Emadyne in the stables, they kidnapped her, too. A villager needs rescuing; daring adventurers wanted!*

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423

DRAGON May 2013

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Dungeon Allure

By Steve Winter

"Far over the misty mountains cold
To dungeons deep and caverns old
We must away ere break of day
To seek the pale enchanted gold."
—J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

This month's theme as planned in 2012 was to be "dungeons." As sometimes happens, editorial rescheduling and shuffling resulted in fewer articles focused on dungeons than we had envisioned, so the theme is pretty loose. Still, dungeons as we intrepid adventurers know them have always fascinated me and I can expound on them endlessly, so after poking unenthusiastically through the heaped papers on my desk scanning for an editorial topic, I decided to stick with the original theme.

The D&D dungeon is a unique setting. It has little precedent in the swirl of mythology, fairy tales, novels, and movies that influenced early D&D designers and Dungeon Masters. The underworld itself is a major theme in mythology; any great hero worth his or her salt makes an epic journey into the Earth. Some of our earliest and most powerful myths revolve around the twin themes of descent and rebirth.

On those journeys, heroes such as Orpheus, Inanna, Hermodr, and Indra traveled through dreary and unpleasant caverns. They slew or outwitted "demons" (a generic label for almost any denizen of the underworld) that barred their way. Ultimately, they confronted the lord of the dead and petitioned for a loved one to be released from bondage and allowed to return to the surface world, or in the case of Hermodr, retrieved a legendary weapon or sacred relic. Sound familiar?

Even when the basic outline is the same, those mythical underworlds are very different from the dungeons of D&D, which tend toward multilevel labyrinths where evil cultures and deranged wizards store their amassed treasure under the protection of diabolical puzzles, deadly traps, roving monsters, and minions so loyal to their master that they'll defend his property with their lives.

That type of locale is unique to Dungeons & Dragons. In the thousands of temples and tombs excavated by archeologists, no traps have ever been found, unless you count the infrequent open pit dug across an entry passage. Excavators have encountered no concealed crossbows or scything blades, no crushing ceilings or rolling boulders, and certainly no demon faces with leering mouths that spit *spheres of annihilation*. To those of us who aren't field archeologists, this lack of death traps is a huge disappointment.

Even movies and fantasy fiction seldom portray settings that resemble D&D dungeons. It would seem that dungeons evolved so that D&D characters could explore them, rather than D&D having been created so we could explore dungeons.

When you return from the dungeon, you can bone up on rare assassin's poisons, study the strange ecology and life cycle of the gargoyle, or explore the possibilities for wildly divergent styles of play in this or your next campaign. Better yet, if you're exhausted from your travels and the trauma of the dungeon, you can relax at the famous Inn of the Welcome Wench, a favorite respite for tired adventurers since 1979.

Assassin Poisons of the Underdark

By Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel

Illustration by Jason Juta

To the nefarious races dwelling in the Underdark, assassin is as honorable a trade as merchant or blacksmith. The usual deadly poisons that comprise the assassin's stock-in-trade are widely available to such practitioners, but the Underdark also has its own poisonous traditions. Many of the toxins used by drow, duergar, and derro assassins are crafted from the remains of powerful aberrant monsters.

Only the executioner assassin can learn to make and use these poisons. When you can learn a recipe of the appropriate level, by way of the Improved Poison Use executioner assassin class feature, you can select a poison of that level from this article. For example, when you gain the Improved Poison Use class feature at 15th level, you can add aboleth slime concentrate, gibbering grind, grell bile, and umber dust to the list of poison recipes you can choose from.

Aboleth Slime Concentrate

As its name suggests, aboleth slime concentrate is created from the thick slime that coats the bodies of the aquatic subterranean aberrations. Calling the concentrate a "poison" is technically a misnomer, since it is not truly toxic, at least in a biological sense. Nevertheless, aboleth slime concentrate is charged with psionic power. When it enters the bloodstream of a sentient creature, it drastically lowers the victim's defenses against psychic attack.

Aboleth Slime Concentrate Level 15

This sticky tar-like substance makes creatures vulnerable to psychic attacks.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to your melee weapon or five pieces of your ammunition. Until the end of the encounter, whenever you hit a creature with a weapon attack using the poisoned item, the target gains vulnerable 10 to psychic damage and takes a -2 penalty to Perception checks and to saving throws (save ends all).

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Standard Action. You apply the poison to a handheld object. Within the next hour, the next creature other than you to hold or wear the object for more than 1 minute gains vulnerable 10 to psychic damage and takes a -2 penalty to Perception checks and to saving throws until the end of its next extended rest.

Origins and Application

The recipe for aboleth slime concentrate is a product of the aboleths themselves. They often teach favored kuo-toa assassins how to create the poison. These assassins then share the recipe with others of their kind.

Aboleth slime concentrate is a thick, viscous fluid that is easily applied to edged weapons. Kuo-toas smear it on the barbs on their pincer staves and barbed nets to make captured slaves more vulnerable to the psychic attacks of their aboleth masters.

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Although not unique to the kuo-toas, aboleth slime concentrate is quite rare away from those who serve aboleths. When it is found elsewhere, the substance is not used by assassins to make a kill. Instead, it is smeared on coins offered as bribes to those who might know how to find an elusive target. The poison's will-sapping effect serves to loosen the victim's tongue, allowing an assassin to more easily obtain the information he or she needs.

Gibbering Grind

Those brave (or foolish) enough to intentionally seek out the protoplasmic horrors known as gibbering beasts often do so for a very specific purpose. The hundreds of eyes that float within the gelatinous flesh of a gibbering beast can be removed, dried, and then ground into a fine powder. The powder, known as gibbering grind, is a potent psychic poison that causes its victims to unleash a torrent of blasphemous nonsense that can damage the minds of those nearby.

Gibbering Grind Level 15

This fine gray powder turns a creature into a font of gibbering madness.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Implement, Poison, Psychic): Standard Action. *Effect:* You make the following attack.
Ranged 5
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + Dexterity modifier poison damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: The target is dazed (save ends).
Each Failed Saving Throw: Nondeafened creatures adjacent to the target take 10 psychic damage.
Special: If the DM allows it, a creature reduced to 0 hit points by this poison is not killed, but is instead driven permanently insane.

Power (Consumable): Standard Action. You place the poison in a closed container, such as a chest or a jewelry box. Make the attack above against the first creature to open the container within the next hour.

Gibbering grind is usually made from the eyes of gibbering mouthers, but more powerful varieties derived from the eyes of gibbering abominations and gibbering orbs are rumored to exist.

Origins and Application

The derro are the creators of gibbering grind, but only a handful of savants understand how to produce the vile poison. Derro assassins carry the poison in thin parchment tubes sealed with wax on both ends. When needed, they break the wax seals and then use the tube to blow a puff of gibbering grind at a target.

Rarely, the recipe for gibbering grind appears for sale in the largest cities in the Underdark. A prospective buyer needs to beware: The derro often sell the recipe in small chests rigged to release the poison on the first creature to open them. The derro find the thought of sowing psychic discord through an unsuspecting target in the middle of a crowded bazaar intensely satisfying.

Grell Bile

Grell bile can be harvested from a number of organs in a grell's floating, sacklike body. In truth, it is not bile at all, but a distillation of the aberrant creature's blood and other bodily fluids. This fluid is extremely toxic and can drastically affect the hand-eye coordination of its victims.

Master assassins and poison crafters know that grell bile has an additional property beyond its common applications. Grells have powerful psionic abilities, and grell bile contains a trace of this ability. By imbibing a small amount of grell bile (at no small personal risk), the poisoner can establish a temporary psionic link to the victim. Through this link, an assassin has a chance to momentarily shunt any aggression the victim feels toward him or her onto a different target.

Grell Bile Level 15

This thin yellow fluid has a slight acrid tang and makes creatures less effective in combat.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to your melee weapon or five pieces of your ammunition. Until the end of the encounter, whenever you hit a creature with a weapon attack using the poisoned item, the target takes 6 extra poison damage, and it takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Special: If the DM allows it, you can imbibe a small amount of grell bile as a minor action before applying it. Imbibing the bile deals you 6 poison damage, and you take a –2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends). Doing so also grants you the following additional effect.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the first time a creature chooses you as a target for a melee or ranged attack, it must instead choose a target at random from among all creatures in range, including you.

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You pour the poison into a drink or onto a plate of food. The first creature to consume the food or drink within the next hour takes 30 poison damage, and the creature takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls and is weakened until the end of its next extended rest.

Origins and Application

Although certainly not common, the recipe for grell bile can be purchased throughout the Underdark. Drow, duergar, and dark folk manufacture and use the poison, and by knowing how to ask and where to look, one can find it easily. The recipe for grell bile occasionally makes its way into the inventory of those who deal in illicit substances on the surface.

Grell bile is a watery fluid that can be left in its natural state when applied to food or drink, since it is all but undetectable in this form. Assassins who want to apply the thin liquid to a weapon thicken it with sand or flour so it can be easily smeared on a blade or arrowhead.

Umber Dust

Umber dust is created from the pulverized eyes of umber hulks. It is highly toxic, and like many poisons crafted from aberrations with strong mental abilities, it also carries a powerful psionic effect. Those who survive the initial poisonous shock of umber dust suffer lingering confusion and often cannot tell friend from foe.

Like some other poisons created from the body parts of aberrations that have potent mind-affecting powers, umber dust offers additional benefits when the poisoner is familiar with its effects. By inhaling a small dose of umber dust, an assassin gains a measure of influence over where a poisoned target moves. This benefit is not without risk, however, and the assassin gambles that the umber dust will not cause significant harm to the assassin before he or she can poison a target.

Umber Dust Level 15

This black dust scintillates with an odd sheen in the light, causing your head to spin if you stare at it too long.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Implement, Poison): Standard Action. *Effect:* You make the following attack.
Ranged 5
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + Dexterity modifier poison damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: The target is dazed (save ends).
Each Failed Saving Throw: On the target's next turn, the target must charge the nearest creature.
Special: If the DM allows it, you can inhale a small amount of dust while making the above attack. Inhaling the dust deals you 10 poison damage, and you are dazed until the end of your next turn. Doing so also grants you the following additional effect.
Effect: When the target fails a saving throw against the above effect, you can slide the target up to 3 squares as a free action.

Power (Consumable): Standard Action. You place the poison in a closed container, such as a chest or a jewelry box. Make the attack above against the first creature to open the container within the next hour.

Origins and Application

The duergar manufacture and use umber dust more regularly than any other race in the Underdark. In fact, some duergar assassin guilds do not allow new members to join until they can slay an umber hulk and craft umber dust from its remains.

The recipe for umber dust is widely available in Underdark cities where duergar are common. Assassins roll the umber dust into a long cloth sash and then simply unfurl the sash with a flick of the wrist, sending a blast of the poisonous powder out to a range of 20 feet in any direction the assassin chooses.

Duergar assassins also plant umber dust in chests and other containers holding valuable items. These containers are rigged with small air bladders that blow a dose of umber dust directly into the face of the unwary when the trapped container is opened.

Heart of Mimic Powder

An exceedingly rare and toxic poison, heart of mimic powder is derived from the central nerve bundle found in the fleshy core of object mimics. Its scarcity is due to the fact that mimics are not common, are exceedingly dangerous, and are more than intelligent enough to evade those who look to harvest their internal organs.

The effects of heart of mimic powder are as bizarre and lethal as the creature from which the poison is derived. The toxin relies on the mimic's polymorph ability, temporarily imposing a limited and debilitating version of the mimic's ooze form on the victim.

Heart of Mimic Powder Level 25

This green powder clumps when you squeeze it, behaving like a solid mass one moment and like a powder the next.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Implement, Polymorph, Poison): Standard Action. *Effect:* You make the following attack.
Ranged 5
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d10 + Dexterity modifier poison damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: The target assumes an oozelike form and is immobilized (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is restrained (save ends) instead of immobilized.
Second Failed Saving Throw: The target is stunned (save ends) instead of restrained. It also falls prone and drops any items it is holding.

Power (Consumable): Standard Action. You place the poison in a closed container, such as a chest or a jewelry box. Make the attack above against the first creature to open the container within the next hour.

Origins and Application

Heart of mimic powder was originally crafted by the dark folk, and it is still used by the mightiest dark stalker assassins. Over the years, trade and thievery have made the recipe for this poison increasingly available, so that any Underdark assassin with enough coin and perseverance can find it.

Heart of mimic powder has the consistency of thick flour, and it can clump and hold its shape indefinitely. This malleability gives assassins a number of options in how they deliver the poison to their victims. If left as a powder, the poison can be sprayed from a handheld tube or from air bladders placed inside a trapped chest. Heart of mimic powder can also be rolled into dense pellets that burst in a puff of poisonous dust when they strike a target.

Mind Flayer Tentacle Extract

Only the bravest or most foolish assassins dare to harvest the body parts of mind flayers for poison crafting. Still, the practice occurs often enough that mind flayer tentacle extract is not an uncommon toxin among the greatest murderers of the Underdark.

The poison is elegant in its simplicity, since it scrambles the higher brain functions of its victims, temporarily leaving them completely vulnerable to an assassin's blade. Like grell bile and umber dust, mind flayer tentacle extract has an additional effect available to those assassins who are brave enough to sample the toxin themselves.

If an assassin imbibes a small amount of the extract before attacking, he or she can temporarily take on the most feared ability of the mind flayer and become able to control the actions of a victim. This benefit has an exceedingly dangerous drawback, since even a small amount of mind flayer tentacle extract also stuns the assassin, leaving the assassin nearly as vulnerable as his or her mark.

Mind Flayer Tentacle Extract Level 25

This purple fluid scrambles a creature's brain functions, momentarily reducing it to a defenseless state.

Assassin Poison

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You apply the poison to your melee weapon or one piece of your ammunition. During this encounter, the next creature you hit with a weapon attack using the poisoned item takes 10 extra poison damage, and it is stunned until the end of your next turn.

Special (Poison): If the DM allows it, you can imbibe a small amount of mind flayer tentacle extract as part of the above attack. Imbibing the mind flayer tentacle extract deals 10 poison damage to you, and you are stunned until the end of your next turn. Doing so also grants the following additional effect.

Effect: When the target is no longer stunned due to the poison, the target is dominated by you (save ends).

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. You pour the poison into a drink or onto a plate of food. Within the next hour, the first creature to consume the food or drink takes 20 poison damage, and it is dazed and takes a –2 penalty to saving throws until the end of its next extended rest.

Origins and Application

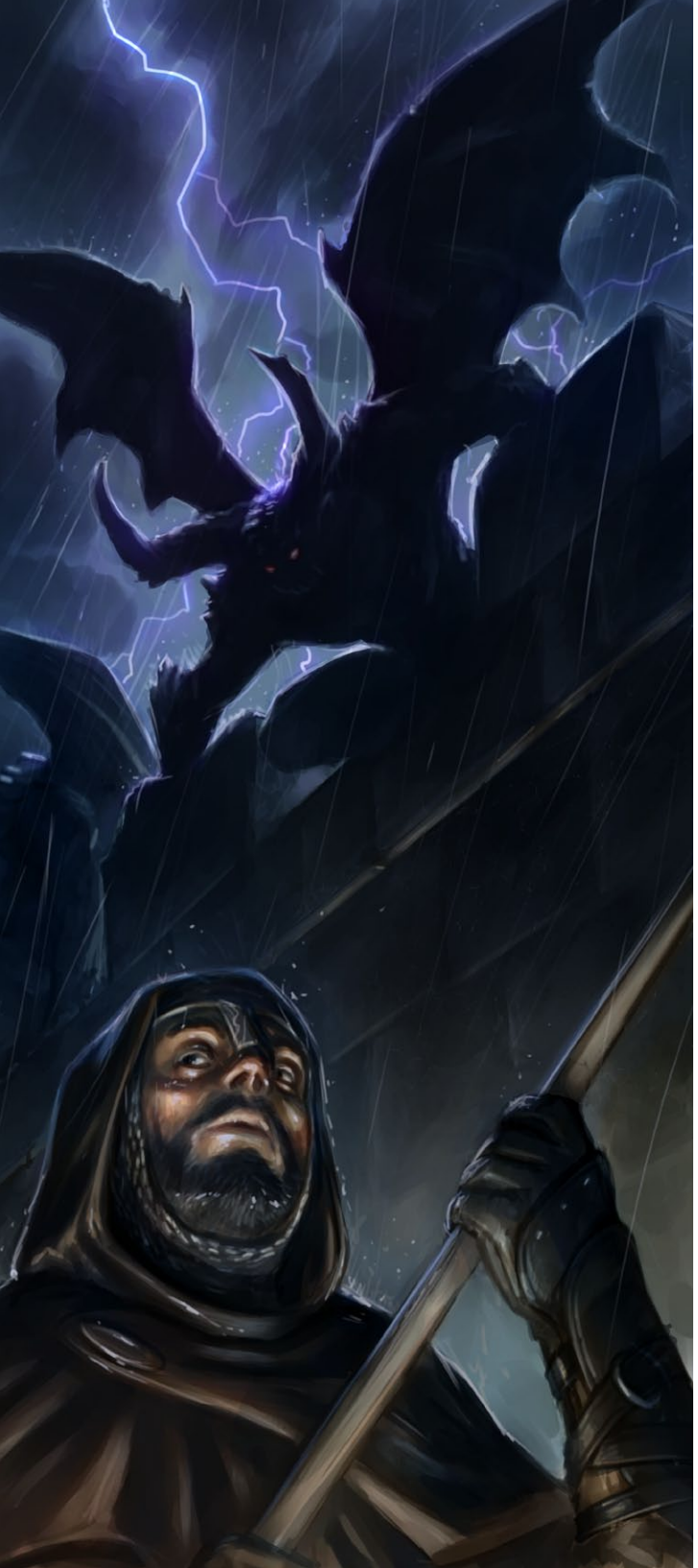
Although most of the tentacles used to create the poison come from illithids slain by powerful adventurers or mighty assassins on the hunt for raw materials, there is another source. At least one mind flayer enclave trades or sells tentacles harvested from illithids that have broken specific laws and have had their tentacles removed as punishment.

Underdark assassins typically use mind flayer tentacle extract to coat a weapon, since its stunning effect allows an assassin to easily dispatch a victim with a follow-up strike. When an assassin wants to use the secondary effect of the poison by imbibing a small amount of the toxin, he or she typically coats a projectile and attacks a target at range. This precaution ensures that the assassin has time to overcome the poison before taking mental command of a target.

Mind flayer tentacle extract is odorless and tasteless and can be added to food or drink with little chance of detection. When ingested, the poison disorients the victim. The victim remains completely aware of his or her surroundings, making this particular use of the poison perfect for assassins who want their targets to know the identity of their killer.

About the Author

Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel is a writer, editor, and game designer who has worked in the gaming industry since 2005. His recent RPG credits include the *Dungeon* magazine adventures "The Vault of Darom Madar" and "Heart of the Scar" from Wizards of the Coast and *Blackdirge's Dungeon Denizens* and the *Critter Cache* series from Goodman Games. Aeryn lives in Seattle, Washington, with his wife, Melissa.



Ecology of the Gargoyle

By Jeff LaSala

Illustration by Tyler Walpole

They perch atop battlements in storm-filled skies, snarling, frozen in stone. They lurk in shadowed alcoves deep underground, waiting to strike the unwary. They adorn the rooftops of majestic buildings, wings folded, peering in silence. They jut from the dread walls of the legendary Temple of Elemental Evil. But are they mere sculptures, or real monsters lurking in plain sight?

Gargoyles are treacherous humanoids of elemental origin that resemble winged statues of diabolic aspect. Most have prodigious horns, sharp teeth, and long tails. Relentless predators, they haunt ruins, caverns, and subterranean hollows, usually hunting for sport or charged with guarding a specific location.

Elemental Existence

Sages speculate that the gargoyle race might have originated in mortal wizardry. They suspect that grotesque statues in ancient civilizations were animated through magic, like golems or shield guardians. By some fluke of transmutation, those constructs came to life and propagated, becoming the stony predators feared today. Other people claim that clerics disfavored by their gods became cursed, and the stones of their temples came to life in demonic form to punish their transgressions.

Such tales are pure mythology; contemporary elementalists know better, even if they can't pinpoint a specific genesis for gargoyles. They know that the creatures are natives of the Elemental Chaos, likely spawned from the works of the primordials before the world took final shape. Some look to the nabassu gargoyle, a demonic species associated with Orcus, and wonder if the Demon Prince of the Undead had a hand in its creation. But whether gargoyles are the sentient runoff of various creations or the deliberate project of a primordial, no one can say for sure.

Gargoyles are common in the Elemental Chaos. More powerful, intelligent denizens dismiss them as dim-witted beasts, similar to the animal-minded elementals of the wild. As a result, gargoyles live a lurking or nomadic existence, preying on weaker creatures and attacking stronger ones only with sufficient numbers.

Although gargoyles can be as ferocious as slaads, their behavior is more consistent. Accordingly, some elemental powers have learned to harness gargoyles' natural savagery and territoriality, employing them as hunters, messengers, and sentries. Lacking keen intelligence, gargoyles often consent to serve such masters, especially those who can provide them with a domain to defend.

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Noble efreet, especially, exploit gargoyles, using them to terrorize slaves or hunt escapees. Gladiatorial arenas in the City of Brass and other civilizations in the Elemental Chaos often feature gargoyles as first-round contenders. The dao also use gargoyles as defenders, supplying them with weaker prey to sate their destructive appetites.

Physiology

Gargoyles are roughly anthropomorphic in form, and most are the size of a human, if not larger. Their skin has the texture of stone and is just as varied in appearance; typically, it resembles the dark gray of basalt. A gargoyle's hide might be porous or marbled, striated or smooth. Although the creatures have internal organs, their anatomy is unusual. Sheathed in indurated flesh, their bones are as hard as rock but much less brittle. Their vital fluids bear little resemblance to the blood of worldly creatures, having the consistency of wet sand.

Gargoyles do not require conventional forms of sustenance. They don't need to eat, drink, or breathe. Instead, they slowly siphon mineral nutrients through physical contact with the stone on which they lair. Those that perch on buildings in open places occasionally fly to rockier locales to "feed," but gargoyles can endure for years without any nourishment at all.

Minerals provide them with greater energy for hunting, and it is the pleasure of the hunt that drives the stony monsters. They kill for sport, not sustenance. Nevertheless, they relish consuming the flesh of living creatures. A victim's fear and pain speaks to the cruelty that is a gargoyle's birthright and inspires further aggression. In addition, the iron-rich blood and organs of soft-skinned humanoids provide gargoyles with sensory delight, if not nourishment.

Gargoyles Are Grotesque

In the real world, we tend to use the word "gargoyle" broadly to mean any carved monster hanging off a building. Architecturally, gargoyles are bestial protrusions that convey rainwater away from buildings and famously adorn churches and cathedrals. The word comes from the Old French *gargouille*, meaning "throat" or "waterspout," literally referring to the gurgling sound they make. Meanwhile, the term "grotesque" covers everything else: hideous carved stone sculptures of human, beast, or a hybrid of the two. Of course, in D&D®, architectural gargoyles are inspired by the living monsters, not the other way around.

DMs take note: If you want gargoyles to be an effective menace in your game, don't make every bestial sculpture one of these creatures. Let your characters see actual, harmless grotesques perched atop temple and castle walls a few times before they encounter real gargoyles. Otherwise they're liable to get jumpy and attack every statue they see. Get them to relax their guard before you strike. That's the gargoyle way.

Life in Stone

A gargoyle's signature talent is its ability to become like perfectly solid stone and remain that way for any length of time. In this defensive state, gargoyles are virtually impossible to recognize as living creatures and are impervious to casual harm. They use this ability to camouflage themselves in their environment, surprise their foes, or merely pass the time. While in stone form, their wounds mend quickly.

If another creature steps within 50 feet of a gargoyle in stone form, the gargoyle detects it by vibrations traveling through liquid or solid matter. Like a spider at the center of its web, a gargoyle waits for prospective prey to venture into its zone of awareness, and then it strikes without warning.

In death, gargoyles revert almost instantly to stone form, becoming like the material from which they were birthed. This proto-state is a type of rock that is tremendously brittle. It is difficult to learn much from dead gargoyles; their remains are often indistinguishable from broken rubble or spilled gravel, especially if they were slain in midair. An intact dead gargoyle is just a statue.

Gargoyles live for about fifty years, but they do not age while in stone form. Because they spend most of their time in stasis, it's possible, even common, for gargoyles to live for centuries. They rarely die of old age, however—they delight in torturing weaker creatures and sometimes misjudge their targets. Almost inevitably, gargoyles are slain by adventurers, other monsters, or their own kind. An elderly gargoyle is more likely to assume stone form and never reawaken than to simply let its years run out.

It's worth noting that while in stone form, gargoyles remain aware of their surroundings and dimly cognizant of the passing of time. Their active minds lapse into inertia but do not drowse entirely. They are alert enough to discriminate among prospective victims in close proximity.

Reproduction

Gargoyles possess gender, though other creatures find it difficult (or impossible) to discern one from the other. Males typically have the largest horns, and females sport longer tails. Both genders are equally vicious and cruel. Females are better hunters, while males make better guards.

Mated pairs remain together only until eggs are produced. When the female becomes pregnant, she

selects as secure a lair as she can find and assumes stone form for more than a year. The male stands guard, spending much of that time in stone form, but he also patrols the area a few times a month, looking for signs of activity or intrusions. When the female comes out of stasis, she holds a clutch of mismatched eggs that look like smooth rocks.

The mother leaves the eggs with the male and departs. The father carries them to a new location, scatters them, and also departs, leaving the eggs to their fate. Such is the extent of their parental instincts.

The rocklike eggs do not hatch, instead growing larger over time and shifting into humanoid shape. Slowly these new gargoyles become mobile and explore their surroundings, learning to claw, bite, and take wing. If the young gargoyles discover one another, they test their natural weapons in battle—often to the death. Survivors reach adulthood within five years, when they gain the ability to assume stone form and seek out a lair of their own. Only rarely do siblings band together and search for others of their kind. Even when the gargoyles join larger groups, familial bonds fade quickly.

Organization

As a rule, gargoyles do not play well with others. They are obstinate, sadistic, and brooding creatures, selfish in their pursuits and hateful of rivals. Still, they crave a certain amount of permanence, such as a stationary roost or domain to defend. To that end, they congregate with others of their kind to hunt and kill in packs, sometimes called flights or wings—but they still don't get along. If too many members of a flight are active at one time, fights break out, leading to crippling injuries or death. Large flights can be held together only by the strength and bullying of a margoyle (see the "Variations" section) or an even more powerful, charismatic creature.

The natural territoriality of gargoyles is frustrated in the Elemental Chaos, where they rank among the plane's weaker denizens. It is little surprise, then, that they long ago slipped into the mortal world, where they aren't at the bottom of the pecking order. Gargoyles have infested caves, ruins, and other dark places ever since, preying on all living things and earning a reputation as earthly fiends.

Because they are not from the world, gargoyles have no natural place in it. Their presence is almost always unwelcome, a tumorous threat to other beings. They claim territory by force, hunting and harassing any creature that cannot placate or defeat them.

Gargoyles favor venues that have open spaces where they can fly and high vantages from which they can dive on prey, but such a location must also have a view of roads or trails that provide a supply of victims. Within those requirements, gargoyles are as comfortable in Underdark caves as they are beneath the open sky. They can develop a fondness for particular sites and might vie to win a prime perch. On the surface world, they choose mountains and rocky bluffs. They ambush prey by diving from high above or by springing from shadowed alcoves. A small number of gargoyles—the bravest and most vicious—live in cities, where they perch on the eaves and spires of the tallest buildings in the guise of stone statues.

Timeless Sentries

For creatures born of chaos, gargoyles are remarkably patient. Sages speculate that the ability to become dormant for years, decades, or centuries must give gargoyles a unique perspective on time. Exactly what that perspective *is*, only a gargoyle could say, and the creatures are not known for being communicative or thoughtful.

Gargoyles cleave to extremes, much like their primordial forebears, switching explosively from attentive and guarded to tumultuous and destructive. A gargoyle might crouch in stone form for ten years, ignoring hundreds of travelers who pass beneath its perch, and then spring upon one particular victim who seems no different from any other. Another gargoyle might refuse to let any creatures pass without accosting them.

Tales of the creatures' watchful evil have become ubiquitous across the ages. Common superstition holds that their presence, though undesirable, wards off worse problems. Kings, priests, mages, and nobles erect gargoyle-shaped statuary on their estates to "guard" their holdings. This trend further muddies the origin of the creatures. Which came first—the gargoyle or the statue? Is a grotesque carving a dormant gargoyle, or just cut stone? Every crouched, bestial sculpture is suspect, and that fact suits their builders fine.

It suits some gargoyles, too. They take advantage of the confusion by perching among grotesque statues placed by builders. These statues are almost always high overhead, where one more won't be noticed. Other gargoyles avoid buildings adorned with such figures because they, too, can't tell the difference between a real gargoyle and a sculpture without close (and risky) inspection. A dormant gargoyle doesn't just resemble stone; it *is* stone, and unless it moves, it can fool others of its kind. Some gargoyles stay away from buildings that might already be claimed by rivals.

Temples often erect diabolical statues that resemble gargoyles to ward off intruders or to remind their followers of the fiends that oppose their beliefs. Evil faiths sometimes encourage real gargoyles to roost on the rooftops of their temples, offering a relatively safe lair in exchange for strikes against their enemies.

For gargoyles, territory is a genuine need. More intelligent creatures recognize this aspect of gargoyle psychology and use it to manipulate them.

Service and Mutability

Gargoyles are creatures of elemental evil, spawned from primeval rock before the world was constant. In many ways, they are still malleable and shaped by external forces. They are free-willed beings susceptible to change, mutation, or refinement.

Most gargoyles indulge their baser appetites and are happy to follow the directives of intelligent, vile masters. Legions of gargoyles loyal to Orcus were corrupted when the primordial became a demon prince long ago. Some were twisted into demons, and others merely took on demonic aspects. These nabassu gargoyles act more like fiends and dwell in the Abyss as well as in the world.

Other demonic cults recruit, train, and breed gargoyles, none more successfully than the Elder Elemental Eye. Members of this cult have made many advances in gargoyle physiology and have found ways to enslave them. Gargoyles of the Eye are fearless and self-sacrificing. Unlike their free-willed kin, they die to ensure the safety of their masters.

In Eberron, the humans of House Vadalis have tamed and employed gargoyles, subduing if not dispelling their murderous tendencies. They employ the monsters as messengers or bounty hunters and give them greater hunting opportunities in return. Sharn, the City of Towers, includes one of the first successful gargoyle installations of the dragonmarked house. Customers can pay to have gargoyles deliver messages or parcels or track down specific people. A gargoyle even participates in the annual Race of Eight Winds.

Not Carved in Stone

The standard-issue gargoyle coming out of the ovens of the Elemental Chaos is mean, evil, and dumb. It's full of instinct and avarice but is still chewy and warm. The "Service and Mutability" section of this article addresses how other agencies manipulate them before they cool—not literally, of course. Gargoyles aren't cookies. But it's a fitting (and tasty) analogy.

Because gargoyles are so mutable, they're perfect candidates for the monster themes in *Dungeon Master's Guide*® *2*. The demon-based themes are no-brainers (look to the nabassu), but a Feywild denizen gargoyle might be more intriguing. Perhaps one of the great archfey—such as the Prince of Frost, the Trinket Lord, or the Carrion King—fostered packs of its own. Now variants of the gargoyle can be found across the Feywild or throughout the Feydark below. How would a storybook gargoyle act? Limned in faerie lights, guarding sacred forest groves, or cavorting with will-o'-wisps in swampy ruins, a "feygoyle" could be great fun. It might prefer a game of riddles over combat, or offer intruders a suspicious invitation to tea.

Variations

Many types of gargoyles exist, from obsidian or ironstone to crystalline or ice. They originate in different pockets of the Elemental Chaos, or foul spellcasters breed them. Each is shaped like the rest, but their stony hides, ferocity, and abilities vary.

Aquatic gargoyles known as kapoacinths also came into the world long ago, having spilled over from the Riverweb (*The Plane Below*, page 84). Unlike their aerial cousins, kapoacinths fly effortlessly through water, although they remain creatures of elemental earth. They favor flooded ruins and undersea shipwrecks, knowing sunken shelter and treasure is a lure for prey.

Every now and then, a gargoyle is born that is different from its fellows. A paragon among its kind, it grows larger than average or manifests bizarre mutations, such as additional horns or limbs. Experienced adventurers refer to such specimens as margoyles. The name might derive from the deep grooves that mar their bodies and that never seem to heal in stasis, or from the hideous lacerations and scars the creatures inflict upon their foes. Margoyles are slightly more intelligent than their smaller kin, and they use that slim edge to become leaders of gargoyle flights.

Using Gargoyles

Gargoyles are tireless guardians that require no food, water, or air. They can hold their posts indefinitely—in theory—provided they can be made to cooperate. Evil mages and priests have an easier time finding common ground with gargoyles, but for those unable to persuade one, magic is a safer method of coercion.

Rituals exist for summoning and binding gargoyles to service (see below). These rituals call gargoyles directly from the Elemental Chaos and forge a mystic link that connects the ritual caster, the gargoyle, and the site to be guarded.

Arcanists have found other ways to harness the elemental power of gargoyles. When the rock of a dead gargoyle is ground into powder and mixed with residuum and other alchemical reagents, the creation of magic items such as the *cloak of the gargoyle* becomes possible. Such items are rare, and gargoyles are mystically attracted to—and angered by—those who use them.

Summon Gargoyle

With your final gesture, a winged humanoid swells out of the rock nearby. As the creature takes shape, its horned head swivels to face you.

Level: 12
Category: Exploration
Time: 1 hour
Duration: Special
Component Cost: 500 gp and two healing surges
Market Price: 2,600 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

You call a gargoyle from the Elemental Chaos and force it to serve you. Upon the ritual's completion, make an Arcana check with a -10 penalty, and consult the following table. You can choose any result lower than your actual result.

Arcana Check Result	Result of Ritual
19 or lower	A gargoyle (level 9) appears and attacks you. It fights to the death and grants no XP for its defeat.
20–25	1d4 gargoyle rakes (level 5) appear.
26–30	A runic gargoyle (level 8) appears.
31–34	A gargoyle (level 9) appears.
35+	A gargoyle harrier (level 11), a gargoyle rock hurler (level 11), or an ice gargoyle (level 12) appears.

The summoned gargoyle understands anything you command, but it cannot speak any new languages.

Once summoned, the gargoyle guards one object or an area until it is killed. The gargoyle attacks any creature that approaches the object or enters the area, though it allows for any exceptions you make. Runic gargoyles protect you, rather than an object or a location.

Cloak of the Gargoyle — Level 9+ Uncommon

Although this dark gray garment flows like a heavy woolen cloak, it has the texture of cracked, aged stone. When you act aggressively while you wear it, your eyes glow red.

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

Neck Slot
Enhancement Bonus: Fortitude, Reflex, and Will
Properties
✦ While you wear this cloak and you are within 20 squares of a gargoyle, that gargoyle can sense you, knows what you are, and knows your location.
✦ Except against gargoyles, you gain an item bonus to Intimidate checks equal to this cloak's enhancement bonus.
Utility Power (Polymorph) ✦ **Daily** (Standard Action)
Effect: You take the form of a stone statue that looks like you. While in this form, you gain tremorsense 10 and resist 20 to all damage, and you gain 5 temporary hit points at the start of each of your turns. You can take actions only to spend your second wind or to end this effect (a minor action).
Level 14: Resist 25 to all damage.
Level 19: Resist 30 to all damage.
Level 24: Resist 35 to all damage.
Level 29: Resist 40 to all damage.

Adventure Hooks

In the mortal world, gargoyles can be found almost anywhere they can nest, perch, or hunt. Although they can serve as wandering monsters or quintessential dungeon guardians, here are a couple interesting ways to use them in your game.

Time Capsule: While adventuring in a dungeon, the characters uncover a chamber that had been sealed by a cave-in (or a magically locked door). Inside is a lone gargoyle that passed the centuries in stone form. Relieved at its release, the creature considers the newcomers' reactions. The next few seconds make all the difference. Will it attack, flee, or become an unexpected ally? What secrets might it know about the dungeon? What if it has knowledge that no library in the world possesses?

Idol Fears: A king has been gifted with a large, monstrous sculpture of eldritch design by one of the kingdom's high priests. Carved of obsidian, possessing four arms, and only slightly damaged, it appears to be a religious idol from a long-vanished civilization. Uncertain what to do with so remarkable a statue, the king placed it in the castle vaults while his wizards consulted their libraries. Is the statue a mystic icon, or a gargoyle assassin in stone form biding its time? Did the high priest think the statue was just a decoration, or is it part of his scheme to take over the kingdom? Either way, the gargoyles that have recently perched on his temple's spires are making the king nervous. The king has sent messengers to the adventurers to seek their knowledge and experience. Perhaps they have encountered this statue before.

About the Author

Jeff LaSala was menaced—yet fascinated—by the gargoyles of Mons, Belgium, at the age of 4. He is a writer/editor of speculative fiction and an inquisitory game designer. He has written an Eberron® novel (now an audiobook), a slew of DDI articles, and some RPG books for Goodman Games, and he recently edited and cowrote the cyberpunk anthology+soundtrack, Foreshadows: The Ghosts of Zero. Now living in New York City, Jeff still looks for gargoyles wherever he can find them—and photographs them.

Tavern Profile: Inn of the Welcome Wench

By Shawn Merwin

Illustration by Mark Winters
Cartography by Jason A. Engle

The adventure *The Village of Hommlet* was a seminal starting point for the careers of many D&D® player characters during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Most players at that time spent at least a few sessions exploring the town before heading off to confront the evil lurking in the ruined moat house. The centerpiece of the village was the Inn of the Welcome Wench.

Like many published adventures from that era, *The Village of Hommlet* is very short: only sixteen pages of text. To emphasize the inn's importance in the adventure, nearly two whole pages—and a good portion of the map space—were dedicated solely to the inn and the nonplayer characters (NPCs) located there. For players who cut their gaming teeth on AD&D®, the Inn of the Welcome Wench was a portal to everything that was enticing about role-playing games: interesting NPCs, mysterious plots, traitorous foes, outrageous rumors, stalwart allies, and copious amounts of squab-stuffed pheasant for a mere 2 gold pieces!

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Hommlet was set in Gary Gygax's *World of Greyhawk* campaign setting, incorporating the geopolitical map, the important NPCs, and the deities of that setting into the historical background of the adventure as well as into the events of the adventure itself. Figures such as St. Cuthbert of the Cudgel, the demigod Iuz, and the demon queen Zuggtmoy play pivotal roles in adventures that begin in sleepy little Hommlet.

A History of the Inn

A history of the Inn of the Welcome Wench is synonymous with a history of Hommlet. Over thirty years of real time have passed since the inn first found its way into the hearts and minds of players. In many ways, the Inn of the Welcome Wench became the archetype for many of the other famous inns and taverns that cropped up in various D&D settings.

In countless adventures written and played since the publication of *The Village of Hommlet*, quests have begun at an inn. The plot hook might change—a rumor from the barkeeper, a note posted on a board, a mysterious figure skulking in the corner, or the hysterical victim bursting through the front door—but the tavern is the old standby. In a way, knowing the history of the Inn of the Welcome Wench is knowing the history of how adventurers begin their careers.

The Adventures

The Village of Hommlet by Gary Gygax, published in 1979, describes Hommlet's humble beginnings: a few farms, a smithy, and a rest house established at the junction of two well-traveled trade roads on the southeast fringes of the Viscounty of Verbobonc. As the routes saw greater use, more settlers came to the area to farm the land and provide services to travelers.

The adventure, designated T1, mentioned that the plots and adventures contained therein were preludes to further adventures in a subsequent publication, T2 *The Temple of Elemental Evil*. This follow-up super-adventure was finally published in 1985, credited to Gygax with Frank Mentzer. This much-anticipated adventure included *The Village of Hommlet* in its entirety; while there were small edits and alterations, most of the content from the earlier adventure was unchanged.

Hommlet received further treatment with the release of *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil*, Monte Cook's 3rd Edition mega-adventure. In this adventure, a few years have passed since the events of the original *The Temple of Elemental Evil*. Hommlet has grown from a small village to a large town, yet the Inn of the Welcome Wench endures.

Hommlet's origins were revisited in 2009 when Wizards of the Coast's Andy Collins designed an updated 4th Edition version of Gygax's original Hommlet adventure. The content remained as faithful as possible to the original, modernizing the rules elements that changed during the various editions of the game.

Throughout all these changes, and even with the added input from a 2001 novel and 2003 video game that both shared the name of the original 1985 adventure, the Inn of the Welcome Wench still sat peacefully and invitingly at the center of the village.

The Inn at the Crossroads

The Inn of the Welcome Wench sprang from a more functional and less extensive rest house that was built at the crossroads of two overland trade routes. The rest house served the travelers as well as the farms and artisans' shops at these crossroads.

When the area became more settled by the forces of civilization, a festering evil also crept into the region. A short distance from the bucolic Hommlet emerged the seedy Nulb, a place as dark and sinister as Hommlet was honest and hospitable. From amid the ruffians and cutthroats of Nulb rose the evil priests who would soon gather a vile flock and build the Temple of Elemental Evil.

Such profound evil could not hide for long, however, and soon diverse forces of light—the paladin Prince Thrommel leading forces from Furyondy and Veluna, dwarf troops from the Lortmil Mountains, gnomes from the Kron Hills, and elves from the Gnarley Forest—came together to crush these forces of evil at the Battle of Emridy Meadows. The vile army was routed, and the forces of good marched upon the temple itself, razing it and sealing in the demonic force behind its rise.

With the oppressive might of the temple no longer supporting the bandits and with barbaric humanoid forces plaguing Hommlet and its surrounding lands, the village was again free to grow and prosper. It is at this point we get our first glimpse of the Inn of the Welcome Wench.

Seeing the potential for growth and the serenity of the area, a retired soldier who fought in the Battle of Emridy Meadows brought his wife and his life's savings to Hommlet to purchase the rest house and turn it into the best inn the area had ever known.

The inn became the center of the growing community, where villagers could share news, victorious adventurers could sleep in a bed once again (or doomed ones for the last time), the militia could congregate, and people could even hide in case evil swept the land again.

Whether a DM wants to use the inn during the time before the first emergence of the temple or the second, the inn is a perfect place to launch adventure for beginning players or veterans alike. All are welcome at the inn!

The Inn's Denizens

The Inn of the Welcome Wench offers three commodities to visitors: room and board for the weary, rumors for the curious, and potential allies for the understaffed. This latter resource has been one of the highlights of the inn since its creation: giving an adventuring party access to companion characters before that element of the game even had a name.

The Staff

The inn is owned and operated by Ostler Gundigoot and his family. ("Ostler" refers to a person who cares for horses and other pack animals at a stable, but here it also doubles as the owner's first name.) Gundigoot established the Inn of the Welcome Wench not long after he participated in the Battle of Emridy Meadows as a militia member in the viscount of Verbobonc's army. As an ex-soldier and proud citizen, Gundigoot soon became a leader in Hommlet's militia and one of the town's most outspoken and trusted elders. Although advancing in age, Gundigoot remains active in running the inn and in the politics of the town.

Gundigoot is affable but businesslike in his dealings with his clientele. He has made an art form out of talking much but saying little, realizing that opinions are bad for business and secrets can become terrible weapons. If the adventurers become trusted heroes, he opens up more in his dealings with them.

The innkeeper's wife, Goodwife Gundigoot (only Ostler Gundigoot uses her given name, Glora), holds court in the inn's kitchen, ensuring that the place is kept clean and the meals' reputations never fall below the highest standards. She leaves the socializing and other business dealings to her husband. Her keen insight into human nature makes her a good judge of character, however, and she shares her opinions with her husband behind closed doors.

The Gundigoots' elder daughter, Vesta, is proud of the business her parents have created, and she looks forward to taking over for them when they are too old to work. She can be found at the right hand of her mother or father, performing chores and learning every nuance of the innkeeping trade. Pleasant in appearance and sharp of wit, she is of marrying age, though she has exhibited no urgency about finding a husband. More than a few bachelors in Hommlet frequent the inn in hopes of catching Vesta's eye.

Their other daughter, Emadyne, is younger than Vesta by several years, and a mischievous streak runs from the tips of her toes to the top of her bright red curls. She is infamous for neglecting her chores to spy on the inn's patrons, whether they are in the common room or in their private chambers. This rebellious attitude drives her parents and sister to distraction, but no amount of punishment has been able to cure her. In fact, this aversion to authority makes Emadyne a mascot for some of the less savory characters who frequent the inn. They find it amusing to teach her to curse like a teamster, cut purses like an expert thief, and throw daggers with unnatural precision.

With a thriving business to manage, Gundigoot maintains a good-sized staff. Two potboys, Melroy and Addison, act as apprentices, serving patrons when business is brisk and performing various maintenance jobs when called upon. Melroy, able but dull-witted, hopes he might someday be the owner of the inn, although no one else doubts that the place is destined for Vesta. Addison, whose fair features and good looks hint at elf blood in his ancestry, performs his tasks adequately. His true passion is the druidic arts; he sneaks away whenever he can to spend time with Jaroo, the half-elf druid, in his grove.

The current cook is an elderly halfling everyone calls "Mother Minnie." The position of cook at the Inn of the Welcome Wench is generally temporary, because Goodwife Gundigoot rules the kitchen, determining menus and managing the purchase of ingredients. This means that cooks, many of whom are used to giving orders rather than following them, end up at odds with her. In this case, Mother Minnie has lived long enough and is lazy enough to let Goodwife Gundigoot handle as much of the work as she likes. Minnie's age and failing health, however, mean that a new cook will have to be hired soon.

As befits its name, the Inn of the Welcome Wench, although known for great food and the best drink in the land, has a greater reputation for hospitality. Part of that friendliness is embodied in the cheerful and cordial women Ostler Gundigoot hires as barmaids. Gundigoot has a standing policy, which he makes clear to barmaids and patrons alike: Flirting and saucy behavior is the limit. No further salacious activity by the staff or the customers will be tolerated. The current trio of barmaids—Tavara, Selonia, and Vonye—have years of experience in giving their customers the finest service without disobeying Gundigoot.

Gundigoot employs several more helpers: chambermaids, stable hands, and scullery maids, to name a few. Additionally, a number of merchants and artisans rely on Gundigoot's patronage to sustain their businesses. These individuals would not be out of place in the common room of the inn.

The Patrons

Rumors that the forces of evil are starting to unite again in the lands around Hommlet have brought a number of visitors to the area. Some have taken rooms at the Inn of the Welcome Wench.

Zert the Fighter

Zert is a tall, muscular human fighter with long dark hair and many battle scars. He claims to be waiting to meet the caravan of a textile merchant returning from a long overland trip to Keoland. This story, however, is a cover. Zert has really been planted in Hommlet as a spy for the forces of the rebuilding temple. He meets once a week with different couriers, who carry his reports back to the temple. So far, Zert has aroused no suspicions.

Because Zert is an accomplished swordsman, if he sees adventurers who appear capable of and interested in disrupting the plans of his masters, he attempts to ingratiate himself with them to keep better tabs on them. He joins them on quests if they allow him to, biding his time until he can attack them during combat, provided that his defection could turn the tide of battle. On the other hand, if the adventurers seem morally and ethically dubious, he might try to recruit them for the forces serving the temple.

Spugnoir the Wizard

One of the stranger long-term inhabitants of the inn is a fledgling wizard named Spugnoir. Although appearing as a human wizard, he is really a tiefling. Spugnoir uses magic to hide his true identity, fearing that the area's dark past and its problems with creatures from the netherworld might put his life at risk to superstitious peasants bearing the dreaded torches and pitchforks so loved by small-minded farmers. His fears are not entirely unfounded.

Spugnoir's disguising magic works only while he is conscious, so he hides himself away in a locked private room when he sleeps, and he does not drink more alcohol than he can handle for fear of passing out in public. Before he joins an adventuring party for long excursions, he will make sure they would be tolerant of his race should the need to sleep arise.

Spugnoir's main goals are to learn new spells and find new rituals, so he has come to the village chasing rumors that such magic might be found in the ruined moat house to the east of Hommlet. He attempted to enter the moat house by himself, but he was scared away by strange noises. The tiefling now waits to either join an adventuring party headed there or to shadow one if the party makes the journey without him.

Turuko and Kobort

Turuko and Kobort are adventurers who have been traveling and working together for a little over a year. Turuko is a human monk of Baklunish descent, his head shaved and his dark skin made leathery by the sun. Kobort is a half-orc fighter at least two heads taller than Turuko.

Turuko is devious and thoroughly evil. He seeks out those weaker than himself, and then he takes everything from them, including their lives if possible. Because Kobort is not smart enough to understand concepts like good and evil, Turuko has used faulty logic and psychological manipulation to turn the huge half-orc into a pliable thrall.

Turuko came to the area because he heard banditry was on the rise here, and he figured he and Kobort could ply their trade of thieving and murder without drawing much suspicion. The two share a room and claim to want to join a group that will seek out and fight evil in the land. Turuko is patient and cunning; he will not play his hand until he is sure he can get what he wants.

Furnok the Gambler

The common room of the inn is rarely without the mousy form of the human Furnok of Ferd, sitting at a table shuffling (marked) cards or rolling (loaded) dice. Furnok is a thief by training and inclination, having grown up as a gambler and sneak-thief on the mean streets of Greyhawk. He lives at the inn, making enough coin by gambling to pay room and board, waiting for a chance to find enough treasure during an adventure to retire.

Furnok has traveled the roads of the Flanaess (the main continent of the World of Greyhawk), generally staying in one place until his cheating and stealing are noticed—then he scurries out of town to find his next marks. Although not overtly evil, Furnok understands the importance of money to a life of comfort, and he strongly desires such a life.

Magic items are of interest to Furnok; he realizes if he can find and sell just one item of great power, he can earn enough coin to never have to work again. With that in mind, Furnok is always willing to strike out on an adventure with the right party. He demands an equal share of the loot, and he fights with the skill of a man who values his own skin. Although he's brave, he isn't likely to sacrifice his life for another.

Elmo the Ranger

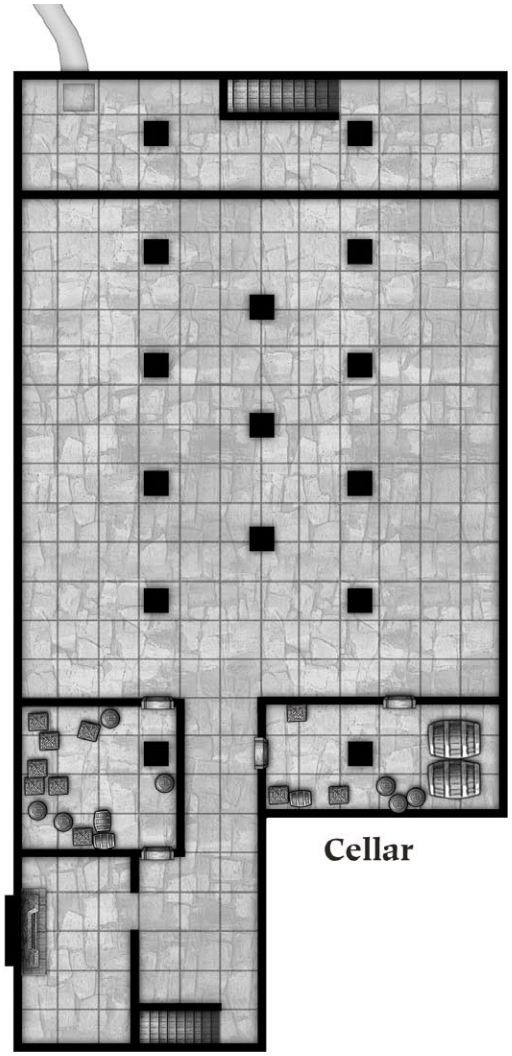
The likeliest and most enthusiastic henchman for a party of adventurers is Elmo, the human ranger. Elmo is a powerfully built young man, his blue eyes often hidden beneath a mop of long, blond hair. The first time adventurers come to the inn, he is sure to introduce himself. His speech is often slow and stilted, suggesting a lack of intelligence, an abundance of drink, or both. He emphatically conveys to adventurers, however, his desire to seek adventure.

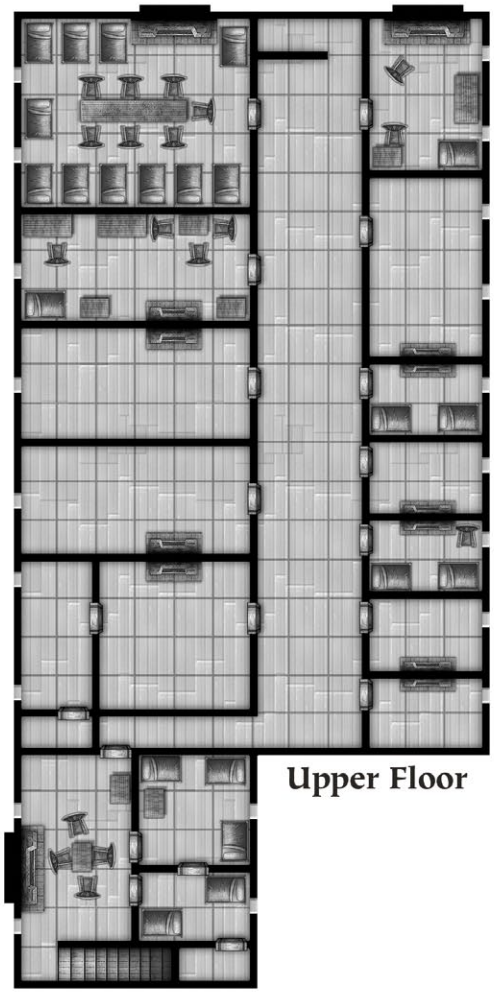
The drunken-yokel act hides the fact that Elmo is a highly skilled fighter. He is employed by the viscount of Verbobonc to act as a spy, monitoring any evil that might be on the move in or around Hommlet. The guise Elmo employs makes everyone, including his parents, believe he is a wastrel and a lout.

When he first accompanies a party, Elmo tries to make his successful maneuvers in battle appear to be accidents or lucky swings. After he is sure his companions are on the side of good, or when the news of renewed temple activity becomes too overwhelming, Elmo will reveal his true nature.

Other Characters

Although all these people frequent the Inn of the Welcome Wench, the inn's location and reputation make it the perfect place to interact with anyone, from villagers to traveling merchants to rascals of dangerous mien. Any individual a DM needs to put in front of the adventurers could reasonably end up at the inn for a meal, a drink, a meeting, or a fight.





INN OF THE WELCOME WENCH

Adventures at the Inn

The challenges and trials awaiting adventurers in the ruined moat house near Hommlet have never quite been appropriate for brand-new 1st-level characters. (In fact, both *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* and the 4th Edition update of *The Village of Hommlet* suggest that 4th level is the best starting level.) Even in the early versions, many DMs were left to their own devices to create some content that would get adventurers to an appropriate level to tackle the challenges present in the moat house.

The Inn of the Welcome Wench has all the makings of a place that can lead to many adventures and even host some of them. What follows are plot hooks, conflicts, complications, and encounters that can be associated with adventures in and around the inn.

An effective method of bringing the adventurers to Hommlet is for them to hear a bit about the history of the area: more specifically, the rise and fall of the first Temple of Elemental Evil. From their far-flung homelands, they have learned brigand attacks are on the rise again in the area, and adventurers may soon have both unlimited opportunities for adventure and the chance to find wealth and magic left over from the fall of the evil there. These rumors should be enticement enough for any adventurer seeking to launch a career.

Beginnings

At the start of the adventurers' path to power and greatness (especially when players are new to the game as well), it is often wise to unfold plots slowly, allowing the players and their characters to move gradually from the known into the unknown. Each salient plot path—each stretch of rising action, revelation, and climax—can lead the players deeper into the strangeness and danger of the setting.

For this effect to be most gripping, the beginning of the campaign should rest comfortably in the known. Threats to the innocents and the dangers plaguing a town are felt more strongly if the adventurers have had the chance to become familiar with the setting. When the mundane and the usual are threatened by the unimaginable, what is at stake seems much greater. For this reason, the Inn of the Welcome Wench is the perfect place for a beginning. When the adventurers enter Hommlet for the first time, or if they begin as lifelong residents of Hommlet, the inn becomes the focal point for bringing those important NPCs into the adventurers' field of vision (and field of caring).

To open a campaign, have the adventurers' first visit to the inn take place during a celebration: a public holiday or a large gathering like a wedding. This allows the players to roleplay their characters while the NPCs interact with one another. Adventurers can get their first impressions about which NPCs they can trust and admire, whom they might come into conflict with, and where they might ask about leads for potential quests.

Although it may seem trite and stereotypical, a drunken tavern brawl is a valuable tool early in a campaign. This kind of event shows the adventurers quickly who will be the problem-causers, and it also gives them an idea of how the law enforcement is managed in the town—and how strict or relaxed that enforcement will be. Perhaps more importantly, it gives the adventurers the chance to present themselves to the villagers, letting everyone know what they are all about and how skilled they are in combat.

Assuming that the adventurers handle themselves honorably and skillfully, proving themselves strong and trustworthy, more opportunities should open up for them in Hommlet.

Adventures and Quests

After the adventurers have proven themselves, they should find the villagers in Hommlet have important business that can be handled only by skilled adventurers. These can be short quests encompassing nothing more than a brief encounter or interaction. Others may turn into full adventures intertwining with a larger, more immersive plot—particularly when the forces at the ruined moat house and the reemergence of the Temple of Elemental Evil are involved.

The important point to remember is that some of these quests might take place incrementally over several sessions while the players follow other plot threads. One of the keys to a continuously engaging campaign is to weave three or four plots at a time through the game, sometimes bringing them together when least expected.

Missing Wine

Ostler Gundigoot is running out of Velunan Fire amber, a specialty wine from his supplier in Veluna. He expected a shipment to arrive several days ago, and the caravan master delivering the goods is rarely late. Gundigoot wants the adventurers to travel the road between Hommlet and Veluna to see if the caravan carrying the wine was attacked. Rumors have it that bandits are in the area again, but this is the first trouble Gundigoot has seen with his deliveries.

When the adventurers head out on the road northwest toward Verbobonc, where the caravan would have made deliveries before leaving for Hommlet, they come across a pack of savage wolves, drakes, and wild dogs. The creatures attack ferociously, and upon defeating them the adventurers notice these creatures have been domesticated and trained to attack but probably escaped from their previous masters. They wear collars and harnesses bearing runes that represent the letters TZGY. This symbol shows the bearer is affiliated with the Temple of Elemental Evil,

although the adventurers will not learn this until much later in the campaign.

After a couple days of careful journey along the road, the adventurers find the remains of the caravan. Undead creatures feed upon the bodies of caravan guards. The wine and other goods from the caravan are missing, indicating that these creatures are acting only as scavengers and are not the original attackers.

Later in the campaign, a trader might show up at the Inn of the Welcome Wench and try to sell barrels of the stolen wine to Gundigoot. This trader could either be one of the killers, or he could point the adventurers to where he bought the wine. When the heroes bring the killers of the caravan members to justice, they should receive rewards for completing a minor quest.

Fugitive

While the adventurers are resting at the inn, a Baklunish woman named Loranah approaches them. She offers them information about potential trouble spots in the area, specifically those locations where she has heard that bandit attacks are most frequent. She claims to be a surveyor making maps on behalf of the Mouqollad Consortium, the mercantile guild of Ket.

Loranah can become a friend and source of information about the rest of the world for the adventurers. Then one night, when the inn is full, a heavily armed Baklunish man enters the tavern and attacks Loranah, trying to drag her from the building. When anyone tries to intervene, he tells them Loranah was contracted to be the wife of a lesser noble in Ket, and she ran away on the night of her wedding. She has broken the law and brought shame to her family. She is to be taken back to Ket to face justice.

Loranah begs the adventurers to save her, for she faces a long stay in the mines as her punishment, which is as good as a death sentence. If the adventurers help her, they will have to face immediate combat with the bounty hunter and his hirelings, who wait outside. There can be later repercussions for this as well. A plot seemingly launched by followers of the temple could really be another group of bounty hunters coming for Loranah.

A Treasure Cache

In the secret cellar of the Inn of the Welcome Wench is a cache of weapons, armaments, provisions, and wealth. It also contains bunks where a militia could hide and survive in case of a long siege. This cellar was added by Ostler Gundigoot and is known only to a few of the powerful citizens of Hommlet.

Unfortunately for Hommlet, a band of ne'er-do-wells in the Gnarley Forest have learned of the existence of the cellar and its contents. The band, led by an eladrin called Inresk, thinks there is far more treasure than there truly is. His band of gnomes, elves, eladrin, and their minions plans to infiltrate the inn, find the cellar, and use a secret tunnel exit to escape with all the goods. The adventurers can learn of this plan—either before or as it is happens—and recover the goods.

As an added complication, these fey bandits might not be as vile as they seem at first. Instead, they could have heard that the weapons in the cellar were silvered; the group is actually fighting a horde of jackalweres and wererats that have formed a colony in the forests not far from Hommlet. The adventurers can complete a minor quest for stopping the theft of the goods from the cellar and another if they successfully assist the fey in fighting the lycanthropes. For added synergy, make the leader of the lycanthropes an associate of the temple's forces.

The Girl Who Cried Wolf

Emadyne, Gundigoot's youngest and mischievous daughter, thinks it is great fun to scream about some great danger and watch everyone come running with weapons drawn and looks of panic on their faces. After doing this many times, and hopefully being suitably scolded by the adventurers, she learns her lesson.

One evening, however, she goes into the stables on an errand and finds a couple of goblins stealing horses. She screams as the goblins grab her and attempt to kidnap her. They assume someone will pay a generous ransom for such a well-fed human child.

The adventurers might come running to her aid only to see her being carried off by goblins heading for the Kron Hills. If the adventurers don't follow, a goblin arrives at the inn later, demanding a ransom for the safe return of the child. Either way, the adventurers would earn a minor quest reward for saving her, and they could even call upon her to use her roguish skills to aid in her own escape. The goblins could be part of a larger force that runs a slave trade between the Kron Hills and the village of Nulb near the temple.

About the Author

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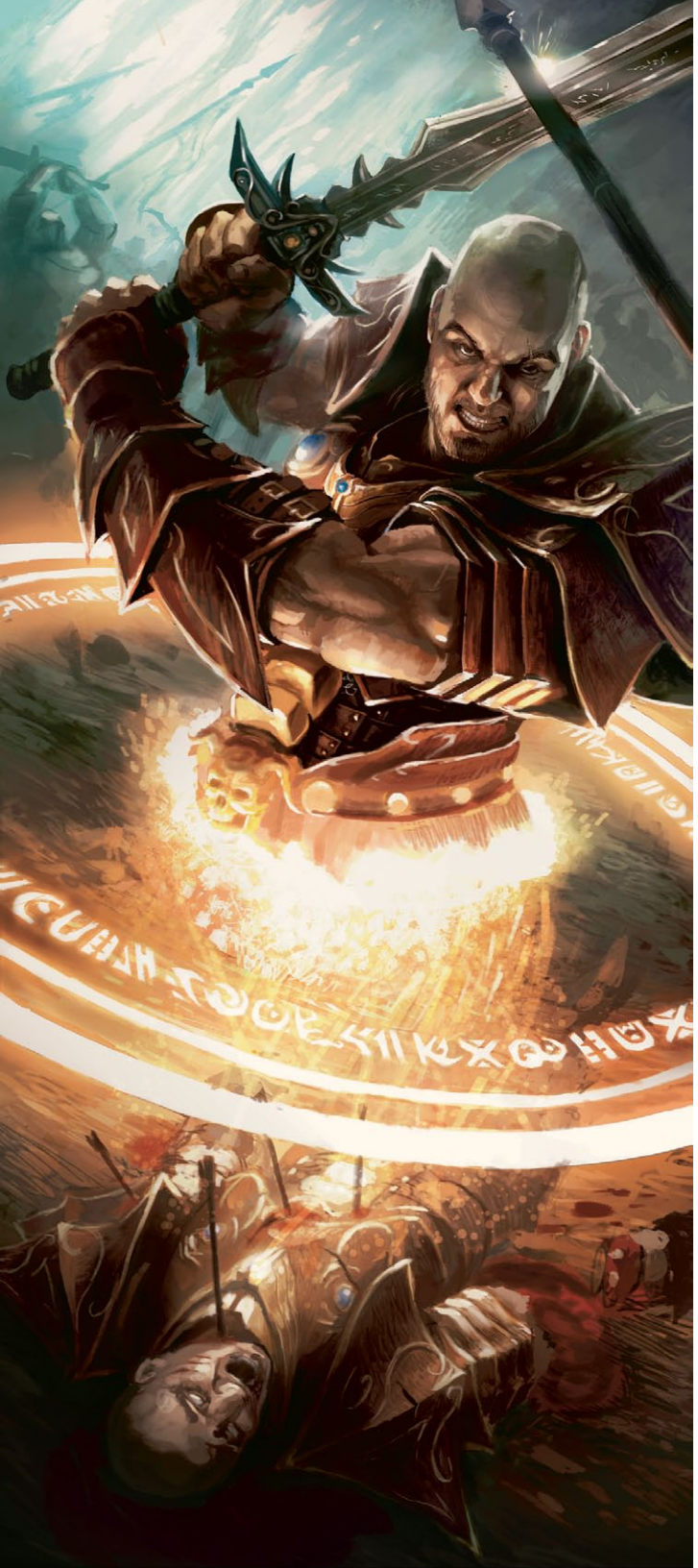

Unearthed Arcana
Game Changers

By Robert J. Schwalb and Matt Sernett

Illustration by Phill Simmer

The rules of the Dungeons & Dragons® game have evolved over the years to cover just about any contingency. But not all campaigns are the same—each is a unique story told by a unique group. This article presents alternate rules options for DMs who want to add some mechanical twists to their campaigns.

Playing without XP

Experience points (XP) have been part of the game since the beginning. A character accumulates XP during play and gains a level when the experience point total reaches a certain number.

Defeating monsters is the most traditional way to earn XP, but the game has provided other methods as well. In 1st Edition, characters gained XP for collecting treasure. Their classes could give them XP awards for specific actions in 2nd Edition. Characters could spend XP to power spells and make magic items in 3rd Edition. And now, completing quests and succeeding on skill challenges can grant XP rewards.

As ingrained as experience points are in the D&D® game, is it possible to remove them altogether?

A character's XP total is just a number—it serves no function other than to track progress toward gaining the next level. The only difference between 200 XP and 300 XP is that the latter value puts the character a bit closer to reaching 2nd level. The XP total does not define the character's capabilities—those are a function of level. Removing XP, then, has no effect on a character's abilities or performance during game play.

Without XP as a tracking system, you need another method for determining when characters gain levels. As long as the gains occur at discrete intervals and are determined fairly, any system can work. You might find one of the following suggestions helpful for replacing XP.

DM Decides: Rather than track progress, you can simply decide when the characters gain a level. This approach lets you tailor the campaign's pacing to suit the group's interests. You can move the adventurers through some levels rapidly to prepare them for the most important parts of the campaign and then slow down as the group works through the challenges. Afterward, you can pick up speed or maintain a slower pace, as you prefer. One downside to this system is that character advancement depends on the DM and not always on the characters' achievements.

Regimented: The characters might gain levels on a schedule, such as every other session. The advantage of this strategy is that everyone knows when a level gain will happen and can come prepared to make the necessary adjustments. It might seem odd, though, if you have a couple of sessions during which the heroes don't seem threatened.

Story Goals: Characters gain levels whenever they achieve a particular goal, such as fulfilling a major quest. This method puts level acquisition in the

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players' hands, since they need to achieve a concrete goal in the game to grow their power.

Milestone Advancement: For combat-heavy games, milestone advancement can be a good solution. Whenever the adventurers reach some number of milestones—say, five—the characters advance a level.

For the DM: Even if you drop XP as an advancement criterion, you should still use it as an encounter-building tool to keep your encounters balanced and ensures that they remain challenging.

When deciding at what point the characters gain a level, don't forget skill challenges. If you use the milestone advancement method, count each complexity 3 or higher skill challenge as an encounter for the purpose of reaching a milestone.

Alignment Enforcement

Alignment is a character's moral compass. At its most basic level, alignment helps to frame the character's goals, and it guides the choices a player makes, including responses to ethical dilemmas, and whether or not the character should take a stand for certain causes. More importantly, alignment identifies which of the cosmic forces at work in the D&D world the character might support. By choosing an alignment, the player throws in the character's lot with one side or the other. If the player opts not to choose an alignment, the character doesn't take a stand and instead goes his or her own way.

As important as alignment is to framing choices and determining character behavior, it is easily overlooked and forgotten during play. The game provides no actual consequences for not playing within the character's alignment parameters. A lawful good adventurer can still murder, steal, or betray. Doing so is poor form, and the actions may have story repercussions, but alignment is more a suggestion than a hard-and-fast rule.

Alignment Tokens: To help make alignment more meaningful, you can use alignment tokens as a reward system. Characters can acquire and use alignment tokens as described in the "Gaining and Spending Alignment Tokens" sidebar, below.

Granting Tokens: At the end of each game session, award an alignment token to each player who acted in a manner that exemplified his or her character's alignment. For example, if a good character stood in harm's way to protect the innocent or took a mission to help another with no expectation of recompense, award 1 alignment token. You can simply decide who deserves the reward, or you could call for a secret vote from the entire gaming group. The tokens can then be "cashed in" for bonuses, as noted in the sidebar. You can also grant an alignment token as a reward for great roleplaying.

Consequences: Because a player gains alignment tokens at the DM's discretion, you must be sure to award them in an equitable manner, assessing all players by the same criteria. Review the alignment descriptions in the player books and keep them in mind when judging a player's performance.

This system favors aligned characters by giving then a slight advantage when players play within alignment bounds. While it urges players to play good or lawful good characters for the mechanical edge, it might also push some players who would rather skip over this system toward unaligned characters. Since these mechanics encourage players to act in accordance with their characters' alignment, unaligned characters are not affected by this system.

Gaining and Spending Alignment Tokens

Alignment tokens provide rewards for playing within alignment strictures.

Gaining Tokens: At 1st level and with each level gained thereafter, you gain 1 alignment token. As long as you have at least 1 alignment token, no changes accrue to your character. If you drop to 0 tokens, you take a -2 penalty to all defenses until at least 1 token is regained. Your DM may also grant an additional alignment token at the end of each gaming session in recognition of great roleplaying, or of playing within your character's alignment strictures.

Spending Tokens: Once per encounter, on your turn, you can spend an alignment token after you make an attack roll, saving throw, ability check, or skill check to gain a +2 power bonus to the triggering roll.

Changing Alignment: If you gain a level while you have 0 alignment tokens, your alignment shifts one step toward unaligned. At the DM's discretion, it may be possible to regain your previous alignment by undertaking a minor quest to atone.

Going off the Grid

The Dungeons & Dragons game uses a grid of 5-foot squares to make play more understandable. The grid allows for easier handling of somewhat complicated concepts such as flanking, shifting, range, area, threatened squares, and speed. In addition, the visual presentation of a grid on the game table, showing all the important elements in play, gives everyone a shared understanding of the situation the characters face.

You don't have to play this way, though. Using miniatures on a grid goes back to the earliest roots of the game, but many people have played and continue to play without them. If you want to play without using a grid, keep the following points in mind.

1 Square = 5 Feet: Although you won't be using the grid, the relative locations of creatures and

objects are still important for helping players understand how far their characters can get in a round, and whether or not spells can reach the desired targets.

Areas Get Fuzzy: Without a map to indicate how far one creature is from others, you must rely upon everyone's shared understanding of relative distances. The responsibility for resolving these questions will rest on the your shoulders. Most of the time, it boils down to whether a target is relatively close or very far away. Thus, the difference between a burst 2 and a burst 3 (or even 4) spell might all but disappear.

Flanking and Threatened Squares: The grid presents a clear indication of whether a character has moved into a flank or can get around some enemy's threatened area. Such clarity is generally absent from the theater of the mind.

You could try to ignore the rules for flanking and opportunity attacks due to threatening squares, but doing so obviates many of the mechanics that characters and monsters use. If rogues can't get combat advantage through flanking, how can they get their sneak attacks on a regular basis?

For threatened areas, you might instead just think about arm's reach (or weapon's reach). A player who says a character is staying out of an enemy's reach can do so as long as sufficient space exists. Any character within that reach is in melee and thus subject to an opportunity attack for moving far from that spot.

For flanking, the player can simply declare an attempt to move into such a position and allow the group's shared sense of the distances on the battlefield to determine whether the move is possible.

A Map Is Still Handy: When you're not playing on the grid, even a rough map of the area can be extremely helpful. With a basic map, it's much easier to get all the players on the same page as far as the space in which they imagine their characters.

New Opportunities: Although drawbacks exist, freedom from the grid presents new opportunities for scenes that would be difficult to play on a map. The most obvious element that's tough on a two-dimensional map is a three-dimensional battle with heights and depths that overlap. In such cases, the fuzziness of the location is a boon to play, allowing the DM and players the opportunity to improvise.

Grittier Play

D&D characters are tough, even at 1st level. If you'd like to ramp up the difficulty to create a grittier play experience, try these rules options.

Lower Starting Ability Scores: If you use the standard arrays to generate ability scores, subtract 1 from all the scores to alter character effectiveness. If you roll 4d6 for each score, roll 3d6 instead.

If you use the point-buy method of generating starting ability scores from the *Rules Compendium*™, you can scale back ability scores by reducing the number of points players can spend from 22 to 20, or even 18. Doing so makes it costlier to start the game with an 18 in a key ability, and ensures that other scores will be flat or nearly so. As a consequence, players might be less likely to choose races that don't provide a bonus to their characters' key abilities.

Daily Powers: Reining in daily powers can create a grittier play experience. For example, you might limit usage to one daily power per character per encounter.

You can also set a milestone requirement for the use of daily powers: Regardless of how many daily powers a character knows, he or she can use only one per day at the heroic tier, two per day at the paragon tier, and three per day at the epic tier. Whenever the group reaches a milestone, each character can use one additional daily power that day.

Other methods might work. For example, each daily power might cost a healing surge to use. Or, a character can use a daily power only by spending an action point. Requiring healing surges diminishes the party's resources and makes it harder to reach milestones. The action point solution is a bit more elegant, although it does mean forcing the characters to spend them so that they can use their most powerful attacks.

Delayed Rests: Short rests and extended rests control the rates at which the characters' resources refresh. To slow this rate, consider limiting the party's ability to take short rests. For example, maybe the adventurers can't take a short rest until they reach a milestone or achieve a story goal.

Reduced Hit Points: Dropping hit points can achieve interesting effects. For a grittier campaign, try reducing starting hit points by 5 and hit points gained at each level by 2. But if you drop characters' hit points, be sure to drop monsters' by about twenty percent as well. Or you could drop the numbers even more—say, by half on both sides. Combat becomes far more harrowing, since one hit can often drop a target.

No Action Points: Action points give characters an extra resource with which to do more on their turns. Cutting action points from the game removes an incentive to keep adventuring. It also interferes with certain class features, paragon path features, and even epic destiny features. So if you use this option, you might want to compensate the affected characters in some way—perhaps by granting additional healing surges. A less drastic option would be to lengthen the time between action point gains to one for every two milestones.

No Second Wind: Second wind helps adventurers tough out nasty fights. Removing this mechanic places a heavier burden on the party's healers, making such classes almost mandatory. Rather than doing that, consider reducing the healing surge value to one-fifth of a character's maximum hit points.

High-Octane Games

Dungeons & Dragons characters already have the wherewithal to do what no one else can do. Heroes can withstand injury, cast potent spells, shake off debilitating conditions, and survive some of the harshest environments in the world and beyond. But even with all their advantages, player characters

face limitations. Their most powerful attacks require recharge time after each use. A spent healing surge is lost until the character rests. The fact that tensions escalate when resources dwindle is a central component of the play experience. That said, you can relax these restrictions to expedite resource recovery and allow player characters to do more during game play.

The rules options presented in the "High-Octane Characters" sidebar provide ways for adventurers to turn the tide of a battle more quickly. For other ways to ramp up your game, see the "Superpowered Characters" section that follows.

HIGH-OCTANE CHARACTERS

The rules options presented here provide ways for characters to regain expended resources more quickly and create a more powerful presence on the battlefield. Use them in any combination to enhance the experience you want.

Milestone Daily Powers: Whenever you reach a milestone, you regain the use of an expended daily power of your choice.

Critical Recharge: Whenever you score a critical hit, you regain the use of an expended encounter power.

Greater Mobility: Each time you spend an action point to gain an extra action, you also gain an extra move action.

Critical Success: Whenever you roll a natural 20 on an attack roll, saving throw, skill check, or ability check during a combat encounter, you can either regain the use of an expended encounter power or take an extra standard action.

Massive Damage: Whenever an attack reduces a creature to one-quarter of its hit points or fewer, it must make a saving throw. A success produces no additional effect. On a failure, the creature immediately drops to 0 hit points.

High Damage: Apply the following changes to your powers.

Damaging At-Will Attack Powers: At 11th level, the power deals 1[W] extra damage if it's a weapon power or 1d8 extra damage if it's not.

Damaging Encounter and Daily Attack Powers: The power deals 1[W] extra damage if it's a weapon power or 1d8 extra damage if it's not.

Nondamaging Attack Powers: You gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls made using the power.

Point Buy Ability Scores: Increase the points used to generate your ability scores. Raising the points to 24 creates a slight power increase, while raising them to 28 creates a significant power increase.

High-Octane Scores: Assign character ability scores using the following array. 18, 16, 14, 13, 12, 10. Then apply racial modifiers as normal.

Racial Powers: You can use your 1st-level encounter racial powers twice per encounter, though not more than once per round.

Superpowered Characters

Just as you can alter the rules to make a game grittier, you can also alter them to make the game easier for the characters, making the players feel more like superheroes.

Much of the enjoyment players gain from the D&D game comes from its power fantasy nature. Who gets to sling spells and defeat villains in real life? Indulging in this aspect of the game is fine if that's what everyone wants to do.

Alternatively, you might choose to use some of these rules only in special cases. Maybe the heroes need to battle monsters much more powerful than themselves, so the gods grant them the weapons they need to succeed. Perhaps some short-lived artifact falls into the party's possession, and it gives them the ability to accomplish great deeds for a limited period of time.

Dozens of ways exist to make play favor the characters. A few of them are described below.

Respawn: Electronic games often allow a character to return to the game after death. The "penalty" for dying might be replaying a portion of the game, waiting a period before reentering play, or the loss of a life from a limited number of "lives." Perhaps each character wears a necklace of "life gems," or maybe a guardian spirit whisks a hero away the moment before death for restoration.

Playing without the threat of character death might seem as if it would produce a perfectly normal game, given that the rules allow for raising characters from the dead. But giving the players the knowledge that their characters can't die is likely to have strange effects. An adventurer might leap over a cliff to "escape" enemies, or repeatedly attack a much more powerful foe to wear him down—even walking over the corpses of other heroes to do so.

More Magic: Even if you don't provide items of higher level or items that inflate the characters' numbers, simply having more magic items can provide adventurers with more options for facing challenges, both in and out of combat. The items don't even need to provide defenses or attacks. Characters who can walk on ceilings, travel at high speed, or pass through walls can take advantage of strategies unavailable to those without such abilities.

Play as Superheroes: You might find it interesting to treat your D&D characters as comic-book superheroes in a fantasy world. Players can use race,

class, power choice, and magic items to craft identities that mimic their favorite superheroes, or create their own. The tiefling warlock or wizard with lots of powers, items, and feats that focus on fire sure starts to look like a fire-based superhero. If the player characters and a long roster of villains are the only people in the world with that level of power, the campaign easily takes on the feel of a superhero comic book.

Playing without Money

Even in the oldest editions of the game, magic items were usually associated with particular prices in gold pieces. This value was often a "suggested sale price," and the implication—stated or not—was that this amount of money was what a character could get for selling the item to a rich noble or wealthy wizard.

The character found the item in the dungeon and could sell it for gold, but if he or she wanted another magic item, the character had to go and look for it. Of course, the idea of a magic item seller and even a magic item shop showed up early in the game's history. After all, if people buy magic items, someone must resell them. But even in this context, characters more often spent their cash on engaging hirelings, building fortifications, running businesses, feeding armies, and other mundane needs.

The third edition of the game changed this situation when it systemized magic item prices. Instead of just spit-balling and throwing out a number, game designers assigned prices based upon the embedded game effects of the item. Furthermore, the game systemized *when* characters should get a certain value of magic items. For the first time, an adventurer had a target for power level against monsters, and that target included an expected amount of magic items. And because characters could make magic items, they funneled nearly all their gold into doing so.

Fourth edition continued this trend toward rationalizing magic item value against the economy of the game, further emphasizing a necessary amount of magic to keep up with the regulated and escalating attack and defense numbers of monsters as a character gains levels. Yet unlike in 3rd Edition, magic items now have a listed commonality that describes how likely it is for a character to be able to buy or create an item. This element puts a brake on the amount of optimizing a character can do beyond some basic items, allowing found treasure to be fun again.

Yet another side effect of the rules might be to give the character a great deal of spending money. Common items tend to be inexpensive compared to the items that characters can't create or buy, so if the adventurers sell uncommon or rare items they find, they might accumulate a lot of money.

As in previous editions, characters might count their coppers and spend their wealth on mundane needs, but the group could have more fun by letting it all slide. In such a scenario, the heroes couldn't make or purchase even common items, but on the other hand, they wouldn't have to worry about having enough money for a night at the inn.

When players stop keeping track of character wealth, you assume that the normal items and services they need for adventuring are within their means. The magic items they use are those they find in their adventures. Characters don't bother checking the orcs' pockets for loose change. And when they find the dragon's hoard, the heaps of gold can be massive, and they can play Robin Hood by distributing it to good causes rather than turning all the gold into trinkets.

If you play this way, you need to have a shared understanding with your players about how much magic treasure you will give out. Players might have a wish list of items, or they might enjoy the sense of discovery in allowing themselves to be surprised.

Average or No Damage

Combats in the Dungeons & Dragons game can be among the most exciting aspects of play, and the act of grabbing a handful of dice and throwing them down on the table can be downright thrilling. Even with the fun involved, though, rolling a bunch of dice and adding them up takes a surprising amount of table time. Selecting the dice from your dice bag or from a pile on the table takes more time than you might think. If your combats seem to take too long, consider using one of these two ways to speed things up.

Average Damage: All the players calculate the average damage of each of their characters' attacks before play. Each hero then deals the appropriate average damage for any normal hit. A critical hit deals maximum damage as normal, plus the calculated average for any extra dice rolled. A character who deals half damage on a miss uses half of his or her average damage. With these numbers already calculated for each power or attack, the player can simply make attack rolls and declare damage. Average damage calculations used for healing powers or used to gain temporary hit points can also be done in advance, and the results jotted down next to the powers on the character sheet.

It might not seem like much, but eliminating damage dice rolling and calculations can shave minutes off each person's turn. That in turn can shorten the length of combats dramatically. A fight that normally takes an hour might take half that time or less.

This system does present a few potential problems. The first is that since there's no "swing" to damage besides a critical hit, elements such as damage resistance might reduce some attacks to uselessness. The other is that die size loses some of its meaning: The difference between a d8 and a d12 is just 2 points of average damage, whereas with

maximum damage rolled on those dice, the difference is 4 points of damage.

No Damage: If you want to try a truly radical mechanic to speed play, try playing without using damage or hit points at all. In this version of the game, monsters and characters just take a certain number of hits before dropping. A standard monster can take 4 hits before falling, whereas an elite can take 8, and a solo can take 16. Each character can take 4 hits. A healing surge grants a character 1 hit back.

The complexity of this system increases as you try to model more parts of the game. Should defender classes get an extra hit? What do you do about temporary hit points, which usually aren't given out in an amount significant enough to be considered a hit? How about minions that normally do a very small amount of damage? How do you handle ongoing damage?

If you answer these questions with half-hits or by determining that a certain amount of hit points equals a "hit," then you're no better off than with the usual system. If you simplify with methods such as ignoring ongoing damage, or having minions cause hits and not worrying about their low damage, you'll see strange effects. For example, if hits are what you want, you're always better off picking powers that attack more targets and items that increase accuracy.

If you do try this experiment, you'll eventually have a much faster game—but it might feel a lot different than your normal D&D sessions.

Tougher Deprivation

The Dungeons & Dragons game offers lenient rules for starvation, thirst, and suffocation. Heroic D&D characters perform perfectly well under such conditions for quite a long time. Even when that time runs out, they might struggle on with few negative effects. In fact, in all but extraordinary circumstances, you have little reason to use these rules.

This model has a basis in reality, since some people can hold their breaths for very long periods, and individuals have survived without food or water for astonishing periods of time. It also has a basis in heroic fiction—how often do you see action heroes in movies or novels stopping for breakfast? On the other hand, you have to miss only a couple of meals to realize how much deprivation can affect your mood, energy, and thinking.

Using tougher rules for deprivation means that you need to keep closer track of food and drink consumption, as well as time spent without air. The food and drink the adventurers carry into the dungeon must be counted as a number of meals and drinks, and its frequency of use tracked. This system can lead to tense moments as the characters seek food or water when they run out or are running low. Is the fountain in the dungeon safe to drink from? If the orcs have meat roasting on the spit, can the heroes trust that eating it would not constitute cannibalism? The cupboard of food in the dungeon might prove to be more valuable than the chest of treasure!

All such tracking might as well stop if the characters gain magical access to food and water. If you want to retain the tension of staving off deprivation, avoid using such magic in your game.

Consider using the tougher deprivation rules below.

Starvation: A character who does not consume a meal during each extended rest takes a –1 penalty to attack rolls, checks, and saving throws. If a character does not take an extended rest during a 24-hour period, the same penalty applies. If the character takes another extended rest without a meal or goes another 24 hours without an extended rest, the penalty applies again. Such penalties remain in force until the character takes a rest and has a meal.

Thirst: A character who does not take a drink during each short and extended rest takes a –1 penalty to attack rolls, checks, and saving throws. If a character does not take a rest during a 24-hour period, the same penalty applies. Such penalties remain in force until the character takes at least a short rest and a drink. If the character takes another rest without a drink or goes another 24 hours without a rest, the penalty applies again.

Suffocation: A character can go without air for a number of rounds equal to his or her Constitution score (or about 6 seconds per such round). Each round thereafter, the character takes a –1 penalty to attack rolls, checks, and saving throws.

Accumulating Penalties: If a character accumulates a –3 penalty from starvation, thirst, or suffocation, the character must make Endurance checks as described on page 180 of the *Rules Compendium*.

About the Authors

Robert J. Schwalb has developed or contributed to the design of nearly two hundred roleplaying game titles for the Dungeons & Dragons game, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire* RPG, *Star Wars* RPG, and the d20 system. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *The Book of Vile Darkness*™ and *Player's Option: Heroes of the Elemental Chaos*™. For more information about the author, be sure to check out his website at www.robertjschwalb.com or follow him on Twitter (@rjschwalb).

Matt Sernett is a writer and game designer for Wizards of the Coast. Recent credits include *Halls of Undermountain*™, *Neverwinter*™ *Campaign Guide*, and *Scars of Mirrodin*™. When he's not making monsters or building worlds, he's watching bad fantasy movies you don't realize exist and shouldn't bother to learn about. You can follow him on Twitter, where he's @Sernett.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S
Eye on the Realms

Masters of the Alluring Dungeons

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Zoltan Boros

Rumors are spreading through many cities of the Realms of long-hidden dungeons just below the streets, rich in treasure waiting for those who dare to explore those chambers. There's no need for long treks through monster-roamed wilderlands, no deep delves into the perilous Underdark—merely find a few hidden doors in nearby cellars, and fortunes await!

Alluring Dungeons

Tales of treasure-filled labyrinths in the cellars and passages beneath Ankhapur, Arabel, Athkatla, Elturel, Iriaebor, Selgaunt, Suzail, Urmlaspyr, and Yhaunn are not mere fancies. Treasure has been found by a fortunate few in newly discovered (or at least, newly known to the public) networks of connected cellars and a few deeper chambers under the bustling hearts of those cities.

Though many of these "dungeons" contain traps that encage intruders, and a few dagger-wielding thieves and small creatures have been encountered in them, they have so far been devoid of traps designed to maim or slay. Of more concern is the disquietingly large (and ever increasing) count of persons who have simply disappeared while exploring them.

As to who created these dungeons and why they rose to public attention all at the same time—these are matters of furious debate (to say nothing of wild speculation) among interested folk everywhere in the Realms and among the citizens of the relevant cities in particular.

Some say it's a war among secret societies, where one side seeks to ruin another by making public their lairs and smuggling storage areas. Others suggest it's a sign of the fall or transformation of a cult that's now leaving behind its former sacred places. Perhaps they are the work of a cabal of rulers and wealthy or noble families that are abandoning dank meeting places they no longer need or that have become dangerous liabilities. Are they spawning grounds for monsters reared by doppelgangers or by evil humans acting as secret urban farmers? Places tainted by years of

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storing drugs, poisons, the bones of dragons, or waiting armies of undead? Lairs for spies or monsters who all departed at once, to gather elsewhere for some sinister purpose?

The postulations are as endless and as far-fetched as those making them. Since nothing definite can be said, fancy rides free, and fear and fascination grow.

In some places[1] it's become fashionable among the higher ranks of society to take brief, guided forays into these dungeons. Such guided tours typically end in one of the deeper, gloomier chambers transformed into a comfortable lounge with drinks and staged combat or a risqué play, so participants can say they explored the "perilous depths."[2] In others, the underways are being used increasingly to host trysts or shady business meetings, or are being taken over by thieves guilds or other local, sinister groups.[3]

Yet the central mystery remains: Why did so many of these dungeons come to public notice all at the same time? All of them show evidence of recent construction or maintenance, though some rooms and passages look ancient, and may well be. What's going on?

Speculation continues, but if Elminster can be believed, he knows the truth. He says these so-called dungeons were created and revealed to the world by a group of mind flayers, the Tharthrallyd, entirely to capture adventurers unharmed.

Over the last few years, Elminster claims, this illithid cabal took to establishing minor dungeons beneath large cities by forcing thralls to expand and connect existing cellars. It then spread word of these supposedly treasure-rich underways to lure adventurers (along with thieves and unscrupulous merchants) down into them. As a result, these "alluring dungeons" rose suddenly to public notice all over the Realms.

When asked why mind flayers, who see humans as cattle and human brains as food, are so interested in the brains of adventurers, Elminster replied that the illithids in this case are actually more interested in brawn, not brains. They need adventurers to act as their agents, whether unwitting, willing, or coerced, in the shadowy manipulations that the illithids use to win greater dominance in the Realms. In short, the adventurers become tools to make the handful of lowly Tharthrallyd a force in illithid politics.

The Tharthrallyd

One of the youngest, weakest, and smallest illithid cabals, this organization is named for its founding council, a tharth of five illithids (in the tongue of illithids, a *tharth* is a bold new idea or a valuable scheme worth pursuing long-term), and for the thralls that the tharth hoped to use as agents in a manner that is more sustained, wide-ranging, and trusted than illithids had hitherto employed.

The tharth who head this new and swift-rising group are the illithids Koroambyr ("Kore-ROAM-beer"), Klagalauklath ("Kuh-lag-all-AWK-lath"), Jyrimproak ("JEER-im-pro-kh"), Iyritkolankh ("Ear-IT-coe-lank-hh"), and Waeryuardlur ("Way-er-YOO-ard-yuh-lur"). They all have young, tall, gaunt bodies and are restless with blazing energy that makes them pace and fidget whenever they can't be moving and doing things.

They see the best way forward for their race to be controlling the politics of the surface Realms, covertly ordering kingdoms as they see fit from behind the thrones, so as to allow them to harvest brains here and there, very much as the tender of a woodlot would harvest this or that tree in such a way that a varied and lively remainder would flourish and multiply.

They see other mind flayers, who pursue other interests, to be a problem that will need to be dealt with in time to come, if they haven't seen and accepted the superiority of the Tharthrallyd way—but that time will only be when influence over the surface lands is so advanced and solid that such secondary matters can be attended to. Unless, of course, those unenlightened mind flayers imperil the establishment of Tharthrallyd rule or otherwise make dangerous nuisances of themselves.

The Dungeons

In point of fact, there is no typical dungeon in this category. What follows are samples of the wide variety of discoveries that have been reported.

In Ankhapur, Delnar's Holes are named for Ithrel Delnar, the sinister, long-vanished former innkeeper of The Roosting Falcon inn, a large, old, well-favored downtown hostelry. Like many a brusque but successful city innkeeper, Delnar was rumored to be involved in smuggling and kidnapping. In his case, some of these tales were true. The cellars of the Falcon gave into deeper cellars guarded by silent and unsleeping guards that (during searches prompted by Delnar's disappearance) were discovered to be zombies guarding rooms that held casks of expensive wine and other exotic luxuries without tax seals.

The Holes are rumored to be deeper warrens of rooms whose connections to Delnar's undercellars have now been discovered. These deeper chambers are said to be inhabited by fearsome monsters that have for years been gathering treasure—the valuables of those citizens of Ankhapur who tried to swindle them in business dealings. Traps are many, and some of the denizens happily dine on human victims.

Arabel's mildewed storage cellars have always been used by furtive cults and rebels plotting the rise of Arabel as an independent city or as the capital of a risen northern kingdom free of the yoke of Cormyr. Now recent rumors insist that someone "deeper" has carved extensive tunnels that link dozens of these cellars to a newly constructed underground labyrinth. In those underways, dubbed "the Beneath" in most of the tales making the rounds of Arabel's taverns, lurks something fell that lies in wait for overly inquisitive War Wizards whom it defeats easily by spell-assaulting their minds. Several Crown mages are said to have been subverted to work against their fellows or

ILLITHIDS IN THE HEARTLANDS

Although the typical mind flayer encountered in the Realms is a lone kingpin that gathers and leads a group of expendable lesser allies and thralls, there are also cabals of illithids and groups of mind flayers that work with doppelgangers, beholders, and other formidable creatures as near-equals.

Some of these groups hunt in the wilds and dominate frontier towns, caravanserais, and trade moots, but the majority lurk in large, human-dominated cities, among the "cattle" whose brains they devour. They will fight fiercely to defend their turf, but they won't battle recklessly when retreat is more prudent.

All illithids believe themselves intellectually superior not only to all other types of creatures but to all other illithids as well (excepting their deities and elder brains). Despite their megalomania, mind flayers are neither deluded nor ignorant of the world or its practicalities. They recognize that others might be physically stronger, more numerous, better organized, or more potent in magic than themselves, without yielding an inch in all-important superiority.

Moreover, mind flayers view themselves as farmers assembling (sometimes breeding, always improving) herds of lesser beings for later use. Wanton slaughter, fomenting wars, and allowing disease to spread only wastes resources; humans (in particular, but all sentient races to one extent or another) are to be tended and have their affairs subtly guided to yield the maximum number of healthy, lively brains.

Strife between mind flayers is largely conducted through thralls (often coerced, manipulated, or mind-controlled monsters) and behind the scenes in arranged contests akin to duels where the sides agree that the victors will command and be exalted, and the losers will be subservient–for a time.[4]

In the Heartlands of the Realms, a confrontation is brewing between several long-established, ambitious Underdark cities of illithids (with their surface-based thralls and mind-conquered cities[5]) and a new breed or more properly new style[6] of mind flayers: small, fairly close-knit and harmonious illithid groups that live in the surface Realms, usually hiding their true guises so they can dwell in human cities.

These "new breed" cabals tend to be mobile and to operate with a wide reach (their members travel across Faerûn, rather than staying within a city and dominating it). They go by such names as the Faerlynfyrd, the Ambraerl, the Iringrael, the Ortholyn, and the Tharthrallyd.

The Faerlynfyrd[7] are numerous and well-estabished. They are strongest in Amn, but have used the caravan routes Amn dominates to spread to Scornubel, Iriaebor, Riatavin, and Saradush. They have worked on achieving covert dominance over Calimshan for some time, but they have encountered fierce resistance from the genies and genasi and from a rival race already bent on covertly dominating the Calishites: the rakshasas.

The Ambraerl[8] enjoy the climate and terrain of Cormyr and the Dales and find the humans who thrive there to be the choicest cattle. Few in number but wise in the ways of the surface world and able to hide their true natures very well, these illithids live among humans (particularly the nobility of Cormyr) and work to subtly steer their humans away from frequent warfare by knitting them together ever more tightly with bonds of trade and common interest. Ambraerl illithids tend to find humans entertaining, even amusing, and believe that letting humans have maximum freedom with few laws, light enforcement, and wide social tolerance rather than enforced conformity will lead to future gains in the quality of their brains.

The Iringrael[9] were formerly deeply embedded among the Red Wizards of Thay, but as undeath rose to greater prominence, they worked to take the maximum number of apprentices and lowly Thayan mages right out of the Red Wizards. The Iringrael mentally manipulated their new herd into disguising themselves and starting new lives, so their brains would remain alive and palatable, not undead and revolting. The Iringrael often start new secret societies among wizards all over Faerûn and work to keep laws and rulers' control over mages everywhere as light and weak as possible.

The Ortholyn[10] are few but personally powerful. They tend to avoid cities, because they believe that the brains of humans who crossbreed with monsters or whose bodies have been magically changed into monstrous forms are the most desirable. Accordingly, they dwell wherever they can bring about such matings or influence others into doing so (traditionally, they were at work in the Border Kingdoms and the Bandit Kingdoms, not to mention the Wizard's Reach; nowadays, they can be found anywhere on the fringes of civilized society, particularly where swamps, jungles, or dense woods offer cover and lairs for monstrous crossbreeds. Most Ortholyn work alone but aid each other whenever they meet or see a benefit for their herds in cooperation.

to slaughter Purple Dragons and adventurers exploring the catacombs. A deadly idol of some sort (tall and of dark stone, but descriptions vary wildly) stands in a room at the heart of the labyrinth; it can be manipulated to unlock doors and defuse traps in the Beneath by those who learn its secrets.

Elturel's Treasure Deeps seem to consist entirely of existing cellars beneath the grandest central buildings of the city, but they are linked by doors hidden behind false walls. The catacombs are used by local thieves to cross the city undetected and to hide from pursuers. They are gaining notoriety as the owners of the cellars discover more connections to adjoining cellars—and large caches of coins, gems, and trade bars behind the false walls. This has prompted some of the bolder landlords to hire adventurers as bodyguards to escort them on far-ranging explorations that begin in their own cellars but press on as far as their courage allows through the Deeps. Thrill-seekers were formerly many, but trade has slackened since explorers started to disappear; or, more correctly, to partly disappear, since various pieces of some of them have been left at doorways for unknown reasons.

Iriaebor's extensive underways have long been used by the thieves of the city, complete with rumors of connections to the Underdark, but now these tales have been spiced up with something new: accounts of rooms shrouded in an eerie magical gloom that deadens all sounds, veils lights into feeble glows, and swallows intruders—perhaps literally, as many who venture into the silent rooms simply disappear, never to be seen again.

What has been seen, on rare occasions (when heavily armed expeditions have made forays into the gloom) are strangling tentacles that appear out of thin air to break joints and limbs, twist off heads, crush windpipes, and then vanish as swiftly as they came.

Speculation as to what is causing the gloom is rife, but one tale or claim seldom agrees with another. Theories range from drow experimenting with new magic, to a cabal of liches, to a tentacled monster of awesome size that can merge with stone and earth and sprout parts of its body out of solid rock at will.

Urmlaspyr has a long-established network of damp, shallow storage cellars, just one layer deep, under its oldest buildings. Fears of flooding kept anyone from joining their cellar to others, and springs seeping through the stone kept such cellars small. They lacked a collective name, and locals never thought of them as a lower level of the city.

It now appears that someone has set about surreptitiously connecting the existing cellars with a sprawling, seemingly random web of rough, newly dug passages that extend far inland, into dryer rock, with some passages that ascend to hidden surface connections in wooded, wild areas and others that descend into the Underdark. These new delves are prowled by all sorts of hungry, hunting monsters, but the beasts are bewildered as to how they got into the tunnels and seem to be searching for ways out rather than for new lairs.

Who built the tunnels, and why, is a matter of wild conjecture. Whoever did it has thoughtfully deposited large chests of current coins in many places in the new passages.

Yhaunn's bowl-shaped terrain has always featured multilevel buildings ascending the steep hillsides around the harbor, penetrating into the surrounding rock as far as owners can afford to dig. The city's busy port trade rewards those who dig out rentable storage space. Collectively known as the Backs, these areas are seldom connected, because each additional connection is a potential entry point that must be guarded against thieves. Delvers sometimes breach neighboring cellars unintentionally, whereupon a stout stone wall is usually constructed, to the satisfaction of both property owners.

Recently, gory murders and disappearances of building owners on the north side of the city were followed by the discovery of freshly dug tunnels extending into the solid rock. Most who dared to explore them have not been seen again, but the few who have returned say the tunnels reach a row of monster-filled, deadly chambers that pass through a series of locked, trapped gates up to the cellars of some of the city's grandest buildings. Speculation is rampant that the owners of those buildings might control the labyrinth or that those owners might have been replaced and are now being impersonated by the creatures responsible.

The Haul

Thus far, the Alluring Dungeons have captured scores of adventurers—both desperate novices and capable veterans, but more rogues and warriors than clergy or arcane spellcasters. The Tharthrallyd have used hired wizards (whom they intend to soon eliminate, to safeguard their secrets) to teleport these adventurers to cities far from the dungeons they were captured in. There, the adventurers are met by Tharthrallyd members disguised as humans who want to hire them for a variety of tasks, all devised to eliminate rivals to rulers and officials the Tharthrallyd already influence or believe they can easily come to control.

The Tharthrallyd are patient and quite willing to nurture and covertly aid their pet adventurers for years, so long as said adventurers don't offer them treachery or defiance. The adventurers can build bright careers for themselves—while in the shadows behind them, the Tharthrallyd whisper into the minds of king after lord after wizard.[11]

Notes

1. Notably the cities of Athkatla, Selgaunt, and Suzail.

In Athkatla, see either Herrevore Tlananther ("HAIR-rev-vore Tul-AN-an-thur") on Runesails Street or Klasimiyr Glorist ("KLAZ-ih-meer GLORE-ist") on Manycoins Broad for tours of the Dark

Depths. The competing guides keep to different sides of the River Alandor. It is generally considered that Tlananther's north bank underways are grander than Glorist's south bank dungeon; tunnels connect them, but they are flooded and fouled by drowned bodies.

In Selgaunt, tours are offered by Raldro Hammerbeam, a garrulous and amiable retired dwarf sea captain, who works with many of his former crew guiding patrons through the underways of the city.

In Suzail, Laraelra Snoontam ("Lah-RAIL-rah Sn-NOON-tamm") of Upbanners on the Promenade is the woman to see for a tour of the damp, low-ceilinged Sharraskways (named for a possibly mythical local smuggler). Be advised that undercover Crown agents are said to take many of the tours and scribble notes on who goes touring Suzail's underways.

2. All of the tour operators offer old, odd coins claimed to have been found in the dungeons as souvenirs. Even those purchasing them often murmur the adage "Claims are easily made."

3. In Arabel, the Thronedrench Knife, a shadowy gang dedicated to the overthrow of the Obarskyrs, are said to meet in the underways to discuss what courtier to murder or which Crown vault to plunder next. In Athkatla, Urmlaspyr, and Yhaunn, local groups of thieves use the dungeons to meet, confer, and exchange stolen goods: the Harnrath (nobles and wealthy who steal from other nobility and wealthy) in Athkatla; the Hands in Shadow in Urmlaspyr (smugglers who seek to profit by arranging shortages to drive up prices all over the Dragonreach; despite their name, they have nothing to do with shades, the city of Shade, or Shar); and Treldron's Boys in Yhaunn (thieves and spies who deal in gleaning information or planting it in the right ears, for pay; despite their collective name, every last one of them is female).

4. More often, the winner gains territory (an area of land or a group of people, such as the population of a place or all of a particular clan or guild or allied group of families) and the loser withdraws from it—until they dare to join battle again, of course.

5. That is, human cities where illithids have influenced the minds of those in power. In many cases, these rulers and senior courtiers are unaware they are being manipulated or controlled. In all cases, the mind flayer influence is hidden from the wider world, with the citizenry either entirely unaware of it or at most experiencing only a vague sense that something is not right.

6. *Maurokhra delhurlra* (in Common, "new breed") is the term for this sort of lifestyle among illithids, who have always operated in the World Above (the surface Realms) but traditionally were based in the Underdark and returned there to mate, confer with kin and allies, cache treasure, and reach decisions of governance among their kind.

7. *Fyrd* ("FEAR-d") means "of the cause of" or "devoted to" or "bound up in" among illithids. *Lyn* means "kin of" or "bloodsworn to," and *faer* refers to the rogue illithid Faeraerus the Wanderer, who defied the elder brain of the Underdark city it belonged to and set forth on its own to "live in the world in a new way." Faeraerus disappeared some centuries ago and is presumed dead. In fact, it traveled the surface Realms and decided that living hidden in the heart of bustling human-dominated cities along the Sword Coast offered the most rewarding life for a mind flayer. Returning to the Underdark, it gathered like-minded illithids and led them upward to Athkatla and other Sword Coast ports to tend herds of minds there.

8. Among illithids, *braerl* are "those similarly inclined" or "those who share an enthusiasm." Ambrith was an illithid who loved to impersonate many humans of different social standings, professions, and genders, and sought to know the full range of human experience. Ambrith worked to perfect the ability to leap from mind to mind, controlling many host bodies in succession—moving from one to another so swiftly that it could effectively control all of them at once. Ambrith is believed to have been destroyed by the spells of a hired outlander mage in a skirmish near Marsember, where its last act was attempting to leap into the mind of one of several War Wizards of Cormyr who were fighting on the other side of the battle. Lingering doubts about Ambrith's ultimate fate is why Ambraerl members try to avoid, and never, ever to kill, any Wizard of War, if at all possible.

9. In the tongue of illithids, *irael* means "those pursuing the same goal" or "of one accord/idea/philosophy." Iringrar ("EAR-ring-gar") was a mind flayer who believed that the most powerful human or elf wizards had the most developed, lively, and therefore delectable brains, and that devouring the right wizard brains in a carefully planned sequence would enable a prepared illithid to gain the magical knowledge and capabilities of those brains. Iringrar perished almost a century ago when it tried to devour the wrong mage's brain and got blown to flaming dust for its troubles.

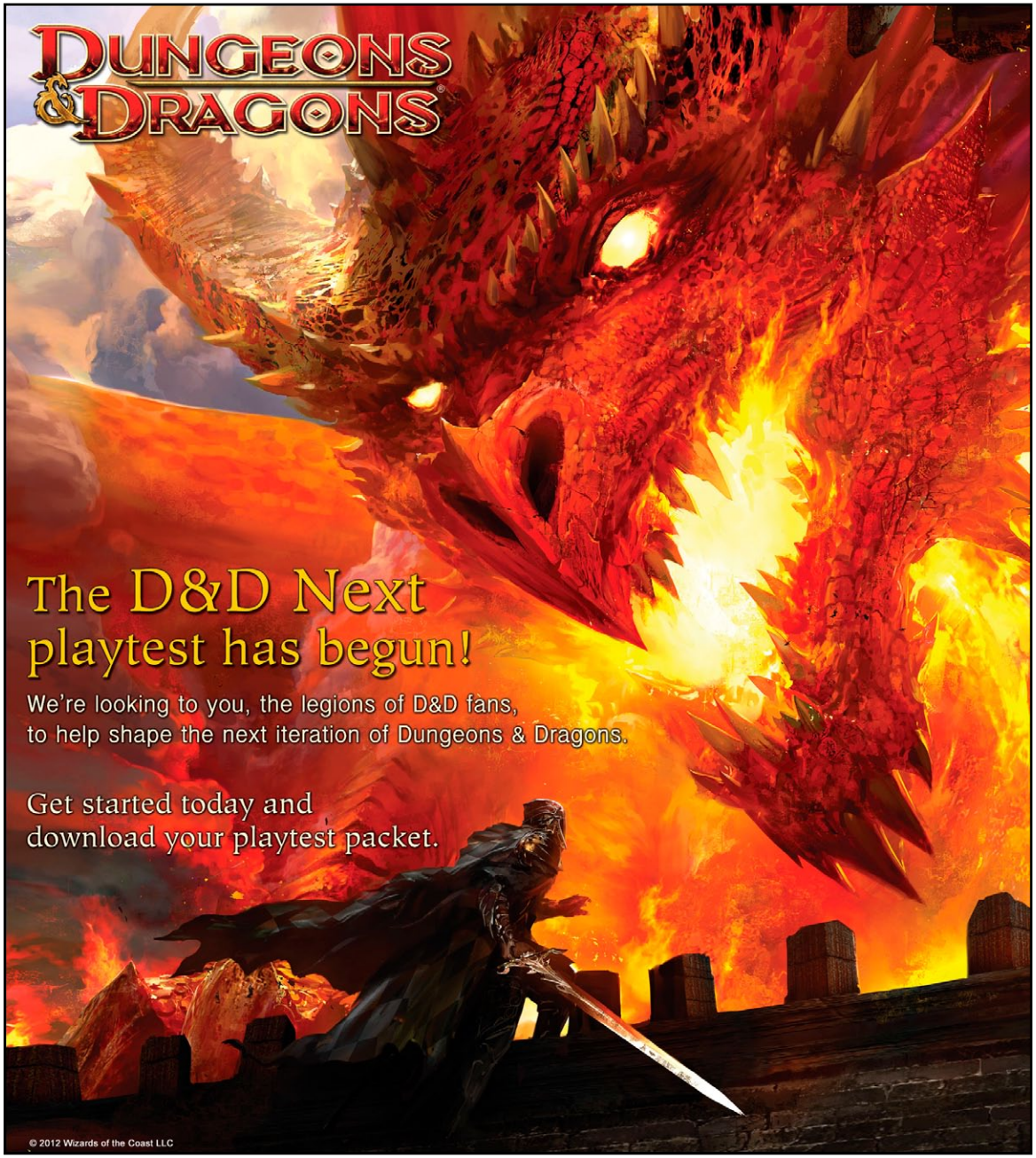
10. As aforementioned, *lyn* means "kin of" or "bloodsworn to" (and thanks to how illithids begin life and take over the bodies of others, kinship is more often something declared rather than a matter of birth heritage). Ortholor was an illithid who preferred monster brains to those of humans. It gathered a large array of monsters around itself, then tried to found monster-ruled realms in many places across

Faerûn. Thanks to the predatory nature of the monsters and the reactions of neighboring creatures, these were all short-lived. Ortholor itself was destroyed, along with all of its remaining force of monsters, by wizards defending Aglarond, after Ortholor's arrival was mistaken for the latest Thayan attack.

11. If the Tharthrallyd plans proceed as currently envisaged, they will avoid only the minds of priests and organized guilds or cabals of wizards, who might detect the illithids' influence and begin working against it before the creatures' grip is sufficiently strong and widespread. Everyone else of power and authority will be under the sway of the Tharthrallyd eventually—one vast and carefully tended herd.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.



COMING NEXT MONTH

BESTIARY: CATASTROPHIC DRAGONS, PART 1

By Bruce Cordell and Ari Marmell

Chromatic and metallic dragons are the stuff of legend throughout all lands and cultures. Even the common folk are familiar with these legendary creatures. Only the most seasoned adventurers know about catastrophic dragons—and those who do know these creatures quickly learn to fear them. In June, we meet the avalanche dragon and the typhoon dragon.

UNEARTHED ARCANA: ACHIEVEMENTS

By Robert J. Schwalb

Gold, magic items, jewels, and power are the traditional motivators that drive adventurers. A few seek medals, titles, and fame. This article explores a third category, called achievements: connections, influence, information, and property.

HISTORY CHECK: MARTEK AND THE DESERT OF DESOLATION

By Sterling Hershey

Ages ago, the wizard Martek bested and banished a mighty efreet in a magical duel that seared miles of desert into glass. Martek understood that despite his victory, the efreet would eventually escape its bonds. For the sake of the future, he set complex events into motion—events that would rely on the bravery, endurance, and ingenuity of adventurers as yet unborn.

EYE ON THE REALMS: THE DRAGON THAT NEVER DIED

By Ed Greenwood

The green dragon Aglaraerose sleeps atop the greatest treasure ever assembled in Faerûn—or so they say. Though thousands of treasure-seekers have entered the dragon's mountain, only one has ever emerged.

AND MORE!