

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Badooga's Monster Guidelines! I do a lot of monster homebrew for 5e, and this document compiles all of the tricks and techniques for creating monsters that I've learned over the years. In tandem with the official books, this document will show you how to make monsters, insert them into an encounter, and determine their behavior during combat. The appendix contains premade stat blocks and other monster content that you can use with minimal preparation or effort.

As a word of advice: **don't try to read this entire document in one sitting**. It is filled with a lot of dense, technical writing that lacks art to break it all up. After reading Chapter 1 (three pages), I would recommend jumping to a specific section that catches your eye using the table of contents below, or to skim through the document until you find something you're interested in. However you end up reading this document, I hope you get some good use out of it.

To see the other homebrew that I've made, you can visit my GM Binder profile, or you can follow this link: [Badooga's Homebrew](#).

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CHALLENGE RATING EXPANDED

Every official monster is given a Challenge Rating (CR). A monster's CR acts as a quick reference for how powerful it is, and the XP reward derived from its value can be used to build combat encounters for the party to fight. Rules regarding the Challenge Rating system are given in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

WHAT DOES IT DO RIGHT?

In short, the Challenge Rating system, when used by someone aware of its limitations, can be used to create monsters that are both properly balanced and fun to fight. By knowing the factors that influence CR, using the given charts to estimate what stats any monster should have at a certain CR, and by manipulating the numeric difference between a monster's Offensive Challenge Rating (OCR) and Defensive Challenge Rating (DCR), a DM can make monsters of all shapes and sizes. As an added bonus, the system's abstract nature leaves plenty of room for the DM to add extra abilities (e.g. imposing conditions or diseases) without imbalancing the monster too much.

WHAT DOES IT DO WRONG?

The encounter creation guidelines in the DMG fail to properly account for the "action economy", which refers to the number of discrete actions that can be taken by each side of the encounter. For example, a creature with Legendary Actions is much more capable of taking on a party by itself than a creature without such actions, even if the two are balanced to be at the same CR.

Additionally, Challenge Rating is a one-size fits all rating system, but not all monsters are the same. Should I give a monster exactly the amount of hit points given on the table in the DMG? How should I weigh a "tank" monster's OCR versus its DCR? What about for a sneaky rogue-esque monster? And what about my custom boss fight?

As it turns out, the system provides most of the tools needed to rectify these problems. However, it does not adequately explain how to use such tools. While monster homebrewers can master the craft of monster design given enough practice, inexperienced creators will have trouble creating a properly designed monster given the supposedly balanced nature of the system, and might be (rightfully) upset that the official books don't give them any good advice on the matter.

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?

Before I start elaborating on the Challenge Rating system, it is worth investigating what kinds of alternative approaches could be used instead. While all of these options are viable, I consider them to be inadequate in various ways. Thus, the rest of this document (starting with the content on the next page) is designed to expand upon the regular system that is given to us in the official books.

PURE IMPROVISATION

Ah, the timeless classic. Instead of trying to use math to pretend everything is standardized, some people may wish to simply estimate what kind of statistics their monsters should have. The DM knows their party best: they know the kinds of abilities they have and the damage they can output. They also acknowledge that monster tactics and terrain features can significantly change the balance of a fight. This philosophy also applies to encounter balancing: I personally just throw some monsters at my players based on what I know they can handle.

This method requires an above average amount of game knowledge. Beginner DMs that try this may end up with some disastrous results. But when successful, it requires much less work than any other method.

ROUGH IT OUT

Who cares if CR has some weird issues? Just use the system as-is to make a monster, and then just adjust things to how you see fit. You can also just copy statistics from existing monsters, or even just use such monsters as a "base template" for your own creations. For encounter balancing, see what the DMG gives you, and then change it to see if you know best.

This method is similar to Pure Improvisation, but it uses the existing system to make educated guesses. Even with the rules given in this document, any good DM will make their own adjustments as appropriate.

DO SOME MATH

The people over at the Blog of Holding have realized that official monsters are a bit different from what the CR system suggests they should be. Their [5e Monster Manual on a Business Card](#) provides statistical approximations of formulas you can use to create monsters that are mathematically consistent with official monsters.

GIFFYGLYPH'S MONSTER MAKER

Inspired by the 4th Edition monster math, [Giffyglyph's Monster Maker](#) is an approach to monster creation that is quick and easy, yet easily expanded upon. It has standardized statistics, monster roles and tiers, free-form attacks, paragon actions, and more.

I haven't personally played with this system, but some of you may find it to be appealing. This system isn't perfect: for example, some people I know have criticized this system for leaning towards high HP values that artificially extend the length of fights, which I agree with. With that in mind, this document has some other goodies that are useful, including some that inspired the contents of this document (e.g. his take on monster roles and tiers, and his encounter building formula).

MONSTER CLASSIFICATIONS

To continue, it is important to say the following: **not all monsters are the same**. Some are weak, some are overwhelmingly strong. Some charge in and swing wildly, and others shoot from a distance. We can use monster roles and tiers to account for such differences.

MONSTER ROLES

Just as characters within an adventuring party might specialize in certain roles (e.g. tanking), monsters can also be given categories based on their role(s) in combat.

Brutes hit hard and get hit hard. They deal a lot of damage in melee, and while they might be easy to hit, they have a lot of hit points to compensate. Having loads of HP isn't enough: if a brute can't deal damage or otherwise attract the attention of the enemy, they can simply be ignored, and they will fail at tanking. Ogre zombies (and other types of zombies), hill giants, and purple worms are all examples of brutes.

Controllers use their abilities for utility, rather than just damage. Some controllers manipulate the battlefield by negating vision or creating difficult terrain. Others inflict "debuffs" upon their foes that lessen their offensive or defensive power, such as by imposing disadvantage on their attack rolls or saving throws. Many controllers even use their powers to directly disable their opponents by charming, incapacitating, or restraining them. Such powers can take the form of magical or psionic abilities activated from a distance, or they can be delivered in melee via auras or on top of melee attacks. Harpies, mind flayers, and rakshasas are all examples of controllers.

Skirmishers weave in and out of combat, using their mobility and slipperiness to avoid the exposure of their fragile defenses. They wait for a good opportunity to strike, typically aiming at the weakest or otherwise easiest opponent to attack without taking damage themselves. Often times, they have traits such as Nimble Escape or Flyby that allow them to move in and out without being punished as other creatures would. Assassins, bugbears, and goblins are all examples of skirmishers.

Snipers are those that choose to deal damage from a distance. They have weak defensive capabilities, which they compensate for using good positioning that prevents them from easily being engaged in melee. They needn't hide like skirmishers, nor must they deal as much damage as a striker, although they are allowed to if appropriate. Archers, beholders, and scouts are all examples of snipers.

Soldiers are generalists who can both take damage and deal damage as needed. While most soldiers are melee-centric, some also have access to ranged options, but do not focus on them to the point of being full on snipers. Veterans, hezrous, and erinyes are all examples of soldiers. Many basic enemies that serve as minions (see below), such as bandits, orcs, and skeletons, also act as soldiers by default.

Strikers are the major damage dealers in a given encounter. A striker's offensive power tends to be notably stronger than its defense. Despite this, strikers are not exclusively ranged attackers; it is possible for a striker to be a melee combatant. With this in mind, many spellcasters lend themselves to be excellent strikers. Archmages, dragons, and liches are all examples of strikers.

TIP: ROLES AREN'T EXCLUSIVE

When categorizing a monster under a monster role, keep in mind that some monsters have abilities and traits that touch upon multiple roles at once. For example, while glabrezus are powerful in direct melee combat, allowing them to act as soldiers, they also have access to potent spells such as *darkness* and *power word stun* that also make them controllers.

If you'd like, you can give certain enemies two roles, or you can give them a "major" and "minor" role. For example, bandits are best labeled as soldiers, but you can also have some of them act exclusively as snipers during a given encounter. Meanwhile, goblins might use their Nimble Escape feature to attack from range with impunity, making them both skirmishers and snipers.

No matter what you do, I encourage you to somehow take advantage of this role overlap to fill any gaps in a given encounter. For example, in an encounter with a demonic horde of mostly skirmishers and snipers, a glabrezu would be able to engage the party head-on while also using their controller abilities to compliment their allies' roles in the encounter.

MONSTER TIERS

While many monsters have different roles to play in combat, the challenge they pose to the party gives them a tier of difficulty that is worth noting or taking advantage of.

Minions are simple, weak enemies used en masse as fodder against the enemy. They are often encountered in large groups, and they serve as a stopgap between important creatures and the enemies that oppose them. Any individual minion is simple to defeat for any competent combatant, but if they aren't careful, a large group of minions can overwhelm an adventuring party before they even reach their main opponent.

Standard enemies are the typical foes fought in a given encounter. They will take a bit of time to defeat, and while they can be dangerous in groups of two or more, no standard enemy will be a deadly threat to an adventuring party by itself.

Elite enemies are a cut above the rest. They are typically accompanied by standard enemies and/or minions, and they are major threats that have the potential to take down the party if given the chance. In a videogame, an elite enemy would be a miniboss or some other encounter that is significantly more challenging than the rest.

Champions are powerful foes that turn a normal encounter into a boss battle. Either they are accompanied by minions and other lesser monsters, or they are strong enough to take on their opponents by themselves. They typically have Legendary Resistances, Legendary Actions, or some other mechanics that allow them to keep up with the party in both offense and defense despite being only one creature, but such features aren't required for all champions.

As an example of these monster tiers, suppose that a high level adventuring party enters a lich's lair to put an end to its evil machinations forever. They are faced by its skeleton and zombie minions, as well as some standard-tier balguras summoned as part of the lich's fiendish pact with an unnamed demon lord. It has an elite-tier iron golem guarding the entrance to its inner sanctum, and the actual lich, once encountered, acts as a champion-tier opponent.

SPECIAL DESIGNATION: LEADER

Leaders enable their comrades to perform at a higher capacity compared to normal. Some leaders boost the hit points of their allies, such as through healing magic or by giving them temporary hit points. Others boost their offensive power, in ways such as commanding them to attack using their reaction or by granting them advantage on attack rolls. Some leaders even summon additional allies into the battle, through methods such as conjuration spells or by exuding a lesser creature from its body. Gnoll pack lords, hobgoblin warlords, and orc war chiefs are all examples of leaders.

This designation is halfway between a role and a tier. It has a distinct playstyle in an encounter, but its broad nature doesn't reveal anything about a monster's offensive or defensive capabilities. While a leader typically won't be a minion, its status does not tell us if it is a standard enemy, an elite enemy, or a champion-tier one.

As such, consider the "leader" designation to be both a "minor role" and a "minor tier" as you see fit. Determine the monster's primary role and tier, and apply them as you see fit.

TIP: TIERS ARE RELATIVE

While this might seem obvious, it is still important to state that a monster's tier is measured in comparison to the adventuring party that fights them. For example, the balguras in the above example are mentioned to be standard-tier enemies for the high level adventuring party, but for a much weaker party that is just starting out, a balgura can act as an elite or champion-tier opponent, depending on just how weak the party really is.

This means that at your party levels up, you may need to continually use stronger foes in order to properly challenge your party. And that's okay: after all, as your party levels up, they become more powerful, so they become capable of defeating bigger and better threats as time goes on.

USING ROLES AND TIERS

Now that we know how monster roles and tiers work, we can use this knowledge to determine how we make our monsters, taking advantage of the existing Challenge Rating system to balance them appropriately.

The role and tier information presented here will be used in later sections of this document, so be ready to reference them as needed.

OCR AND DCR BY MONSTER ROLE

Most official monsters, especially the ones found in supplements beyond the *Monster Manual* (e.g. *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*), have at least a little more offensive power than defensive power. This makes sense: too much defense makes a fight too sluggish and boring, and too little offense makes a monster not feel threatening to the party.

In particular, many of the monsters in the *Monster Manual* have an OCR that is 6 more than its DCR (before traits come into play). Based on some existing statistical analyses and my own personal investigations, this seems to be an intentional choice by the designers.

With this in mind, below is a table listing a recommended range of numeric differences between a monster's OCR and DCR, depending on its role.

Role	OCR - DCR
Brute	-2 to 4
Controller	4 to 8
Skirmisher	6 to 8
Sniper	6 to 8
Soldier	4 to 6
Striker	8 to 10

Note that since a monster's overall CR is a combination of its OCR and DCR, the difference between a monster's OCR and DCR will not influence its CR. For example, a CR 10 striker might be OCR 14/DCR 6, while a CR 10 brute might be OCR 11/DCR 9. The two have the same Challenge Rating, but their actual statistics, other than their proficiency bonuses, will look completely different.

To simplify the averaging and subtraction of fractional CRs, treat them as negative integers: CR 1/2 is really 0, CR 1/4 is -1, CR 1/8 is -2, and CR 0 is -3. Then, after your calculations are finished, convert their CR back to their proper, fractional form. This is because **CR is actually a median**, rather than an average.

AVERAGE CR BY MONSTER TIER

We can use the Average Party Level (APL) of the player characters to determine the recommended CR range for each given monster tier, as listed below. These tier definitions break down and become inaccurate at higher levels, but are otherwise a reasonable starting point for your monsters.

Tier	Challenge Rating
Minion	APL/4 or less
Standard	APL/3 to APL × 2/3
Elite	APL × 2/3 to APL × 5/4
Champion	APL × 5/4 to APL × 3/2

These CR ranges apply to parties with three to five players in it. When a party has less than three or more than five players, or as a whole is stronger or weaker than the average party (e.g. due to optimization or magic items), you should adjust their effective APL as you see fit.

MONSTER DESIGN

Okay, so I've told you about monster roles, tiers, and how to balance them out using CR. But how do you actually make a monster?

Between the DMG's Challenge Rating rules and the advice in this document, you should be able to make monsters that just as fun and balanced as official monsters.

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

When I design monsters in 5e, I take into account the following factors.

THEMATIC COHESION

To make a monster, you first have to establish its theme: what it looks like, how it acts, how it feels to fight it, etc. If you are converting a monster from an external source, such as a previous edition of D&D or some other form of media, the theme is already there for you to take. However, remember that **the theme of a monster is independent from the medium it is viewed from**. In other words, make sure that your theme isn't particularly reliant on mechanics that don't port over well to 5e.

For example, if you are converting a monster that originates from an action game, much of the fight might be centered around its individual attacks and successfully blocking or dodging them. However, 5e is a turn-based game that doesn't do reflex-based combat like that. Thus, instead of trying to take its mechanics and brute force them into 5e, try to simply focus on what makes the monster cool/scary/intense/etc. You will then capture the essence of this theme, either through compatible mechanics or through new ones, through the statistics you give it in 5e.

In any case, consider the following factors when attempting to build a monster's theme:

- The general tactics it uses in combat (i.e. what monster role it would have)
- The kinds of tactics that work well against it (based on its role in combat)
- How strong it should be relative to the world and the players (i.e. what CR and monster tier you should give it)
- What emotion/feeling it should illicit to those that fight it
- What it does out of combat and/or when the players aren't around
- The generic abilities it has (e.g. "fire blasts", "big punches", "invisibility and teleporation")

BALANCE

It is important to create monsters that are neither underpowered or overpowered for their CR. When underpowered, such creatures get steamrolled by the party, making it unfun for the DM that wanted to use them and boring for the players that seek to be adequately challenged in combat. When a monster is overpowered, it can easily crush unprepared players, making them feel bad for losing and making you feel bad for ruining their fun.

To balance monsters, use the monster creation rules in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, which are supplemented by the advice and expansions made in this document.

FUN TO FIGHT

So you've made a cool monster with a strong theme that is balanced by the books. You try it out in a session, only to find that your players are peeved by its very existence and that they didn't enjoy the fight with it. What gives?

Perhaps unfair and unfun mechanics are to blame. Here are a few examples:

- Overusing action-negating effects such as the paralyzed and stunned conditions, as well as large amounts of unavoidable damage, can take certain players out of the fight entirely, making them feel as if they have nothing to do and that the fight is boring.
- Reactions that completely negate a character's actions can be unfun when not limited in usage. For example, spells like *counterspell* are established in the world and can create interesting twists during an encounter, but when usable at will, the spellcasters of the party might feel useless. Similarly, other "gotcha!" moments and effects like "Surprise, it is immune to all spells!" can be unfair to players that are simply trying to fight a monster as they are expected to.
- Instakills and other character-removing effects are extremely strong and should not be taken lightly. Intellect devourers (death by brain removal) and medusas (character removal by petrification without an available cure) are both examples of monsters that have such effects. These monsters are deviations from the norm: they are classic, iconic creatures that are popular and dangerous because of their extremely potent abilities. You need a very strong justification for including such an effect on a monster, and in play, you should consider telegraphing the ability (e.g. by informing the players about it ahead of time) so that they aren't deleted without any prior warning.

USING CHALLENGE RATING

As mentioned earlier, WotC has its own custom math that it follows when designing monsters that deviates from the Challenge Rating guidelines they gave us. It is for this reason that I personally don't follow the CR guidelines to the letter. What should you do?

BY THE BOOKS

Most official monsters are properly balanced according to CR anyway. Those that deviate tend to only differ by a small amount. Thus, it is easy to simply use the system in the DMG and to make small adjustments as appropriate. In general, **monsters are allowed to be a bit stronger than their official CR suggests**, whether it be due to powerful non-damaging effects that aren't accounted for, or due to certain statistics and traits that aren't actually as important as the DMG says they are.

In particular, I have personally observed that the following factors aren't weighted as heavily by WotC as they are in the DMG:

TRAITS AND OTHER FEATURES

Traits like Blood Frenzy and Nimble Escape are very powerful, and they do significantly contribute to a monster's potency in combat, but their effect on Challenge Rating seems to differ from monster to monster. For example, goblins seem to be balanced as though they didn't have the Nimble Escape feature at all. The same applies to other traits given in the DMG. All of this can be attributed to WotC's playtesting feedback, where deviations from the default math are improvements to the monster based on what felt right in play. In your case, you shouldn't ignore the presence of these traits altogether, but you should account for them collectively when determining the monster's final CR.

LEGENDARY RESISTANCES

Legendary Resistances are worth little effective HP, if any at all (depends on how high the CR is). I personally see legendary resistances as an extension of a monster's tier (i.e. boss monsters should almost always have them when they are solo), so I only truly account for them when doing a holistic analysis of a monster.

CONDITIONS

Potent conditions such as paralyzed and stunned can have a significant influence on a given fight, but they don't deal direct damage, so the official books somewhat imply that they shouldn't be accounted for. However, if this were the case, monsters like the ghoul or ghast that inflict such conditions would have a much lower CR. In reality, WotC weighs these powerful conditions as "virtual damage". They find the lowest level spell that inflicts this condition (e.g. *hold person*), and they compare it to another spell of the same level (e.g. *scorching ray*). In this case, *scorching ray* deals an average of 21 (6d6) damage, so this is the "virtual damage" that the paralyzed condition is worth.

That said, you don't necessarily have to do this math every time: you can try to quantify them in some other manner (as described in an upcoming section), or you can simply consider these conditions during the holistic consideration of the monster's balance.

DAMAGE RESISTANCES AND IMMUNITIES

Damage resistances and immunities are not worth as much as the DMG claims. This specifically applies to resistance or immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks. Either it halves or entirely negates a martial player's physical contributions, or it is rendered irrelevant by magic weapons. Given the existence of Ki-Empowered Strikes and other class and subclass features that are similar to it, it is reasonable to assume that players are supposed to get weapons that count as magical at some point in the game (although these weapons needn't grant any other benefit beyond bypassing physical resistances and immunities). Thus, I opt to ignore these resistances or immunities when it feels safe to do so (e.g. it is fine for high CR demon lords, but it must be considered when making low CR incorporeal undead), viewing it more as something that contributes to a monster's narrative power level more than anything else.

REGRESSION FORMULA

Let's take a page from the Blog of Holding (see below) by presenting the DMG's quick monster stats in the form of a set of mathematical formulas. Note that these formulas have some wiggle room in them, and are slightly less accurate than the DMG rules.

For the purpose of these formulas, treat fractional CRs as negative integers: 1/2 is 0, 1/4 is -1, 1/8 is -2, and 0 is -3.

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS

OCR	Damage Per Round	Attack Bonus	Save DC
0 to 1/2	$2(OCR) + 7$	3	13
1 to 19	$6(OCR) + 5$	$.4(OCR) + 3$	$.4(OCR) + 12$
20 to 30	$18(OCR - 13) + 5$	$(OCR)/3 + 3$	$(OCR)/3 + 12$

DEFENSIVE STATISTICS

DCR	Hit Points	Armor Class
0 to 1/2	$19(DCR + 3) + 3$	13
1 to 19	$15(DCR + 4) + 3$	$(DCR)/3 + 13$
20 to 30	$45(DCR - 12) - 12$	19

COPY OFFICIAL MONSTERS

Whenever I make a monster, I find an official stat block that fits a similar role in combat and take inspiration from its ability scores, hit points, and its average damage per round (DPR). For example, if I am making a CR 10 monster that is large and physically powerful, I might take a look at the Stone Golem from the *Monster Manual* and borrow its hit points, AC, Strength and Constitution scores, and some other traits as I see fit. If I don't want my monster to have damage resistances or immunities, I may want to increase its HP compared to the Stone Golem, as the golem has some potent damage immunities that contribute to its defenses.

This approach allows me to make a monster that is properly balanced based on WotC's in-house formula, without actually having to do any heavy math beyond "increase this" and "decrease that". After all, WotC already did the math when they made the original monster you are taking inspiration from. And whenever I need to make adjustments, I just use the official CR guidelines to appropriately balance them.

USE A TWEAKED VERSION

The [5e Monster Manual on a Business Card](#) page has statistical approximations of the formulas used to create monsters by the books. It lists formulas for the average AC, HP, attack bonus, damage per attack, save DC, and saving throw bonus for a monster of a given CR. With this resource, you can quickly obtain statistics that you can use to create monsters of a given CR. Let's expand on these formulas to make them even better.

OCR vs DCR REVISITED

As mentioned, the formulas given are just that: averages. The same page gives the advice of adjusting these values based on the monster concept, with a recommended range of variance for each value.

However, there might be a better way to adjust these values based on concept. This document already lists suggested differences between OCR and DCR based on a monster's role. Once you know the value for a monster's OCR and DCR, it should be possible to be more precise than just "adjust by up to 50% based on concept".

The solution is simple: instead of plugging in the monster's average CR into every column, you can plug in its OCR or DCR as appropriate:

- For the monster's AC, HP, and saving throw bonus, plug its DCR into the formulas.
- For the monster's attack bonus, damage per attack, and save DC, plug its OCR into the formulas.

This approach allows you to get estimates that are much more precise than the default recommendation without requiring any additional thinking or formulas. As with the original formulas, this is an approximation: be sure to adjust your final monster as appropriate.

DAMAGE PER ROUND

The approach of creating a "damage budget" for monsters may be very useful for some; if this is the case for you, feel free to use the formulas provided in the original blog post. However, I personally prefer to use the DMG's approach of supplying the average damage per round (DPR). Use whatever you feel is comfortable.

SAVING THROWS

The default business card provides a formula that allows one to approximate the total bonus a monster's best saving throw should get based on CR. However, this doesn't tell us how many saving throws the monster should receive bonuses to, which is arguably more important; as most saving throw bonuses take the form of proficiency in that save, having a recommended bonus for a monster's best saving throw really just tells us what kind of ability scores the monster should get.

As discussed in a later section, a save proficiency is worth a boost of DCR +1/2 for every proficiency beyond two. If you don't want to use this system, perhaps you just can grant saving throw proficiencies based on a monster's tier. Minions get 0 proficiencies, standards get 1, elites get 2, and champions get 3. Once the party is level 11 or higher, increase all of these values by 1. Of course, feel free to increase or decrease this number for any given monster as appropriate.

USE AN ALTERNATIVE

[Giffyglyph's Monster Maker](#) is a system that can be used as an alternative to Challenge Rating. Drawing inspiration from the monster math in 4th edition, it specifically replaces CR with Monster Level (ML), a 1:1 match to character level. While I recommend reading it for yourself, I will summarize most of the differences here:

- A different stat block format that is smaller and less exhaustive than the official ones
- Monster roles that change the monster's base stats when applied
- Monster traits and "powers" that are mostly different than the official ones
- Statistics for monsters at each given level that are more defined and exhaustive than the official ones
- Templates for three tiers of monsters: minions, elites, and solos
- Elites and solos get extra actions each round ("paragon actions") instead of dedicated legendary actions
- Solos get phase transitions that remove ongoing effects at certain health thresholds
- Freeform attacks and a recommend, static damage budget instead of set action entries
- Condition attacks that inflict conditions instead of dealing damage
- Movement attacks that cause the target to be forcibly moved around the battlefield instead of dealing damage
- Resource attacks that can inflict exhaustion or failed death saves, or can drain hit dice, spell slots, or gold
- Freeform magic instead of dedicated spellcasting traits

A lot of this stuff is certainly interesting and should exist in 5e in some capacity. But there are a lot of issues surrounding **compatibility**. While there is a conversion chart that allows you to convert back and forth between CR and ML, the differences in design and such make it difficult to use official monsters alongside this system. In other words, it makes it much harder to use official monsters and campaign modules using this system, although I can imagine it isn't impossible for someone experienced with it.

That said, not everyone is **experienced** with monster homebrew and D&D in general. While this system's freeform nature allows for some creative applications, it also means that a new DM might be more confused than if they were to stick with the official monsters and monster math provided in the core books. After all, monsters in 5e are spelled out the way they are so that they can be used in play with minimal editing and work on the part of the DM. This is contrasted to GiffyGlyph's system, which is more geared towards those already comfortable with the system and willing to put more work into their monsters.

Finally, this system has issues with **modularity**, and is mostly designed to be used as a complete package. Suppose you like the freeform attacks, but end up not liking the core math or the templates for each monster role. This gives you two choices: either use this system despite this, or rebuild the feature from scratch in base 5e.

Personally, I like a lot of GiffyGlyph's ideas, but I am a fan of Challenge Rating and the general math behind official monsters. So, I took the second option for you by taking a lot of his ideas and inserting them into this document. I also kept modularity in mind when making this - perhaps you are only here for the encounter balancing rules, or maybe you only care about the boss fight variants presented later on. Some of you might only care about the stat blocks presented in the appendix. No matter why you're here, this document is designed to be compatible with base 5e, to present content for inexperienced and experienced DMs alike, and to allow you to pick and choose what you want to use from it.

MONSTER FEATURES REVISITED

The DMG has plenty of information on the effects of certain traits and features on a monster's Challenge Rating. These effects are mostly phrased in terms of effective HP, effective attack bonus, effective AC, etcetera. But if all of these were translated into their direct effects on a monster's CR, while also making adjustments to inaccurate information, perhaps it would be easier to parse.

When reading this section, remember that Challenge Rating is a median, rather than an actual average. Adding 1 to a monster's OCR or DCR is equivalent to moving one row down on the Monster Statistics by Challenge Rating table in the DMG. Additionally, if you are left with a fractional value for CR, you are free to round up or down as appropriate.

Finally, know that I don't personally use most of the information in the tables below, but some of you might find them useful depending on how you prefer to make monsters.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

In order to make this translation, we can recognize that most traits either increase a monster's effective attack bonus or its effective armor class. In turn, the DMG says that when a monster's effective AC or attack bonus is 2 points too high (or low), its DCR or OCR (respectively) becomes 1 point higher (or lower). In other words, traits like Magic Resistance that add +2 to a monster's effective AC directly increase the monster's DCR by 1. We can summarize these essential statistics as follows:

ESSENTIAL STATISTICS

Name	Effect on Challenge Rating
Effective AC +2	DCR +1
Effective Attack Bonus/Save DC +2	OCR +1
Save proficiencies	DCR +1/2 for each save above 2
Consistent advantage on a save	Counts as an extra save proficiency

CONDITIONS

As discussed earlier, WotC often treats conditions as dealing "virtual damage" to a monster. Because damage scales linearly with OCR, and because conditions are equally relevant at all levels, we can take this one step further by translating this "virtual damage" into increments of a monster's CR.

Conditions that make it easier to attack a creature (e.g. stunned) add to a monster's OCR. Conditions that only make it harder for a creature to attack (e.g. poisoned) add to a monster's DCR. Both effects are derived by comparing the spells that inflict them (e.g. frightened or paralyzed) to equivalent spells of the same level (e.g. *shield of faith* or *scorching ray*), or to equivalent effects on a single monster that can inflict such conditions (e.g. a beholder's eye rays).

Assume that each condition below only targets one creature, and can be imposed once every round. If a condition is applied in an area of effect, you can assume that it will apply to two creatures, allowing you to double the effect on CR listed below. If a condition isn't listed, its effect on CR is negligible or otherwise isn't worth quantifying.

CONDITIONS

Name	Duration	Effect on Challenge Rating
Blinded	1 minute, save ends	OCR +1
Charmed	1 minute, save ends	DCR +1
Exhaustion	Instantaneous	CR +1
Frightened	1 minute, save ends	DCR +1
Incapacitated	1 minute, save ends	OCR +1
Paralyzed	1 minute, save ends	OCR +2
Petrified	Until dispelled	OCR +3
Poisoned	1 minute, save ends	OCR +1/2
Restrained	Until escaped	OCR +1/2
Stunned	1 minute, save ends	OCR +3/2
Unconscious	1 minute, damage ends	OCR +2

GENERIC MONSTER FEATURES

Now that we have all of this information, let's make a new version of the Monster Features table on DMG 280. First, we can add extra traits like Improved Critical to the list. Next, we can translate each feature's effect on Challenge Rating to its fractional effect on CR using the tables above. Finally, we can also make one or two adjustments to these effects based on the discussions in the previous sections.

In general, **a feature's effect on CR weakens as the monster's CR goes up**. A trait like Magic Resistance is a strong feature for a CR 3 bearded devil to have, but it is reasonable to expect that a CR 21 creature like a solar would have access to it. This mirrors the fact that for any given party, balance tends to be thrown out the window once they reach the fourth tier of play.

If a monster feature isn't listed in the following table, then you should reference its original entry in the DMG.

MONSTER FEATURES

Name	Example Monster	Effect on Challenge Rating
Aggressive	Orc	Round the total OCR up, if relevant.
Ambusher	Doppelganger	OCR +1/2
Avoidance	Demilich	DCR +1
Blood Frenzy	Sahuagin	OCR +2
Constrict	Constrictor snake	DCR +1/2
Elusive	Lazav (GGR)	DCR +1/2
Frightful Presence	Ancient black dragon	DCR +2
Improved Critical	—	Round the total OCR up, if relevant.
Indomitable	Champion (VGM)	DCR +1/2 per available use
Invisibility	Imp	DCR +1/2
Leadership	Hobgoblin captain	CR +1/2
Legendary Resistance	Ancient black dragon	DCR +1 per available use
Magic Resistance	Balor	DCR +1
Nimble Escape	Goblin	CR +2 (assuming the monster hides every round)
Pack Tactics	Kobold	OCR +1/2
Parry	Hobgoblin warlord	DCR +1/2
Rampage	Gnoll	Round the total OCR up, instead of down.
Reactive	Marilith	CR +1/2
Redirect Attack	Goblin boss	DCR +1/2
Relentless	Wereboar	DCR +1
Shadow Stealth	Shadow demon	DCR +2 (assuming the monster hides every round)
Slow	Stone golem	DCR +1
Stench	Troglodyte	DCR +1/2
Superior Invisibility	Faerie dragon	DCR +1
Uncanny Dodge	Master thief (VGM)	DCR +1/2
Undead Fortitude	Zombie	DCR +1
Web	Giant spider	DCR +1/2

We can also apply this to some miscellaneous effects that aren't defined by any one feature, such as imposing disadvantage on saves or automatically reducing a creature to 0 HP if it fails a single saving throw.

OTHER FEATURES

Feature	Duration	Effect on Challenge Rating
Can't be mentally influenced	—	DCR +1/2
Imposes -1d4 on saves	1 round	OCR +1/2
Imposes disadvantage on saves	1 round	OCR +1
Instant reduction to 0 HP	Instantaneous	Equivalent to three times the damage of the monster's strongest attack
Lets an ally make an attack	Instantaneous	Equivalent to the damage of the monster's weakest attack

ADDITIONAL MONSTER FEATURES

The "Creating a Monster" section of the DMG includes guidelines regarding Challenge Rating calculations and how to make monsters, including step-by-step instructions for monster creation, as well as multiple lists of generic features to be used by monsters and NPCs alike.

This section builds off of this DMG content by making suggestions as to what generic features certain monsters could get based on their role and tier. Note that the features mentioned in this section all have the potential to increase a monster's Challenge Rating, as discussed in the previous section.

Additionally, note that the features discussed in this section aren't exclusive to a given role. When a monster has two or more overlapping roles, it is appropriate to give it features that are associated with any of those roles. Even when this overlap isn't present, it is reasonable to use a "mismatching" feature if it can be justified via flavor. For example, the Limited Flight ability below might be usable to represent a flying skirmisher instead of a controller. Rather than being rigid categories, you can treat each collection of features as fluid recommendations that purely depend on the flavor of your monster.

BRUTES

The Aggressive, Brute, Charge, Rampage, Reckless, Relentless, and Siege Monster features are all appropriate for brutish monsters. In addition, consider using any of the following features to round out your brutes.

Brawler. The monster can use its bonus action to attempt to grapple or shove a creature within its reach.

Brutish Durability. Whenever the monster makes a saving throw, it can roll a d6 and add the result to its saving throw total.

Improvised Attack. The monster can replace any of its attacks with an unorthodox attempt to bash with or throw an object within its reach. The attack's normal and long ranges are determined based on the size of the monster, and the attack's damage dice is one size smaller than the melee attack it normally uses on its turn (e.g. if most of its attacks have dice of about 2d6, this attack's dice will be 2d4).

Shrug it Off. The monster can use its reaction to halve the damage that it takes from an attack that hits it. The monster must be able to see the attacker.

Survivor. The monster regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point but fewer hit points than half its hit point maximum.

Unyielding. As a reaction when the monster is subjected to an effect that would move it, knock it prone, or both, it can choose to be neither moved nor knocked prone.

CONTROLLERS

The Charm, Illusory Appearance, Invisibility, and Mimicry features are all appropriate for controllers, although they tend to be used in tandem with other controller-esque spells and abilities. With this in mind, consider using any of the following features to round out your controllers.

Aura of Mind Erosion. Any hostile creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of the monster must make an Intelligence saving throw (DC is Intelligence-based). On a failed save, a creature suffers disadvantage on all Wisdom and Charisma saving throws until the start of the monster's next turn.

Broken Will (Action). The monster targets one creature it can communicate with via telepathy. The target must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC is Intelligence-based). On a failed save, the monster chooses the target's movement and action on its next turn. A creature is immune to this ability if it is immune to being charmed.

Captivating Presence. Any creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of the monster must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC is Charisma-based). On a failed save, the creature becomes charmed by the monster for 1 minute or until the creature is farther than 30 feet away from it. On a successful save, the creature becomes immune to the monster's Captivating Presence for 24 hours.

Limited Flight. The monster can use a bonus action to gain a flying speed equal to its walking speed until the end of the turn.

Redirect Attack. As a reaction when a creature the monster can see targets it with an attack, the monster chooses an ally within 5 feet of it. The two creatures swap places, and the chosen ally becomes the target instead.

Stunning Gaze (Action). The monster targets one creature it can see within 30 feet of it. The target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw (DC is Charisma-based) or be stunned until the end of its next turn.

SKIRMISHERS

Ambusher, Cunning Action, Elusive, Evasion, Flyby, Invisibility, Nimble Escape, Pack Tactics, Shadow Stealth, Sneak Attack, Surprise Attack, and Uncanny Dodge are all features (either rogue class features or generic monster features) that are fitting for skirmishers. In addition, consider using any of the following features to round out your skirmishers.

Assassinate. During its first turn, the monster has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit the monster scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

Lightfooted. The monster can take the Dash or Disengage action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Lurker in Shadow. While in darkness, the monster is invisible to any creature that relies on darkvision to see it in that darkness.

Mobile. When the monster makes a melee attack against a creature, it doesn't provoke opportunity attacks from that creature for the rest of the turn, whether it hits or not.

Shroud Self (Action). The monster magically turns invisible until the start of its next turn. This invisibility ends if the monster makes an attack roll, makes a damage roll, or casts a spell.

Skirmisher. As a reaction when a creature misses a melee attack against the monster, or if a hostile creature ends its turn within 5 feet of the monster, the monster can move up to half its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

SNIPERS

Many of the stealth-based features that skirmishers get can be appropriate for snipers, but not all of them are appropriate for non-stealthy snipers. Consider using any of the following features to round out your snipers:

Aim. As a bonus action, the monster can add 1d10 to its next attack or damage roll with a ranged attack.

Focus. As a bonus action, the monster can target a creature it can see within 120 feet of it and make that creature its focus. The target remains the monster's focus for 1 minute, or until either the target or the monster drops to 0 hit points. The monster can add 1d4 to attack and damage rolls against the target.

Sharpshooter. The monster's ranged attacks ignore half cover and three-quarters cover.

SOLDIERS

Soldiers are generic enemies of any type (although many of them are melee-centric), so there are no specific feature recommendations for it.

STRIKERS

The Aggressive, Blood Frenzy, Martial Advantage, and Reckless features are all appropriate for strikers. In addition, consider any of the following features to round out your strikers.

Action Surge (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest)

The monster can take an extra action on its turn.

Arcane Advantage (1/Turn) The monster can deal an extra 7 (2d6) damage to a creature it hits with a damaging spell attack if that target is within 5 feet of an ally of the monster and that ally isn't incapacitated.

Guided Strike (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest)

When the monster makes an attack roll, the monster can use its reaction to add a +10 bonus to that roll.

Improved Critical The monster's weapon attacks score a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20 on the d20.

Potent Spellcasting The monster can add its spellcasting ability modifier to the damage it deals with any cantrip.

War Magic When the monster uses its action to cast a spell, it can make one weapon attack as a bonus action.

LEADERS

My [Warlord Collection](#) document includes a list of possible features a leader-type monster can be given, some of which are reprinted below. While the pregenerated monsters in this document all have legendary actions, keep in mind that they aren't a requirement for all leaders.

Battlefield Inspiration The monster chooses up to three allies it can see within 30 feet of it. Until the end of the monster's next turn, each target can add a d4 to its attack rolls and saving throws.

Bulwark (3/Day) As a reaction when an ally within 30 feet of the warlord fails a saving throw, the ally can reroll the saving throw.

Command Ally As a bonus action, the monster targets one ally it can see within 30 feet of it. If the ally can see and hear the monster, it can make one weapon attack as a reaction and gains advantage on the attack roll.

Leadership (Action; Recharges after a Short or Long Rest) For 1 minute, the monster can utter a special command or warning whenever a nonhostile creature that it can see within 30 feet of it makes an attack roll or a saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand the monster. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if the monster is incapacitated.

Rallying Cry The monster chooses one ally it can see within 30 feet of it. If the ally can see or hear the monster, it gains temporary hit points equal to the monster's Challenge Rating plus its Charisma modifier. If the ally is currently charmed or frightened, those effects immediately ends on itself.

Tactical Maneuver As a bonus action, the monster targets one monster it can see within 60 feet of it. If the ally can see and hear the monster, it can use its reaction to move up to half its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

CREATING A BOSS FIGHT

In D&D and fiction as a whole, the concept of an epic showdown against a powerful boss monster is universal. Before making entirely new homebrew mechanics for these boss monsters, let's first discuss the options that already exist, and expand upon them as needed.

REACTIONS

Reactions are a basic action option available to all creatures, allowing them to create some sort of effect in response to a given trigger. By default, the only at-will reaction the monster has is to make an opportunity attack. However, it is very easy to take existing reactions from official monsters (e.g. Parry) and to add them to a custom monster as appropriate.

Consider using the following traits to enhance a monster's capability to use reactions.

Fast Reflexes When the monster takes a reaction, it can also move up to half its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Legendary Reaction The monster can spend one legendary action to take a reaction, even when it has already used its normal reaction.

Limited Reactiveness The monster can take two reactions per round in combat.

Reactive The monster can take one reaction on every turn in combat.

LEGENDARY RESISTANCES

Legendary Resistances are given to many legendary monsters to prevent them from being gibbed by a "save or suck" ability, such as the *hold monster* spell or the Stunning Strike monk feature. On one hand, this mechanic can prevent a boss fight from being ended prematurely by an unlucky saving throw against a powerful effect. On the other hand, some DMs find this mechanic to be boring and/or unfair to their players. If so, consider the following alternatives:

Break Free If the monster is incapacitated at the start of its turn, the effect causing this condition immediately ends on the monster, and the monster takes damage equal to its Challenge Rating.

Freedom of Action The monster has advantage on saving throws against effects that would restrain or incapacitate it.

Freedom of Movement The monster ignores difficult terrain, and magical effects can't reduce its speed or cause it to be restrained. It can spend 5 feet of movement to escape from nonmagical restraints or being grappled.

Indomitable (3/Day) The monster can reroll a saving throw it fails. It must use the new roll.

Legendary Durability (1/Turn) The monster can choose to halve the damage it takes from an effect it can see.

Legendary Protection If the monster fails a saving throw, it can spend one legendary action to succeed instead.

Legendary Resistance (1/Round) If the monster fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Unbreakable (3/Day) If the monster is incapacitated at the start of its turn, the effect causing this condition immediately ends on the monster.

LAIR ACTIONS

To make certain fights more epic and cool, you can give your monsters access to lair actions. Lair actions are special powers that certain monsters can use to manipulate the lair they reside in. For example, an ancient red dragon can cause magma and volcanic gases to erupt within its lair, while Orcus can cause corpses within the lair to animate as undead. Not only do these powers add to the presentation of the fight, but they also influence the action economy by allowing a monster that has them to do more from round to round.

That said, just like legendary actions (see below), lair actions needn't be restricted to boss fights, high CR monsters, or even to lairs in general. For example, the lair action system can be used to quantify the spread of fire due to a rampaging squad of rogue fire elementals, which lacks all three of these qualities. In other cases, you can even just have environmental shifts (e.g. the effects of a natural earthquake) occur on initiative count 20 of each round, which is the equivalent of a lair action that isn't even taken by a monster at all.

The "lair actions without a lair" concept might sound strange at first, but can actually be used quite well in boss fights and other climactic scenarios. Many official monsters have lair actions that don't necessarily manipulate their lair itself; for example, both of Zariel's lair actions boil down to her casting some sort of spell. While the lack of a lair dependency is arguably a form of bad design (an argument I won't disagree with), this independence also allows you to use these lair actions even when it is outside of its lair or it doesn't have a lair in the first place. Remember that while this might work for some monsters, it might not work with the ones that directly manipulate their lair via their lair actions.

In general, whenever a monster uses a lair action, one or more of the following effects can occur:

- The monster causes the lair to shift and transform, such as destroying all its exits or erecting a new wall.
- A hazardous terrain feature in the lair is activated or takes effect.
- The monster grants its allies some sort of buff or allows them to take some sort of an additional action.
- One spell or effect on the monster immediately ends.
- The monster creates or summons new allies to fight alongside it.
- All hostile creatures in the lair suffer some sort of detrimental condition (save resists).
- The monster casts an innate spell that is often (but not always) incapable of dealing damage.
- The effects of an ongoing ritual take place.

Additionally, consider using the following ability to enhance a monster's capability to use lair actions.

Manipulate Lair (Costs 2 Legendary Actions). On initiative count 10 (losing initiative ties), the monster takes a lair action.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Legendary actions are special abilities that some monsters can use outside of their normal turn in combat. They have a set number of legendary actions per round, and they can spend them on various effects that interrupt the normal initiative order.

Legendary actions are typically used to balance out the action economy when a boss-like monster is alone in their fight against the adventuring party. However, even if a monster is of a low CR and is not strong relative to other legendary creatures in the world, giving them legendary actions can still make the fight against them that much more fun and challenging.

When designing legendary actions for your monsters, keep the following tips in mind:

Balance them Out. Remember that the damage dealt by a monster's legendary actions contributes to their total damage per round. This can stack up quickly, so try not to make a legendary action that is both spamable and powerful. Furthermore, note that most monsters have three legendary actions per round, but some extraordinarily powerful monsters (e.g. Tiamat) can have five of them.

Add Variety. If a monster just repeats the same attack three times using their legendary actions, then what's the point of having them at all? As legendary actions can be used whenever a creature ends its turn, they should be designed in a way that allows certain actions to be used in certain situations. For example, many creatures often have a legendary action that lets them move, which can be used to reposition, to retreat when in a bad situation, or to give chase when in a good situation. The use of this legendary action must be weighed against the other options: for example, an Attack legendary action that will increase their offensive power accordingly.

Differ the Costs. While it is okay to have a monster who uses each of their legendary actions one at a time, another way to add variety is to create options that cost multiple legendary actions to use. This allows for powerful abilities to be used outside of a monster's turn without allowing them to be spammed repeatedly. For example, you might give a spellcaster the ability to Cast a Spell as a legendary action, but using this ability would cost two legendary actions at once. The most extreme situations involve powers that cost three legendary actions at once, which typically a monster's entire budget per round.

Remember that while these costly abilities should be more powerful than the others, they shouldn't necessarily be the best choice in all situations. While some abilities might be considered the "default" options, they should all be comparable enough where choosing between them involves some sort of opportunity cost.

Stay Organized. Legendary actions aren't just sorted alphabetically. All options are sorted in an ascending manner based on how many legendary actions they cost, and within each tier, they are sorted alphabetically. Then, utility legendary actions such as Detect, Move, and Use an Object that don't have any direct offensive or defensive power are moved to the top, unless such options cost more than one legendary actions.

Customize your Options. Not all monsters will have the same type of legendary actions. Some legendary actions will enable them to enter melee range and to smash their foes into the ground. Others will boost their defensive power of both themselves and their allies. A few of them even let a monster teleport across the battlefield and activate powerful magical or psionic abilities.

You should customize a monster's legendary actions based on their role in combat. Below are a few example legendary actions that you can use for each role.

SOLDIERS

The legendary actions listed below are all generic enough to be used by any type of monster.

Detect. The monster makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Move. The monster moves up to its speed.

Use an Object. The monster takes the Use an Object action.

Attack. The monster makes one weapon attack.

At-Will Spell. The monster casts one of its at-will spells.

Tustle. The monster attempts to grapple or shove one creature within its reach.

Cast a Spell (Costs 2 Actions). The monster casts a spell.

Magic Item (Costs 2 Actions). The monster activates a magic item.

Psionics (Costs 2 Actions). The monster activates a psionic power.

Recharge (Costs 2 Actions). The monster recharges one of its actions and uses it.

BRUTES

Brutes tend to have legendary actions that compliment their raw strength or savagery.

Destroy. The monster makes a melee attack against an object or structure.

Charge (Costs 2 Actions). The monster moves up to its speed in a straight line and can move through the space of any creature or object that is smaller than itself. The first time it enters a creature or object's space during this move, the target must succeed on a DC Strength saving throw (DC is Strength-based) or take bludgeoning damage equal to the monster's Strength score and be pushed ahead of the monster for the rest of this move.

Savage (Costs 2 Actions). The monster makes a melee attack against each creature and object within its reach.

Smash (Costs 2 Actions). The monster makes a melee attack against a creature within its reach. On a hit, the target must also make a Constitution saving throw (DC is Strength-based). On a failed save, the target is stunned until the end of the monster's next turn.

Swat Away (Costs 2 Actions). The monster makes a melee attack. If the attack hits, the target must succeed on a DC Strength saving throw (DC is Strength-based) or be pushed 15 feet in a straight line away from the monster. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the target also falls prone.

CONTROLLERS

Controllers tend to have legendary actions that disable or weaken their foes rather than doing direct damage.

Inflict Condition. The monster targets one creature within 60 feet of it that it can see. The target must succeed on a saving throw or suffer one condition until the end of the monster's next turn. The DC and type of the saving throw, the condition inflicted, and the range of the ability are all determined by the monster's specific abilities and the ability score they are derived from.

Thrall. The monster targets one creature within 60 feet that is charmed or frightened by the monster; that target must make a Charisma saving throw (DC is Charisma-based). On a failed save, the monster decides how the target acts during its next turn, as long as the target's behavior is consistent with the effects of the condition(s) it is suffering from.

Utility Power. The monster casts a spell or activates a psionic power. The ability used must not be capable of dealing damage.

Reposition (Costs 2 Actions). The monster targets two creatures within 60 feet of it. An unwilling creature must succeed on a Charisma saving throw to avoid this effect (DC is Intelligence-based). Each affected target is teleported to a different unoccupied space that the monster can see within 60 feet of it. That space must be on the ground or on a floor.

Weaken (Costs 2 Actions). The monster targets one creature within 60 feet of it that it can see. The target must succeed on a Charisma saving throw (DC is Charisma-based) or have disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws until the end of the monster's next turn.

LEADERS

My [Warlord Collection](#) document includes a list of possible legendary actions a leader-type monster can be given.

SKIRMISHERS

Skirmishers tend to have legendary actions that allow them to weave in and out of combat.

Quick Step. The monster moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Teleport. The monster teleports, along with any equipment it is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

Stealth Shot. The monster makes a ranged weapon attack. If the monster was hidden, this attack doesn't reveal the monster's exact position, but it does reveal the general direction that the monster can be found in.

Step from Sight (Costs 2 Actions). The monster moves up to half its speed, and is invisible during this movement. If the conditions are met, it can take the Hide action at the end of the move.

Backup Plan (Costs 3 Actions). The monster casts the *invisibility* spell on itself. It then moves up to its speed.

SNIPERS

Snipers tend to have legendary actions that enable them to focus on one enemy in particular.

Crippling Shot. The monster makes a ranged attack against a creature. On a hit, the target also has its speed reduced by 10 feet until the end of the monster's next turn.

Disarming Strike. The monster makes a ranged attack against a creature. On a hit, the target must make a Strength saving throw (DC is Dexterity-based). On a failed save, it drops one object of the monster's choice. The object lands at the target's feet.

Seeking Shot. The monster makes a ranged attack against one creature it knows the exact location of, even if it can't see it. The projectile flies towards the target, moving around corners if necessary and ignoring three-quarters cover and half cover. If the target is within the attack's range and there is a path large enough for the projectile to travel to the target, the attack roll is made with advantage. Otherwise, the attack misses.

Sniper's Ire. The monster targets one creature it can see within 90 feet of it. The monster has advantage on ranged attack rolls against the target until the end of the monster's next turn.

Vulnerable Target. The monster makes a ranged attack against a creature that is incapacitated. If the attack hits, it deals an additional 7 (2d6) damage.

STRIKERS

Strikers tend to have high damage legendary actions, but they might also have non-damaging alternatives that are used to compliment their exact lore and flavor.

Critical Strike. The monster makes an attack against one target. If the attack hits and some condition is met, the attack becomes a critical hit.

Dash Attack. The monster moves up to half its speed and makes one attack.

Blitz (Costs 2 Actions). The monster moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks. It can make one melee attack against each creature it moves past.

Curse (Costs 2 Actions). The monster magically curses one creature it can see within 60 feet of it. The cursed creature gains vulnerability to all damage dealt by the monster until the end of the monster's next turn.

Rapid Assault (Costs 3 Actions). The monster makes three attacks against one target. The monster gains advantage on the attack rolls if some condition has been met (e.g. the target is incapacitated).

MYTHIC TRAITS AND ACTIONS

The official setting book *Mythic Odysseys of Theros* introduced mythic monsters, which are a tier above legendary actions. This mechanic prevents a monster from dying at 0 hit points - instead, they effectively regain all of their hit points and gain access to powerful new legendary action options called mythic actions. A mythic monster thus counts as two distinct monsters of its Challenge Rating for the purpose of encounter balancing and experience rewards.

Personally, I think this is a great addition to 5e. It is elegant, flexible, and very effective at what it is trying to do. In fact, I even made my own mythic monster in my [Elder Evils](#) 5e conversion as soon as I learned how they work.

BREAKDOWN

Mythic monsters have two key components: a mythic trait, and mythic actions that are associated with it.

A mythic trait that details the monster's optional "second phase". Instead of dying at 0 HP, it regains all of its hit points, or it otherwise triggers a mechanic that grants them that many effective hit points. This also leaves room for the monster to immediately take some sort of movement and/or action. This trait typically recharges after a short or long rest, but might not recharge at all if it is a permanent transformation.

With this mythic trait comes a list of mythic actions. Mythic actions are new legendary action options that the monster gains access to once their mythic trait is triggered. These legendary actions are generally more powerful than their old ones, but they still retain access to their old ones if needed. Mythic actions are typically available for 1 hour after the mythic trait is triggered, but this can be changed to fit a particular monster's circumstances.

VARIANTS

Here are some variants of this system that you can use for your mythic monsters.

Traits and Actions. In addition to gaining new legendary actions, you can also give a mythic monster access to new traits and abilities when their mythic trait is active. For example, if you want to give a monster Limited Magic Immunity during its second phase, you can label this trait as "Limited Magic Immunity (Mythic Form Only)". If you want a monster to lose access to a feature, such as a Frightful Presence action, you can instead label it as "Frightful Presence (Original Form Only)". This notation is similar to features that are restricted to a shapeshifter's specific forms, such as those of a werewolf.

Extra Action Slots. You can also grant a mythic monster an extra action on its turn each round called a "mythic maneuver". Note that this extra action might be oppressive if it isn't heavily restricted. I would personally recommend restricting this maneuver to be strictly utility-based (e.g. the Dash or Disengage action), but if proper restrictions are applied, damage-based abilities should be fine as well (e.g. one weapon attack only).

A similar concept applies to reactions: you can grant the monster an additional reaction slot, or access to a trait like Reactive, while its mythic trait is active.

Multiple Transformations. Want to have a monster with more than just two phases? Label its mythic trait with multiple uses per day, and that's all you need to do. That said, such a monster will be much stronger than a normal mythic monster, which is already very strong compared to a normal legendary monster. With this in mind, perhaps the monster's transformations shouldn't restore all of its hit points, or perhaps the monster should have less hit points to begin with.

GENERIC MYTHIC TRAITS

Here are some mythic traits you can copy or build off of to create your own mythic monsters.

Basic Mythic Monster (Mythic Trait; Recharges after a Short or Long Rest) If the monster is reduced to 0 hit points, it doesn't die or fall unconscious. Instead, it regains all of its hit points.

Exposed Weak Points (Mythic Trait; Recharges after a Short or Long Rest) If the monster is reduced to 0 hit points, it doesn't die or fall unconscious. Instead, the damage reveals the monster's four weak points. A weak point shares the monster's AC and has a quarter of its hit point maximum. It also shares the monster's damage vulnerabilities, resistances, and immunities, and it is immune to all conditions. If it is forced to make a saving throw, treat its ability scores as 10 (+0). If the monster finishes a short or long rest, the monster heals, any destroyed weak points regenerate, and the weak points are covered again. The monster dies when all of its weak points are destroyed.

Permanent Transformation (Mythic Trait) If the monster is reduced to 0 hit points, it doesn't die or fall unconscious. Instead, it regains all of its hit points, and it permanently transforms into a second form. This form is immune to all conditions, has advantage on all saving throws, and deals an additional 7 (2d6) damage whenever it hits with a weapon attack. Otherwise, this form uses the monster's normal statistics.

Punishing Transformation (Mythic Trait; Recharges after a Short or Long Rest) If the monster is reduced to 0 hit points, it doesn't die or fall unconscious. Instead, it regains all of its hit points, it recharges all of its actions, it moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks, and it makes one weapon attack against the creature that reduced it to 0 hit points, if possible.

Limited Rejuvenation (Mythic Trait; Recharges after a Short or Long Rest) If the monster dies, its body reforms at the start of its next turn, regaining all its hit points and becoming active again.

Multi-Stage Fight (Mythic Trait; 2/Day) If the monster is reduced to 0 hit points, it doesn't die or fall unconscious. Instead, it regains all of its hit points, and it regains one spell slot of 8th level or lower, as well as one use of its Legendary Resistance feature.

EXTRA FEATURES

The traits and abilities below are examples of other features you can use to hook into the mythic monster system.

Mythic Fury. If the monster's mythic trait is active, the number of legendary actions it can take each round increases by 1 for 1 hour after using it.

Mythic Maneuver. While the monster's mythic trait is active, it gains an additional action it can use on each of its turns. That action can be used only to take the Dash, Disengage, Hide, Search, or Use an Object action.

Mythic Reaction. While the monster's mythic trait is active, it gains a special reaction that it can take once per round. The monster can't use this special reaction on the same turn that it takes its normal reaction.

Variable Resistance. While the monster's mythic trait is active, it gains resistance to one damage type of its choice for 1 hour after using it.

BOSS FIGHTS EXPANDED

Some DMs may wish to alter the details of their boss fights beyond what the official books suggest. This section provides tools and features that may help with that.

BOSS PHASES

A classic trope is that of boss phases: at some point(s) during the battle, the boss changes its form or gains powerful abilities that weren't used during the first part of the fight. Boss phases continue the tension and excitement of a fight by granting a boss new abilities, allowing it to break free from a detrimental effect, or otherwise changing the circumstances of the battle.

TRANSITION TRIGGERS

Most phase changes take place when a monster is reduced to a certain HP threshold. For example, the **bloodied** condition, which takes effect when a monster is reduced to half of its hit points or fewer, is a popular descriptor used in 4th Edition. By attaching mechanics to this descriptor (e.g. automatically recharging an action), you can be used to transform fights with even the simplest of monsters into exciting challenges that have an unexpected twist halfway through the fight.

With that in mind, feel free to add your own phases as you see fit; for example, you can have a monster change phases at every third or fourth of its hit points.

You can also have a phase transition occur when a monster is reduced to 0 hit points. When this occurs, it will typically

Meanwhile, some phase changes might occur due to external forces. For example, perhaps an aspiring necromancer is currently undergoing the transformation into a lich, but the party has barged in and is attempting to stop the ritual from completing. When this is the case, a phase change typically occurs when some milestone in the ritual is reached, such as its halfway point or its full interruption. To manage such a fight, keep track of how many rounds have gone by, relative to the duration required for the ritual to complete.

TRANSITION EFFECTS

Whenever a monster changes phases, one or more of the following effects can occur:

- The monster ends all detrimental conditions and effects on itself
- The monster recharges or regains uses of one or more of its abilities
- The monster immediately uses one of its abilities as a reaction
- The monster gains access to new features and/or loses access to existing features
- The monster's general statistics (e.g. its speed or condition immunities) change
- The monster gains a number of temporary hit points, or it regains a number of regular hit points
- The monster gains advantage on certain rolls for a short duration
- The monster summons one or more of its allies
- The monster's weak points are revealed
- The monster changes to a new stat block altogether

ACTION ORIENTED MONSTERS

Matt Colville's [Action Oriented Combat](#) video extensively discusses homebrew rules and guidelines for boss fights. The discussion boils down to the following ideas regarding "Action Oriented Monsters" (AO monsters):

- AO monsters should have access to regular actions, bonus actions, and reactions, as well as "villain actions". These abilities should all be diverse and unique in nature, rather than all of them just being some sort of weapon attack.
- Villain actions, in Colville's words, are once-per-round legendary actions that are "scripted" in nature. That is, specific villain actions are set to be used on certain rounds in combat, meaning that they are scripted to be used in a certain order.

Some of the **finer details** are also important to remember:

- Even if there is more than one AO monster on the field, one villain action being used per round is enough. The monsters can share villain actions, or you can pick and choose (or just write out from the start) which monster gets to use their villain action each round.
- Adhering to traditional game mechanics is fine, but the point of this free-form system is to allow for abilities to exist without having to justify them beyond "because it's cool". Monsters shouldn't have the same limitations as PCs do, so they should be able to do whatever the DM wants them to (unless it is unfair or doesn't make any sense).

What **lessons** can we learn from this and apply to our general knowledge of official monster making rules? Let's see:

- Game mechanics are ultimately the vehicle through which the narrative is delivered. Don't let the rules of the system hold you back from creating powers that are cool and exciting (unless they are unfair to your players, of course). Monsters aren't built like player characters are, so they don't have to follow the same rules to determine what powers they get and how much they can use them. The only limit here is how you choose to design the monster.
- In order to engage your players with an important monster, the monster can't be static in its actions. By creating a diverse set of monster abilities where there isn't an option that is objectively the best to use throughout the majority of the fight, you have an encounter whose pacing, excitement, and dramatic tension is much better than that of a static encounter.
- If there is more than one legendary monster on the field, you might want to condense their legendary action options into one pool of legendary actions to track. These abilities should be more powerful than a single monster's legendary actions, as they represent the firepower of multiple monsters at once. For an official example of this, see the Obzedat Ghost stat block (GGR 245). The same idea applies to lair actions: if two legendary monsters share a lair, it might be wise to use one list of (possibly empowered) lair actions.

AO monsters seem pretty cool. That, are there any **flaws** to this approach?

- If you make AO monsters for yourself, that sounds pretty great. However, if you make monsters to be published/used by others, using a homebrew approach to monster making might be incompatible with many DMs's games. This applies to all homebrew monster creation methods, it applies here in particular because if you are publishing your monsters publicly, you can accomplish much of what Colville sought to do with this method via the use of pre-existing game mechanics.
- AO monsters are designed with the goal of being dynamic, but the way they are set up might just encourage the opposite. While villain actions are like regular lair actions in that they can be used after a specific player's turn, the scripted order in which they are used makes it harder for a monster to adapt to a given situation. For example, the AO Goblin Boss's "Focus Fire" villain action, which allows the Boss's goblin minions to immediately move towards one creature of the Boss's choice, might not make sense to use when the current fight involves sniping the party from range and then immediately using Nimble Escape to hide again. Yet, the Goblin Boss is forced to either use the ability anyway, which is a suboptimal tactical decision, or to not to use the ability at all, which makes the whole system pointless. With legendary actions, there will always be some option that can be used by the monster in any given situation.
- Building off of the previous point, villain actions only being usable once per round can sometimes be less exciting and fast-paced than being able to use multiple legendary actions per round. While the individual legendary actions might not be as strong, being able to actually respond to the party's actions multiple times per round (beyond the monster's reaction) can make a solo fight much more challenging than. Besides, you can always make some options cost two or three legendary actions; a legendary action that costs three actions is literally a villain action without the flaws described here.

As you can see, all of these criticisms are directed towards the "villain action" system, which is the only actual part of Colville's video that deviates from the existing 5e system. Thus, I will summarize my **adjusted version** of this system into the following advice:

- On its turn, a boss monster should have access to both utility-based and damage-based abilities. For example, you can give it the traditional option to Multiattack as an action, and then to reposition one of its allies as a bonus action. Even if the monster is a striker, if all it can do is deal damage, then the monster will probably be boring unless great care is taken in making the monster fun and exciting.
- Outside of its turn, a boss monster should be able to respond to the party's behavior through the use of extra abilities. Such abilities often take the form of reactions (directly responding to a trigger) and legendary actions (using an ability after a party member ends its turn), but variants of these abilities can work too if done right.

- To make a boss monster cool, it shouldn't be using the same abilities over and over again. Whether through a diverse pool of legendary actions or a sequence of scripted events, using different abilities as the rounds go on maintains the excitement and tension over the course of the fight.

PARAGON MONSTERS

A few years ago, the [Angry GM](#) released a blog post about designing boss fights in 5e. In particular, he drafted up a stat block for a "two-headed, two-tailed, bifurcated snake", which while silly on its own, reveals an interesting concept for "paragon monsters": to make a boss monster, you can effectively combine two different monsters into one stat block. Such a paragon monster has two core components:

- **Health Pools:** The monster has multiple health pools. This lends itself well to boss phases, and it also acts as a stopgap that prevents the monster from being bursted down. This is because damage doesn't carry over from one health pool to the other. Additionally, when a health pool is reduced to 0, all conditions and effects end on the monster.
- **Paragon Actions:** The monster can take multiple turns and reactions in combat; it gains one turn and reaction for every health pool it currently has.

Future installments of the series also go into detail on the following variants:

- Monsters that gain turns as they lose health pools, rather than losing them
- Dismemberment and targeting different body parts of a monster
- Monsters that have different actions in different forms
- Swarms and smaller groups of multiple weaker minions
- Monsters that split into multiple other monsters
- Lair actions that don't require a lair

A lot of this stuff is pretty cool. However, this system has a few flaws:

Complexity. In general, it requires more tracking and notekeeping than a normal legendary monster, especially when dealing with his version of group monsters.

Lack of Excitement. As the author admits, if you just use the core components, a paragon monster doesn't actually become more interesting. Even though it has extra turns and reactions, it doesn't actually have anything new to use them on by default.

Redundancy. With the release of mythic monsters, many of the things that paragon monsters set out to do (e.g. transformations) can be handled via mythic traits and actions instead.

Verbose. This system is rather verbose in how it writes everything out, especially when dealing with multiple forms. While this is fine on its own, it's something to weigh against the simplicity of legendary actions.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARAGON ACTIONS

As a whole, if you like AngryGM's stuff, feel free to use it. That said, between legendary actions, mythic actions, the options discussed earlier in this document, and the new traits listed below, you might be better off if you pick and choose what you like from his homebrew for use on your own monsters. Note that any trait below that refers to legendary actions can also be changed to work on reactions as well.

Dismemberment. When the monster takes damage equal to or greater than a quarter of its maximum hit points in a single turn, one of its limbs or body parts are destroyed.

Legendary Fury. When the monster is reduced to two-thirds of its maximum hit points or fewer, the number of legendary actions it can take each round increases by 1. This effect occurs again at one-third of the monster's hit points or fewer.

Legendary Movement. Whenever the monster takes a legendary action, it can also move up to half its speed.

Permanent Transformation. When the monster is reduced to 0 hit points, it doesn't die or fall unconscious. Instead, it transforms into or gains the statistics of another monster.

Weak Point (1/Turn). If an attack is aimed at the monster's weak point and the attack roll has advantage, the attack deals additional damage to the monster equal to its Challenge Rating.

PARAGON ACTIONS REVISED

Perhaps you have found mythic monsters to be a bit too weak for your liking. If that is the case, maybe we can solve paragon actions by attaching them to the existing mythic monster system.

First, let's represent a second health pool by giving the monster a mythic trait. Grab one of the generic mythic traits listed earlier in this chapter and slap it on your paragon monster. Second, we need to address the flaws listed earlier. Let's take a page from legendary actions, and make a predetermined list of what a monster can use its "paragon action(s)" on in combat.

We can format this by adding a new section called "Paragon Actions". Give it a header along these lines:

Paragon Actions

If the monster's mythic trait is active, it can take two turns each round in combat for 1 hour after using it. The extra turn is taken at the monster's initiative minus 10. This extra turn is taken as normal, but the monster doesn't recharge any of its abilities or regain any of its spent legendary actions. During this extra turn, the monster only has access to the action options listed below.

From there, you can make a list of paragon actions that the monster can choose from on its extra turn. This lets you have a monster that can take multiple turns each round without being repetitive or inherently unbalanced.

If you want to have a monster that can take more than two turns each round, use the wording below. Note that an extra sentence has been appended to this header to ensure that the monster uses a variety of different actions in combat.

Paragon Actions

If the monster's mythic trait is active, it can take three turns each round in combat for 1 hour after using it. The two extra turns are taken at the monster's initiative minus 10 and at its initiative minus 20. These extra turns are taken as normal, but the monster doesn't recharge any of its abilities or regain any of its spent legendary actions. During these extra turns, the monster only has access to the action options listed below. The monster can't use the same action option more than once per round.

CUSTOMIZING EXISTING MONSTERS

Most of the document so far has been about making new monsters. But what about making edits to existing ones? As it turns out, a lot of that advice still applies here.

STATISTICAL EDITS

The easiest way to change a monster is to edit its numerical statistics - hit points, AC, ability scores, etcetera.

TRIVIAL CHANGES

First, let's discuss the types of changes you can make to a monster that don't really change its Challenge Rating:

- Changing its creature type, alignment, speed, skills, condition immunities, senses, or languages
- Increasing or decreasing its size without changing its hit point maximum
- Increasing or decreasing ability scores that aren't used to calculate other statistics
- Changing the types of damage it is vulnerable, resistant, or immune to (except bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing)
- Adding or removing features that don't contribute to damage, defense, or utility when in combat
- Reflavoring the source of its armor or the descriptions of its attacks
- Changing the types of damage it deals with its abilities
- Changing the types of saving throws imposed by its abilities

In general, changes that don't actually change a monster's numbers are trivial and won't affect the monster's CR.

EASY CHANGES

Any description of how certain features and statistics will affect a creature's CR can be used to determine a variant monster's CR without having to recalculate anything. In particular, the Monster Features Revisited section earlier in this document expresses these descriptions in terms of CR adjustments, which you can apply to an existing monster when making edits of it. For example, if you give a CR 5 monster the Magic Resistance trait (DCR +1) and an extra +2 to its attack bonus or save DC (OCR +1), that monster will become CR 6.

HARDER CHANGES

Most other changes you make will require you to do a soft recalculation of the monster's Challenge Rating. These recalculations are generally straightforward, but take a bit more work than the other changes.

Damage and Hit Points. A guard (MM 347) has an OCR of 1/4 and a DCR of 0. Changing its weapon from a spear to a greatsword might sound easy enough, but that changes its average damage to $8 (2d6 + 1)$ - that's twice its one-handed damage! That changes its OCR to 1/2. Similarly, giving an assassin (MM 343) an extra two hit dice will bring its HP to 91 (13 higher than before). This change might not seem like much, but it is already enough to increase its DCR by 1.

Whenever you change statistics like a monster's hit dice, Constitution score, or damage dice, be sure to check the DMG to see how these changes to its hit points or damage per round affects the monster's CR.

With the guard example, you could always just flavor the guard to have a greatsword, but to continue using the damage dice provided for its spear. While your players could potentially notice that the guard isn't doing that much damage with its "greatsword", it is an easy way to vary its weapon of choice without actually changing its statistics.

Changing Spells. Changing the spells a monster has access to can have a major impact on its CR. For example, if you give a monster access to the *shield* spell, expect its DCR to become much higher. Meanwhile, giving a monster that mostly has supportive spells access to *fireball* will probably cause its OCR to go up.

Before changing a monster's spells, first determine the optimal spell sequence that was originally used to calculate its Challenge Rating. Knowing this, we can figure out which spells are harmless to remove and which spells can be added without any problems.

For example, a mage (MM 347) will deal the most damage with a *cone of cold* spell followed by two uses of a 4th-level *fireball*, while also relying on the *counterspell*, *greater invisibility*, *mage armor*, and *shield* spells for defense. This means that every other spell it has is fair game to replace. Adding spells like *mirror image* and *slow* could warrant an increase in CR, so let's instead replace *fire bolt* with *chill touch*, *misty step* with *darkness*, and *ice storm* with *blight* to give this mage a darker bend.

Note that despite not affecting its CR, spell swaps like these can and often will change a monster's combat effectiveness. For example, the mage's *misty step* spell might not contribute to its Challenge Rating, but it is an important tool that allows it to escape melee fights more easily. Without it, this variant mage might be easier to defeat in battle, even though its CR never actually changed.

ITEMS AND EQUIPMENT

Stat blocks for monsters purposefully don't include any extra equipment so that you are free to customize them as you see fit.

ADVENTURING GEAR

The PHB includes items like alchemist's fire, caltrops, ball bearings, and oil that are generally used by adventurers, but can also be used by monsters. Especially when used by monsters that are especially weak or otherwise meant for low-level characters, the use of this adventuring gear can have a significant impact on the difficulty of a given encounter, which is only amplified by the amount of preparation time the monsters have.

MAGIC ITEMS

If you are ever looking to give your players a new magic item or two, instead of putting them in a chest at the end of the dungeon, consider giving this item to a monster for it to wield during combat. A monster that wields a magic item is more likely to become a memorable and exciting encounter for your players, and it makes them feel like they have earned the magic item once they have finally defeated its original wielder.

CONSUMABLES

Potions, poisons, and other consumable items deserve a special shoutout due to how they interact with monsters. Because a consumable goes away after a monster uses it, the party can't actually loot it from them once it has been defeated. Thus, when giving consumable items to a monster, you needn't consider whether or not they will be balanced in the hands of the party nearly as much as you would with a permanent item. And because monsters are generally only fought once before they are killed, consumable items are more valuable in their hands than in the hands of the players. Best of all, consumable items can still be just as memorable as regular items are. An ogre that drinks a *potion of invulnerability* is bound to be just as fun of a fight compared to an ogre that wields a *shield of missile attraction*: the only difference is that the party can loot the shield, but not the consumed potion.

NEW ACTION OPTIONS

Another way to make monsters more interesting is to give them access to more universal options like Dash, Disengage, and Dodge.

ALTERNATIVE ATTACKS

When a monster hits a creature with a weapon attack, you can allow it to forgo dealing damage and to create some other effect instead. Some example effects are listed below.

Blind. The target is blinded until the start (or end) of its next turn.

Disarm. The target drops one item of the monster's choice that it is holding.

Disrupt. The target's concentration is broken.

Forced Movement. The target is pushed, pulled, or otherwise forcibly moved a certain distance as appropriate. This distance should scale with the monster's size: 5 feet for Medium and smaller, 10 feet for Large, 15 feet for Huge, and 20 feet or more for Gargantuan.

Grapple. The target is automatically grappled, following the same escape rules as other monsters. For an official example of this, see the unarmed strike attack of a vampire (MM 297).

Prone. The target is knocked prone.

Stun. The target is stunned until the start (or end) of its next turn.

As you can imagine, this setup can be used to inflict other conditions as appropriate. For example, a particularly putrid monster could replace one of its attacks with an attempt to inflict the poisoned condition on the target. When appropriate, feel free to have the target of one of these attacks attack make an ability check or saving throw against the effect, instead of rolling to hit their AC.

GRAPPLING AND SHOVING

Unlike the Attack action, a monster's Multiattack action doesn't allow it to replace its attacks with grapples or shoves by RAW. That said, it's easy enough to ignore RAW here and to allow grapple and shove replacement anyway.

IMPROVISED ATTACKS

Monsters can make improvised attacks just as players can. Perhaps the ancient red dragon that is burning down the city decides to drop a small cart on top of the party, or the evil thug that is mugging the party wields a glass bottle as their weapon of choice. You can give your monsters improvised attacks in order to add variety to your combat encounters.

As we are making monsters and not player characters, we can ignore the official rules for improvised attacks. Instead, all monsters are proficient in improvised attacks, which can be either melee or ranged (thrown) as appropriate. Compared to the monster's weakest attack, the damage dice of a monster's improvised attacks are one size smaller, to a minimum of 1d4. For example, if a monster's weakest attack has damage dice of 2d10, its improvised attacks have damage dice of 2d8.

CREATURE TEMPLATES

If you wish to make quick modifications to a monster that doesn't involve rewriting all of its statistics, check out the Creature Templates section of this document (Appendix A). Creature templates are packages of new features and statistical changes you can give to a monster to turn them into something new. For example, the *Monster Manual* has a shadow dragon template you can apply to any dragon to turn them into a Shadowfell-based version of themselves. With generic templates like the ones provided in this document, customizing a monster becomes super easy, while still allowing the impact on its final Challenge Rating to be predictable or otherwise easy to calculate.

CULTS AND BOONS

To make generic monsters more interesting, you can give them cult features or supernatural boons that help to convey their flavor more effectively.

In the official books, these cult features and supernatural boons take the following forms:

- Elder Evil Blessings for members of an Elder Evil cult
- Demonic Boons granted by especially powerful demons or demon lords
- Diabolical Cults in service of various archdevils that grant cult features
- Worshippers of an evil god like Bhaal that all have the same set of features

In addition to these official options, I encourage you to create your own features that are shared between members of the organizations and cults of your campaign. The basic setup is to create one option that most members have access to, and another option that only the elites or upper echelon of the faction can get. Generally speaking, these features are primarily applicable in combat scenarios, and don't contribute too much to a creature's Challenge Rating.

By using cult features and supernatural boons, you create a cohesive theme and flavor that can be conveyed mechanically, rather than just through descriptions and roleplay.

PC FEATS OR CLASS FEATURES

You could decide to give a monster access to a feat or class feature, setting it apart from its peers. The PC Options for Monsters section of this document will have everything you need to do this.

CUSTOM SPELLCASTING

While spellcasting provides plenty of opportunities for customization, it still might fall short at times. Here's what you can do to change that.

To see many of the changes below in action, check out the **force mage** stat block in Appendix C.

DAILY SPELLCASTING

Compared to the normal Spellcasting feature, Innate Spellcasting is very freeform. Instead of using rigid spell slots, it lets you assign how many times a given spell can be cast each day. It can even allow a monster to cast a leveled spell at will, if appropriate.

But why does this approach need to be restricted to innate spellcasters, anyway? If monsters don't have to follow the same rules as players in other instances, then why do they use the same spell slot system as them? The answer is that while official monsters might use slots, you don't have to.

Having daily spells via a Spellcasting feature doesn't take any effort. The format of the header is basically identical to that of an innate spellcaster, except with all mentions of "innate" removed and a spellcasting class and level optionally being referenced.

This approach makes balancing spellcasting monsters much easier, while also making them easier to track in combat. For example, you can use this approach to cut out any non-combat spells, or to make its main attack spell at-will for simplicity.

MODIFIED SPELLS

Official monsters sometimes have extra parenthetical notes after their innate spells. For example, you might find "(self only)" after a *mage armor* or *plane shift* spell. We can use this notation as a way to deliver other changes to certain spells.

If you wish to string more than one of these modifications together, use a single set of parentheses, with each modification being separated by a semicolon.

Spell Level. By default, innate spellcasters (as well as daily spellcasters, as above) cast their spells at the lowest level possible. However, you can add a note that allows a monster to cast certain spells at higher levels. For example, a monster that has "*fireball* (5th level)" will cast this spell at 5th level every time, instead of 3rd level.

Damage Type. You can change the damage type of a monster's spell if it is appropriate for its theme. For example, a monster that has "*incendiary cloud* (necrotic damage)" will deal necrotic damage with this spell, instead of its normal damage type.

Different Targets. You can change the number of targets a spell will have. For example, you can write "*blight* (two targets)" or "*bless* (one target only)". Note that the former example is a good way to represent the Twinned Spell metamagic.

Different Size or Range. You can change the size of a spell's area of effect, or you can change its range. For example, a monster that has "*fire bolt* (240-foot range)" will be able to cast this spell at twice its normal range, and a monster with "*cone of cold* (120-foot cone)" will create a much larger blast of cold than normal.

Other Restrictions. When a spell has a variety of effects or possibilities to choose from, you can choose to restrict them as appropriate. For example, a monster with "*animal shapes* (insects only)" can only use the spell to turn others into insectoid beasts, while a monster with "*symbol* (discord only)" can only create a discord glyph when it casts the spell.

CUSTOM SPELLS

The adventure *Baldur's Gate: Descent Into Avernus* introduced the following notation to 5e:

Ray of Sickness (1st-Level Spell; Requires a Spell Slot).
Ranged Spell Attack: +5 to hit, range 60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of the monster's next turn. If the monster casts this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d8 for each slot level above 1st.

In the official books, this notation is used to make spellcasting monsters easier to run, as it reduces the amount of bookkeeping required to use them. However, what if we could take advantage of this for our own purposes?

As it turns out, we can use this notation to give a monster access to spells of our own design. We can do this in any of the following cases:

- The monster significantly modified an existing spell somehow
- We want to give a monster access to a spell from another homebrew
- The monster has a spell that is somehow restricted to NPCs only
- We want to give the monster a magical effect that can interact with *counterspell* and *dispel magic*

To do this, we only need to list our custom spell as a regular monster feature, and to explicitly label that it is a leveled spell as appropriate. For example, you can give a particularly necromantic monster access to the following homebrew spell of my own design:

Clutch of Orcus (3rd-Level Spell; Requires a Spell Slot).
One humanoid of the monster's choice within 60 feet of it begins to suffer a magic-induced heart attack. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take 13 (3d8) necrotic damage and be stunned for 1 minute or until the monster's concentration ends. At the end of each of its turns, the target repeats the saving throw. It takes 13 (3d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, and the spell ends on the target on a successful one.

Keep in mind that you don't have to tie these spells to spell slots. For example, you can make them at will, or you can put them on a recharge like other monster features. The only thing that distinguishes one of these from a regular monster feature is that it counts as a spell for the purpose of other game effects.

PC OPTIONS FOR MONSTERS

Even with the variety of generic features available for you to choose from, there are times when it is appropriate to give your monsters some of the options that are normally used by player characters.

NPCs WITH CLASSES

Page 282 of the DMG describes two ways of creating NPCs from scratch: making a traditional stat block, or using the same process that you use to create a player character. While the second option might make sense when creating an NPC companion for the party, there are some important reasons why using class levels to make NPCs doesn't work:

- Classes are designed with resources, flavorful ribbon features, and other unique abilities for a single player to be preoccupied with. As a DM, having to handle an entire PC while also running the rest of the game is a lot of effort.
- Player characters are designed to have enough power to handle multiple combat encounters per adventuring day, while monsters are built to be ran once before being defeated. This means that NPCs built using class levels will have a very high damage output compared to their defensive capabilities. This is the same reason why running one encounter per adventuring day is an issue, and why PvP between characters in the same party almost always goes wrong.

To summarize, **you shouldn't build your monsters the same way you build player characters**. But then an issue arises, how do you make a stat block for a monster that is associated with a given player class?

ADDING CLASSES TO MONSTERS

First, let's discuss the official options for this. Page 283 of the DMG presents a process you can use to give class levels to pre-existing monsters. In short, it's the same as it is with players, but the monster's hit dice stay the same size, and its proficiency bonus is based on the Challenge Rating you end up with.

This process is decent when used in moderation. After all, only one or two levels in fighter don't offer much in terms of resource management compared to five or six levels in druid. Even so, this method still has the same flaws given in the previous section. Additionally, the same section admits that adding class levels to a monster has an extremely variable effect on CR. This is to be expected: PCs are built differently from monsters, so of course things work differently. That said, it goes against the monster design steps described in this document: if the goal is to determine a target CR before making the monster, then giving the monster class levels will be a guessing game.

So how can we do better? Simply put, we can build monsters using individual class features and unique traits of our own design that we pick and choose as appropriate.

CLASSES IN THE GAME WORLD

It is clear that the player classes that exist in the game are not encompassing of every power source and archetype out there. Additionally, not all creatures within the same class gain the same abilities. Here is a list of a few of these differences:

- Not all members of a class gain a subclass. For example, **mages** (MM 347) don't have an Arcane Tradition.
- Some members of a class gain new abilities that players can't access. For example, **bards** (VGM 211) have a Taunt ability that normal bards can't normally get.
- Not all members of a class gain certain class features. For example, some druids might not have Wild Shape, while others might not even have spellcasting.
- Some members of a class can further develop their abilities or can reduce their restrictions. For example, **diviners** (VGM 213) have a modified version of Portent that is rolled during combat rather than after a long rest, and it recharges whenever the diviner casts a divination spell of 1st level or higher, rather than being limited to two uses per day.

This understanding can be used to justify monsters that are associated with certain classes having features that players don't have access to. For example, you can give the Martial Advantage feature to fighter-like warriors, and you can give resistance to damage from spells to archmages and other powerful wizards. This is elaborated on in the Example Monster Class Features section below. For now, let's discuss how to use existing class features on your monsters.

CLASS FEATURES FOR MONSTERS

It is worth noting that many class features, like Action Surge, Cunning Action, and Spellcasting, are fairly easy to give to monsters as-is. But then there are some features, like Ki, Metamagic, and Wild Shape, that need some modifications before being given to a monster.

REMOVING RESOURCES

Traditionally, monsters can access their abilities through the following resources, as described in the *Monster Manual*:

- At will: A monster can use this ability without any resource restrictions.
- 1/Turn: A monster can only use this ability once per turn, or maybe only on each of their turns.
- Recharge: Once a monster uses this ability, they have to roll a d6 each round to see if they can use it again.
- Short Rest: Once a monster uses this ability, they can't do so again until they finish a short or long rest.
- Spell Slots: A monster must expend a spell slot of appropriate level to use this spell or other ability.
- X/Day: A monster has X uses of this ability. They regain all expended uses of it when they finish a short or long rest.

Many class features work through other resources that could be converted to one of the ones above:

- X times Short Rest: Instead of tracking uses of features like Ki and Combat Superiority between short rests, it might make sense to give a monster's maneuvers or ki arts a Recharge of 4-6, or perhaps you can make some of them 1/turn or at-will as appropriate.
- Channel Divinity: Instead of sharing one resource pool, you can just make each one an independent Short Rest ability.
- Special: Features like a Zealot Barbarian's Fanatical Focus that only work once per rage or otherwise are limited in some unique way should typically be made at will or on a recharge

In general, you should consider how many times you want your monster to use a certain feature per round. If you only want it to work once or twice, tie it to a short rest or make it X/Day. If you want it to be used frequently but not every round, give it a recharge. If you want it to be used throughout the entire fight, make it at will or turn it into a passive ability.

FEATURES TO EXCLUDE

Not all class features are necessary to give a monster. In general, consider excluding the following abilities from a monster:

Niche Abilities. Unless you foresee the monster using this ability in combat, don't add it. For example, a cleric monster won't need Turn Undead unless it is relevant to their theme or if the campaign has a lot of undead in it.

Skill Bonuses. Features like Jack of All Trades and Reliable Talent can be replaced with extra skill proficiencies. The monster can also be given expertise in certain skills as appropriate.

Modifiers. Features like a Fighting Style, the War Wizard's Tactical Wit, and the Lifedrinker warlock invocation aren't necessary unless they are really important to the monster. For example, you can replace Tactical Wit with advantage on all initiative rolls, and you can simply add extra dice of necrotic damage to the warlock's melee weapons. You can exclude a Fighting Style altogether, as the monster's AC and attack bonus are already customized according to CR.

Resource Buffs. Features like Arcane Recovery and a Samurai Fighter's Tireless Spirit aren't usually needed. In the latter case, you can just choose a different resource as discussed in the previous section.

Extras. Features that add extra cantrips, spells, languages, skills, tools, movement, resistances, and so on don't need to be written down or anything. You can simply parse them and add them to the monster's statistics, without any actual mention of the feature unless you feel it is necessary.

Non-Combat Abilities. Features like a Battle Master Fighter's Know Your Enemy and an Inquisitive Rogue's Eye for Detail can be useful, but not only are they niche, but they are almost entirely non-combat abilities. Simply exclude them unless you feel they are necessary.

LEVEL SCALINGS

Some class features, such as Second Wind and Spellcasting, have damage or uses that scale off of your level in that class. So if you aren't actually adding class levels to a monster, then how do you determine what level it counts as? You have two options: use the monster's CR, or come up with the monster's "virtual class level". After all, even if it doesn't actually have a class level, the monster might *represent* a certain class level, so you can use that target level for scalings.

In the Example Monster Features section below, I use the latter option. Feel free to use either one, or to remove the scalings altogether.

MUNDANE VERSUS SUPERNATURAL

As you go higher and higher on the CR scale, it becomes harder and harder to make a monster that doesn't have some any manner of supernatural attack (e.g. spellcasting) or defense (e.g. damage resistances). This is because it is harder to make a "mundane" monster that deals enough damage, has adequate defenses, has a proper justification for its powers, and as a whole is an interesting creature to fight. For example, it makes sense for the typical iron golem to have 210 HP due to its size and material, but a humanoid pit fighter with 210 HP is bound to be among the strongest warriors in the region or even the entire setting.

Because of this, many martial creatures (especially those representing the barbarian, fighter, and rogue classes) need extra attacks, saving throw proficiencies, magic items, legendary resistances, legendary actions, or innate spells in order to reach higher CRs. Keep this in mind when designing your monsters.

EXAMPLE MONSTER CLASS FEATURES

In addition to picking and choosing from existing class and subclass features, consider using the following features to represent monsters that are associated with certain character classes.

ARTIFICER

Artificers are tricky because they are inherently tied to magic items, which are something most monsters don't have. That said, infusions vanish from an item at least one day after the monster's death, allowing you to give an artificer monster items without fear of your players getting their hands on them.

Foundation of Knowledge. The monster can cast spells of 1st level at will, without expending a spell slot.

Improvised Action. On each of its turns, the monster can use a bonus action to take the Help, Search, or Use an Object action.

Magical Genius. As an action, the monster can roll a d4 and regain a spell slot of that level or lower. If it has no spent spell slots of that level or lower, nothing happens.

Retooled Spell. When the monster casts a spell that deals damage, it can change the spell's damage to cold, fire, force, lightning, or thunder.

Spell Versatility (Recharge 5-6). At the start of its turn, the monster can immediately swap one of its prepared spells for another spell on the artificer spell list.

BARBARIAN

Barbarians are easy to represent due to their straightforward manner of attacking. To reach higher CRs, they can be given damage resistances and other forms of damage mitigation that are adequately explained by their Rage feature.

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the monster hits with it (included in the attack).

Deadly Critical. The monster scores a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20 and rolls the damage dice three times, instead of twice.

Rage. In combat, the monster is raging while it isn't incapacitated. While raging, the monster has advantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws, it has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, and it deals one extra die of damage when it hits with a melee weapon attack.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the monster can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

Relentless (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). If the monster takes damage that is equal to or less than 10 + its Constitution modifier that would reduce it to 0 hit points, it is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

BARD

Bards can easily be represented through their spells, music, and skill proficiencies (including Expertise). Beyond that, any features you give a bardic monster should relate to their Bardic Inspiration or should be usable on top of their spellcasting.

Bardic Inspiration (Recharge 4-6). As a bonus action, the monster chooses one creature within 60 feet of it that can hear the monster. Once within the next 10 minutes, the target can roll a d6 and add the number rolled to one ability check, attack roll, or saving throw it makes.

Combat Inspiration. While the monster isn't incapacitated and can play its music, allies within 30 feet of the monster that can hear the monster have advantage on attack rolls and saving throws.

Countercharm. While the monster isn't incapacitated and can play its music, the monster and any ally within 60 feet of it that can hear the monster has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Mantle of Inspiration. At the start of each of the monster's turns, each ally that can hear the monster gains temporary hit points equal to 5 + the monster's Charisma modifier. This ability doesn't function while the monster is incapacitated or otherwise can't play its music.

Taunt (2/Day). The bard can use a bonus action on its turn to target one creature within 30 feet of it. If the target can hear the bard, the target must succeed on a Charisma saving throw (DC is Charisma-based) or have disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws until the start of the bard's next turn.

CLERIC

As clerics gain most of their power from their Divine Domains, it's easy enough to represent the base class through spellcasting and some other features as appropriate. In particular, Channel Divinities can be represented as individual short rest abilities or as recharge abilities rather than costing a resource.

Divine Eminence. As a bonus action, the monster can expend a spell slot to cause its melee weapon attacks to magically deal an extra 10 (3d6) radiant damage to a target on a hit. This benefit lasts until the end of the turn. If the monster expends a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the extra damage increases by 1d6 for each level above 1st.

Divine Intervention (1/Week). The monster calls upon the aid of a deity or some other divine power. Roll a d100. If the number rolled is equal to or lower than the monster's virtual cleric level, the divine power intervenes by duplicating the effects of some spell. The spell normally must be 6th level or lower, but can be higher if the monster is capable of casting spells of a higher level. On a failed d100 roll, the divine power only intervenes with a beneficial spell of 4th level or lower, with targets chosen by the monster as appropriate.

Healing Prayer. As a bonus action, the monster can target one creature it can see within 30 feet of it. The target regains hit points equal to the monster's Wisdom modifier.

Spirit Blast (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). Each creature of the monster's choice within 30 feet of it must make a Constitution saving throw (DC is Wisdom-based), taking necrotic or radiant damage (monster's choice) equal to twice the monster's virtual cleric level on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Power of Belief (3/Day). When the monster or a creature it can see makes an attack roll, a saving throw, or an ability check, the monster can use its reaction to add or subtract its Wisdom modifier from the roll.

DRUID

The druid class has two big components: spellcasting, and Wild Shape. Feel free to exclude either feature from your druid-like monsters as you see fit. Particularly strong druids can also receive traditional traits like Aggressive, Reckless, and Siege Monster while in beast form via Wild Shape.

Nature's Wrath. The monster chooses one beast or plant it can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can hear the monster, the target uses its reaction to make one melee attack against a target that the monster can see.

Power of Nature. Each beast and plant of the monster's choice within 30 feet of it has advantage or disadvantage (monster's choice) on all attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

Speak with Beasts and Plants. The druid can communicate with beasts and plants as if they shared a language.

Tree Stride. Once on its turn, the monster can use 10 feet of its movement to magically step into one living tree within her reach and emerge from a second living tree within 60 feet of the first tree, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second tree. Both trees must be Large or larger.

Wild Shape (2/Day). The monster magically polymorphs into a beast or plant with a challenge rating as high as its virtual druid level divided by 3, and can remain in this form for a number of hours equal to half its virtual druid level. The monster can choose whether its equipment falls to the ground, melds with its new form, or is worn by the new form. The monster reverts to its true form if it dies or falls unconscious. The monster can revert to its true form using a bonus action on its turn.

While in a new form, the monster retains its game statistics and ability to speak, but its AC, movement modes, Strength, and Dexterity are replaced by those of the new form, and it gains any special senses, proficiencies, traits, actions, and reactions (except class features, legendary actions, and lair actions) that the new form has but that it lacks.

The new form's attacks count as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistances and immunity to nonmagical attacks.

FIGHTER

Fighters are among the easiest classes to give to a monster; most of them can just be added without any modification. That said, there are some other features that you can use to represent a fighter that aren't given by the class itself.

Martial Advantage. Once on each of its turns, the monster can deal an extra 7 (2d6) damage to a creature it hits with a weapon attack if that creature is within 5 feet of an ally of the monster that isn't incapacitated.

Second Wind (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). As a bonus action, the monster can regain hit points equal to 10 + its virtual fighter level.

Tactical Discipline. The monster has advantage on all ability checks and saving throws made during combat.

Unyielding. When the monster is subjected to an effect that would move it, knock it prone, or both, it can choose to be neither moved nor knocked prone.

Weapons Expert. A weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the monster hits with it.

MONK

The Ki-Empowered Technique and Martial Arts features below represent the core features of the monk class that could be used by a monster. Feel free to add or remove options from these features based on the monster's individual capabilities.

Deflect Strike (1/Turn). The monster can deal an extra 7 (2d6) damage to a creature it hits with a weapon attack.

Ki-Empowered Technique (Recharge 4-6). On each of its turns, the monster can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Dodge action, or to make one unarmed strike.

Martial Arts (1/Turn). When the monster hits a creature with a melee weapon attack, the monster can choose one of the following additional effects (all DCs are Wisdom-based):

- The target must succeed on a Strength saving throw or drop one item it is holding (monster's choice).
- The target must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.
- The target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of the monster's next turn.

Mental Equilibrium. The monster has advantage on all Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws.

Stunning Strike (1/Turn). When the monster hits a creature with a melee attack, it can force the target to make a Constitution saving throw (DC is Wisdom-based). On a failed save, the creature is stunned until the end of the monster's turn.

PALADIN

Rather than having to track spell slots and uses of Divine Smite, it is best to simply give a paladin monster the ability to passively deal radiant damage on its attacks. Otherwise, you are free to create abilities that represent an individual paladin's theme and divine power.

Divine Fury. The monster's weapon attacks are magical. When the monster hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 2d8 radiant damage.

Healing Touch (3/Day). The monster touches another creature. The target magically regains hit points equal to the monster's virtual paladin level plus its Charisma modifier. In addition, the touch removes all diseases and neutralizes all poisons afflicting the target.

Holy Vigor. Whenever the monster expends a spell slot, it also gains 1d8 temporary hit points per level of the spell slot expended.

Resolute (2/Day). As a bonus action, the monster can magically end one spell or hostile effect on itself and each friendly creature within 30 feet of it.

Unwavering. The monster has advantage on saving throws against effects that would charm, frighten, or incapacitate it, as well as those that would cause it to suffer exhaustion.

RANGER

The ranger occupies a strange niche, overlapping with both the druid and the rogue in some of its themes, enabling you to give your ranger monsters features like Evasion and Uncanny Dodge. Another issue is that they are meant to be exploration based, which is extremely useless for monsters in nearly all cases. Thus, I encourage you to focus on how a ranger monster's interactions with nature influence both its martial prowess and its magical abilities.

Foe Slayer. The monster has advantage on attack rolls against one race of humanoid or one general creature type that isn't humanoid.

Hunter's Mark (3/Day). As a bonus action, the monster can mark a creature it can see within 90 feet of it and make that creature its quarry. The target remains the monster's quarry for 1 hour, or until either the target or the monster drops to 0 hit points. While the target is marked, the monster has advantage on any Wisdom (Perception) or Wisdom (Survival) check it makes to find the target, and weapon attacks deal one extra die of damage when the monster hits the target with them.

Lightfooted. The monster can take the Dash or Disengage action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Natural Explorer. While the monster isn't incapacitated and is in a natural or untamed environment, it and any group it is with has advantage on checks made to avoid getting lost, to detect hidden threats while traveling, to track other creatures, or to find food or other natural resources.

Tireless. The monster has advantage on saving throws against exhaustion, poison, and being knocked unconscious.

ROGUE

Many rogue features are straightforward and work well on monsters. Features like Pack Tactics can be used to enhance roguish monsters, while features like Nimble Escape and Shadow Stealth are simple variants of existing rogue features that you can use as appropriate. Just remember that hiding won't always be an option, so roguish monsters should have other tricks they can use in such unfavorable situations.

Ambusher. In the first round of a combat, the monster has advantage on attack rolls against any creature it surprised.

Cheap Shot (1/Turn). If the monster makes a weapon attack with advantage on the attack roll and hits, the target can't take reactions and has its speed halved until the end of the monster's next turn.

Exploit Weakness (1/Turn). If the monster makes a weapon attack with advantage on the attack roll and hits, the target takes an extra 10 (3d6) damage.

Lurkers in Shadow. The monster is invisible to darkvision. While in dim light or darkness, the monster has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

Surprise Attack. If the monster surprises a creature and hits it with an attack during the first round of combat, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) damage from the attack.

SORCERER

Metamagics are best handled by making them at-will or giving them a recharge. Otherwise, emphasize that a sorcerer's innate abilities can be extremely powerful when channeled correctly.

Arcane Vigor. The monster can expend a spell slot to reroll a saving throw it fails. The reroll also gains a +1 bonus for each slot level above 1st. It must use the new roll.

Elemental Spell. When the monster casts a spell that deals damage, it can change the spell's damage to acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder.

Font of Magic. As a bonus action, the monster can roll a d4 and regain a spell slot of that level or lower. If it has no spent spell slots of that level or lower, nothing happens.

Quick Cantrips. When the monster casts a spell using its action, it can cast one cantrip as a bonus action.

Sorcerous Fortitude. The monster can maintain concentration on two different spells at the same time. In addition, it has advantage on saving throws to maintain concentration on spells.

WARLOCK

While warlocks certainly make good enemies due to their story potential, the nature of their spell slots makes it much harder to balance them sometimes. I would personally suggest simply ditching pact slots for your warlock enemies and making them only use Innate Spellcasting (or regular slots, if you think that would be better), especially as invocation spells are already treated as innate spells. Otherwise, it is fairly easy to give a monster an invocation of your choice, whether it is an existing invocation or a new invocation of your own design.

Beyond that, I recommend using cult features (such as the ones found in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*) to make your warlock monsters unique when you can help it.

Beseech Patron (Recharge 5-6). As a bonus action, the monster can regain one spell slot.

Dark Devotion. The monster has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Eldritch Ward. The monster has advantage on Wisdom and Charisma saving throws.

Mind-Eroding Hex. As a bonus action, the monster can magically curse one creature it can see within 60 feet of it. The target must make a Charisma saving throw (DC is Charisma-based). On a failed save, the target suffers disadvantage on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws until the start of the monster's next turn.

Potent Spellcasting. The monster can add its Charisma modifier to the damage it deals with any warlock cantrip.

WIZARD

Wizards are probably the easiest spellcaster to represent because the base class has almost no features whatsoever, and not all mages need unique features to represent a specific arcane tradition (if they have one). That said, the features below can instead be used to represent various arcane traditions.

Displacement (Recharge 5-6) As a bonus action, the monster projects an illusion that makes the monster appear to be standing in a place a few inches from its actual location, causing any creature to have disadvantage on attack rolls against the monster. The effect ends if the monster takes damage, it is incapacitated, or its speed becomes 0.

Instinctive Charm (Recharge 5-6) The monster tries to magically divert an attack made against it, provided that the attacker is within 30 feet of it and visible to it. The monster must decide to do so before the attack hits or misses.

The attacker must make a Wisdom saving throw (DC is Intelligence-based). On a failed save, the attacker targets the creature closest to it, other than the monster or itself. If multiple creatures are closest, the attacker chooses which one to target.

Limited Teleportation. When the monster expends a spell slot, it can also use its bonus action to teleport up to 10 feet per level of the slot expended. It must teleport to an unoccupied space it can see.

Portent (Recharge 5-6) When the monster or a creature it can see makes an attack roll, a saving throw, or an ability check, the monster can roll a d20 and choose to use this roll in place of the attack roll, saving throw, or ability check.

Spell Ward (Recharge 4-6) When the monster takes damage from a spell, it can use its reaction to magically halve the damage taken.

FEATS

Feats are an easy way to customize your monsters, as they are modular and independent of classes themselves. That said, they are designed for player use, which is reflected in their wording and limitations. But you don't have to abide by such limitations when making monster. So, I compiled a list of condensed traits and features that can be given to monsters to help represent the themes and ideas behind the feats we all know and love.

Do keep in mind that if you don't like the generic versions below, you can always just use the original feat or a modified version of it as you see fit.

If a feat is excluded from this list, it means that you can use it as-is, or you probably wouldn't consider using it in the first place.

ACTOR

In addition to granting the monster proficiency and possibly expertise in the Deception and Performance skills, you can add the following trait to a monster that is particularly skilled in mimicry.

Actor. The monster can mimic the speech or sounds made by other creatures it has heard. A creature that hears the sounds can tell they are imitations with a successful Wisdom (Insight) check contested by the monster's Charisma (Deception) check.

ALERT

Static bonuses can be a bit weird when given to monsters, and it wouldn't be fun for the rogue's Sneak Attack to be denied because of the third benefit. Thus, let's simplify the feat as shown below.

Alert. The monster has advantage on initiative rolls, and it can't be surprised while it is conscious.

ATHLETE

The climbing portion of this feat can be accomplished by simply giving the monster a climbing speed. Otherwise, use one or more of these traits to represent the Athlete feat.

Spring Up. While prone, standing up only uses 5 feet of the monster's movement.

Standing Leap. The monster's long jump is up to half its speed and its high jump is up to a third of its speed, with or without a running start.

Sturdy Legs. The monster has advantage on ability checks and saving throws to resist being knocked prone.

CHARGER

This feat is easily represented by the generic Charge trait, reprinted below for reference.

Charge. If the monster moves at least 10 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a melee weapon attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra die of damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a Strength saving throw (DC is Strength-based) or be pushed up to 10 feet away from the monster.

DEFENSIVE DUELIST

This feat can be represented by the generic Parry ability, reprinted below for reference.

Parry. As a reaction, the monster adds its proficiency bonus to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the monster must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

DUAL WIELDER

Adding additional attacks to the Multiattack action is enough to handle the physical act of dual wielding. If you have a monster that particularly excels at dual wielding, consider giving it one or more of the following traits.

Dual Wielder. A weapon deal one extra die of its damage when the monster is dual wielding it.

DURABLE

Just give the monster more hit dice or a higher Constitution score. If you want this monster to feel especially tough and meaty, give it the following generic Brute ability, taken from earlier in this document for reference.

Shrug it Off. The monster can use its reaction to halve the damage that it takes from an attack that hits it. The monster must be able to see the attacker.

ELEMENTAL ADEPT

Rerolling ones and twos is inconsequential. Just give your monster the trait below.

Elemental Adept. The monster's spells ignore resistance to one of the following damage types (DM's choice): acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder.

GRAPPLER

Pinning creatures down is not something most monsters will bother doing. Instead, give the monster expertise in the Athletics skill, and consider using any of the following traits.

Grappler. The monster has advantage on attack rolls against any creature grappled by it.

Grappling Expert. When the monster hits a creature with a melee weapon attack, it can choose to automatically grapple the target (DC 10 + the monster's Strength (Athletics) bonus) instead of dealing damage.

GREAT WEAPON MASTER

We can represent this feat through the use of advantage and disadvantage to ensure that the benefit is applicable no matter what CR the monster is. The first benefit can be handled by the generic Rampage trait.

Great Weapon Master. Before making a melee attack with a heavy weapon, the monster can choose to impose disadvantage on the attack roll. If the attack hits, it automatically becomes a critical hit.

HEALER

Let's simplify this feat by providing two action options that also remove the strict requirement of a healer's kit.

Emergency Care. As an action, the monster quickly tends to the wounds of one creature within 5 feet of it, allowing it to regain 1 hit point.

Mend Wounds (2/Day). As an action, the monster tends to the wounds of one creature within 5 feet of it. The creature regains hit points equal to 10 + the monster's Wisdom modifier.

HEAVY ARMOR MASTER

Instead of flat damage reduction, consider giving the monster a flat +1 bonus to Armor Class (as the Defense fighting style).

INSPIRING LEADER

Use the ability below to make this concept more active and interactive in combat.

Rallying Cry. As a bonus action, the monster chooses one ally it can see within 30 feet of it. If the ally can see or hear the monster, it gains temporary hit points equal to the monster's Charisma modifier plus its Challenge Rating.

KEEN MIND

Use this feat as-is, or just handwave the details.

LIGHTLY ARMORED

Just give the monster the armor you feel is appropriate.

LINGUIST

Just give the monster the languages you feel are appropriate.

LUCKY

While the original feat allows for strange interactions with the advantage/disadvantage mechanic, we can simply use that mechanic to simplify this concept.

Lucky (3/Day). When the monster makes an attack roll, a saving throw, or an ability check, or when an attack roll is made against the monster, the monster can cause the roll to be made with advantage or disadvantage.

MAGE SLAYER

We can go beyond the limits of the original feat using the following ability.

Interrupt Spell. When a creature that the mage slayer can see casts a spell, the mage slayer can use its reaction to make one weapon attack against that creature. If the attack hits, the creature's spell fails and has no effect.

MAGIC INITIATE

You can treat the spells granted by this feat as a form of Innate Spellcasting. Feel free to grant additional spells or uses of said spells as appropriate for the monster.

MARTIAL ADEPT

You can use this feat as-is. Alternatively, allow the monster to use maneuvers freely, or perhaps tie them to a recharge for balance purposes. It is also acceptable to add or subtract from the number of maneuvers known depending on the concept.

MOBILE

The first benefit can be incorporated into the monster's speed. The second and third benefits boil down to the traits listed below.

Agile. The monster doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when it moves out of an enemy's reach.

Sure Footed. The monster ignores the effects of difficult terrain (or only a certain type of it).

POLEARM MASTER

Instead of dealing with the d4 part of the feat, just let it make another attack as part of the Multiattack action. The second benefit boils down to the trait given below.

Polearm Master. As a reaction, the monster can make a melee weapon attack against a creature that enters its reach.

RITUAL CASTER

It's far easier to just let the monster cast certain ritual spells at will via the Innate Spellcasting trait.

SAVAGE ATTACKER

You should just give the monster the generic Brute trait, reprinted below for reference.

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the monster hits with it.

SENTINEL

The Sentinel feat can be split into two important parts: opportunity attacks reducing a creature's speed to 0, and being able to attack anyone that attacks your allies. We can draw inspiration from the Protection fighting style, the Polearm Master feat, the Hold the Line cavalier feature, and the Merregon monster to create the abilities below.

Control the Battlefield. As a reaction, the monster can make one melee weapon attack against a creature that enters its reach, exits its reach, or moves 5 or more feet while within its reach. If the attack hits, the target's speed is reduced to 0 until the end of the current turn.

Guard. As a reaction when an ally of the monster within 5 feet of it is hit by an attack, the monster causes itself to be hit instead.

Protective Retaliation. When a creature within 5 feet of the monster makes an attack against one of the monster's allies, the monster can use its reaction to make a melee weapon attack against the attacking creature.

SHARPSHOOTER

We can use the same approach that we used with the Great Weapon Master feat to handle the third benefit of this feat.

Sharpshooter. Before making a ranged weapon attack, the monster can choose to impose disadvantage on the attack roll. If the attack hits, it automatically becomes a critical hit.

Steady Aim. The monster's ranged weapon attacks ignore half cover and three-quarters cover. Additionally, attacking at long range doesn't impose disadvantage on its ranged weapon attack rolls.

SHIELD MASTER

The most important part of this feat is the shoving part, as the other benefits can just be handled by Evasion, proficiency in Dexterity saving throws, and some extra flavor to describe its actions in combat.

Shield Master. The monster can use its bonus action to attempt to shove a creature within its reach with its shield.

TAVERN BRAWLER

The second and third benefits of this feat can be handled by simply adding attacks labelled "Improvised Attack" and "Unarmed Strike". You can also give it the trait below.

Tavern Brawler. The monster can use its bonus action to attempt to grapple a creature within its reach.

TOUGH

Same as Durable.

BACKGROUNDS

While this may seem a bit strange at first, you can give an intelligent monster a background—either a sample background or a custom one—as described in the PHB. Doing so will flesh out the monster's backstory while also opening the door for future roleplay. It will also set a group of simple monsters apart from each other: for example, one bandit might be a sailor (pirate) whose experience on the high seas allows them to navigate vehicles on water, while another bandit can be a charlatan that uses their false identity and deceptive skills to rob travelers on the road without actually having to fight them.

RACES

As described in the DMG, you can give specific racial traits to your generic humanoid monsters to turn them into members of a specific race. The book describes how the player races from the PHB don't affect a monster's stat block, and also extends the approach to non-humanoid monsters like skeletons and zombies.

RACIAL FEATS

Racial feats are especially easy to add to a monster, as they don't usually change the monster's theme or behavior. Many of them can be added as-is, but be sure to use your judgement and to alter them as needed.

OTHER REWARDS

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* describes a variety of DM rewards that are normally available to player characters: supernatural gifts such as blessings and charms, and epic boons that are designed for 20th level characters. Such rewards are also provided in books like *Mythic Odysseys of Theros*, which provides supernatural gifts designed for 1st level characters and piety rewards for followers of specific gods.

Simply put, there is no reason you can't give these rewards to your monsters. For example, an extraordinarily powerful archmage might have access to the Boon of High Magic, while an evil assassin that prays to Lolth might receive the Blessing of Weapon Enhancement. Doing so also provides you with an opportunity for interactive storytelling about a monster's background, beliefs, and goals.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Now that we know the different roles and tiers that contribute to monster balancing and creation, we can focus on creating balanced groups of monsters that challenge the players in combat encounters.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

To understand the thought process behind encounter-building guidelines, it is essential to acknowledge the factors that influence an encounter's difficulty (other than a monster's difficulty).

ACTION ECONOMY

The concept of action economy is discussed earlier in this document. In encounter building, the action economy should be balanced as to not allow any side to be overwhelmingly superior to the other, which creates one-sided stomps that might be inconsistent with the intended difficulty of the encounter.

As a rule of thumb, **the monsters should never be inferior to the party in action economy**. For example, a monster with only three legendary actions (four effective actions total) can easily be dunked on by a party of five or more players, unless the monster is capable of targeting multiple characters with the majority of its abilities. When not dealing with legendary actions, this means that you should always have at least one monster for every player in the party.

It should be noted that some player characters might be capable of making more attacks than others on a given turn. The number of attacks a character can make per turn adds to its action economy, but other players will be just as effective. For example, a fighter with two attacks can be just as effective as a rogue with one attack, as the rogue deals extra damage via the Sneak Attack feature. Thus, while the number of possible player attacks shouldn't be ignored, it typically won't influence how difficult you should make an encounter.

The exception to this is when players, such as spellcasters, have access to abilities that have a large area of effect. For example, if the wizard of the party has the *fireball* spell, that group will be able to take down a mob of skeletons very easily. Without the *fireball* spell, the encounter might be a bit more challenging for the group, even if the party is otherwise identical. As such, area of effect powers are an essential balancing factor when creating an encounter.

Conversely, monsters that are more powerful tend to have multiple attacks at their disposal per round, while weaker monsters have less attacks and do less damage. This is mostly accounted for in their Challenge Rating, so as with players, it typically won't influence how difficult an encounter is unless you use a monster with access to numerous attacks per round or a monster that can use a powerful area of effect ability that can easily more than two players at once (as area of effect abilities are assumed to hit two players for the purposes of Challenge Rating).

With this in mind, minion-tier monsters tend to have very weak attacks that most characters can withstand easily. As such, **a minion's action is worth less than that of a stronger monster**, which is why it is acceptable to send large groups of minions at most adventuring parties.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

If every fight took place in an open field, D&D would be a very easy game to excel at. But that is not always the case. The narrow hallways of a dungeon, the blinding depths of a raging blizzard, and the foggy bogs of a marshland are all possible sites for a combat encounter.

As a rule of thumb, **the addition of a terrain feature or a similar effect increases an encounter's difficulty by one step**, unless the feature is carefully designed to be beneficial or neutral to both sides of the fight when taken advantage of. For example, kobolds might attempt to push the party into spike pits, but the party can also just push the kobolds into the pits instead.

Consider the following factors when designing an encounter and the area it takes place in.

DIFFICULT TERRAIN

Difficult terrain and other types of movement-impairment have the potential to massively influence an otherwise easy. Some difficult terrain might also hinder the monsters, but some monsters might be immune to such features as appropriate.

TRAPS AND HAZARDS

Traps and hazards are objects or terrain features that either deal damage or inflict other negative effects on their victims. Such features can range from a concealed spike pit to a *sphere of annihilation*. The usage of traps and hazards will increase the offensive power of any side that uses them.

VISION AND LIGHT

Keep in mind that darkvision isn't infallible. Lightly obscured areas, such as areas filled with fog or dim light, as well as darkness that is viewed by a creature with darkvision, impose disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks, making it easier for monsters to ambush the party. When areas are heavily obscured, either by total cover or by some other effect, most effects can't target them at all. A party that can't see can't act, greatly increasing the difficulty compared to the same encounter being ran in bright and clear conditions.

RESOURCE DRAIN

Characters in 5th edition are not designed around having one fight per day. Such a structure makes classes with daily abilities (such as spell slots) extremely powerful, while leaving classes with abilities that recharge on a short rest (e.g. ki points) in the dust. Additionally, running only one fight per day allows for players to dump all of their resources into the fight, allowing them to take on threats that are much stronger than the party should normally be allowed to take on.

As mentioned in the DMG, most adventuring parties can handle about six to eight medium or hard encounters in a day. This is a maximum, and not necessarily a recommendation. Six to eight encounters is a good target in dungeons crawling with random patrols and rooms filled with monsters. However, during a narrative-based game, not only can this amount of encounters per day interfere with the pacing of the game, but it might not be realistic based on the circumstances of the current story.

With that in mind, the DMG offers a few fixes. Instead of throwing many easier encounters at the party, you can throw a few harder encounters at them. While this is a great solution for games that wish to be very difficult, keep in mind that overusing this approach might exhaust your players over time.

Another approach is to extend the length of an adventuring day. For example, in a campaign that uses normal resting rules (rather than the Gritty Realism variant in the DMG), you can still abstract four to seven days of travel between locations as "one adventuring day", where each night of rest during their travels is considered a short rest. That way, you can throw one or two encounters at your party each in-game day without the party using all of their resources to demolish the enemy with ease. You can then switch back to normal resting when in a settlement or dungeon setting.

As a rule of thumb, **try to have at least three combat encounters per adventuring day, with two short rests spliced between them.** Having enough encounters to warrant two short rests per adventuring day is roughly the ideal way to balance short rest and long rest classes against each other. It makes D&D a resource conservation game, as intended: while a character could potentially use a powerful daily ability in a given fight, they have to weigh the benefits of doing so against the potential detriment of not having the ability available for later use.

PARTY STRENGTH

Not all adventuring parties are created equally. Some consist of multiple characters that are optimized for combat and/or are in possession of magic items that boost their combat effectiveness. Others are built for fun, and might not be able to handle the same deadly encounters optimized parties can easily stomp on.

You know your party best. If you know your party is stronger or weaker compared to normal adventuring parties, feel free to adjust your encounters as you see fit.

TACTICS

While many creatures are wild beasts or otherwise have low Intelligence scores, others are equal to or better than the party in terms of intellect. Monsters that play smart, either by optimizing their ability usage or by taking advantage of terrain features and the like, are much more deadly than if ran as being more straightforward and simple. For more on monster tactics, see the Running Monsters chapter later in this document.

Conversely, some parties are very smart and tactical, while others are a bit clueless and disorganized. While some of this is influenced by the experience and intelligence of the players, a large portion of this also depends on the Intelligence and Wisdom scores of their characters. Keep in mind that parties with simpler tactics might not be able to handle as much as those who come up with more complex schemes and gambits.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING: BY TIER

With the above factors in mind, let's create some encounter building systems you can use instead of the official ones. This first system leverages the tier system created

ACQUIRE MONSTER POINTS

Lets use a modified form of **Giffyglyph's monster points (MP)** to build this encounter. First, let's determine our basic budget. We are going to take the number of characters in the party, add a constant based on other factors, and multiply this result by another constant determined by difficulty of the encounter:

PARTY STRENGTH

Start by giving yourself an amount of MP equal to the number of characters in your party.

Now, go through each character in the party (including allied NPCs, if any). If the character has access to powerful area of effect abilities or other powers that are especially strong *when compared to the rest of the party*, you can add an additional 1 MP to the pool. This adjustment accounts for the character's larger influence on the action economy.

DIFFICULTY MULTIPLIER

Now that you have adjusted your budget based on your party's strength, we will take this amount of MP and multiply it by a constant based on the encounter difficulty.

MP MULTIPLIER BY ENCOUNTER DIFFICULTY

Difficulty	Multiplier
Easy	1/2
Medium	1
Hard	3/2
Deadly	2

ADD MONSTERS

Next, we spend these monster points to add monsters to the encounter. Monsters with higher tiers cost more MP, as shown in the table below. Keep adding monsters until you've spent all of your MP.

MP COST BY MONSTER TIER

Tier	Cost
Minion	1/4*
Standard	1
Elite	2
Champion	4**

*By default, this cost assumes that four minions are roughly equivalent to one character. The first section already accounts for characters with access to particularly potent abilities that can take out large groups of minions, so we don't have to consider that here. Instead, note that if you are using minions that are particularly weak or strong, you can change this cost to be 1/5 MP or 1/3 MP, respectively.

The following quote from the DMG is relevant here: "When making this calculation, don't count any monsters whose challenge rating is significantly below the average challenge rating of the other monsters in the group unless you think the weak monsters significantly contribute to the difficulty of the encounter."

**If a monster of this tier has legendary actions, you can calculate its cost to be 1 MP plus 1 MP for each legendary action it has (typically a total of 4 MP).

DMG REPRINT: CHALLENGE RATING AND DIFFICULTY

When putting together an encounter or adventure, especially at lower levels, exercise caution when using monsters whose challenge rating is higher than the party's average level. Such a creature might deal enough damage with a single action to take out adventurers of a lower level. For example, an ogre has a challenge rating of 2, but it can kill a 1st-level wizard with a single blow.

In addition, some monsters have features that might be difficult or impossible for lower-level characters to overcome. For example, a rakshasa has a challenge rating of 13 and is immune to spells of 6th level and lower. Spellcasters of 12th level or lower have no spells higher than 6th level, meaning that they won't be able to affect the rakshasa with their magic, putting the adventurers at a serious disadvantage. Such an encounter would be significantly tougher for the party than the monster's challenge rating might suggest.

OTHER COSTS

Rather than having Lair Actions and terrain features increase the difficulty of an encounter, you can choose to have these factors be accounted for by assigning an MP cost to them. Adding Lair Actions to an encounter, whether they are attached to a single monster or are associated with a group of monsters or even the environment itself, costs 1 additional MP.

Additionally, note that reinforcements and summoned creatures influence MP just as normal monsters do, regardless of their stance in the fight. For example, if you have a druid in the party that can cast *Conjure Animals*, you can increase your MP budget based on how many creatures you anticipate will be summoned. Meanwhile, a demon that is summoned by a warlock or some other fiend costs MP as normal.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR ENCOUNTER

Feel free to personalize your encounter as much as you'd like. Most of the time, you will have a general idea of what kind of monsters the encounter will consist of based on the narrative of your game. Other times, you will already know what kind of monsters will be involved in the fight, so you will use the MP system above purely to figure out how many monsters a balanced encounter will consist of.

FINE ADJUSTMENTS

The more you use this system, the better you will be at making approximations and changes as needed. Ideally, you won't need this system once you get the hang of balancing encounters for your specific party. As such, feel free to experiment: create an encounter, and make judgements as needed. If you find an encounter to be too weak or too strong, make sure to remember what to change for next time.

MONSTER ROLES

If you'd like, choose monsters with roles that you feel will adequately challenge your party. For example, an encounter consisting of a brute, a group of soldiers, and a few snipers will have multiple layers of tactical thinking to it: taking out the brute with single target attacks might be important, but if the soldiers aren't taken out in time, they have the potential to overwhelm the party via their numbers. Perhaps it would also be a good idea to take out the snipers, preventing them from dealing too much extra damage with impunity; with them gone, it might be much easier to take down the brute and the soldiers. Knowing what you know about your party's abilities (and their combat roles, if you will), encounter creation along these lines can allow for fun tactical thinking on both sides of the DM screen.

SAMPLE ENCOUNTER COMPOSITIONS

All of the sample encounters below assume a party of four party members, with a base budget of four MP. Feel free to use these sample encounter setups in your own game, making adjustments as appropriate.

Remember that in any encounter, especially one that includes minions, you are free to add monsters that are much weaker than a normal minion as appropriate. For example, a Fragile Boss fight for a party of 15th level characters might include four wights as minions, but you can also include a horde of twenty zombies if you feel the wights won't be able to pull their own weight.

BEEFY BOSS: DEADLY ENCOUNTER

Name	Role	Tier	Amount
Boss	Brute	Champion	1
The Asshole	Sniper/Skirmisher	Elite	1
Fodder	Soldier	Minion	4
Wild Card	Any	Standard	1

FRAGILE BOSS: DEADLY ENCOUNTER

Name	Role	Tier	Amount
Boss	Striker or Controller	Champion	1
Guardians	Brutes	Standard	2
Fodder	Soldier	Minion	4
Wild Card	Any	Standard	1

THE PACK: HARD ENCOUNTER

Name	Role	Tier	Amount
The Heart	Brute	Elite	1
The Body	Soldier	Minion	12
Wild Card	Any	Standard	1

KILL OR CAPTURE SQUAD: HARD ENCOUNTER

Name	Role	Tier	Amount
Lockdown	Controller	Elite	1
Enforcer	Brute	Standard	3
Clean-Up	Sniper	Standard	1

SUMMONER: MEDIUM ENCOUNTER

Name	Role	Tier	Amount
Summoner	Striker or Controller	Standard	1
Big Summon	Brute	Standard	1
Small Summon	Soldier	Minion	4

MID-COMBAT ENCOUNTER ADJUSTMENTS

No set of rules or guidelines will be perfect. While most of your encounters should work out smoothly, there will be times when you realize that what you sent at them is either too easy or too hard. Ideally, such cases can be avoided or minimized as time goes on. If you find yourself in a situation like this, try one or more of the following:

- Leverage the fact that not all enemies will fight to the death. If a monster is at low HP, it might choose to run away instead of fighting, even if you as a DM know that they could potentially beat the party.
- Fudge a monster's HP as appropriate. Decreasing HP allows you to prevent a fight from being impossible or feeling like a slog, and increasing HP prevents the fight from ending sooner than you anticipated.
- Hold back from using a certain ability. For example, a chain devil's Animate Chains ability triples its damage output per round, but your party might not be able to handle such an increase. Not using this ability, or only using it once the chain devil is at half HP or lower, might make the encounter feel more fair to your players.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING: BY XP

You may have noticed that the encounter building system above covers a wide range of Challenge Ratings with its tiers. This creates more wiggle room for the CRs of your monsters to be adjusted. But it also obfuscates a much larger flaw with the system, which we will discuss and address below.

ONE VERSUS MANY

As discussed earlier, action economy matters a lot. A solo monster without legendary actions will get overwhelmed by the party, while a large swarm of weaker monsters can do the opposite. Thus, it is necessary to take it into account when balancing your encounters.

The thing is, the encounter building system in the previous section, as well as the one presented in *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*, doesn't account for it at all. In my case, one champion is weighed the same as two elites, four standards, or sixteen minions. But in an actual encounter, including four standard monsters might make the fight much harder for the party than including two elites would. And even with area of effect spells like *fireball* taken into account, sixteen minions can present a huge threat to the party if the conditions are right. If you don't balance the action economy separately while using these systems, using either of these systems haphazardly can lead to a party wipe.

THE ORIGINAL SYSTEM

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* presents a precise system for encounter balancing based on the XP values of the monsters in the encounter. To account for the action economy, they add an extra step to the process labeled "Modify Total XP for Multiple Monsters". During this final step, the DMG tells you to multiply the total XP of the monsters by a multiplier determined by the number of monsters in the encounter.

While this concept is a good one, the multipliers themselves make no sense. They start with one monster being times 1, scaling upwards as you add more monsters. But, we already know that solo monsters generally tend to get dogpiled. Shouldn't the multiplier of 1 apply when there are an equal number of combatants on both sides? Speaking of, why don't these multipliers account for varying party sizes at all? Finally, why are the multipliers presented for specific ranges of CRs, causing significant gaps to form between them all?

TWEAKING THE SYSTEM

Let's tweak step 4 of the DMG's encounter creation process by creating our own multipliers, taking into account the grievances presented above.

First, let's account for party size. Whatever multipliers we come up with should be divided by the number of party members.

Next, let's establish a multiplier of 1 for when the number of monsters equals the number of players. Having less monsters should yield a multiplier of less than 1, and having more should yield a multiplier that is greater than 1.

Finally, let's make this new multiplier formula more precise by not using ranges of monsters, instead creating a continuous function: the function's main input will be the number of monsters, and its output will be the XP multiplier we need.

With all of these facts, we can replace step 4 of the "Creating a Combat Encounter" process in the DMG with the calculation presented below.

REVISED: MODIFY TOTAL XP FOR MULTIPLE MONSTERS

The more monsters there are in the encounter, the more attack rolls you're making against the characters in a given round, and the more dangerous the encounter becomes. To correctly gauge an encounter's difficulty, multiply the total XP of all the monsters in the encounter by the value given below:

- If the encounter includes only 1 or 2 monsters, the multiplier is equal to $3 \div$ the number of characters in the party.
- If the encounter includes 3 or more monsters, the multiplier is equal to the number of monsters \div the number of characters in the party.

When making this calculation, don't count any monsters whose challenge rating is significantly below the average challenge rating of the other monsters in the group unless you think the weak monsters significantly contribute to the difficulty of the encounter.

ALLIED NPCs

Note that if the party has one or more allied NPCs that fight alongside them, they will be able to take on harder encounters. To account for this, you can sum up the XP values for all of those allies, and add them to the encounter's XP budget.

BADOOGA'S ENCOUNTER BUILDER

Do you find the very act of building encounters to be tedious? If so, consider making a copy of [this](#) spreadsheet of mine, which automates both of the Encounter Building methods detailed in this document.

RUNNING MONSTERS

So, you know how to create and balance a monster, and you know how to balance an encounter. But how do you actually run the encounter in game?

ESTABLISHING MOTIVES

While combat is certainly fun as its own pillar of play, it needs to have a reason for occurring within the game world. When building an encounter, you need to establish the goals of all combatants, including the player characters.

PARTY GOALS

Monsters generally act as an obstacle that stand in the way of the party's goals. For example, a displacer beast might try to interfere with the party's travels, or a band of kobolds might guard the lair of the red dragon the party seeks to slay. To make an encounter interesting, you can try to connect the encounter's circumstances to the party's goals in some way, even if the connection is indirect or incidental.

MONSTER GOALS

The players aren't the only creatures with goals in your setting. Even if their goals are simplistic or shallow, a monster will always have some sort of goal in mind when they initiate combat.

Beasts and other animals with similar intellects will generally act on their innate desires to eat and defend themselves. Meanwhile, mindless undead like zombies and skeletons will seek to kill all living beings unless they are ordered otherwise by their masters.

In contrast, humanoids and other intelligent creatures usually have goals with a level of complexity equal to or greater than those of the party. A gang of bandits might notice the party's valuables and swoop in for a quick score, and an archdruid might attempt to defend their sacred grove from the party's meddling. Even the compulsions of a mad cultist are often guided by the influences of their dark master.

GATHERED INFORMATION

Even if the different combatants have different goals, the amount of information each of them have can create a huge impact on how these goals are expressed.

For example, the party rogue might seek to avenge their father, but if they don't know the killer is the dashing noble they just passed on the street, initiative won't be rolled at all. Similarly, even the noblest of paladins can be tricked into thinking the party is evil and needs to be slain, despite the fact that they have a flawless track record.

Even if combat has already been initiated, certain information might influence the actions taken by each combatant. The party might be willing to throw hands with a bandit brigade, but that would be different if they knew about the young dragon that is leading these bandits.

Whatever the case may be, whenever you design an encounter, be sure to account for what the combatants know, which is separate than what the DM knows.

INITIATING AND ENDING COMBAT

It is clear from the last section that when monsters encounter the party, they aren't necessarily out for blood. Monsters have their own goals, which can influence when and how combat is initiated and resolved.

ROLLING INITIATIVE

Initiative is usually rolled when combat starts, but it can also be rolled just beforehand. If the players encounter one or more monsters that aren't hostile, you can have them roll initiative so that you can properly resolve each of their actions sequentially.

Suppose the party and a displacer beast come across each other in a forest. Initiative is rolled, but on its turn, the displacer beast doesn't attack. Even though the displacer beast is evil and hunts for sport, it knows that it is outnumbered, and that isn't hidden like it would prefer. Instead of attacking, the beast slowly backs off and retreats into the woods. If the party obliges, the combat then ends... that is, until the displacer beast returns to stealthily hunt the party alongside its pack.

Intelligent creatures in particular are prone to not attacking immediately. Despite its bloodlust, a demon might ignore the party altogether, instead continuing to carry out its master's orders. A passing bandit brigade might allow the party to pass if they aren't in any position to shake them down. Even an insane cultist might yell gibberish at the party in an attempt to get them to leave. That said, some adventuring parties might choose to attack immediately in all three of these scenarios. If that happens, the monsters will be forced to defend themselves and counterattack as appropriate.

RESOLVING COMBAT

If you got in a brawl, would you fight to the death? For the average D&D monster, the answer is no.

Instead of meeting a bloody end, a displacer beast might run away, or a group of bandits might lay down their arms and surrender. Even if they have malicious intentions or want to seek revenge at a later date, they would rather lose a single battle than render their lives forfeit.

On the other hand, mindless constructs, oozes, plants, undead, and other creatures might not have the mental capacity to retreat. Others might possess goals that lead them to fight to the death.

Similarly, if the entire party agrees that they are in over their heads, end the initiative order and allow them to retreat. If the monsters wish to continue fighting, shift to the chase rules detailed in the DMG.

TACTICS

The behavior of a monster in combat can be determined by a number of factors.

THE MONSTERS KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING

The dominant factor that influences a monster's behavior in combat is its individual features and abilities. [The Monsters Know What They're Doing](#) is a blog that discusses a variety of tactics that can be used by specific types of monsters in combat. I recommend checking that blog out if you want tactical advice for specific monster types.

USING ABILITY SCORES

We can use a monster's mental ability scores to build a profile for its behavior in combat. Each section below will discuss the general behavior of a monster based on the numerical range its ability scores fall under.

INTELLIGENCE

A monster's Wisdom score represents its mental acuity, accuracy of recall, and ability to reason. It also represents the sum of all the knowledge it possesses and can potentially use to its advantage.

1-3 The monster most likely cannot speak or understand any languages, and is incapable of using any proper tactics in combat. It has a poor memory and will act only on instinct (or the commands given to it).

4-6 The monster might have a rudimentary understanding of language, but will not have the intellect required to build or create anything more than a simple shelter. If it can be communicated with, it is easily confused by anything more than a superficial overview of basic concepts.

7-9 The monster has a general sense of deductive reasoning and can use that reasoning to solve puzzles and to determine what course of action it should take in combat. However, the monster might have trouble thinking ahead or making more than a handful of logical connections at the same time.

10-13 The monster can use logic to extrapolate missing information, think ahead and strategize, and can apply knowledge drawn from its previous experiences to the current situation.

14-17 The monster has an above average understanding of logic and possesses plenty of knowledge regarding multiple topics. In combat, the monster can overcome the obstacles ahead of it by recalling specific information about its enemies and predicting what actions they will take ahead of time.

18-20 The monster is smarter than most humanoid creatures, and may possess an intricate understanding of a wide variety of topics. It can think many steps ahead of most combatants and can plan multiple courses of action to take depending on the behavior of its enemies.

21-30 The monster's Intelligence is high enough to rival dragons, planar rulers, and even some deities. In combat, it can apply its vast amount of knowledge to almost any situation it comes across.

WISDOM

A monster's Wisdom score represents its intuition and its awareness of the world around it. It also represents how well the monster can apply the information it has to the situation at hand.

1-3 The monster is unable to distinguish different creatures from one another without external aid, or it doesn't acknowledge the existence of creatures other than its specific target. Instead of avoiding terrain hazards, the monster might walk straight through them, even if doing so would harm it.

4-6 The monster might have a limited understanding of teamwork and cooperation, and can possibly distinguish friend from foe, but it will probably remain oblivious to its surroundings. The creature will also have a semblance of self-preservation and might retreat from battle in certain cases.

7-9 The monster will actively avoid any obvious terrain hazards and ensure its own survival as needed. And while it may be able to distinguish certain foes from one another, it might not have a clear understanding of the intentions behind their actions. The monster will also be able to use teamwork as needed.

10-13 The monster has a general awareness of the area around it and may take advantage of it when needed. It will be able to read any obvious body language, as well as other signs of the intentions behind another creature's behavior. The monster will also properly recognize its own behavior and how that behavior affects others.

14-17 The monster has an above average awareness of the world around it and can keep track of the battle at hand. Its intuition will allow it to understand the bigger picture of the surrounding battle and will know when to retreat or to press onwards.

18-20 The monster is wiser than most humanoid creatures, and is capable of outwitting them with ease. Unless a creature is extraordinarily deceptive or intelligent, the monster will be able to read its true intentions with little effort. In battle, it will know the general steps it should take in order to come out on top.

21-30 The monster's Wisdom is high enough to rival dragons, planar rulers, and even some deities. In combat, it will be able to use the information it has to achieve the most favorable outcome possible.

MORALE

In combat, a monster's morale will determine its confidence and whether or not it wants to retreat. You can use or take inspiration from the Morale optional rule (DMG 273) to determine whether or not a creature retreats in a dire situation.

TRAPS, HAZARDS, AND EQUIPMENT

Most battles don't take place in empty fields or corridors. They often involve obstacles that grant cover and break line of sight, as well as hazards that the combatants must avoid in order to survive. And on the monsters' home turf, a battle might even include the use of clever traps and siege weapons against unsuspecting adventurers.

TRAPS

Traps are generally made to hinder adventurers and other creatures from traversing through a specific location. However, they can also be used by monsters in the middle of a combat encounter. For example, a deep pit with spikes at the bottom can be cloaked by illusion magic to trick the adventurers into walking into it, but the monsters can also attempt to shove the adventurers into the pit after surprising them in combat.

Whether you are looking for a list of example traps or rules for making custom ones, *Xanathar's Guide to Everything* includes a comprehensive discussion of traps that I would definitely recommend looking into.

When inserting a trap into an encounter, keeping the following factors in mind:

Familiarity. If the monsters made the trap themselves or have had time to experiment with it, they will generally know how to optimize its usage. However, if they aren't too familiar with it, the monsters might use it inefficiently, and even have a chance of harming themselves in the process.

Follow-Up. A single trap generally doesn't kill in one hit. It may deal some damage, but it is far more likely that the trap will also impose some sort of condition or other disadvantage that the monsters can capitalize on. For example, if the group of monsters manage to shove the adventurers into the pit of spikes, they can follow up by pouring flaming oil onto these pour souls.

Player Usage. The monsters aren't the only ones that can take advantage of a trap. With a keen eye and a sharp wit, it may be possible for the adventurers to turn around and use the trap against the monsters. For example, if the monsters fail to shove the adventurers into the pit of spikes, they in turn might be shoved into it by the adventurers.

HAZARDS

Hazards are similar to traps in function, but are generally not designed or created by any given creature. They also tend to be passive or constantly on, as opposed to the active nature of most traps. With this in mind, you can treat hazards as being similar to traps for the purpose of including them in an encounter.

ITEMS AND GEAR

As discussed in the "Customizing an Existing Monster" section earlier in this document, you can outfit your monsters with mundane or magical items in order to make them more memorable. Remember that the availability and effects of these items will influence the behavior of a monster that wields them. For example, a goblin with a *potion of healing* might retreat momentarily in order to drink it, while an ogre that consumes a *potion of invulnerability* will probably be much more confident and reckless than a regular ogre.

SIEGE EQUIPMENT

Even outside of large-scale warfare, you can arm your monsters with powerful siege weapons (DMG 255) that can give the adventurers a run for their money. Perhaps the outer walls of the lich's castle are guarded by ballistae-wielding skeletons, or a devious group of bandits have positioned a suspended cauldron of green slime over a bridge to pour on any unsuspecting travelers that try to pass under it.

The sections below expand on the siege equipment entries in the DMG in multiple ways (e.g. adding new projectiles for them to launch).

BALLISTA

Ballistae are similar to crossbows in their design and the projectiles they normally launch. Thus, some ballista variants opt to change the weapon's firing mechanism instead of the projectile itself.

In addition, consider taking inspiration from the alternative cannon projectiles detailed in the next section when designing your own ballista projectiles.

Harpoon. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 120/480 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) piercing damage, and the target is impaled. While impaled, the target can't take any action on its turn other than trying to free itself from the harpoon, which requires a successful DC 15 Strength check. If the check succeeds, the target takes 5 (1d10) piercing damage as the harpoon is pulled free and is no longer impaled. If an action was used to attach the harpoon to the gun by a rope before it was fired, a creature impaled on that harpoon can't move farther away from the gun or increase its altitude until it frees itself. A creature within reach of the gun's winch can use its action to reel in a harpooned creature, pulling it up to 20 feet closer to the gun.

Lancer Ballista. These ballista variants are made with advanced engineering that allows them to fire up to three shots at once. It takes one action to load each projectile, one action to aim it, and one action to fire it. When fired, the ballista launches all loaded projectiles at the same target in quick succession.

Oversized Javelin of Lightning. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 120/480 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) lightning damage. As the javelin travels, it transforms into a bolt of lightning, forming a line 5 feet wide that extends out from the ballista to the target. Each creature in the line excluding the ballista and the target must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

CANNON

If gunpowder-based cannons don't make sense in your campaign, you can explain cannons as being powered by magic. To that end, you can use the magical projectiles detailed below instead of a regular cannon ball.

Arcane Shot. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 600/2,400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 44 (8d10) acid, cold, fire, force, lightning, necrotic, or thunder damage (DM's choice).

Explosive Shot. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 600/2,400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 44 (8d10) bludgeoning damage, and each creature in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on the target must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Magic Missile. *Ranged Spell Attack:* automatic hit, range 600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (6d4 + 6) force damage.

CAULDRON

Note that a cauldron's iron pot can hold 1 gallon of liquid, which is equivalent to 8 flasks (pints) of liquid. You can use this conversion to determine the cost of filling a cauldron with an item like *alchemist's fire* or *holy water*, as shown below.

Acid. The cauldron pours acid onto a 10-foot-square area directly below it. Any creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (4d4) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Alchemist's Fire. The cauldron pours 400 gp's worth of alchemist's fire onto a 10-foot square area directly below it. Any creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a target takes 2 (1d4) fire damage at the start of each of its turns. A creature can end this damage by using its action to make a DC 10 Dexterity check to extinguish the flames.

Holy Water. The cauldron pours 200 gp's worth of holy water onto a 10-foot square area directly below it. Any desecrated ground in the area is purified, and any fiend or undead in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (2d6) radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

MANGONEL

Mangonels and other catapults have a shorter range than trebuchets. This makes them more effective against groups of enemies than structures, provided that they are loaded with projectiles that can harm multiple enemies at once.

Jar of Boiling Oil. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 300/1,200 ft. (can't hit targets within 60 feet of it), one target. *Hit:* 22 (5d8) bludgeoning damage, and each creature and object in a 10-foot-radius sphere centered on the target must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Meatbag. The mangonel launches a mass of diseased meat or corpses at a point between 60 feet and 200 feet away from it. Each creature within 15 feet of that point must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw against disease, taking 7 (2d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. On a failed save, a creature is also poisoned until the end of its next turn.

Scattershot. The mangonel launches a mass of small rocks at a point between 60 feet and 200 feet away from it. Each creature and object within 15 feet of that point must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

SIEGE TOWER

If you are looking for inspiration to customize your own siege towers, consider imbuing a tower with the power of an appropriate spell. For example, perhaps a siege tower might be imbued with the *greater invisibility* spell, allowing the tower and its inhabitants to roll up to a wall without necessarily being detected.

Crossbow Turrets. This variant siege tower is equipped with three heavy crossbow for each story of the tower. These crossbow turrets are positioned in front of slats along the side and back walls that allow them to shoot enemies that attempt to approach the tower.

Floating Tower. This variant siege tower is held aloft by an upgraded *Tenser's floating disk* spell. Instead of following a creature, a creature within the tower can use its action to cause it to move up to 30 feet horizontally, abiding by the movement limitations detailed in the original spell.

Protective Field. This variant siege tower emits a protective aura of magic out to a radius of 30 feet. The tower and each creature in the aura gain half cover against attacks from outside the field.

TREBUCHET

Trebuchets are already perfect. They don't need any variants. But if you want to try your hand at improving them further, you can take inspiration from the alternative projectiles presented in the sections above.

TUCKER'S KOBOLDS

To tie this chapter together, I recommend reading [Tucker's Kobolds](#). This Dragon Magazine article discusses how even the weakest of creatures can threaten high-level adventurers through a combination of teamwork, traps, and tactical wit.

APPENDIX A: CREATURE TEMPLATES

Creature templates are preset modifications and additions you can apply to existing monsters. You can use a creature template to represent the conversion of a specific monster into something new (e.g. a zombie), or you can use one to add variety to an otherwise homogenous group of monsters.

OFFICIAL TEMPLATES

The dracolich template and other templates included in the *Monster Manual* are examples of templates that transform a given monster into something new. However, the *Dungeon Master's Guide* also includes a table for NPC Features (DMG 282), which it states can be applied to existing monsters to cause them to be members of specific races.

USAGE

The creature templates in this chapter are designed to modify how a given monster behaves in combat. For example, the Berserk Monster template can be used to turn a normally docile beast into a feral horror, while the Lurk template can be used to turn a simple warrior into a stealthy assassin.

TYPICAL CHANGES

A creature template can change any of a monster's statistics, but there are certain statistics that are more likely to be changed than others.

Ability Score Adjustments. Some templates will increase or decrease a monster's ability scores. For example, the zombie template in the DMG decreases a monster's Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores (to represent the loss of brain function) while also increasing its Strength and Constitution scores (to represent the increase in physical might).

Hit Dice. Some templates will increase the number of hit dice possessed by a monster. This can represent a notable increase in physical fortitude, but it may also serve to balance out a significant increase in offensive power granted by other parts of the template.

New Proficiencies. A template might grant a monster extra skill or saving throw proficiencies. The former represents the monster being adept at a specific skillset (e.g. being stealthy), while the latter represents the monster having greater physical or mental defenses than others of its kind. If a monster is already proficient in a specific skill, it might gain expertise in that skill, meaning that it can double its proficiency bonus when making a check with that skill. Meanwhile, a monster that is already proficient in a specific saving throw might gain advantage on all saving throws of that type.

New Resistances and Immunities. A template might also grant a monster additional damage resistances, damage immunities, or condition immunities (or even damage vulnerabilities). For example, the zombie template in the DMG grants a creature immunity to poison damage, exhaustion, and the poisoned condition, which represents the advantages of its undead physiology compared to the base creature.

New Features. Finally, a template is likely to grant a monster access to new traits and abilities as appropriate. For example, the groll template in the DMG gives a monster the Rampage trait, while the kuo-toa template grants a monster the Amphibious, Otherworldly Perception, Slippery, and Sunlight Sensitivity traits.

CHALLENGE RATING

Because a template can be applied to so many different monsters, there is no listed value for how it will affect a monster's Challenge Rating; once you apply one of these templates, recalculate the monster's Challenge Rating. For guidance on this matter, see the "Monster Features Revisited" section earlier in this document.

MODIFYING TEMPLATES

These templates are just a starting point for your monsters. Don't feel the need to constrain yourself to their limitations, or to avoiding using abilities that aren't mentioned in their descriptions.

It's also worth noting that many of these templates simply piece together some of the monster features discussed earlier in this document. For example, the Bodyguard template simply combines my monster version of the Alert feat with pieces of the Polearm Master and Sentinel feats. Thus, you can view these as example applications of the other content in this document, whereas you are free to ignore or deviate from them as you see fit.

LIST OF TEMPLATES

The templates below are listed in alphabetical order.

ABOMINATION

An abomination is some sort of monster that has been corrupted, diseased, warped, or otherwise changed in some unnatural way. The source of this corruption determines its severity and specific nature.

Natural Weapons. If the monster normally uses manufactured weapons, you can give it a natural attack instead. This natural attack deals the same amount of damage as its normal weapon attacks.

Senses. The monster gains one new sense of your choice.

The monster also gains one or more of the following traits.

Abominable Form. Creatures that can see the monster have disadvantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Amorphous/Boneless. The monster can move through and occupy a space as narrow as 4 inches wide without squeezing.

Spider Climb. The monster can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Warped Mind. The monster has advantage on all Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws.

The monster also gains one or more of the following abilities.

Aura of Madness. Creatures within 20 feet of the monster that aren't aberrations have disadvantage on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws.

Feed on Weakness. As a reaction when a creature within 20 feet of the monster fails a saving throw, the monster gains temporary hit points equal to half its Challenge Rating.

Frightening Screech (Action; Recharge 5-6) Each creature within 30 feet of the monster that can hear it must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw (DC is Charisma-based) or be frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the monster's Frightening Screech for the next 24 hours.

Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of the monster must succeed on a Constitution saving throw (DC is Constitution-based) or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the monster's Stench for 24 hours.

BERSERK MONSTER

A berserk monster is some sort of beast or other creature that has gone on an unstoppable rampage. Such creatures are often described to be feral or to have gone mad, and present a threat to anyone unfortunate enough to cross paths with them.

Saving Throws. The monster gains proficiency in Wisdom saving throws. If it already has this proficiency, it instead gains advantage on all Wisdom saving throws.

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the monster can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature that it can see.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the monster can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

Unbreakable (3/Day). If the monster is incapacitated at the start of its turn, the effect causing this condition immediately ends on the monster.

BODYGUARD

A bodyguard is some sort of monster used by others used to protect them from physical harm. Some are trained warriors that use their skills for defense. Others use their brute force to attack a threat until they stop moving.

Alert. The monster has advantage on initiative rolls, and it can't be surprised while it is conscious.

Guard. As a reaction when an ally of the monster within 5 feet of it is hit by an attack, the monster causes itself to be hit instead.

The monster also gains one of the following abilities.

Hold the Line. As a reaction, the monster can make one melee weapon attack against a creature that enters its reach. If the attack hits, the target's speed is reduced to 0 until the end of the current turn.

Protective Retaliation. When a creature within 5 feet of the monster makes an attack against one of the monster's allies, the monster can use its reaction to make a melee weapon attack against the attacking creature.

BOSS MONSTER

The best way to turn a normal creature into a boss monster is to give it mythic traits and actions. You can use this template if you want an abbreviated process that you can elaborate on later. If you wish to make this monster a solo boss, choose a base creature with a CR that is equal to or slightly less than the average party level.

First, give the monster some legendary resistances and a mythic trait. If you'd like, you can replace Legendary Resistance with one of the alternative traits presented earlier in this document, and you can add extra effects that trigger alongside the mythic trait.

Last Stand (Mythic Trait; Recharges after a Short or Long Rest) If the monster is reduced to 0 hit points, it doesn't die or fall unconscious. Instead, it regains all of its hit points.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day) If the monster fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Next, give the monster three legendary actions; you can adjust this number up or down if you have more or less than four characters in the party. Then, give the monster three of the legendary action options below.

Move. The monster moves up to half its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Detect. The monster makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

At-Will Spell. The monster casts one of its at-will spells.

Weak Attack. The monster uses one of its weaker attacks.

Recharge (Costs 2 Actions). The monster recharges one of its actions and uses it.

Finally, give the monster three of the mythic actions below.

Rush. The monster moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Strong Attack. The monster uses one of its strong attacks, or it uses one of its weaker attacks twice.

Assault (Costs 2 Actions). The monster gains advantage on all attack rolls until the end of its next turn.

Cast a Spell (Costs 2 Actions). The monster casts a spell.

Defend (Costs 2 Actions). The monster gains advantage on all saving throws until the end of its next turn.

COMMANDER

A commander is a monster that is slightly smarter, wiser, or more charismatic compared to its kin or peers, granting it natural leadership skills that it can use in combat. For more guidelines for creating leader monsters, see my [Warlord Collection](#) homebrew.

Ability Score Adjustment. The monster's Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma score increases by 2.

Hit Dice. The monster gains two hit dice.

Command Ally. As a bonus action, the monster targets one ally it can see within 30 feet of it. If the ally can see and hear the monster, it can make one weapon attack as a reaction and gains advantage on the attack roll.

Leadership (Action; Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). For 1 minute, the monster can utter a special command or warning whenever a nonhostile creature that it can see within 30 feet of it makes an attack roll or a saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand the monster. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if the monster is incapacitated.

DIRTY FIGHTER

Whether out of malice, fear, or a strong desire to succeed, a dirty fighter doesn't play by the rules. They will do whatever it takes to win, including taking the cheapest shots possible and ambushing foes in order to ensure the greatest chance of success.

The monster gains one of the following utility-based traits.

Battle Adept. Opportunity attacks against the monster have disadvantage, and the monster's opportunity attacks against other creatures have advantage.

Brawler. The monster can use its bonus action to attempt to grapple or shove a creature within its reach.

Cheap Shot (1/Turn). If the monster makes a weapon attack with advantage on the attack roll and hits, the target can't take reactions and has its speed halved until the end of the monster's next turn.

Evade Foes. On each of its turns, the monster can use a bonus action to take the Disengage or Dodge action.

Limited Reactiveness. The monster can take two reactions per round in combat.

The monster also gains one of the following offense-based traits.

Cut Down. The monster has advantage on weapon attack rolls against any creature that has half of its hit points or fewer.

Deadly Critical. The monster scores a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20 and rolls the damage dice three times, instead of twice.

Surprise Attack. If the monster surprises a creature and hits it with an attack during the first round of combat, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) damage from the attack.

Vicious Retaliation. In response to being hit by a melee attack, the monster can make one melee attack against the attacker.

Wounded Fury. While it has half of its hit points or fewer, the monster has advantage on attack rolls. In addition, it deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage to any target it hits with a melee attack.

HORDLING

A hordling is a general term used for any monster that works well in groups. While swarms of demons and undead are the most common examples of hordlings in action, the term can also be used to refer to organized soldiers that work well together.

Skills. The monster gains proficiency in the Athletics skill. If it already had this proficiency, it gains expertise with the skill instead.

Pack Tactics. The monster has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the monster's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

The monster also gains one of the following traits.

Formation Tactics. The monster has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, grappled, or restrained while it is within 5 feet of at least one ally.

Group Retaliation. When the monster is reduced to 0 hit points by a melee attack, one ally of the monster can use its reaction to make a melee weapon attack against the attacker.

Mob Behavior. The monster can use its bonus action to attempt to grapple or shove a creature if at least one of the monster's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Overbearing Pack. The monster has advantage on checks made to grapple or shove a creature if at least one of the monster's allies is within 5 feet of the target and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Swarming Rush. The monster adds an additional die of damage to its weapon damage rolls while within 5 feet of an ally that isn't incapacitated.

LURK

A lurk is a particularly stealthy monster, which is capable of remaining undetected through either mundane skill or magical abilities.

Ability Score Adjustment. The monster's Dexterity score becomes 13 if it was 12 or lower.

Skills. The monster gains proficiency in the Stealth skill. If it already had this proficiency, it gains expertise with the skill instead.

The monster gains one of the following abilities.

Cunning Action. On each of its turns, the monster can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Nimble Escape. The monster can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, the monster can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

The monster also gains one of the following features.

Shroud Self (Action). The monster turns invisible until the end of its next turn. This invisibility ends if the monster makes an attack roll, makes a damage roll, or casts a spell.

Skulker. When the monster is hidden from a creature and misses it with a ranged weapon attack, making the attack doesn't reveal the monster's position.

Trackless. The monster leaves no tracks to indicate where it has been or where it's headed.

SHADOW DWELLER

A shadow dweller, also referred to as a shadow touched monster, is a being that has been corrupted by the Shadowfell or some other dark power. This corruption tethers them to the darkness and grants them limited control over negative energy.

Darkvision. The monster gains darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. If it already has darkvision, its range increases by 60 feet.

Damage Resistances. The monster has resistance to necrotic damage.

Skills. The monster gains proficiency in the Stealth skill. If it already had this proficiency, it gains expertise with the skill instead.

Living Shadow. While in dim light or darkness, the monster has resistance to damage that isn't force, psychic, or radiant.

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, the monster can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the monster has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Touch of Death. If the monster deals acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison damage with any of its abilities, change that damage type to necrotic.

SPELLCASTER

Any sentient monster is capable of becoming a spellcaster through a variety of means. This template provides a quick way for you to add spellcasting to a monster that doesn't already have it.

Ability Score Adjustment. The monster's Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma score increases by 2, to a minimum of 13.

Spellcasting. The monster's spellcaster level is equal to half its Challenge Rating (rounded up). It is associated with one of the following classes: artificer, bard, cleric, druid, paladin, ranger, sorcerer, warlock, or wizard. Its spellcasting ability and the number of spells it knows or prepares are determined by this class selection.

WARRIOR

A warrior is a monster that uses martial training to enhance their combat capabilities. Only the best warriors can be considered fighters, but even a small amount of training can create a significant gap between a warrior and its peers.

Ability Score Adjustment. The monster's Strength or Dexterity score increases by 2.

Equipment. The monster gains proficiency in all weapons and armor. Feel free to upgrade its equipment as you see fit.

Hit Dice. The monster gains three hit dice.

Martial Advantage (1/Turn). The monster can deal an extra 7 (2d6) damage to a creature it hits with a weapon attack if that creature is within 5 feet of an ally of the monster that isn't incapacitated.

EXAMPLE MONSTERS

WARPED KUO-TOA MONITOR

Medium humanoid (kuo-toa), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)

Skills Perception +6, Religion +4

Senses darkvision 120 ft., truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Undercommon

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Amphibious. The kuo-toa can breathe air and water.

Aura of Madness. Creatures within 20 feet of the monster that aren't aberrations or kuo-toa have disadvantage on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws.

Slippery. The kuo-toa has advantage on ability checks and saving throws made to escape a grapple.

Spider Climb. The kuo-toa can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the kuo-toa has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Warped Mind. The kuo-toa has advantage on all Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws.

Actions

Multiattack. The kuo-toa makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) lightning damage, and the target can't take reactions until the end of the kuo-toa's next turn.

Frightening Screech (Recharge 5–6). Each creature within 30 feet of the kuo-toa that can hear it must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the kuo-toa's Frightening Screech for the next 24 hours.

BERSERK ANKYLOSAURUS

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 68 (8d12 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Wis +3

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the ankylosaurus can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature that it can see.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the ankylosaurus can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

Unbreakable (3/Day). If the ankylosaurus is incapacitated at the start of its turn, the effect causing this condition immediately ends on the ankylosaurus.

Actions

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

TROLL BODYGUARD

Large giant, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 84 (8d10 + 40)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)	7 (-2)	9 (-1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Giant

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Alert. The troll has advantage on initiative rolls, and it can't be surprised while it is conscious.

Keen Smell. The troll has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Regeneration. The troll regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the troll takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the troll's next turn. The troll dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Actions

Multiattack. The troll makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Reactions

Guard. As a reaction when an ally of the troll within 5 feet of it is hit by an attack, the troll causes itself to be hit instead.

Protective Retaliation. When a creature within 5 feet of the troll makes an attack against one of the troll's allies, the troll can make a melee weapon attack against the attacking creature.

MYTHIC YUAN-TI

ABOMINATION

Large monstrosity (shapechanger, yuan-ti), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 127 (15d10 + 45)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
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19 (+4)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)
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Skills Perception +6, Stealth +7

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP, or 10,000 XP as a mythic encounter)

Shapechanger. The yuan-ti can use its action to polymorph into a Large snake, or back into its true form. Its statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It doesn't change form if it dies.

Innate Spellcasting (Abomination Form Only). The yuan-ti's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). The yuan-ti can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *animal friendship* (snakes only)
3/day: *suggestion*
1/day: *fear*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the yuan-ti fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The yuan-ti has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Unholy Blessing (Mythic Trait; Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). If the yuan-ti is reduced to 0 hit points, it doesn't die or fall unconscious. Instead, it regains all of its hit points, and it doubles in size for 1 hour. During this time, both of the yuan-ti's forms are Huge, and its reach is increased by 5 feet.

Actions

Multiattack (Abomination Form Only). The yuan-ti makes two ranged attacks or three melee attacks, but can use its bite and constrict attacks only once each.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the yuan-ti can't constrict another target.

Scimitar (Abomination Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Longbow (Abomination Form Only). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage.

Legendary Actions

The yuan-ti can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The yuan-ti regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Move. The yuan-ti moves up to half its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Shove. The yuan-ti attempts to shove one creature within its reach.

Weak Attack. The yuan-ti makes one attack with its bite or scimitar. If it makes a bite attack, the attack roll is made with disadvantage.

Mythic Actions

If the yuan-ti's mythic trait is active, it can use the options below as legendary actions for 1 hour after using Unholy Blessing.

Rush. The yuan-ti moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Strong Attack. The yuan-ti makes one attack with its bite, constrict, or longbow.

Dark Rites (Costs 2 Actions). The yuan-ti gains advantage on all saving throws until the end of its next turn.

BUGBEAR WARCHIEF

Medium humanoid (goblinoid), chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (chain shirt, shield)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Skills Intimidation +3, Stealth +6, Survival +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the bugbear hits with it (included in the attack).

Command Ally. As a bonus action, the bugbear targets one ally it can see within 30 feet of it. If the ally can see and hear the bugbear, it can make one weapon attack as a reaction and gains advantage on the attack roll.

Heart of Hruggek. The bugbear has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned, or put to sleep.

Surprise Attack. If the bugbear surprises a creature and hits it with an attack during the first round of combat, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) damage from the attack.

Actions

Multiattack. The bugbear makes two melee attacks.

Morningstar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage in melee or 5 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage at range.

Leadership (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). For 1 minute, the bugbear can utter a special command or warning whenever a nonhostile creature that it can see within 30 feet of it makes an attack roll or a saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand the bugbear. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if the bugbear is incapacitated.

VICIOUS WYVERN

Large dragon, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 110 (13d10 + 39)

Speed 20 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages —

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Cheap Shot (1/Turn). If the wyvern makes a weapon attack with advantage on the attack roll and hits, the target can't take reactions and has its speed halved until the end of the wyvern's next turn.

Wounded Fury. While it has half of its hit points or fewer, the wyvern has advantage on attack rolls. In addition, it deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage to any target it hits with a melee attack.

Actions

Multiattack. The wyvern makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its stinger. While flying, it can use its claws in place of one other attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Stinger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage. The target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

BANDIT GOON

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class 12 (leather armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +2

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Group Retaliation. When the bandit is reduced to 0 hit points by a melee attack, one ally of the bandit can use its reaction to make a melee weapon attack against the attacker.

Pack Tactics. The bandit has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the bandit's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) slashing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

STEALTH ARCHER

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Acrobatics +6, Perception +5, Stealth +6

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Archer's Eye (3/Day). As a bonus action, the archer can add 1d10 to its next attack or damage roll with a longbow or shortbow.

Cunning Action. On each of its turns, the archer can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Skulker. When the archer is hidden from a creature and misses it with a ranged weapon attack, making the attack doesn't reveal the archer's position.

Actions

Multiattack. The archer makes two attacks with its longbow.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

SHADOW TOUCHED YETI

Large monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 51 (6d10 + 18)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
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18 (+4)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)
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Skills Perception +4, Stealth +7

Damage Resistances necrotic

Damage Immunities cold

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Yeti

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Fear of Light. If the yeti takes radiant damage, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn.

Keen Smell. The yeti has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Living Shadow. While in dim light or darkness, the yeti has resistance to damage that isn't force, psychic, or radiant.

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, the yeti can take the Hide action as a bonus action, with advantage on the Dexterity (Stealth) check made to do so.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the yeti has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Multiattack. The yeti can use its Gaze of Doom and makes two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage.

Gaze of Doom. The yeti targets one creature it can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can see the yeti, the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw against this magic or take 10 (3d6) necrotic damage and then be paralyzed for 1 minute, unless it is immune to necrotic damage. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If the target's saving throw is successful, or if the effect ends on it, the target is immune to the Gaze of Doom of all shadow touched yetis (but not shadow touched abominable yetis) for 1 hour.

Mooks

A mook is a group-oriented monster that is weaker than other monsters for the purpose of being cut down easily. Compared to a normal monster of its kind, a mook has one-fifth as many hit points, and is worth one-fifth as much XP. However, mooks take half damage from effects that target an area, such as the *fireball* spell.

To make combat fun as possible for melee characters, consider pairing this mook rule with the Cleaving Through Creatures optional rule. When using these two rules together, you can allow attacks to cleave through mooks that aren't necessarily in the original attack's reach. For example, perhaps the original attack causes the target's corpse to fly backwards, hitting and damaging more mooks in the process. Use discretion when ruling on this, and consider requiring an attacker to expend their movement in cases that wouldn't make sense otherwise.

TFTYP REPRINT: REDUCED-THREAT MONSTERS

A reduced-threat monster uses a normal monster's statistics, but it has half the normal hit point maximum and takes a -2 penalty on attack rolls, ability checks, saving throws, and saving throw DCs.

A reduced threat creature that is based on a creature bigger than Large is instead Large. Some specific reduced-threat creatures also make changes to the abilities they can use. A reduced-threat creature is worth half the normal XP earned for defeating it.

HOLY KNIGHT

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +4, Wis +2
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Brave. The knight has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Spellcasting. The knight is a 2nd-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). The knight has the following paladin spells prepared: 1st level (2 slots): *bless*, *cure wounds*, *heroism*, *shield of faith*

Actions

Multiattack. The knight makes two melee attacks.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

Leadership (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). For 1 minute, the knight can utter a special command or warning whenever a nonhostile creature that it can see within 30 feet of it makes an attack roll or a saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand the knight. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if the knight is incapacitated.

Reactions

Parry. The knight adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the knight must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

SKELETAL WARRIOR

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 14 (hide armor)
Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)	8 (-1)	5 (-3)

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages understands all languages it spoke in life but can't speak
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Martial Advantage (1/Turn). The skeletal warrior can deal an extra 7 (2d6) damage to a creature it hits with a weapon attack if that creature is within 5 feet of an ally of the skeletal warrior that isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

APPENDIX B: VARIANT MONSTERS

ADULT BLACK DRAGON

Huge dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 195 (17d12 + 85)

Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	14 (+2)	21 (+5)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +10, Wis +6, Cha +8

Skills Perception +11, Stealth +7

Damage Immunities acid

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 21

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Amphibious. The dragon can breathe air and water.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws. Alternatively, it can make two attacks with its vitriolic spray.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) acid damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Vitriolic Spray. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, range 90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) acid damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the end of the dragon's next turn.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Acid Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales acid in a 60-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, taking 54 (12d8) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Legendary Actions

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Vitriolic Spray. The dragon makes an attack with its vitriolic spray.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon beats its wings. Each creature within 10 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw or take 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

ADULT BLUE DRAGON

Huge dragon, lawful evil

Armor Class 19

Hit Points 225 (18d12 + 108)

Speed 40 ft., burrow 30 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
25 (+7)	10 (+0)	23 (+6)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +11, Wis +7, Cha +9

Skills Perception +12, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities lightning

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 22

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

Charge. If the dragon moves at least 15 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 13 (2d12) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 10 feet away and knocked prone.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws. Alternatively, it can make two thunder bolt attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) piercing damage plus 5 (1d10) lightning damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d8 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d12 + 7) piercing damage.

Thunder Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +9 to hit, range 90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) lightning damage plus 3 (1d6) thunder damage. On a critical hit, the target must also succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or become stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Lightning Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales lightning in a 90-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 66 (12d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Legendary Actions

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Charge (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon moves up to its speed and makes one gore attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon beats its wings. Each creature within 10 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or take 14 (2d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

ADULT GREEN DRAGON

Huge dragon, lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 207 (18d12 + 90)

Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	12 (+1)	21 (+5)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +10, Wis +7, Cha +8

Skills Deception +8, Insight +7, Perception +12, Persuasion +8, Stealth +6

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 22

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Amphibious. The dragon can breathe air and water.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws. It can replace one of these attacks with a use of Luring Glare.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Luring Glare. The dragon targets one creature it can see within 90 feet of it. The target must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. The target has disadvantage on the save if it is poisoned. On a failed save, the target must use its reaction to move up to half its speed along a path of the dragon's choice.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Poison Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales poisonous gas in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 56 (16d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Legendary Actions

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Mind Poison (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon targets one creature it can see within 90 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 17 Intelligence saving throw or be poisoned until the end of the dragon's next turn. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the target is also incapacitated for the duration.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon beats its wings. Each creature within 10 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw or take 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

ADULT RED DRAGON

Huge dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 256 (19d12 + 133)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
27 (+8)	10 (+0)	25 (+7)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	21 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +13, Wis +7, Cha +11

Skills Perception +13, Stealth +6

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 23

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws. Alternatively, it can make two flame blast attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (2d10 + 8) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d8 + 8) bludgeoning damage.

Flame Blast. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +11 to hit, range 90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) fire damage. If the target is a creature or a flammable object, it ignites. Until a creature takes an action to douse the fire, the target takes 5 (1d10) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales fire in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw, taking 63 (18d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Legendary Actions

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Inferno (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon creates a vortex of fire in a 30-foot-radius, 60-foot-high cylinder centered on itself. Each creature in the area must make a DC 21 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. On a failed save, a creature also can't benefit from resistance to fire damage until the end of the dragon's next turn.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon beats its wings. Each creature within 10 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw or take 15 (2d6 + 8) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

ADULT WHITE DRAGON

Huge dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 200 (16d12 + 96)

Speed 40 ft., burrow 30 ft., fly 80 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	10 (+0)	22 (+6)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +11, Wis +6, Cha +6

Skills Perception +11, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities cold

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 21

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Aura of Winter. Any creature that isn't immune to cold damage has its speed halved while within 30 feet of the dragon.

Ice Walk. The dragon can move across and climb icy surfaces without needing to make an ability check. Additionally, difficult terrain composed of ice or snow doesn't cost it extra movement.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the dragon can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

Actions

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) cold damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Cold Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales an icy blast in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw, taking 54 (12d8) cold damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Reactions

Vicious Reprisal. In response to taking damage, the dragon makes a bite attack against a random creature within 5 feet of it. If no creature is within reach, the dragon moves up to half its speed toward an enemy it can see, without provoking opportunity attacks.

Legendary Actions

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Savage (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon makes a claw attack against each creature within 5 feet of it.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon beats its wings. Each creature within 10 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw or take 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

BALOR

Huge fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 262 (21d12 + 126)

Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	15 (+2)	22 (+6)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Str +14, Con +12, Wis +9, Cha +12

Skills Athletics +14, Intimidation +12, Perception +9

Damage Resistances cold, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 19 (22000 XP)

Aura of Slaughter. Unless the balor is incapacitated, each ally within 60 feet of it can't be charmed or frightened and has advantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Death Throes. When the balor dies, it explodes, and each creature within 30 feet of it must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw, taking 70 (20d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The explosion ignites flammable objects in that area that aren't being worn or carried, and it destroys the balor's weapons.

Fire Aura. At the start of each of the balor's turns, each creature within 5 feet of it takes 10 (3d6) fire damage, and flammable objects in the aura that aren't being worn or carried ignite. A creature that touches the balor or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 10 (3d6) fire damage.

Innate Spellcasting. The balor's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 20). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *dispel magic*, *telekinesis*

2/day each: *fireball*, *wall of fire*

1/day each: *feeblemind*, *power word stun*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the balor fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The balor has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The balor's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Multiattack. The balor makes two attacks: one with its longsword and one with its whip.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d8 + 8) slashing damage plus 10 (3d6) lightning damage. If the balor scores a critical hit, it rolls damage dice three times, instead of twice.

Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) slashing damage plus 10 (3d6) fire damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 20 Strength saving throw or be pulled up to 25 feet toward the balor.

Teleport. The balor magically teleports, along with any equipment it is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

Reactions

Shrug it Off. The balor halves the damage that it takes from an attack that hits it. The balor must be able to see the attacker.

Legendary Actions

The balor can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The balor regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Teleport. The balor uses its Teleport action.

Attack. The balor makes one weapon attack.

Frighten Foes (Costs 2 Actions). The balor targets up to five creatures it can see within 30 feet of it. Each target must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened of the balor until the end of the balor's next turn. Any target within 10 feet of the balor has disadvantage on the saving throw.

Overwhelming Assault (Costs 3 Actions). Up to five allies that can hear and see the balor can each use their reactions to make one weapon attack.

BLACKGUARD

Medium humanoid (any race), any evil alignment

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +4, Con +7, Int +3, Wis +5, Cha +6

Skills Athletics +7, Deception +6, Intimidation +6

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common plus one other language (usually Abyssal or Infernal)

Challenge 8 (3900 XP)

Dark Blessing. The blackguard adds its Charisma modifier to its saving throws (accounted for in its statistics).

Spellcasting. The blackguard is a 10th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). It has the following spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *command*, *hellish rebuke*, *protection from evil and good* 2nd level (3 slots): *darkness*, *find steed* 3rd level (2 slots): *bestow curse*, *dispel magic*

Actions

Multiattack. The blackguard makes three weapon attacks.

Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) necrotic damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Dreadful Aspect (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The blackguard exudes magical menace. Each hostile creature within 30 feet of the blackguard must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. If a frightened target ends its turn more than 30 feet away from the blackguard, the target can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success.

MANTICORE

Large monstrosity, lawful evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 68 (8d10 + 24)
Speed 30 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Deadly Critical. The manticore scores a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20 and rolls the damage dice three times, instead of twice.

Tail Spike Regrowth. The manticore has twenty-four tail spikes. Used spikes regrow when the manticore finishes a long rest.

Actions

Multiattack. The manticore makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws or three with its tail spikes.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage. On a critical hit, the target is also grappled (escape DC 13). While the target is grappled, the manticore can't use this attack against another target.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Tail Spike. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 100/200 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

OGRE

Large giant, chaotic evil

Armor Class 11 (hide armor)

Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	7 (-2)	7 (-2)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages Common, Giant

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Destroy. As a bonus action, the ogre can make a melee attack against an object or structure.

Powerful Blows. When the ogre hits a Medium or smaller creature or object with a melee attack, the target must make a DC 14 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the target is pushed up to 5 feet away from the ogre and is knocked prone.

Actions

Greatclub. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Improvised Attack. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

OWLBEAR

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Keen Sight and Smell. The owlbear has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight or smell.

Actions

Multiattack. The owlbear makes two attacks: one with its beak and one with its claws.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Stunning Screech (1/Day). The owlbear emits a horrific screech. Each creature within 10 feet of the owlbear that can hear its screech must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of the owlbear's next turn.

PIT FIEND

Large fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 300 (24d10 + 168)

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	14 (+2)	24 (+7)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	24 (+7)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +13, Wis +10

Skills Athletics +14, Insight +10, Intimidation +13, Perception +10

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 20

Languages Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 20 (25000 XP)

Fear Aura. Any creature hostile to the pit fiend that starts its turn within 20 feet of the pit fiend must make a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw, unless the pit fiend is incapacitated. On a failed save, the creature is frightened until the start of its next turn. If a creature's saving throw is successful, the creature is immune to the pit fiend's Fear Aura for the next 24 hours.

Infernal General. Each ally within 60 feet of the general has advantage on all ability checks and saving throws while the pit fiend isn't incapacitated.

Innate Spellcasting. The pit fiend's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 21). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect magic*, *fireball*, *invisibility*
3/day each: *hold monster*, *fire storm*, *wall of fire*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the pit fiend fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The pit fiend has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The pit fiend's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Multiattack. The pit fiend makes four attacks: one with its bite, one with its claw, one with its mace, and one with its tail.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (4d6 + 8) piercing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 21 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned. While poisoned in this way, the target can't regain hit points, and it takes 21 (6d6) poison damage at the start of each of its turns. The poisoned target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d8 + 8) slashing damage.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) bludgeoning damage plus 21 (6d6) fire damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (3d10 + 8) bludgeoning damage.

Reactions

Vicious Retaliation. In response to being hit by a melee attack, the pit fiend can make one attack with its mace against the attacker.

Legendary Actions

The pit fiend can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The pit fiend regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Advance. The pit fiend moves up to its speed.

Alternatively, up to five allies that can see and hear the pit fiend can use their reactions to move up to half their speeds.

Command Ally. The pit fiend targets one ally it can see within 30 feet of it. If the ally can see and hear the pit fiend, it can make one weapon attack as a reaction and gains advantage on the attack roll.

Infernal Supremacy (Costs 2 Actions). The pit fiend targets one creature it can see within 30 feet of it. The target must make a DC 21 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the target suffers disadvantage on all saving throws, and the pit fiend gains advantage on all saving throws. This effect lasts until the end of the pit fiend's next turn.

TARRASQUE

Gargantuan monstrosity (titan), unaligned

Armor Class 25 (natural armor)

Hit Points 676 (33d20 + 330)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
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30 (+10)	11 (+0)	30 (+10)	3 (-4)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)
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Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +9, Cha +9

Damage Immunities fire, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 30 (155,000 XP)

Aura of Earthbinding. Any creature or object within 200 feet of the tarrasque has its flying speed halved. Any creature in this aura that is more than 20 feet above the ground or the tarrasque at the end of its turn falls to an altitude of 20 feet automatically.

Destroy. As a bonus action, the tarrasque can make an attack that isn't a bite against an object or structure.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the tarrasque fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The tarrasque has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Powerful Blows. When the tarrasque hits a Huge or smaller creature or object with an attack that isn't a bite, the target must make a DC 20 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the target is pushed up to 15 feet away from the tarrasque and is knocked prone.

Reflective Carapace. Any time the tarrasque is targeted by a *magic missile* spell, a line spell, or a spell that requires a ranged attack roll, roll a d6. On a 1 to 5, the tarrasque is unaffected. On a 6, the tarrasque is unaffected, and the effect is reflected back at the caster as though it originated from the tarrasque, turning the caster into the target.

Regeneration. The tarrasque regains 15 hit points at the start of each of its turns. The tarrasque can only die if it is reduced to 0 hit points and a *wish* spell is used to keep it dead.

Siege Monster. The tarrasque deals double damage to objects and structures.

Actions

Multiattack. The tarrasque can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes five attacks: one with its bite, two with its claws, one with its horns, and one with its tail. It can use its Swallow instead of its bite, and it can replace any attack with an improvised attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 36 (4d12 + 10) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 20). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the tarrasque can't bite another target.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 28 (4d8 + 10) slashing damage.

Horns. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 32 (4d10 + 10) piercing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d6 + 10) bludgeoning damage. This attack is a critical hit on a roll of 18-20 on the d20.

Improvised Attack. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 10 ft. or range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d6 + 10) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the tarrasque's choice that is within 120 feet of it and aware of it must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, with disadvantage if the tarrasque is within line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the tarrasque's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Swallow. The tarrasque makes one bite attack against a Large or smaller creature it is grappling. If the attack hits, the target takes the bite's damage, the target is swallowed, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the tarrasque, and it takes 56 (16d6) acid damage at the start of each of the tarrasque's turns.

If the tarrasque takes 60 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside it, the tarrasque must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, which fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the tarrasque. If the tarrasque dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 30 feet of movement, exiting prone.

Legendary Actions

The tarrasque can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The tarrasque regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Move. The tarrasque moves up to half its speed.

Attack. The tarrasque makes one claw attack or tail attack.

Chomp (Costs 2 Actions). The tarrasque makes one bite attack or uses its Swallow.

Savage (Costs 2 Actions). The tarrasque makes a non-bite weapon attack against each creature, object, and structure within 20 feet of it.

TIAMAT

Gargantuan fiend, chaotic evil

Armor Class 25 (natural armor)

Hit Points 615 (30d20 + 300)

Speed 60 ft., fly 120 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
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30 (+10)	10 (+0)	30 (+10)	26 (+8)	26 (+8)	28 (+9)
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Saving Throws Str +19, Dex +9, Wis +17

Skills Arcana +17, Deception +18, History +17, Intimidation +18, Perception +26, Religion +17

Damage Resistances damage from spells

Damage Immunities acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, poisoned, stunned

Senses darkvision 240 ft., truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 36

Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 30 (155000 XP)

Discorporation. When Tiamat drops to 0 hit points or dies, her body is destroyed but her essence travels back to her domain in the Nine Hells, and she is unable to take physical form for a time.

Freedom of Movement. Tiamat ignores difficult terrain, and magical effects can't reduce her speed or cause her to be restrained. She can spend 5 feet of movement to escape from nonmagical restraints or being grappled.

Innate Spellcasting. Tiamat's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 26). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *bones of the earth*, *earthquake*, *storm of vengeance*

3/day each: *disintegrate*, *divine word*, *wall of fire*

2/day each: *dominate monster*, *geas*, *planar binding*

1/day each: *feeblemind*, *power word kill*, *power word stun*

Legendary Resistance (5/Day). If Tiamat fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Tiamat has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. Tiamat's weapon attacks are magical.

Multiple Heads. Tiamat can take one reaction per turn, rather than only one per round. She also has advantage on saving throws against being knocked unconscious. If she fails a saving throw against an effect that would stun a creature, one of her unspent legendary actions is spent.

Regeneration. Tiamat regains 30 hit points at the start of her turn.

Siege Monster. Tiamat deals double damage to objects and structures.

Actions

Multiattack. Tiamat can use her Frightful Presence. She then makes three attacks: two with her claws and one with her tail.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d6 + 10) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 25 ft., one target. *Hit:* 28 (4d8 + 10) piercing damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of Tiamat's choice that is within 240 feet of Tiamat and aware of her must succeed on a DC 26 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to Tiamat's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Legendary Actions

Tiamat can take 5 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Tiamat regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Some of Tiamat's legendary action options are associated with her five dragon heads (a bite and a breath weapon for each). Once Tiamat chooses a legendary action option for one of her heads, she can't choose another one associated with that head until the start of her next turn.

- **Bite. Melee Weapon Attack:** +19 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. **Hit:** 32 (4d10 + 10) slashing damage plus 14 (4d6) acid damage (black dragon head), lightning damage (blue dragon head), poison damage (green dragon head), fire damage (red dragon head), or cold damage (white dragon head).
- **Cast a Spell (Costs 2 Actions).** Tiamat casts one of her innate spells.
- **Black Dragon Head: Acid Breath (Costs 2 Actions).** Tiamat breathes acid in a 120-foot line that is 10 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw, taking 67 (15d8) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
- **Blue Dragon Head: Lightning Breath (Costs 2 Actions).** Tiamat breathes lightning in a 120-foot line that is 10 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw, taking 88 (16d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
- **Green Dragon Head: Poison Breath (Costs 2 Actions).** Tiamat breathes poisonous gas in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 27 Constitution saving throw, taking 77 (22d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
- **Red Dragon Head: Fire Breath (Costs 2 Actions).** Tiamat breathes fire in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw, taking 91 (26d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
- **White Dragon Head: Cold Breath (Costs 2 Actions).** Tiamat breathes an icy blast in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw, taking 72 (16d8) cold damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Tiamat can take a lair action to cause one of the following effects; she can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- Tiamat casts one of her at-will spells.
- Tiamat beats her wings. Each creature within 20 feet of Tiamat must succeed on a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw or take 24 (4d6 + 10) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. Tiamat can then fly up to half her flying speed.
- Tiamat chooses any number of allies within 60 feet of her that can see her. Until initiative count 20 of the next round, each of those allies makes attack rolls and saving throws with advantage and can't be charmed or frightened.

ZOMBIE

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 22 (3d8 + 9)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Wis +0

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages understands the languages it spoke in life but can't speak

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Mob Behavior. The zombie can use its bonus action to attempt to grapple or shove a creature if at least one of the zombie's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

VAMPIRE

Medium undead (shapechanger), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 144 (17d8 + 68)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +7, Cha +9

Skills Perception +7, Stealth +9

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Shapechanger. If the vampire isn't in sunlight or running water, it can use its action to polymorph into a Tiny bat, or back into its true form. While in bat form, the vampire can't speak, its walking speed is 5 feet, and it has a flying speed of 30 feet. Its statistics, other than its size and speed, are unchanged. Anything it is wearing transforms with it, but nothing it is carrying does. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Innate Spellcasting. The vampire's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *charm person*, *hold person*, *invisibility*

1/day each: *dominate person*, *gaseous form*, *geas*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the vampire fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Regeneration. The vampire regains 20 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If the vampire takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of the vampire's next turn.

Spider Climb. The vampire can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Vampire Weaknesses. The vampire has the following flaws:

Forbiddance. The vampire can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants.

Harmed by Running Water. The vampire takes 20 acid damage if it ends its turn in running water.

Stake to the Heart. If a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into the vampire's heart while the vampire is incapacitated in its resting place, the vampire is paralyzed until the stake is removed.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. The vampire takes 20 radiant damage when it starts its turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Actions

Multiattack. The vampire makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

Unarmed Strike (Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. Instead of dealing damage, the vampire can grapple the target (escape DC 18).

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by the vampire, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the vampire regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. A humanoid slain in this way and then buried in the ground rises the following night as a **vampire spawn** under the vampire's control.

Children of the Night (1/Day). The vampire magically calls 2d4 swarms of **bats** or **rats**, provided that the sun isn't up. While outdoors, the vampire can call 3d6 **wolves** instead. The called creatures arrive in 1d4 rounds, acting as allies of the vampire and obeying its spoken commands. The beasts remain for 1 hour, until the vampire dies, or until the vampire dismisses them as a bonus action.

Legendary Actions

The vampire can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The vampire regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Move. The vampire moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Unarmed Strike. The vampire makes one unarmed strike.

Bite (Costs 2 Actions). The vampire makes one bite attack.

APPENDIX C: GENERIC NPCs

BANNERET

Medium humanoid, any alignment

Armor Class 20 (plate, shield)

Hit Points 143 (22d8 + 44)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +6

Skills Athletics +9, Perception +7, Persuasion +8

Senses passive Perception 17

Languages Common

Challenge 9 (5000 XP)

Indomitable (2/Day). The banneret rerolls a failed saving throw. It must use the new roll.

Martial Advantage. Once on each of its turns, the banneret can deal an extra 7 (2d6) damage to a creature it hits with a weapon attack if that creature is within 5 feet of an ally of the banneret that isn't incapacitated.

Rally. While the banneret isn't incapacitated, it and allies within 30 feet of it have advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Actions

Multiattack. The banneret makes three weapon attacks and uses Battlefield Inspiration or Rallying Cry.

Javelin. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage.

Battlefield Inspiration. The banneret chooses up to three allies it can see within 30 feet of it. Until the end of the banneret's next turn, each target can add a d4 to its attack rolls and saving throws.

Rallying Cry. The banneret chooses one ally it can see within 30 feet of it. If the ally can see or hear the banneret, it gains 15 temporary hit points and can't be charmed or frightened for 1 minute.

Reactions

Bulwark. When an ally within 30 feet of the banneret fails a saving throw, the banneret can expend one use of Indomitable to allow the ally to reroll the saving throw.

Legendary Actions

The banneret can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The banneret regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Advance. The banneret moves up to its speed.

Alternatively, up to three allies that can see and hear the banneret can use their reactions to move up to half their speeds.

Command Ally. The banneret targets one ally it can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can see and hear the banneret, it can make one weapon attack as a reaction.

Weapon Attack. The banneret makes a weapon attack.

WHERE ARE THE MONSTER ROLES?

After all this talk of monster roles, you may have expected the monsters in the appendices here to have them written down somewhere. There are three big reasons why they are absent:

- I designed these monsters before I came up with these rules, which are an attempt to codify various practices scattered in my brain.
- Official monsters don't have them, so perhaps it's best to stick to that format for compatibility reasons.
- I'm lazy. Sue me.

It is up to you to discern which role or roles a monster can fill. For most monsters, both in this document and in the official books, it is obvious what role they fill. A barbarian leader is a brute and a leader, a hobgoblin is a soldier, a survivalist is a skirmisher, and so on.

That said, when you make your own monsters, you can add a monster's role information on the same line as its Challenge Rating.

ANTI-MAGE

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 15 (Arcane Defenses)

Hit Points 40 (9d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +6, History +6

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any four languages

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Arcane Defenses. While the anti-mage is wearing no armor and wielding no shield, its AC includes its Intelligence modifier.

Magic Resistance. The anti-mage has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spellcasting. The anti-mage is a 9th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The anti-mage has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *blade ward*, *mage hand*, *minor illusion*, *ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *magic missile*, *shield*, *sleep*

2nd level (3 slots): *hold person*, *misty step*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, *slow*

4th level (3 slots): *arcane eye*, *Otiluke's resilient sphere*

5th level (1 slot): *Bigby's hand*

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Reactions

Dampen Spell. When the anti-mage sees a creature within 60 feet of it casting a spell, the anti-mage can force the creature to make a DC 14 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the spell's damage is halved.

BARBARIAN LEADER

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 15 (unarmored defense)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +5, Con +5

Skills Athletics +5, Intimidation +5

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any one language

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the barbarian leader can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

Unarmored Defense. While the barbarian leader is wearing no armor, its AC includes its Constitution modifier.

Actions

Multiattack. The barbarian leader makes one weapon attack and uses Rallying Cry.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) slashing damage.

Handaxe. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Rallying Cry. The barbarian leader chooses one ally it can see within 30 feet of it. If the ally can see or hear the barbarian leader, it gains 10 temporary hit points and can't be frightened for 1 minute.

Legendary Actions

The barbarian leader can take 2 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The barbarian leader regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Charge. The barbarian leader moves up to its speed.

Rallying Cry. The barbarian leader uses Rallying Cry.

Weapon Attack. The barbarian leader makes one weapon attack.

Command Ally. The barbarian leader targets one ally it can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can see and hear the barbarian leader, it can make one weapon attack as a reaction.

Frighten Foe (Costs 2 Actions). The barbarian leader targets one enemy it can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can see and hear it, the target must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened until the end of barbarian leader's next turn.

DEATH'S CHOSEN

Medium humanoid (any race), any evil alignment

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +9, Con +8
Skills Athletics +9, Deception +7, Intimidation +7, Religion +5
Damage Resistances necrotic
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages any one language (usually common)
Challenge 9 (5000 XP)

Indomitable (2/Day). The death's chosen rerolls a failed saving throw.

Negative Energy Aura. The death's chosen can activate or deactivate this feature as a bonus action. While active, hostile creatures within 30 feet of the death's chosen can't regain hit points, and such creatures take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage at the start of each of the death's chosen's turns. Undead are immune to this aura.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the death's chosen to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the death's chosen drops to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The death's chosen makes three weapon attacks.

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage dealt. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the end of its next turn.

WARLOCK OF THE DREAD LORD

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 17 (half plate)
Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +6
Skills Arcana +4, Athletics +6, Deception +6, Religion +4
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages any two languages
Challenge 6 (2300 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The warlock's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *disguise self*, *false life*, *hex*
3/day each: *animate dead*, *fear*
1/day each: *circle of death*, *create undead*, *soul cage*

Invoke Dread (1/Turn). When the warlock hits a creature with a melee weapon attack, or when it targets a hostile creature within 30 feet of it with a spell of 1st level or higher, the creature must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened until the end of the warlock's next turn.

Spellcasting. The warlock is a 11th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). It regains its expended spell slots when it finishes a short or long rest. It knows the following warlock spells:

Cantrip (at will): *blade ward*, *chill touch*, *eldritch blast*
1st-5th level (3 5th-level slots): *armor of Agathys*, *blight*, *darkness*, *enervation*, *fly*, *negative energy flood*, *shadow of moil*

Actions

Multiattack. The warlock makes two melee attacks.

Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage.

Reactions

Feed on Weakness. When a creature within 30 feet of the warlock fails a saving throw, the warlock gains 10 temporary hit points.

FALSE PALADIN

Medium humanoid (any race), any evil alignment

Armor Class 20 (plate, shield)

Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +8, Dex +6, Con +8, Int +5, Wis +6, Cha +8

Skills Deception +12, Insight +6, Persuasion +8

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 11 (7200 XP)

Aura of False Divinity. A creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of the paladin must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw, provided the paladin isn't incapacitated. On a failed save, the creature is charmed by the paladin. A creature charmed in this way can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Once it succeeds on the saving throw, a creature is immune to this paladin's Aura of False Divinity for 24 hours.

Dark Blessing. The paladin adds its Charisma modifier to its saving throws (accounted for in its statistics).

Spellcasting. The paladin is an 18th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16). The paladin has the following spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *command*, *charm person*, *cure wounds*

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*, *find steed*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *beacon of hope*, *daylight*, *dispel magic*

4th level (3 slots): *charm monster*, *compulsion*

5th level (1 slot): *dominate person*, *geas*

Actions

Multiattack. The paladin makes three weapon attacks.

Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage, or 9 (1d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack, plus 13 (3d8) necrotic or radiant damage (paladin's choice).

Radiance of the Savior (Recharge 6). Any magical darkness within 30 feet of the paladin is dispelled. Additionally, each hostile creature within 30 feet of the paladin that isn't behind total cover must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 26 (4d10 + 4) radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Reactions

Self-Importance. When the paladin takes damage, it can target one creature within 30 feet of it, other than the source of the damage. The target must make a DC 16 Charisma saving throw. If the target is a willing creature, or if it is charmed by the paladin, it fails the saving throw automatically. On a failed save, the paladin takes only half the damage dealt to it (rounded down), and the targeted creature takes the other half.

FORCE MAGE

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 15 (*mage armor*)

Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +5, History +5

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages any three languages

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Spellcasting. The mage's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following wizard spells prepared:

At will: *mage armor* (self only), *prestidigitation*

3/day each: *magic missile* (3rd level), *shield*

1/day each: *levitate*, *misty step*

Actions

Arcane Bolts (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 120 ft., one or two targets. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) force damage.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Reactions

Force Shield (1st-Level Spell; 3/Day). If an ally the mage can see within 30 feet of it is hit by an attack, the mage can grant the ally a +2 bonus to AC, including against the triggering attack, until the start of the mage's next turn.

ENFORCER

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 19 (half plate, shield)

Hit Points 135 (18d8 + 54)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
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18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)
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Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +5, Con +6

Skills Athletics +10, Intimidation +6, Perception +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 6 (2300 XP)

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the enforcer can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature that it can see.

Brave. The enforcer has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the enforcer hits with it (included in the attack).

Marital Advantage (1/Turn). The enforcer can deal an extra 14 (4d6) damage to a creature it hits with a weapon attack if that creature is within 5 feet of an ally of the enforcer that isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Multiattack. The enforcer can attempt to grapple or shove one creature within its reach. It then makes three melee attacks.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Reactions

Hold the Line. The enforcer can make one melee attack against a creature that enters its reach. If the attack hits, the target's speed is reduced to 0 until the end of the current turn.

Unyielding. When the enforcer is subjected to an effect that would move it, knock it prone, or both, it can choose to be neither moved nor knocked prone.

JUGGERNAUT

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 18 (plate)

Hit Points 170 (20d8 + 80)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
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20 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)
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Saving Throws Str +9, Con +8

Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +6, Perception +5

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 12 (8400 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the juggernaut hits with it (included in the attack).

Brutish Durability. Whenever the juggernaut makes a saving throw, it can roll 1d6 and add the die to its saving throw total.

Charge (1/Turn). If the juggernaut moves at least 15 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a melee weapon attack, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Freedom of Movement. The juggernaut ignores difficult terrain, and magical effects can't reduce its speed or cause it to be restrained. It can spend 5 feet of movement to escape from nonmagical restraints or being grappled.

Indestructible. When the juggernaut is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Constitution saving throw to take only half damage, it instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the juggernaut fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The juggernaut makes four weapon attacks.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d12 + 5) slashing damage.

Handaxe. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Reactions

Parry. The juggernaut adds 4 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the juggernaut must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Unyielding. When the juggernaut is subjected to an effect that would move it, knock it prone, or both, it can choose to be neither moved nor knocked prone.

MAGE SLAYER

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 17 (half plate)
Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Int +6, Wis +5
Skills Arcana +6, Insight +5, Investigation +6, Perception +5
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages any two languages
Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Magic Inquisitor. The mage slayer has advantage on checks made to identify spells and other magical effects.

Magic Resistance. The mage slayer has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Weapons Expert. A weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the mage slayer hits with it (included in the attack). Additionally, the mage slayer can draw or stow two weapons per turn.

Actions

Multiattack. The mage slayer makes three melee attacks.

Double-Bladed Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (3d4 + 4) slashing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage.

Reactions

Interrupt Spell. When a creature that the mage slayer can see casts a spell, the mage slayer can make one weapon attack against that creature. If the attack hits, the creature's spell fails and has no effect.

MAGE SLAYER, PSIONIC

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 17 (half plate)
Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Int +6, Wis +5
Skills Arcana +6, Insight +5, Investigation +6, Perception +5
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages any two languages, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Innate Spellcasting (Psionics). The mage slayer's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *detect magic*, *misty step*
1/day each: *counterspell*, *dispel magic*

Magic Inquisitor. The mage slayer has advantage on checks made to identify spells and other magical effects.

Magic Resistance. The mage slayer has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Weapons Expert. A weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the mage slayer hits with it (included in the attack). Additionally, the mage slayer can draw or stow two weapons per turn.

Actions

Multiattack. The mage slayer makes three melee attacks.

Double-Bladed Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (3d4 + 4) slashing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage.

Mind Thrust. The mage slayer targets one creature it can see within 90 feet of it. The target must make a DC 14 Intelligence saving throw, taking 11 (2d10) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. On a failed save, the target also has disadvantage on saving throws made to maintain its concentration on spells until the end of the mage slayer's next turn.

Reactions

Interrupt Spell. When a creature that the mage slayer can see casts a spell, the mage slayer can make one weapon attack against that creature, or it can use Mind Thrust against it. If the attack hits or if the creature fails its saving throw, the creature's spell fails and has no effect.

MONSTER HUNTER

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 17 (studded leather)

Hit Points 135 (18d8 + 54)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Int +5, Wis +6, Cha +4

Skills Acrobatics +8, History +5, Insight +6, Investigation +5, Religion +8, Survival +9

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common plus one exotic language

Challenge 8 (3900 XP)

Brave. The monster hunter has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Indomitable (3/Day). The monster hunter rerolls a failed saving throw.

Second Wind (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest).

As a bonus action, the monster hunter can regain 20 hit points.

Slayer's Prey. As a bonus action, the monster hunter can target a creature it can see within 60 feet of it and make that creature its focus. The target remains the monster hunter's focus for 1 minute, or until either the target or the monster hunter drops to 0 hit points. When the monster hunter makes an attack roll against its focus, it adds a d4 to its attack roll, and it deals an additional 9 (2d8) damage to the target if it hits.

Actions

Multiattack. The monster hunter makes four attacks with its shortsword or three attacks with its light crossbow.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Reactions

Skirmisher. When a creature misses a melee attack against the monster hunter, or if a hostile creature ends its turn within 5 feet of the monster hunter, the monster hunter can move up to half its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

SURVIVALIST

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +5

Skills Acrobatics +5, Animal Handling +5, Medicine +5, Nature +7, Perception +7, Stealth +7, Survival +7

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages any two languages

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of its turns, the spy can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Evasion. If the survivalist is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, the survivalist instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.

Natural Explorer. While the survivalist isn't incapacitated and is in a natural or untamed environment, it and any group it is with has advantage on checks made to avoid getting lost, to detect hidden threats while traveling, to track other creatures, or to find food or other natural resources.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The survivalist deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the survivalist that isn't incapacitated and the survivalist doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. The survivalist makes two attacks with its shortsword.

Whirlwind Attack. The survivalist makes a melee attack against any number of creatures within 5 feet of it, with a separate attack roll for each target.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Reactions

Uncanny Dodge. The survivalist halves the damage that it takes from an attack that hits it. The survivalist must be able to see the attacker.

THUG BOSS

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-good alignment

Armor Class 14 (studded leather armor)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)	13 (+1)

Skills Athletics +5, Intimidation +3, Perception +1

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Cheap Shot (1/Turn). The thug boss deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the thug boss that isn't incapacitated and the thug boss doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll. If a creature takes any of this extra damage, its speed is halved and it can't take reactions until the end of the thug boss's next turn.

Discern Lies. The thug boss knows when it hears a creature speak a lie in a language it knows.

Nimble Escape. The thug boss can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Pack Tactics. The thug boss has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the thug boss's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Multiattack. The thug boss makes two weapon attacks.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Reactions

Redirect Attack. When a creature the thug boss can see targets it with an attack, the thug boss chooses an ally within 5 feet of it. The two creatures swap places, and the chosen ally becomes the target instead.

Legendary Actions

The thug boss can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The thug boss regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Apprehend. One ally that can see and hear the thug boss can use its reaction to attempt to grapple one creature within its reach.

Shove. The thug boss attempts to shove one creature within its reach.

Leadership (Costs 2 Actions). Until the end of the thug boss's next turn, each ally of the thug boss's choice that can see the thug boss can add a d4 to each of their attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws. This effect ends if the thug boss is incapacitated.

Frighten Foe (Costs 3 Actions). The thug boss targets one enemy it can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can see and hear it, the target must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened until the end of thug boss's next turn.