

A detailed illustration of a blue dragon with yellow horns and spikes, lying on a pile of books and scrolls. The dragon's head is the central focus, with its eyes glowing yellow. Its body is covered in blue scales, and its limbs are spread out, showing sharp claws. The background is dark and filled with various books and scrolls, some of which are open, suggesting a library or a place of study. The overall tone is dramatic and fantasy-themed.

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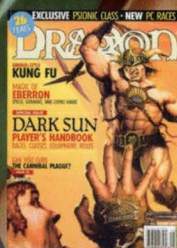
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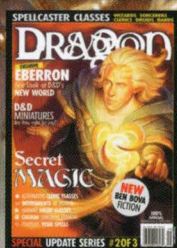
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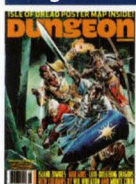
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THE ECOLOGY OF THE PIERCER

"Being the text of an address given to the Wizards Guild of Kabring by the Wizard Pyrex, shortly before his unfortunate demise...."

For anyone not around for issue #72, these words introduced Chris Elliott and Richard Edwards's "The Ecology of the Piercer," the first monster ecology ever to appear in the pages of *DRAGON* magazine. One hundred fifty-three ecologies and more than two hundred fifty issues later, this series is among the most popular and, by far, the longest-running regular feature ever to appear in *DRAGON*. It's spanned every edition of D&D, included the work of some of the best-known authors in gaming, and detailed more than two hundred creatures (including their variants).

But did you know that *DRAGON* wasn't the first magazine to feature this series?

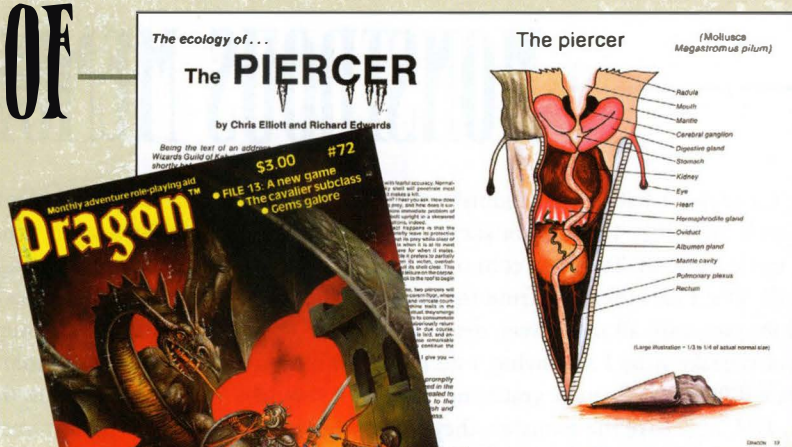
HISTORY OF THE ECOLOGY

After an illusory piercer finishes shocking the Wizard's Guild audience—including a small rabbit—Chris Elliott and Richard Edwards's seminal "The Ecology of the Piercer" cites "This article previously appeared in *Dragonlords—Yet Another Fantasy & Sci-Fi Roleplaying Magazine*." During the early 80s, TSR was quite liberal in allowing other companies to produce works with D&D content. Occasionally, articles from publications such as *Dragonlords*—a periodical few recall nowadays—made its way into *DRAGON* and to the larger D&D fandom. It was, perhaps, an unconventional start to one of *DRAGON*'s most popular series but it wasn't the last time the feature would stand on awkward legs.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE ECOLOGY

What relatively few people know is that, with *DRAGON* #323, a scant seven months after he joined the magazine's staff, a naïve 23-year-old got put in charge of the longest-running series of articles in the most prestigious magazine in gaming. Me.

About three years and thirty-one issues later, a lot has changed. Since the series has been around since 1983, opinions run hot about how to handle ecologies, and I've listened to a lot of advice. Many people love the "old story and footnote" way of doing things, and no one has to remind me how memorable sub-series like the Monster Hunters Association ecologies were—I've had more night terrors about being imperiled by osquips than I care to admit, thank you



Mr. Richards. Like the ever-ongoing debate over the place of fiction in the magazine, favor varies between game utility and a good story. In my opinion, a good ecology straddles the line.

If you want a yarn about monsters, read

the history in "The Ecology of the Spell Weaver," "The Ecology of the Kobold's" origin of Kurtulmak's rivalry with Garl Glittergold, or "The Ecology of the Dracolich's" collection of example dracoliches. If you want solid rules and ideas on how to use monsters in your D&D game, look at those same articles. It's always been my philosophy that your game isn't about our stories, it's about yours. As such, these articles strive to be banks of useful ideas, and nothing pleases me more than to hear that someone got a great plot, villain, or neat encounter for their adventure from an ecology.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE ECOLOGY

What I just said might have been something of a half-truth, as working on monster ecologies has made me keenly aware that behind those that make it into print, D&D is rooted in other people's stories. In the game's decades-long history, hundreds of authors have contributed their interpretations of how to handle characters, rules, and—especially—monsters. As such, throughout the following pages, some of the biggest names in not just gaming, but in all fantasy literature, share their memories, insights, and experiences with some familiar D&D creatures—both those they've had hands in creating and those that helped inspire them to their own fantastical works. As such, this collection seeks to be not just a look back at a few popular ecologies, but a retrospective of the deadliest, most terrifying, and best-loved monsters in *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*—two tasks I hope you'll agree are actually one in the same.

Wes

F. Wesley Schneider
Editor-in-Chief

MONSTROUS MEMOIRS

“As a player I hate all antagonistic monsters, along with any other type that makes my PC’s progress more difficult. Turn the coin over, though, and as the DM I love them all, from the lowliest rat to the lofty red dragon, with all in between dear to my heart.

“Do not mistake what I am saying. I do not enjoy having monsters kill PCs. What is most gratifying to me, as it should be to any DM, is to have the monsters they have included in the adventure cause the players consternation—make them think, innovate, even flee in terror now and then. The challenge of overcoming the hostile creature is the thing. When the challenge comes by surprise, so much the better,

“With that established, no reader should wonder that I paid scant attention to the ecology of any single beastie. I did generally consider the overall ecology of an area, including predators, scavengers, and prey. This becomes rather problematical in a subterranean setting

where normal plants can not normally live, but fungi and similar growth can be substituted if the genre, fantasy, is kept in mind. Using forms of synthesis other than the usually photosynthesis can explain much in this regard.

“I do have comments regarding two monsters. Both of these creatures come from my early years and were inspired by comic books I read avidly then:

“The first monster is the shambling mound, one of my favorite outdoor ones. It is based on The Heap from Airboy Comics. Not only is a shambling mound quite at home in any forest or swamp, but because of its nature it is difficult to detect and hard to destroy in combat. This monster is not one that will radiate evil, and it can logically assail any sort of PC-aligned party. As it feeds like a plant, little consideration need be given to the size of its habitat or prey animals therein.

“The shambling mound species has only low human intelligence, say an IQ of around 80, but great cunning. They reproduce by budding or cross pollination in those rare instances where two of different sex meet.

“The second creature I very much enjoy placing into an adventure setting is the mimic. This monster was inspired by one of my favorite comic book heroes, Plastic Man. Of course such a character might serve as a friendly and highly unusual NPC, or be developed into a super-villain. Both approaches are singular, so I opted to make the mimic a magically spawned race of ultimate shape-shifters that mainly inhabited dungeons. Again, due to their nature these beasties attack by surprise, and with unusual weapons.

“The mimic species has high average human intelligence, say an IQ of around 110, as well as considerable cunning, which is necessary to assume different forms and survive as both predator and prey, for they are not dominant. When two meet, each mimic impregnates the other, as they can be hermaphrodites.

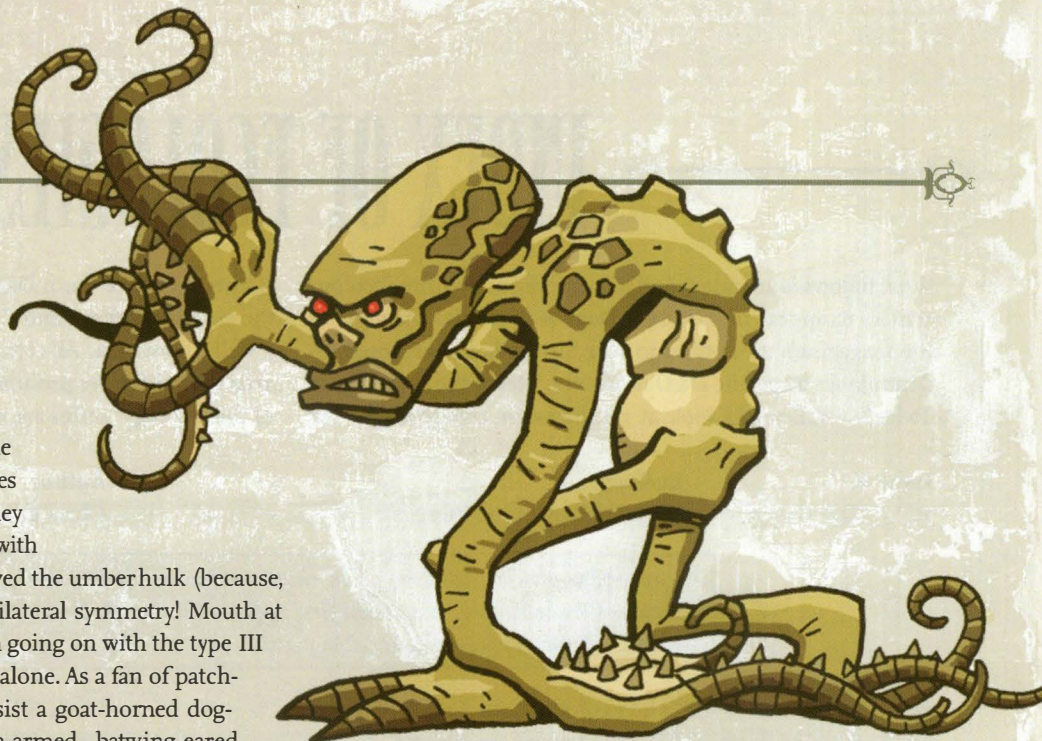
“Both of these species fairly beg for further detailing, a broadening of their attack forms, defenses, and special abilities. When I created them I was far too immersed in the overall process to spend time on the complex information each deserved. I trust that another imaginative author will pick up the torch and develop the two as they deserve, so that DMs can make even better use of both.”

—E. Gary Gygax, Co-creator of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS



“I missed my lost original *Monster Manual* so much I sought out a copy online—anything to see that loved and frankly lamentable cover illustration again. The monsters I liked most were the ones my characters never met, because they kept their mystery. I liked the ones with the most unusual physiologies. I loved the umberhulk (because, you know, mandibles), the xorn (trilateral symmetry! Mouth at the top!) but there was just so much going on with the type III demon, glabrezu, I couldn’t leave it alone. As a fan of patchwork physiologies, how could I resist a goat-horned dog-headed two-pincerered two-human-armed batwing-eared 9-footer? Plus it was Chaotic Evil, the only alignment for bad-dies (Neutral Evil are wusses, Lawful Evil bores). So if we’re counting as favourites the monster whose page got turned to most often, the glabrezu probably wins, against stiff competition.”

—China Miéville, Author of *Perdido Street Station*



“A few people may remember that my brother, Terry Kuntz, created the beholder, a monster which I have a fondness for. He first conceived of the beast in a short story, where a family of these things lived on a mountain and where a hero adventured and encountered them. Yes, that’s right, even monstrosities such as these reproduce!

It was a good story, but now little remembered as the manuscript perished in a fire, but not before Terry presented the concept to Gary Gygax, who immediately included the beholder in supplement #1 to *OD&D: GREYHAWK* (and it was even the center piece of the front cover for it, then). It has since become one of the most frightening monsters ever to have been crafted for the D&D game system, and deservedly so.”

—Rob Kuntz, Creator of *Maure Castle*

INDEX OF ECOLOGIES

What follows is an index of all one-hundred fifty-three ecology articles to appear in *DRAGON*. Dozens of articles throughout the magazine's more than 30 year history have presented in-depth looks at specific D&D monsters, "Never the Same Thing Twice," a real-world look at rakshasas in *DRAGON* #84, the

"Centaur Papers" from *DRAGON* #103, and the examination of the yaun-ti, "Venom and Coil," in *DRAGON* #305, to name but a well-known few. As compiling every such monster-related article would prove prohibitively long, only those that are part of the "ecology" series are collected here.

Issue #	Ecology	Author
72	"The Ecology of the Piercer"	Chris Elliott and Richard Edwards

A two-page article, including an in-character lecture on the piercer and a full-page sketch of its anatomy. This article first appeared in Dragonlords—Yet Another Fantasy & Sci-Fi Roleplaying Magazine.

73	"The Ecology of the Catoblepas"	Chris Elliott and Richard Edwards
74	"The Ecology of the Bulette"	Chris Elliott and Richard Edwards
75	"The Ecology of the Mimic"	Ed Greenwood
76	"The Ecology of the Beholder"	Ed Greenwood and Roger E. Moore
77	"The Ecology of the Unicorn"	Roger E. Moore
78	"The Ecology of the Mind Flayer"	Roger Moore
79	"The Ecology of the Treant"	Susan Lawson
80	"The Ecology of the Doppelganger"	Fraser Sherman
81	"The Ecology of the Basilisk"	Ed Greenwood
82	"The Ecology of the Peryton"	Nigel Findley
83	"The Ecology of the Stirge"	Ed Greenwood
84	"The Ecology of the Trapper"	Ed Greenwood
85	"The Ecology of the Ixitxachitl"	Ed Greenwood
86	"The Ecology of the Slithering Tracker"	Ed Greenwood
87	"The Ecology of the Dryad"	Shaun Wilson
88	"The Ecology of the Rust Monster"	Ed Greenwood
91	"The Ecology of the Leucrotta"	Ed Greenwood
92	"Duh 'Cology of duh Ettin"	Ed Greenwood
93	"The Ecology of the Eye of the Deep"	Ed Greenwood
94	"The Ecology of the Chimera"	Ed Greenwood

The first ecology by Elminster, the Sage of Shadowdale.

95	"The Ecology of the Cockatrice"	Ed Greenwood
96	"The Ecology of the Gulguthra"	Ed Greenwood
97	"The Ecology of the Gorgon"	Ed Greenwood
99	"The Ecology of the Will-o-Wisp"	Nigel D. Findley
104	"The Ecology of the Ochre Jelly"	Ed Greenwood
106	"The Ecology of the Maedar"	Ed Greenwood
107	"The Ecology of the Sea Lion"	Ed Greenwood
108	"The Ecology of the Pernicon"	John Nephew
109	"The Ecology of the Displacer Beast"	Bill Mickelson
114	"The Ecology of the Remorhaz"	Kurt Martin and Ed Greenwood
115	"The Ecology of the Harpy"	Barbara E. Curtis
116	"The Ecology of the Minotaur"	Anthony Gerard
117	"The Ecology of the Anhkheg"	Mark Feil
119	"The Ecology of the Korred"	Ed Greenwood

120	"The Ecology of the Gas Spore"	Ed Greenwood
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131	"The Ecology of the Aboleth"	Brandon Crist
131	"The Ecology of the Hook Horror"	Michael Persinger
132	"The Ecology of the Aurumvorax"	Mark Feil
133	"The Ecology of the Carnivorous Ape"	David Howerly
134	"The Ecology of the Red Dragon"	Gregg Sharp
135	"The Ecology of the Cave Fisher"	Timothy Lethbridge
137	"The Ecology of Carnivorous Plants"	Gregg Chamberlain
139	"The Ecology of the Spectator"	Dougal Demokopoliss
142	"The Ecology of the Kech"	Tony Jones
146	"The New Ecology of the Dragons"	Jean Rabe and Skip Williams

 The first ecology of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS second edition.

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155	"The Ecology of the Satyr"	Gordon R. Menzies
156	"The Ecology of the Behir"	Tony Jones
157	"The Ecology of the Wemic"	J. F. Keeping
160	"The Ecology of the Gibbering Mouther"	Nigel D. Findley
161	"The Ecology of the Griffon"	Christopher Kederich
164	"The Mechanics of the Iron Cobra"	Spike Y. Jones

 The first ecology of a non-living monster—mechanical, undead, or otherwise.

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172	"The Ecology of the Galeb Duhr"	Robert Isaacson
173	"The Sociology of the Flind"	Spike Y. Jones
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197	"The Ecology of the Giant Scorpion"	Ruth Cooke
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215	"The Ecology of the Amphisbaena"	Johnathan M. Richards
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219	"The Ecology of the Black Pudding"	Johnathan M. Richards
221	"The Ecology of the Crystal Spider"	Rudy Thauberger
222	"The Necrology of the Penanggalan"	Paul F. Culotta
223	"The Ecology of the Chitine"	Belinda G. Ashley
224	"The Ecology of the Lammasu"	Belinda G. Ashley
227	"The Ecology of the Osquip"	Johnathan M. Richards

 The first appearance of the popular Monster Hunters Association.

232	"The Ecology of the Roper"	Johnathan M. Richards
235	"The Ecology of the Troglodyte"	Spike Y. Jones

An1	"The Ecology of the Wyvern"	Spike Y. Jones
239	"The Ecology of the Stirge"	Tim Richardson
240	"The Ecology of the Nymph"	Johnathan M. Richards
An2	"The Ecology of the Shambling Mound"	Johnathan M. Richards
242	"The Ecology of the Mongrelman"	Johnathan M. Richards
244	"The Ecology of the Sphinx"	Johnathan M. Richards
245	"The Ecology of the Steeder"	Johnathan M. Richards
246	"The Ecology of the Flumph"	Johnathan M. Richards
251	"The Ecology of the Wererat"	Kristin J. Johnson
252	"The Ecology of the Ghoul"	Wolfgang Baur
An3	"The Ecology of the Steel Dragon"	Jay Knium
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257	"The Ecologies of the Firenewt & Giant Strider"	Paul F. Culotta
258	"The Ecology of the Flail Snail"	Johnathan M. Richards
260	"The Ecology of the Aspis"	Johnathan M. Richards
261	"The Ecology of the Dark Naga"	Johnathan M. Richards
262	"The Ecology of the Jermlaine"	Johnathan M. Richards
An4	"The Ecology of the Gray Ooze"	Johnathan M. Richards
266	"The Ecology of the Xixchil"	Johnathan M. Richards
267	"The Ecology of the Carrion Crawler"	Johnathan M. Richards
269	"The Ecology of the Pseudodragon"	Johnathan M. Richards
270	"The Ecology of the Gorbel"	Johnathan M. Richards
271	"The Ecology of the Bag of Devouring"	Kevin N. Haw



The only ecology of a magic item. Presents bags of devouring as the mouths of extraplanar hunters.



272	"The Ecology of the Hydra"	Johnathan M. Richards
273	"The Ecology of the Hippocampus"	Margaret S. Lundock and Ramsey Lundock
275	"The Ecology of the Darkmantle"	Johnathan M. Richards



The first ecology article of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS third edition.



276	"The Ecology of the Sheet Phantom"	Johnathan M. Richards
An5	"The Ecology of the Feyr"	Kevin N. Haw
282	"The Ecology of the Purple Worm"	Johnathan M. Richards



This issue also features NPC descriptions of the Monster Hunters Association.



300	"The Ecology of the Mummy"	Terry Edwards
301	"The Ecology of the Troll"	Paul Leach
309	"The Ecology of the Hobgoblin"	Terry Edwards
312	"The Ecology of the Drider"	Paul Leach
314	"The Ecology of the Salamander"	Christopher Campbell
322	"The Ecology of the Dark Ones"	Paul Leach
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324	"The Ecology of the Night Hag"	F. Wesley Schneider
325	"The Ecology of the Duergar"	Amber Scott
326	"The Ecology of the Rakshasa"	Eric Cagle
327	"The Ecology of the Grimlock"	Mark A. Hart
328	"The Ecology of the Will-o-Wisp"	Amber Scott
329	"The Ecology of the Kenku"	Eric Cagle
330	"The Ecology of the Chuul"	Mike Mearls
331	"The Ecology of the Green Hag"	F. Wesley Schneider
332	"The Ecology of the Kobold"	Mat Smith

333	"The Ecology of the Behir"	Eric Cagle
334	"The Ecology of the Kraken"	Richard Pett
335	"The Ecology of the Lizardfolk"	Amber Scott and F. Wesley Schneider
336	"The Ecology of the Spawn of Kyuss"	James Jacobs
337	"The Ecology of the Shadar-Kai"	Jesse Decker
338	"The Ecology of the Spell Weaver"	Tito Leati
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344	"The Ecology of the Dracolich"	Richard Pett and Greg A. Vaughan
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351	"The Ecology of the Isle of Dread"	Jacob Frazier



An exploration of the Isle of Dread and the creatures that inhabit it.



352	"The Ecology of the Yrthak"	Erik Roelofs
353	"The Ecology of the Keeper"	Todd Stewart
354	"The Ecology of the Kopru"	Tito Leati
355	"The Ecology of the Devourer"	Owen K.C. Stephens
356	"The Ecology of the Linnorm"	Jacob Frazier
357	"The Ecology of the Titan"	Nicolas Logue
358	"The Ecology of the Kaorti"	James Jacobs
359	"The Ecology of the Tarrasque"	Ed Greenwood and Johnathan Richards

MISSING MONSTERS

Several of the creatures in this index are not detailed in the current edition of *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* or are described outside of the *Monster Manual* series of bestiaries. At this date, the actaeon, aurumvorax, aspis, bird maiden, gorb, flail snail, crystal spider, korred, kech, pernicon, piercer, su-monster, trapper, and xixchil do not have official third edition game statistics in print. Besides these exceptions, though, the remainder of the creatures listed here are detailed in the following sources.

Monster	Source	Monster	Source
Bag of Devouring	<i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i>	Kappa	<i>Oriental Adventures</i>
Catoblepas	<i>Monsters of Faerûn</i>	Leucrotta	<i>Monsters of Faerûn</i>
Chitine	<i>Monsters of Faerûn</i>	Maedar	<i>DRAGON</i> #355
Cave Fisher	<i>DRAGON</i> #355	Osquip	<i>Races of Faerûn</i>
Cyclopskin	<i>Deities and Demigods</i>	Penanggalan	<i>Oriental Adventures</i>
Dakon	<i>Living Greyhawk Journal</i> #1	Peryton	<i>Monsters of Faerûn</i>
Eye of the Deep	<i>Lords of Madness</i>	Rot Grub	<i>Dungeonscape</i>
Feyr	<i>Monster Manual II</i> (as the fihyr)	Shade	<i>FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting</i>
Flumph	<i>DUNGEON</i> #118	Sheet Phantom	<i>DRAGON</i> #276
Fire Newt	<i>Monsters of Faerûn</i>	Slithering Tracker	<i>DUNGEON</i> #143
Gas Spore	<i>Lords of Madness</i>	Spectator	<i>Lords of Madness</i>
Giant Leech	<i>DRAGON</i> #355	Steeder	<i>Races of Faerûn</i>
Giant Strider	<i>Monsters of Faerûn</i>	Steel Dragon	<i>DRAGON</i> #339
Gulguthra	aka. the otyugh	Yeti	<i>Oriental Adventures</i>
Hippocampus	<i>Arms and Equipment Guide</i>		



THE ECOLOGY OF THE *Choker*

*"To him who puts a cord around his neck,
God will supply someone to pull it."*

—Tuareg Proverb

Innumerable creatures haunt the fathomless depths of the Underdark. Drow cut cruelly debauched empires from the darkened stone, duergar toil away at lightless forges, and illithids weave plots incomprehensible to sane minds. Yet, the Night Below isn't feared just for these few and relatively rare masterminds of the depths, but also for the endless, merciless hordes of silently skulking predators. And, numbering among these countless horrors, are the true bogeymen of the Underdark, the silent, ravenous, and irredeemably murderous chokers.

HISTORY OF THE CHOKER

Chokers are relative newcomers to the pitch-black realms of the Underdark. Scholars and adventurers note their numbers increasing with each passing year, although none seem to know the reason why. The origins of these beasts proves equally mysterious. One theory claims that a population of gnomes who descended into the darkness long ago evolved into chokers. Supposedly, over time, these gnomes mutated into horrible aberrations, due to a combination of cannibalism and the weird magical radiations of the Underdark. Gnomes vehemently deny this possibility and insist that any resemblances are purely superficial. The *svirfneblin* also dispute the possibility, although some seem to know more



than they let on. Any attempts to pry more information from the deep gnomes on this topic typically results in stony silence or worse. A variation of this theory involves halflings, who similarly find the prospect detestable.

A more likely theory involves chokers as the result of some experimentation that went horribly wrong. Many of their characteristics seem reminiscent of drow handiwork, but drow dismiss this accusation, pointing out that the creatures now pose as much of a nuisance and threat to them as to anyone else. Of course, the dark elves' lofty pride might mask the truth in this matter. Some scholars note that chokers often congregate near drow settlements, either to remain close to a reliable food source or perhaps because of some lingering racial memory of their creators. Regardless, most drow despise chokers and frequently hunt them for no other reason than to kill as many as possible.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHOKER

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (dungeoneering) check as it relates to chokers. Miners, inhabitants of the Underdark, and adventurers that make forays into the depths are most likely to possess this information. The choker appears on page 34 of the *Monster Manual*.

Knowledge (dungeoneering)

DC Results

- | | |
|----|--|
| 12 | Dangerous aberrations that lurk in the Underdark and other dark, underground spaces, chokers get their name from their proclivity for strangling their victims. |
| 17 | Chokers move easily over almost any surface and usually attack from above doorways, arches, or cavern ceilings. They are sentient and many speak a broken form of Undercommon. |
| 22 | Chokers possess strangely elastic limbs, allowing them to reach farther than their size would suggest. |
| 27 | Bribes of food and treasure can often convince chokers to answer simple questions or guide explorers through their territory. |

Some scholars and Underdark explorers merely accept the appearance and propagation of the choker race as an inevitability of life below. The Underdark's depths' know no limit and—in many cases—connect to realms few know or dare to explore. Thus, the

occasional appearance of beasts and beings with seemingly no relation to the world's other inhabitants is widely accepted as but one more horrific reality of existence in the Night Below.

Chokers—barely sentient themselves—have no knowledge of their

origin and show little interest in discovering the truth of their past. They seem to care only about collecting shiny trinkets and how to get their next meal.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE CHOKER

Although classified as aberrations, chokers are unusual in that they have roughly humanoid forms. From a distance, the choker vaguely resembles an ape or long-limbed halfling, although close up the differences are readily apparent. These hunched, diminutive terrors stand between 3 and 4 feet tall, with smooth, dark gray skin mottled with patches of black, brown, and rust. They possess ungainly, slender frames with jutting skulls, spines, and rib cages. In fact, these three bony structures make up the entirety of the choker skeleton, with rubbery and cartilaginous structures supporting the rest of its unnervingly malleable frame. Jutting forward from between the creatures' shoulders are long, primitive-looking faces ending in vicious, lipless mouths full of jagged teeth. Beady black eyes sit squarely above, granting chokers excellent vision and the ability to see through the utter darkness of their cavernous home. Small, under-developed ear cavities, nestled into the sides of their heads, likely indicate that the creatures rely more on darkvision and other senses than hearing to locate prey.

Doubtlessly chokers' most obvious features, though, are their incredibly flexible, tentaclelike limbs. These boneless, semi-elastic appendages allow chokers to reach farther than their length would imply to be possible. Many an Underdark explorer and would-be captor have found strong, clawed hands around their throats when they thought themselves safely out of reach. Because of these flexible, elongated limbs, chokers appear bow-legged and move in a peculiar, fluid fashion, preferring to keep at least three of their limbs in contact with some surface at all times. Aside from their uncanny reach, both the choker's arms and legs end in oversized

A STRANGLEHOLD ON D&D

Continuing D&D's fixation with monsters named after what they do (ala the lurker, mimic, mind flayer, piercer, and spanner), the choker originally appeared in 1988's *DUNGEONS & DRAGON'S Gazetteer, The Dwarves of Rockhome*. For third edition—unlike many of its similarly named peers—the choker found its place among the iconic creatures of the *Monster Manual*, and even received its own figure in *D&D Miniatures's* 2004 expansion, *Aberrations*. "The Ecology of the Choker" first appeared in *DRAGON* #323.



flexible pads covered with serrated spines. These rough and surprisingly strong starfishlike pads allow chokers to find handholds on almost any surface, making slippery cavern walls no obstacle.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE CHOKER

Having no word for their race, nor seemingly much interest in others of their kind, "chokers" are named for their most commonly employed and deadliest means of attack. Stealthy,

solitary hunters, they survive on what they manage to kill and the carrion left by more dangerous predators. Fearless in their assaults despite their small size, chokers sometimes attack prey up to four times their size. More cunning than simple beasts, they prefer to attack by surprise, usually waiting to ambush a solitary creature rather than confronting larger numbers. Particularly hungry or desperate chokers might go after a group of creatures, but only by picking off stragglers who are more likely to go unnoticed.

With their incredible reach and ability to scale almost any surface, chokers prefer to ambush victims from above and out of reach. Whenever possible, chokers retreat soon after grabbing a victim, trying to climb up tight cavern shafts or similarly elevated apertures to deter pursuit. Should an ambush fail, a choker never stands and fights if there's a visible means of escape, fleeing into the darkness as swiftly as possible.

Before a choker devours its prey, it uses its powerful grasping hands to squeeze the meat into a tenderized pulp. The choker does this even with carrion it finds, seemingly fulfilling some instinctive desire to squeeze the life out of its meal. While constantly hungry, chokers can survive for almost a month without meat, becoming increasingly irritable and likely to take risks in order to procure food. To fend off starvation, a choker can subsist on lichens, moss, and fungi, scraping it off cave walls with its long, rough tongue. Chokers require relatively little water for their size and seems to derive most of their hydration from the blood of their victims.

CHOKER TREASURES

Choker lairs are typically littered with the debris of their occupants' savage lifestyles. Those who search such places are likely to turn up the following.

1d12 Treasure

- 1 Several pounds of bruised, formless, rotting meat.
- 2 A handful of oily black beetle carapaces.
- 3 A knot of four grick tentacles.
- 4 Pieces of a shattered mirror jutting from an oversized mushroom cap.
- 5 The shattered pieces of a masterwork longsword, radiating faint magic.
- 6 A nugget of fool's gold the size of a man's fist.
- 7 The skull of another choker, licked clean.
- 8 A Tiny monstrous spider lairing in a broken clay jar.
- 9 An eye collection, the largest being that of a basilisk.
- 10 The unspeakably stained pages of a sizable spellbook.
- 11 1d4 gems with a 10 gp average (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).
- 12 Roll on the minor column of Table 7-1 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Greedy creatures, chokers covet bright, shiny objects, such as coins, gems, and jewelry. Some explorers have learned that, by cautiously approaching a choker with an obvious offer of food or flashy treasure, the creatures might be coaxed into simple trading. Chokers lack any sense of guile or diplomacy and, thus, their most elaborate bartering techniques consist of "I give this, you give that." A choker might also be convinced to offer its services as a guide through the tunnels and caves of the Underdark in exchange for coins, gems, and food. The creatures have no sense of duty, companionship, or obligation, though, and might abandon or even attack those they're guiding if they become scared, distracted, or simply hungry. If negotiations with a choker go poorly in the first few minutes, the aberration typically retreats and refuses to reenter negotiations with erstwhile bargainers.

Choker can speak and often know Undercommon, which they rasp in hoarse, hissing voices, intermixing words with meaningless barks, coughs, and grunts. They commonly pepper their crude vocabularies with baseless threats and vulgarities stolen from the languages of neighboring creatures.

Solitary beings, chokers do not tolerate other creatures—even other



chokers—in their territory. Once every two years, though, females release a pungent scent that attracts male chokers. Mating is brief and violent, with males wrestling each other into

submission for a female's favor. Gestation lasts for roughly six months, after which the female gives birth to a litter of two to four young. The mother raises her young for a year before abandoning them in a warren at the edge of her territory. These juveniles often prove to be the most aggressive and dangerous members of their race, as they attempt to establish their own turf, battling with their own kind and other foes that lurk in the darkness. Chokers generally live for about 20 years, although those in captivity occasionally reach the age of 40.

Most denizens of the Underdark consider chokers annoying menaces deserving only of extermination. The more intelligent races, such as drow, illithids, and svirfneblin, actively hunt chokers, sending teams of warriors and trackers to clear out areas known to be haunted by the diminutive brutes. Dwarves of all types hold an especial hatred for chokers, primarily due to the aberrations' proclivity for creeping into dwarven chimneys and either attacking the families and smiths below or clogging the vents by asphyxiating inside. The dwarven saying, "crazy as a chimney choker," rises from this dangerously common occurrence.

Some creatures occasionally capture chokers and attempt to train them to act as guardians and trackers. While these projects usually fail, those few that succeed produce highly loyal servants—as long as the keeper provides his choker pet with a suitable amount of live meat to hunt and eat. Because of their elastic bodies and their ability to worm through almost any crevice or enclosure, only the tightest cages and solid-walled holding cells can hold choker slaves, adding to the difficulty and expense of attempting to keep the beasts.

CHOKER LAIRS

Chokers typically establish their lairs—or at the very least, comfortable hidingspots—near crossroads or other places with readily available prey. In an ideal situation, the entrance to a

choker's lair is a difficult-to-spot, narrow crevasse only accessible by climbing a wall or squeezing through an uncomfortably tight tunnel. Chokers dislike large spaces, and these dens are usually awkwardly cramped. They prefer dens with at least one—and preferably two—escape routes easily overlooked by a casual search and simple to block with loose rocks. Bones, bits of trophies from various victims, and indescribable chunks of pulped meat typically litter a choker's filthy den. They often hide stashes of food

there, but only so long as the smell doesn't threaten to attract other predators. Chokers also often prowl close to the settlements of other races, occasionally ambushing loners who stray too far from safety, but more commonly to pick through garbage for "treasure." Most chokers hide what they find—often little more than reflective stones and scraps of metal—among the debris and bones of their lair, occasionally pulling out particularly shiny bits and baubles to admire when it's safe to do so. While most of a choker's hoard is worthless, they sometimes happen across trinkets of surprising value.

ADVANCED CHOKER

While some chokers grow to nearly the size of adult humans and rely upon brute force to throttle their victims, others prove cunning enough to mimic the strategies of those they prey upon and develop tactics of their own. Throughout the least tamed expanses of the Underdark ring the howls and crazed gibbering of these feral chokers, adept at ambushing victims from unexpected angles and dragging them screaming into bottomless fissures.

CHOKER RAVAGER

CR 5

Choker barbarian 2/rogue 2

CE Small aberration

Init +6; Senses darkvision 60 ft.;

Listen +5, Spot +5

Languages Undercommon

AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 15; evasion, uncanny dodge

hp 40 (7 HD)

Fort +5, Ref +8, Will +4

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares); climb 10 ft.

Melee 2 tentacles +8 (1d3+3)

Space 5 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +4; Grp +7

Atk Options improved grab, constrict 1d3+3, rage 1/day, sneak attack +1d6

Abilities Str 16, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 4, Wis 13, Cha 7

SQ fast movement, trapfinding

Feats Combat Reflexes, Improved

Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Stealthy

Skills Climb +13, Hide +12, Jump +6, Listen +5, Move Silently +10, Spot +5, Tumble +5

Constrict (Ex) A choker ravager deals 1d3+3 points of damage with a successful grapple check against a Large or smaller creature. Because it seizes its victim by the neck, a creature in the choker's grasp cannot speak or cast spells with verbal components.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, a choker ravager must hit a Large or smaller opponent with a tentacle attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict. Chokers receive a +4 racial bonus on grapple checks, which is already included in the statistics block.

Skills A choker ravager has a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks and can always choose to take 10 on Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened.

Rage While raging, a choker ravager statistics change as follows:

AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 13; Evasion, uncanny dodge

hp 54

Fort +7, Will +6

Melee 2 tentacles +10 melee (1d3+5)

Grp +9

Abilities Str 20, Con 17

Skills Climb +15, Jump +8



MONSTROUS EVOLUTION: BEHOLDER

“Beholders have always scared all the laughter out of me. Eerie, terror-inducing, they glide silently through the air, beams of magic lancing out at adventurers intruding into their lairs, striking foes helpless to topple into waiting traps like volcanic rifts, deep spiked pits, or pools of acid.

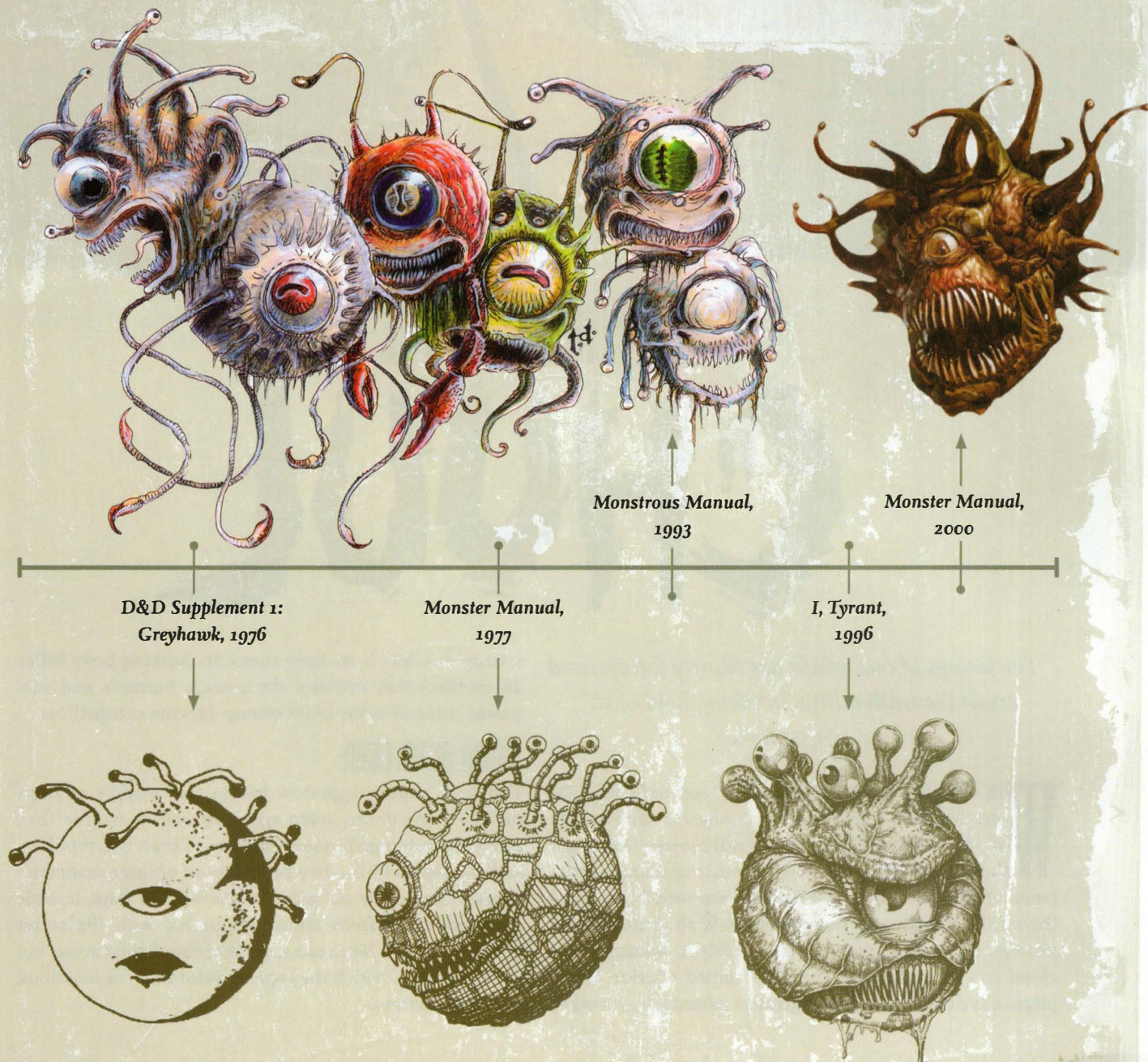
“From beholders as large as horses whose crooked, many-fanged maws can swallow small adventurers whole, to hissing sinister skull-sized flying balls with worm-like wriggling eyestalks, beholders are... scary.

“Properly handled, as kingpin-like, manipulative, lair-squatting masterminds, beholders induce as much awe and more horror than dragons. When player characters uncover the great dark villain behind the crime lord behind the alley gang, and discover it to be an eye tyrant, wise players mutter curses and loudly and urgently want their characters to be elsewhere.

“After thirty-one years, I never get tired of being scared by beholders.”

—Ed Greenwood, Creator of the FORGOTTEN REALMS

AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF THE BEHOLDER





THE ECOLOGY OF THE

CHUUL

"The forceps of our minds are clumsy forceps, and crush the truth a little in taking hold of it."

—H. G. Wells

With crushing claws and crippling tentacles, one creature has torn itself a niche among the fetid waters of the land's most deadly wildernesses. Although the vicious chuul has only recently appeared in the lands of civilized races, already it is renowned as one of the world's deadliest swamp predators. With its monstrous pincers, glistening carapace, and paralytic tentacles, the chuul is a threat to even the most skilled warrior. While physically powerful, a chuul's greatest advantage over other

swamp dwellers is its keen mind. Its hulking body belies an intellect that matches the average human's and surpasses those of many of its swamp-lurking competitors.

HISTORY OF THE CHUUL

The first chuuls appeared within the world's swamps merely a few dozen years ago. Most sages assume that, given their strange physical mixture of insectile, reptilian, and crustacean traits, they are the result of some madman's experiments. After all, many of the world's most terrible monsters arose from arcane tampering with the secret processes of life. None can say where chuuls first arose, but the methods by which they spread paint them as insidious, cunning enemies.



One possible explanation regarding the rise of chuuls is noted by researchers and popularized by the fiction, *Red Sails Over Savagery*. Supposedly, six years ago, an expedition under the command of the elf wizard Tarthalas Driishan set sail for the endless waves beyond the horizon. Tarthalas had uncovered the ancient library of the archmage Kleptis. The archmage's journals described a tropical island far from established trade routes and major currents. According to the books, this place was once the abode of a powerful warlord who had gathered great material and arcane wealth. Supposedly, the world had ignored him until he unleashed a strange, terrible army of aberrations to conquer nearby lands. When he revealed himself as a threat, the nearby civilized nations banded together to destroy him.

The journal detailed the island's location, but the notes ended with the entry that described Kleptis's preparations for the ocean journey.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHUUL

The following table shows the result of Knowledge (dungeoneering) checks related to chuuls. Those who live near swamps, explore the seas, or plumb the Underdark's alien depths might know this information. The chuul appears on page 35 of the *Monster Manual*.

Knowledge (dungeoneering)

DC	Result
17	Chuuls are amphibious, swamp-dwelling creatures that combine the most deadly aspects of crustaceans, insects, and snakes.
22	Chuuls attack from ambush whenever possible. A chuul can crush a nearly any creature to death with its claws powerful claws.
27	Chuuls are surprisingly intelligent and prefer to ambush their prey. They often create simple underwater lairs and gather trophies within.
32	A chuul's tentacles are coated with a paralytic venom. Chuuls possess a particular hatred of all humanoid creatures.
37	Despite their size, chuuls have short arms and can't reach especially far. Chuuls sometimes put aside their hatred of humanoids to barter for goods and information, using the treasures of previous victims in trade.

Tarthalas assumed that the archmage had failed to reach his destination or had died there. In his hubris, Tarthalas believed that with his skills and magic he could succeed where Kleptis had failed. Gathering his

resources, Tarthalas organized a fleet of three ships to venture out to the island and recover its treasures.

When Tarthalas and his men arrived at the island, they soon learned why Kleptis never returned. The place was



overrun with a bewildering array of strange and deadly monsters. Its ecosystem resembled a continuous, blood-thirsty war between predatory creatures. Tribes of primitive mind flayers attacked his crew by night, killing scores of sailors. Three-armed, brutish giants assaulted the ships during the day, while expeditions into the jungles encountered ettercaps, otyughs, gibbering mouthers, and a variety of previously unknown monstrosities. Howling lizardfolk assaulted the sailors with barbed javelins and poisoned darts. Plants lashed out at the explorers, choking them to death in powerful vines or drowning them in murky pools. The monstrous hordes destroyed two of Tarthalas's ships and slaughtered their crews. When a captured and magically dominated lizardfolk revealed nothing of the ruins Tarthalas came searching for, he and the survivors began preparing for the voyage home.

What the lizardfolk's gibbering did reveal was that the creatures of

the island had fought and died for centuries. The lizardfolk spoke of a mighty god who had once ruled the island. One day a horde of monsters that glided upon the water beached themselves and unleashed a torrent of smaller beasts that killed the god and reduced his temple to dust. It spoke of beings called the enforcers, hulking warriors that once defended the god but had walked across the sea floor on some unknown quest before the god's demise. Since that time, the island had fallen into chaos as the god's progeny, freed of his calming influence, battled for supremacy. Every year, new species arose to fight for dominance, either dying at their enemies' jaws or carving out new, bloody links in the food chain. The entire ecosystem seemed to be focused on producing the deadliest creatures imaginable in an evolutionary process gone haywire. Once, the creatures had struggled for the god's amusement and favor. Now, they battled merely to survive.

On the night before Tarthalas's departure, the primitive mind flayers made their final assault and slew the wizard. During the fighting, the sailors failed to notice three large, clawed beasts that slipped pulsing egg sacs through a porthole into an empty cabin. In the morning, relieved that they had survived, the remaining sailors cast off for home. None would live to see their destination. The newborn chuuls picked off the crewmen one by one, carefully pacing their attacks to satisfy their hunger while leaving enough survivors to guide the ship to its destination. After slaying the last sailor, the chuuls leapt overboard in sight of land and swam to their new home.

Some of the forgotten god's enforcers had never left the island, and now they had a chance to escape it. Driven onward by their creator's final orders to war against his ancient enemies, they were determined to avenge their ancient, bitter defeat.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE CHUUL

The individual organs and parts of a chuul bear a resemblance to those found in other organisms, but the collective whole they form is utterly unique. The chuul's outer shell and massive claws give it an outward resemblance to a crustacean, but its rear legs and exoskeleton mark it as a gigantic insect. Stranger still, dissection reveals that the foremost sections of its body resemble a serpent. With its thick carapace removed, a chuul looks like the upper half of a tentacled serpent fused with the hindquarters of a giant water bug. A closer inspection supports a literal interpretation of this initial appearance. Through some trick of evolution or arcane experimentation, a chuul is the union of two creatures that shared such a close symbiotic bond that they eventually melded into a single species.

The divide between the chuul's brutish appearance and its surprisingly keen intellect traces back to

CHUUL LAIRS

Chuuls most commonly lair in natural aquatic caverns, sunken ships, sewer tunnels, or underwater complexes created to their own alien specifications. While the drowned caves and other preformed structures they inhabit might take a variety of shapes, their river bottom homes—usually formed of fallen branches, swamp mud, and various debris—have a relatively uniform layout.

In such a chuul-constructed lair, an underwater entrance leads into the first of several roughly circular chambers. This entrance room often holds a makeshift door made from an uprooted tree stump or other barrier that creatures weaker than a chuul might have trouble moving (requiring at least a DC 15 Strength check to move aside). Past this barrier lies the chuul's all-purpose sleeping and eating chamber, decorated with the humanoid bones of past meals. If any chamber in the lair is even partially filled with air it's likely to be this main room, allowing a chuul to keep a slave or the rare prisoner here. A third circular space commonly branches off from this central chamber, holding the chuul's trophies from previous ambushes and raids. While a chuul lair is likely to be at least this simple, one housing a pair or pack of chuuls is likely to be significantly larger and more complex, with every resident chuul having its own trophy room.

CHUUL TROPHIES

All chuuls harbor a notorious hatred of humanoid races, one they openly express in their lairs. Within these grim aquatic halls and in specialized trophy rooms, chuuls exhibit the bones and treasures of humanoids they've defeated. While an opponent's most valuable possessions are often traded away, particularly impressive pieces are sometimes hoarded or worked into totems and fetishes consisting of the rest of the victim's remains.

d10 Trophies

- 1 A totem of six halfling skulls impaled upon a lizardfolk spear.
- 2 An entire dwarven skeleton, purposefully shattered then reassembled.
- 3 A humanoid spine fashioned into a necklace with a number of finger bone bangles.
- 4 An elven skull randomly punctured by seven arrows of elven make.
- 5 A pouch filled with humanoid teeth of wildly varying sizes.
- 6 The skull of a giant crocodile with lizardfolk claws in place of teeth.
- 7 A stack of human hands and snake meat stacked upon a rapier like a shish kebob.
- 8 The dismembered arm and claw of another chuul.
- 9 A finely stitched quiver crammed with elven rib bones.
- 10 A number of humanoid femurs arranged in a sunburst pattern with a black dragon skull at the center.

this symbiotic link. The basic form of its body derives from a monstrous animal that fused qualities of crustaceans and insects. This simple creature lacked the chuul's intellect and its paralytic tentacles. The second half of this duo was a small, snakelike aberration that hunted by paralyzing its prey, burrowing into its brain, and slowly feeding as it controlled its victim's body like a puppet.

As some researchers theorize, on the hellish island that spawned the chuul, these two creatures adopted a close relationship, with the serpentine puppet masters preferring to victimize the crustacean-insect creatures. Over centuries of artificially accelerated evolution and magical intervention, the chuul's predecessors merged into one species.

Regardless of the conditions that spawned them, chuuls have a range

of abilities that special suit them to hunting in swampy or aquatic environments. Powerful, if not swift swimmers, and taking advantage of their amphibious natures, a common chuul hunting tactic is to spring from boggy water to swiftly drag prey below the surface. Such surprised victims often spend more time struggling against the water than against their true attackers.

A chuul's tentacles are also invaluable natural weapons. These strong appendages are capable of paralyzing prey and feeding scraps of food into the chuul's small mouth, hidden amid its coils. The tendrils are in many ways similar to those of a jellyfish—though stronger and better armored—being covered in stinging filaments and miniscule barbs. This combination allows a chuul's paralytic venom to attack a victim with startling swiftness.

Except for those found in the deepest swamps, most chuuls encountered by humanoids are relatively young. Rumors of chuuls of titanic size spread widely, propagated by swamp-dwelling natives and hunters. As such, none are wholly sure how large an adult chuul can grow.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE CHUUL

In the hyper-competitive environment that some believe spawned the first chuuls, their young had little time to learn the tricks and tactics needed to compete with stronger, faster, and deadlier creatures. To compensate, over time chuuls evolved a cerebral peculiarity that allowed them to pass on some knowledge from one generation to the next. A newborn chuul possesses a portion of the hunting knowledge its parents accumulated, retained as vague images and sense memories. While many of the less important details fade, some chuuls possess thoughts that trace back generations, but more as a form of heightened instinct than as actual memories. This ancestral instinct shapes many of a chuul's actions and attitudes regarding other races.

Chuuls rarely organize, despite any supposedly warlike thoughts

toward humanoids, typically battling any other member of their race they encounter. Such battles often result in the death of one of the combatants, with those who fight to a draw going their separate ways. As chuuls find partners of equal strength attractive, if the survivors of such a meeting battle are of opposite genders they will often mate. The pair find a secluded, hidden place (usually in one's lair or buried in the mud underwater) where they perform a lengthy mating similar to that of crabs. During this time, chuuls enter a meditative stupor and are attached to one another, making them highly vulnerable. At the end of this four to seven day process, the female departs to find warmer waters where, in the next two to four months, she grows and deposits a fertilized sac of eggs. Usually only four to six young survive this birthing. These adolescent chuuls live under the protection of their mother for as long as four years. Packs of chuuls are usually only found together during such rearing, with any other gatherings being exceedingly rare.

Even the most simple humanoid activities in an area a chuul considers its territory are sure to attract its murderous scorn. A caravan bound through a swampy region might find that its sentinels disappear one by one over the course of several nights, dragged off by an unseen opponent smart enough to avoid a large scale confrontation. Hiding amid the rampant vegetation, a chuul might then attack horses, mules, and other beasts of burden. Finally, when the survivors are thoroughly panicked, the chuul closes in for the kill.

While chuuls are notoriously foul tempered, they sometimes work with beholders and mind flayers. Those races typically use their magical abilities to dominate their chuul servants, but sometimes they form tenuous alliances. A chuul's racial memories tell it that mind flayers and beholders are creatures native to its race's home island and might be worked with to

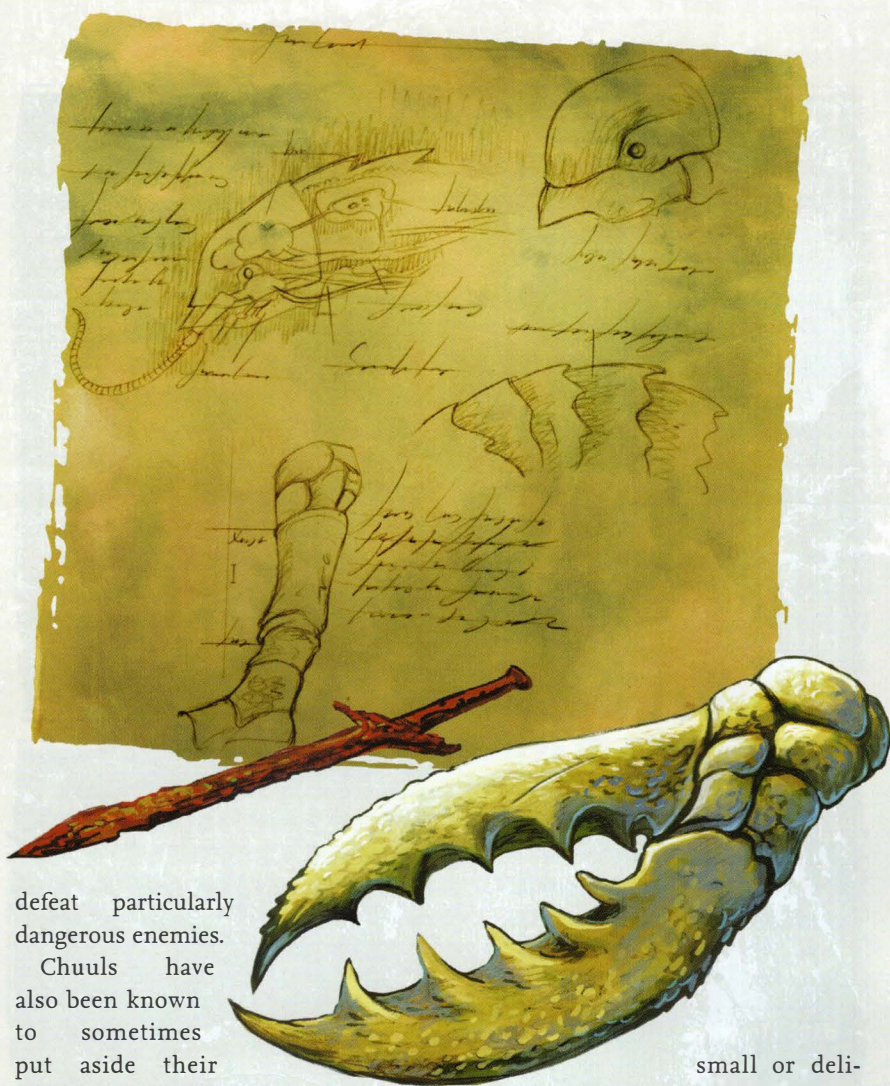
defeat particularly dangerous enemies.

Chuuls have also been known to sometimes put aside their hatred of humanoids to work against greater threats. While a chuul never willingly serves a humanoid creature, it might approach such creatures to benefit itself. Understanding that even the most monstrous humanoid races find their forms just as disgusting as they find the humanoid shape, chuuls sometimes work with such races via a messenger or slave. Such a servant is most often a member of a humanoid race less intelligent than the chuul (usually a kobold, goblin, troglodyte, or lizardfolk), pressed into service either by the promise of wealth—taken from the chuul's previous victims—or violence. Once forced into a chuul's employ, such a servant trades for information or goods its master's form would prevent it from creating itself—which is a great deal, considering that a chuul's massive claws prevent the fine manipulation of

small or delicate objects. In

this manner chuuls become aware of much happening within the areas they inhabit and sometimes gain the materials needed to make surprisingly complex traps.

Chuuls' racial memories also make them dangerous threats, as they supposedly remember glimpses of their homeland and wish to extend that perfect environment to the mainland. Some chuuls even remember their creator, and many wish to help restore his legacy. If their plans come to fruition, they could import an entire malevolent ecosystem that could push aside the native plants and animals. Thus, a chuul might gather treasure and items not merely as keepsakes or out of greed, but to help secretly fund more expeditions to its native lands. A chuul might spare a traveler, offering him a bribe in return for such service. Other chuuls leave slave-created



OUT OF THE WADING POOL

The chuul was newly created for the third edition *Monster Manual*, making it a member of D&D's monstrous family for only six years. It also appears as a rare figure in the *Aberrations DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Miniatures* set. Being one of the few mid-level aquatic creatures, chuuls fill a useful niche and have appeared in numerous *DUNGEON* adventures, including "Tammeraut's Fate" (in #106), "Strike on the Rabid Dawn" (in #111), and "The Styes" (in #121 this month).

A complete history of the chuul can be found in "The Origins of the Chuuls" in Chapter 1 of *Lords of Madness*. "The Ecology of the Chuul" first appeared in *DRAGON* #330.



maps to their homelands in treasure caches beside busy roads for travelers to uncover.

CHUUL ENCOUNTERS

With the adaptability to lurk in nearly any wet environment, chuuls might appear in a variety of encounters.

Shipwreckage: A particularly clever chuul has infiltrated the harbor of a bustling port town. Preying upon small cargo ships, the aberration grasps onto the hull of a vessel and waits until it leaves dock. Then, once shore is out of sight, it scuttles on deck, dispatches the crew, and gluts itself on the bodies and any cargo it pleases.

Water Damage: A chuul has begun weakening a dam, intent on flooding the valley below and gorging itself on the drowned remains. The only warning comes from the animal informants of a mistrusted local druid.

ADVANCED CHUUL

Storied to lurk amid the stagnant, snake-infested bogs of the Crab River, Ol'Rek Claw is a bemired boogeyman feared by the swamper who squat amid the marshes outside the city of Sasserine. Patient and sly, the old chuul spends much of his time hiding amid the river's turbid waters, disguised as a small boggy island as he waits for prey to venture near. Most of his meals, however, are delivered by a family of inbred vagabonds who worship him as a manifestation of the swamp's angry spirits. He doesn't discourage this

misinterpretation, though, demanding that his "faithful" offer regular sacrifices of bog game, crude art, and the occasional explorer who ventures too deep into his swamp.

OL'REK CLAW

CR 10

Male elite advanced chuul

CE Huge aberration (aquatic)

Init +6; Senses darkvision 60 ft; Listen +13, Spot +13

Languages Common

AC 26, touch 10, flat-footed 24

hp 237 (19 HD)

Immune poison

Fort +14, Ref +8, Will +14

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), swim 20 ft.

Melee 2 claws +24 melee (3d6+11)

Space 15 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +14; Grp +33

Atk Options constrict 3d6+11, improved grab, paralytic tentacles

Abilities Str 33, Dex 14, Con 26, Int 10

Wis 16, Cha 7

SQ amphibious

Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat

Reflexes, Improved Initiative,

Improved Natural Armor (2),

Improved Natural Attack

Skills Hide +24, Listen +13, Spot +13, Swim +14

Constrict (Ex) On a successful grapple check, Ol'Rek Claw deals 3d6+11 points of damage.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, Ol'Rek Claw must hit with a claw attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict or on its next turn transfer a grabbed opponent to its tentacles.

Paralytic Tentacles (Ex) Ol'Rek Claw can transfer grabbed victims from a claw to its tentacles as a move action. The tentacles grapple with the same strength as the claw but deal no damage. However, they exude a paralytic secretion. Anyone held in the tentacles must succeed on a DC 26 Fortitude save each round on Ol'Rek Claw's turn or be paralyzed for 6 rounds. The save DC is Constitution-based. While held in the tentacles, paralyzed or not, a victim automatically takes 1d8+2 points of damage each round from the creature's mandibles.

Amphibious (Ex) Although he is aquatic, Ol'Rek Claw can survive indefinitely on land.

Skills Ol'Rek Claw has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

"My favorite monster is....drum roll, please....the drow elf. Big surprise, right? Well, maybe it will be—keep reading. I love using drow in my campaigns, but never as PC's. In fact, my group disallowed that race as player characters a long time ago—or actually, we never included them as such. I love hitting middle-level parties with low-level dark elves. You know, the ones with negative armor classes and insane to hit and damage bonuses because of superb gear. Oh yes, and in our campaigns, drow weapons can't be pilfered, as they melt in sunlight. So I like the old drow, and while I know I played a role in their more recent evolution (to PC, etc.), it hits me as kind of a sad irony."

—R.A. Salvatore, Author of the Dark Elf Trilogy



THE ECOLOGY OF THE DRACOLICH

*“And naught will be left save shattered thrones
with no rulers. But the dead dragons shall
rule the world entire...”*

—From Maglas’s *The Chronicles of Years to Come*
as translated by Sammaster the Mad, circa 887 DR

Who does not fear the great unknown that is the night, when spectral winds carry strange sounds from the darkness? That time when dread clutches the stomach and fear tingles along the spine of even the most stout-hearted; where every mundane shadow becomes a sinister, alien visitor. Night terrors have haunted the living since time began, and with good reason, for many imagined fears are all too real. None, though, commands the dark of midnight skies and abyssal caverns with the horror and the authority of the

immortal night dragon—the dracolich. The most powerful creatures of nature and magic transformed into ever-living, undead monstrosities, they are threats to all who fall under their sway and few can flee beyond their skeletal claws.

HISTORY OF THE DRACOLICH

Many sages and magical practitioners—“experts” in the realm of dragons—claim that Falazûre the Night Dragon created the first dracoliches. There might be some truth to this, considering that “night dragon” is a commonly accepted term when referring to a dracolich. As wholly unnatural, created beings, however, a common heritage is hard to trace. The origins of dracoliches are as varied as the locales in which they appear, whether they come about through the machinations of madmen and demented cults or by dragons instigating the



unnatural process through their own arrogance and naked ambition.

The earliest known dracolich, the infamous Dragotha, was created from the body of one of Tiamat's favored consorts. The god of undeath, Kyuss, granted him unlife in exchange for his eternal servitude. Since then, mortal adepts have developed dim echoes of Kyuss' magics in the form of a powerful ritual accompanied by the consumption of a foul magical concoction—part poison to slay the imbibor and part elixir to bring about the cold existence of undeath—called The Damnable Libation, or more simply, *dracolich brew*.

One other commonality in the origins of dracoliches is their absolute reliance on a magical phylactery in which to store their souls. In this they parallel their humanoid counterpart in undeath, the lich. No one is sure how they came to follow this path and no other form of undead is so reliant upon such a receptacle—except perhaps vampires' connections to their coffins. Perhaps dracoliches rely upon these essential repositories for their nigh invulnerability, although they trade it for extreme

KNOWLEDGE OF THE DRACOLICH

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (religion) check regarding dracoliches. Those who study the magic of necromancy, dragons, and the most ancient of occult tomes might possess this information. A Knowledge (arcana) check can still reveal information about the type of dragon a dracolich was in life. The dracolich appears on page 146 of the *Draconomicon*.

Knowledge (religion)

DC Result

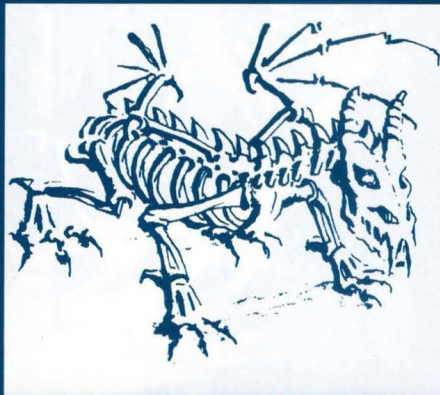
- | | |
|----|---|
| 28 | A dracolich is an undead creature that combines many of the powers of a lich with the might of a dragon. Any breed of dragon can become a dracolich. |
| 33 | Dracoliches are formed when a dragon drinks a foul concoction called <i>dracolich brew</i> and then partakes in a vile ritual of reanimation. The complex ritual requires the cooperation of clerics and wizards in addition to the dragon. |
| 38 | Like lichs, dracoliches hide their life force in phylacteries. Only if the phylactery is found and destroyed can a dracolich be permanently slain. |
| 43 | Dracoliches are masters of the dead, possessing paralyzing abilities and mastery over lesser undead creatures. A slain dracolich can possess the body of any draconic corpse within a short distance of its phylactery. |
| 48 | When inhabiting a body other than its own, a dracolich spends a few days as a weakened proto-dracolich. If the proto-dracolich can be found during this time it is more easily destroyed and might serve as a clue to the hiding place of its phylactery. |

vulnerability at the hands of anyone who should locate their soul-storing phylactery. Perhaps this crucial vulnerability holds some symbolic significance, such as being a representation of the Hades

Pyxis, the receptacle of Falazure hidden somewhere within the shadowed plains of the Gray Waste and said to hold the accumulated knowledge of all dead dragons.

THE FIRST DRACOLICH

While the dracolich as a monster was introduced in 1986 with *DRAGON* #110 and Ed Greenwood's article "The Cult of the Dragon," this was not the first appearance of an undead dragon in D&D. Some 7 years earlier, with 1979's *White Plume Mountain*, an arrow pointing off the map of the mountain's environs bore a sketch of a fearsome skeletal dragon and the note, "Beyond to the lair of Dragotha, the undead dragon, where fabulous riches and hideous death await." In June 1988, this note led to William Simpson's article in *DRAGON* #134, "Lords & Legends," which presented stats for Dragotha, the one-time consort of Tiamat and a unique undead menace. Dragotha rears his deathless skull again as part of the Age of Worms Adventure Path, coincidentally in *DUNGEON* #134, with the adventure "Into the Wormcrawl Fissure." "The Ecology of the Dracolich" first appeared in *DRAGON* #344.



things to many people: a tyrant ruling a kingdom, a benefactor to sages engaged in unfathomable studies, a fearsome battle lord conquering vast territories, and a terrible legend. Uniquely driven, dracoliches are terrible creatures indeed, sometimes seemingly mad in their goals and desires—which are almost as endless as their own lives.

When two or more of these ferocious, proud, and terrible creatures meet, such engagements frequently end in one's destruction. A dracolich is a terrifying foe, and other dracoliches rightly avoid their own kind for fear of being matched. As such, they use their ancient cunning to lure others to do their dirty work for them, spreading rumors of boundless treasure along with their opponents' possible weaknesses, all the while doubling and redoubling their already obsessively thorough defenses.

PHYLACTERIES

The one true weakness of a dracolich is its phylactery. As the destruction of this relic spells calamity for its draconic owner, a dracolich obsesses about its phylactery and weaves plots of astonishing complexity around its whereabouts. The destruction of a kingdom or loss of a hoard means nothing compared to the safety of its precious soul.

Dracoliches thus devise an amazing array of lies and ruses, rumors, false leads, and fakes to prevent their true phylacteries from falling into the wrong hands. Alternatively, some dracoliches prefer to keep their phylacteries with them—cunningly hidden beneath the strongest metals, or held within their form—sometimes melded to appear like parts of their own skeletal bodies. Other dracoliches prefer more obvious approaches, like horrendously trapped dungeons guarded by the toughest monsters. Some prefer the double bluff approach—hiding their phylacteries in places so obvious that no one would think to find them—wreathed beneath protection spells within a cathedral, for example, or perhaps built into the foundations of some huge civic building in the center of a city.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE DRACOLICH

Dracoliches have no metabolism and therefore no need to eat. Old habits die hard, however, and the desire and racial hunger to consume lesser creatures might still exist. Some dracoliches still carry out the function of devouring prey, but the flesh simply falls through their rotting skeletal forms, leaving mountains of mangled corpses. Sometimes, a dracolich eats foes simply out of malice or to feed parasites that cling to its remaining flesh. A dracolich is aware that its maw makes for a fearsome weapon—what better way to make an example out of an enemy than consume him before his friends' eyes? In all other physiological aspects dracoliches follow the same path as lichs, having no need to eat nor having any inescapable cravings or dependency on diets. Dracoliches are magically created and, therefore, have no ability to propagate.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE DRACOLICH

Consider a creature that lives almost forever agreeing to its own excruciating murder to assure complete immortality. Could it be that all dragons, tortured by the knowledge of their own transience, face this death gladly? Could their near

endlessness be a living curse; the very nearness of immortality being a madness that mortal minds cannot conceive? Dare they trust those who promise them immortality in the final moments before their deaths?

Some believe that a dracolich must, by necessity, be insane: a dragon driven by such insatiable need and ego that it cannot perceive its own death and is willing to go to any lengths to avoid it—including the tortuous ritual of death followed by an appalling undead rebirth. Others say that lichdom is something most dragons some day strive for, as the thought of their own mortality is unbearable to such narcissistic creatures. Perhaps they are to be pitied—creatures so unable to face rest that they willingly go to any lengths to avoid it, so fuelled by greed and desire that they cannot conceive of such hungers ending. Avoiding death becomes an obsession, a need so great that it causes them to face their own agonizing poisoning to achieve it.

Dracoliches, as creatures of great intelligence, are consumed by needs and quests, driven by the knowledge that one day they will succeed in all their goals and face the ultimate terror of torpidity. They are thus creatures of great distraction, able to juggle a thousand plots at any time, almost needing to do so. They are also, therefore, many



Phylacteries are as unique as the dracolich to which they belong; examples include sheets of paper-thin iron covered in sigils and bizarre illustrations, a length of horn from some impossible creature woven into an incredible knot of rune-inlaid ivory, or a stone puzzle-box with a hundred different possible shapes. Regardless of how a phylactery looks, most possesses the same statistics—a Tiny object with 40 hp, hardness 20, a break DC of 40, and immunity or resistance to a variety of energies, often related to the color the dracolich possessed in life. If the phylactery is destroyed, the dracolich suffers no physical harm but it is unable to create a new phylactery. Thus, if it is slain, its death is permanent. (More on dracolich phylacteries can be found on page 120 of the *Draconomicon*.)

BECOMING A DRACOLICH

Although the *dracolich brew* and accompanying ritual is by far the most common method of becoming a dracolich (if such a thing can be considered common), there are other,

even less-known, paths to this form of immortality.

The Well of Dragons: Hidden in an ancient caldera deep within a range of violently active volcanic spires, the Well of Dragons is difficult to reach even by draconic standards. This stagnant lake has been a dragon graveyard for untold centuries, its murky black waters riddled with ash and islands of dragon bones. Unlike other dragon graveyards, though, this place has been forsaken by all goodly dragons, and thus only chromatic dragons come here to die.

A cursed place said to have once been a brooding pit of the great dragon Tiamat, the dragon mother beckons her most powerful children back to the Well of Dragons as they near the times of their deaths. The Chromatic Dragon is not a nurturing mother, though, and seeks the service of her spawn even in death. Most dragons who drink directly from the Well of Dragons are stricken down and die immediately, animating as mindless zombie

dragons (see the *Draconomicon*, page 198) in 1d4 days. Those with exceptionally powerful personalities (Charisma of 25 or greater) sometimes manage to retain their minds, awaking in 1d4 days as dracoliches, the skulls of nearby lesser dragons spontaneously becoming their phylacteries. The waters of the Well of Dragons have no effect if removed from their tainted caldera.

Through the centuries the Well of Dragons has become a legend among dragonkind, leading countless wyrms on fruitless and often fatal searches for its location. Those who find the caldera must still contend with the dead wyrms that have come before them, now total slaves to Tiamat's will and protectors of the foul well.

Spiritgorgers: After uncounted eons of undeath some liches—and even some dracoliches—physical forms decay to dust, leaving only their phylacteries behind. In most cases such undead reform in some hateful new body, refreshed and more powerful than ever—but occasionally they return

DRACOLICHES IN FAERÛN

In Faerûn, the first known dracoliches appeared nearly 500 years ago through the machinations of Sammaster First-Speaker—mad archmage, former Chosen of Mystara, and founder of the Cult of the Dragon. While studying an ancient work of the seer Maglas, Sammaster mistranslated a key passage that led him to believe he alone had uncovered the destiny of Faerûn—to be ruled by undead dragons. As a result of this and the influence of one Algashon Nathaire, Sammaster devised the means to create dracoliches. Virtually every dracolich in Faerûn has some connection to the cult. All known dracoliches were originally “Sacred Ones” created by the cult and either serve a cult cell, lead a cult sect, or have rebelled and now plot their own schemes outside the scope of the cult’s activities (often involving the destruction of the cult that created and tried to dominate them).

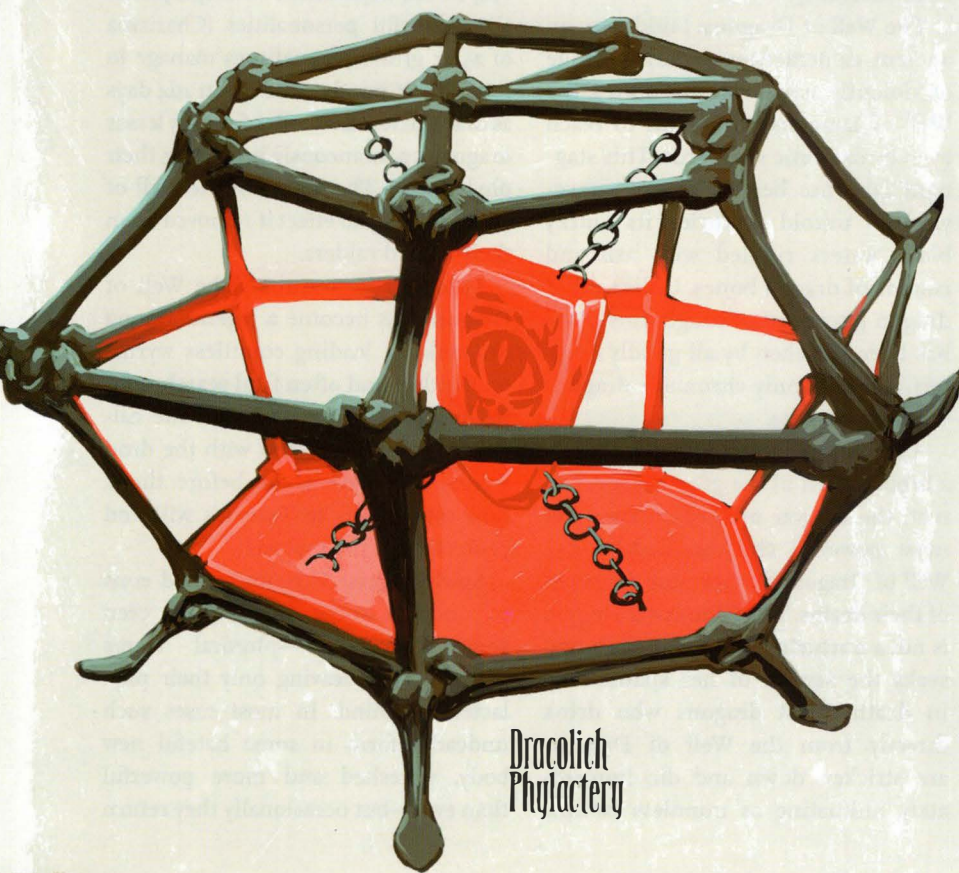
A recent development in the continual plotting of the Cult of the Dragon involves the Grail of Shargrailar, a cup fashioned from one of the horns of the first dracolich created by Sammaster and the mightiest dracolich to ever walk the face of Faerûn. It is believed that somehow some part of that great night dragon lives on in the cup that bears his name, and the cult seeks to use the jeweled goblet as a phylactery for a new dracolich (preferably Nartheling, the ancient fang dragon that dwells atop Umbergoth in eastern Aglarond). It is believed that such a dracolich will possess the animating spirit of Shargrailar, restoring the most fearsome of all dracoliches to once again terrorize the lands. The leader in this scheme is the necromancer Winn Kardzen of Glarondar (CE male half-elf necromancer 7). Unfortunately, his plans have hit a snag, as the fabled grail has disappeared somewhere in the Yuirwood.

The 1998 release, *Cult of the Dragon*, details more of the cult’s history and activities, as well as the ongoing plots of numerous dracoliches currently active across the Realms.

to their phylacteries as trapped souls. Such phylacteries, known as spiritgorgers, are dangerous to deal with. The hateful unlife within the phylacteries whisper and make promises to anyone who has the misfortune to find them. If the owner makes a willing pact with the phylactery he curses himself with lichdom—his physical form is instantly destroyed and he rises as a lich with two minds in one corrupt body. Such schizophrenic abhorrences are usually driven mad by their impossible double mind or are wholly overwhelmed by the lich’s ancient sentence.

Rare cases exist of demented dracoliches being created in such a way. The mad dracolich of the Corusk Mountains calling himself the Infernal Skald is one such example of this sort, combining the essence of the ancient dragon Prystisthese the White with the frost giant sorcerer/bard Beostagg. Able to assume either form, the Skald alternates between visiting the giantholds of the mountains as a lorekeeper and entertainer or razing them as a draconic attacker—often both on the same lodge within a week.

Soul Substitution: On very rare occasions, when the circumstances are just right, a dragon skeleton that has been necromantically charged and kept in long proximity with a receptacle holding the essence of some powerful evil being—such as an entrapped fiend or bound soul—can spontaneously arise as a dracolich. One occurrence of this phenomenon bides its time at the Silphar Royal Museum in the Kingdom of Raoke. For long years this museum has displayed the treasures of the ancient priest-king Ramaket, looted from his hidden burial site by graverobbers. Among these treasures is a jeweled urn said to hold Ramaket’s ashes. Yet also within the urn resides Ramaket’s soul, which has been helplessly imprisoned in the vessel for millennia. In an adjacent gallery hangs a display featuring the mounted skeleton of an old blue dragon. The curator of the museum, a sorcerer, secretly cast *animate dead* on the skeleton to guard the treasures of the museum



Dracolich
Phylactery

against thieves. Unbeknownst to the curator, the powerful will of Ramaket's entrapped soul has slowly begun influencing the necromantic magic animating his mindless guardian, gradually transforming the undead thing into a dracolich with the mind of the evil priest-king—the ancient urn serving as its phylactery. It is only a matter of time before the soul will have attained sufficient control of its new body to launch a second reign of Ramaket.

EXAMPLE DRACOLICHES

No two dracoliches are alike, either physically or mentally, and each individual creature makes a special lair with unique followers, and shaped by its motives and desires. In creating lairs for dracoliches, bear in mind that such places are littered with so many potential escape routes that reaching their residents at all could be a task worthy of several adventures. Such lairs are guarded not only by the dracolich but by the surrounding terrain and devout followers both secret and overt.

THE BREATHER OF LOCUSTS

At the heart of the rainforest lies a steep hill strangled by twisting jungle boughs. This hill is alive: a brooding draconic terror that merely appears to be held amid the overgrowth. Yellow bones and decaying green flesh fester in the vines—a rotting olive spider in the heart of its web, a living building of bone, decay, and hate. Vast canvases of skin flap from the frame, like sails on some huge vessel, and ribs like towers rise sharply upward to a gablelike back and a great green head. Two huge blackened sockets stand like caves at the top of this terrible form, and from within them burns a malicious green fire.

The Breather of Locusts is an evolved great wyrm green dracolich (see *Libris Mortis*) capable of vomiting from its rotting stomach huge plagues of bloodfiend locusts (10 swarms at a time). Of almost unfathomable age, it dwells in the legendary Twilight Mires, part of a great rainforest from where it plans, occasionally sending its children—

DRACOLICHES IN EBERRON

Who knows what intrigues work within the mysterious land of Argonnessen? Some historians claim to have found evidence implying that some dragons allied themselves with the forces of Khyber during the Age of Demons, the cost of their allegiance being a dark gift of immortality—the secrets of creating dracoliches. Some wonder if the draconic stewards of this knowledge still secretly create undead dragons for their own unfathomable purposes. Perhaps they seek to retain the wisdom of their elders like the elves of Aerenal, or possibly an army of undead dragons now bides its immortal time deep within the draconic continent.

As an aside, the Keeper, one of the Dark Six, also takes the form of a skeletal dragon, and makes his lair in the Demon Wastes.

ALTERNATE DRACOLICHES

Not all dracoliches are true dragons. In fact, any creature with the dragon type can become one of these undead horrors, opening the door for dracolich wyverns, dragon turtles, and all manner of half-dragons. Surviving the process of becoming a dracolich is an incredibly painful and trying experience for a mortal spirit, and one that not even all dragons survive. Thus, while non-true dragon dracoliches do exist, they are incredibly rare. For an example, find Sakatha the Deathless, a half-black-dragon twelve-headed hydra dracolich in the web enhancement for **DRAGON #344** available at paizo.com/dragon.

swarms of bloodfiend locusts or hulthoin (both from the *Fiend Folio*)—into the world to do its bidding.

The Twilight Mires are a nightmare land of bottomless, sucking pools, of floating bogs where whole horizons seem to sway like bloated skins, of rivers that twist like mazes through deep canyons, and twisted rainforests filled with ancient trees that weep in the dark. In the deepest quicksand abyss of this place the Breather of Locusts hides his phylactery, a sphere of fused animal skulls. Nothing else lives in the forest, its floor of fallen leaves hiding uncountable numbers of bones.

SIN FEASTER

Sin Feaster—the LychSpider, Slayer of Harvests, the Nightmare that Watches and Waits—dwells in an abandoned cathedral on the edges of a cliff overlooking the ruins of a city the dracolich destroyed on a whim. The Feaster, a corrupted wyrm black dragon dracolich (see the *Book of Vile Darkness*), has made an alliance with the followers of Lolth and claims to be a consort of the Spider Queen herself. Its ruinous cathedral is choked with vast webs, with the dracolich lairing in the spire itself, hundreds of feet up, where it

watches and broods over its phylactery, an iron sphere that sits at the top of the spire. Driders and spiders live in vast numbers in the dreadful city of webs, making it a nightmare of arachnid horrors. The spiders have spread their influence over the rocky hills and deep valleys, giving the region its name: the Ill-Woven Vales.

AURGLOROASA

Within the lost dwarven city of Thunderhome—a realm she personally destroyed—the shadow dragon dracolich Aurgloroasa scrys all those she calls foes. Vain and powerful, Aurgloroasa is an obsessive schemer and calculating adversary—traits exemplified by her fixation with collecting every scale she has ever lost and fusing each brittle obsidian shard back onto her undead form, partially disguising her undead nature. Through her subtle manipulations from deep within the mountain, Aurgloroasa controls a vast network of worshipful agents, dictating events through them and from the shadows that cloak her every movement. The poisoned whippers she hisses from the darkness and her mastery of shadows have led her to be known as the Sibilant Shade.

AURGLOROASA

CR 23

Female ancient shadow dragon dracolich
CE Huge undead

Init +2; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft.,
darkvision 120 ft.; Listen +31, Spot +29

Aura frightful presence (300 ft., Will
DC 35)

Language Abyssal, Celestial,
Common, Draconic, Dwarf, Elven,
Gnome, Goblin, Infernal, Terran,
Undercommon

AC 52, touch 8, flat-footed 52

hp 387 (31 HD); **DR** 15/magic and
5/bludgeoning

Immune cold, electricity, energy
drain, paralysis, polymorph, sleep;
undead traits

SR 33

Fort +22, **Ref** +19, **Will** +26

Spd 80 ft. (6 squares), 150 ft. fly (poor)

Melee bite +40 (2d8+10 plus 1d6 cold
plus paralysis) and
2 claws +37 (2d6+5 plus 1d6 cold plus
paralysis) and
2 wings +37 (1d8+5 plus 1d6 cold
plus paralysis) and
tail slap +37 (2d8+12 plus 1d6 cold
plus paralysis)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Base Atk +31; **Grp** +49

Special Actions breath weapon (50-
foot cone, 6 negative levels, DC 37),
paralyzing gaze

Spells Known (CL 13th, +29 ranged touch)
6th (5/day)—*create undead*, *disintegrate*
(DC 26)

5th (8/day)—*magic jar* (DC 27), *mind*
fog (DC 25), *persistent image*
(DC 25)

4th (8/day)—*bestow curse* (DC 26),
crushing despair (DC 24), *summon*
monster IV, *unholy blight* (DC 24)

3rd (16/day)—*clairaudience*/
clairvoyance, *dispel magic*, *fireball*
(DC 23), *ray of exhaustion* (DC 25)

2nd (8/day)—*alter self*, *blindness*/
deafness (DC 24), *darkness*, *deseccate*,
web (DC 22)

1st (9/day)—*chill touch* (DC 23),
magic missile, *obscuring mist*, *ray*
of enfeeblement, *shield*

0 (6/day)—*arcane mark*, *dancing*
lights, *daze* (DC 20), *detect magic*,
ghost sound, *mage hand*, *message*,

prestidigitation, *read magic*

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 13th)

3/day—*mirror image*, *nondetection*

2/day—*dimension door*

1/day—*shadow walk*

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 15th)

1/3 days—*control undead*

Abilities Str 31, Dex 10, Con —, Int 28,
Wis 28, Cha 31

SQ invulnerability, shadow blend

Feats Blind-Fight, Flyby Attack, Greater
Spell Focus (necromancy), Hover,
Improve Initiative, Lightning Reflexes,
Multiattack, Quicken Spell, Silent
Spell, Spell Focus (necromancy),
Weapon Focus (bite)

Skills Appraise +24, Bluff +44,
Concentration +25, Diplomacy +35,
Gather Information +40, Hide +30,
Intimidate +44, Knowledge (arcana)
+39, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +34,
Knowledge (history) +34, Knowledge
(local) +24, Knowledge (nature) +24,
Knowledge (religion) +43, Knowledge
(the planes) +43, Listen +31, Move
Silently +35, Sense Motive +39,
Spellcraft +43, Spot +29

Possessions *bracers of armor* +8, *crystal*
ball with true seeing, *darkskull*, *gem*
of seeing, *ring of wizardry III*, *wand of*
gentle repose (44 charges)

Breath Weapon (Su) Aurgloroasa's
breath weapon is a 50-foot cone of
billowing smoky shadows. Those
affected by this breath attack gain
6 negative levels. Those who make
a successful DC 37 Reflex save gain
only 3 negative levels. Removing
a negative level requires a DC 37
Fortitude save 24 hours later (see the
rules for energy drain on page 308 of
the *Monster Manual*).

Paralyzing Gaze (Su) Aurgloroasa's
gaze can paralyze victims
within 40 feet who fail
a DC 35 Fortitude
save. If the saving
throw is

successful, the victim is forever
immune to her gaze. If it fails, the
victim is paralyzed for 2d6 rounds. The
save DC is Charisma-based.

Paralyzing Touch (Su) Any creature struck
by one of Aurgloroasa's physical attacks
must make a DC 35 Fortitude save or
be paralyzed for 2d6 rounds. The save
DC is Charisma-based.

Invulnerability If Aurgloroasa is slain,
her spirit immediately returns to her
phylactery, a single unremarkable
onyx gem she hides in plain sight
upon a towering obsidian pillar
within her lair. If no dragon-type
corpse lies within 90 feet for her
spirit to possess, the dracolich is
trapped within her phylactery
until such a time—if ever—that
a corpse becomes available. If her
phylactery is destroyed while it
contains the dracolich's spirit and a
suitable corpse is not within range,
Aurgloroasa is permanently slain.
Likewise, she is unable to possess
the corpses of other dragons if her
phylactery is destroyed.

Shadow Blend (Su) In any condition
of illumination other than full
daylight, Aurgloroasa can disappear
into the shadows, giving her total
concealment. Artificial illumination,
even a *light* or *continual flame* spell,
does not negate this ability. A *daylight*
spell, however, does. ☞



MONSTROUS EVOLUTION: GITHYANKI

“Since the time the original *Field Folio* came out, my favorite D&D monstrous race has been the githyanki. As envisioned by sci-fi author Charles Stross, the githyanki were raiders from another plane of existence, led by anti-paladins no less, who wielded huge magical swords and rode red dragons. That was all very cool, but that’s not what made the githyanki my favorite. What I really loved about Stross’s creation was the great origin story of the githyanki (and by extension the githzerai). So many D&D monsters at the time were simple

dungeon fodder but here was a race with an engaging history that immediately suggested great adventures for your campaign.

“Many years later, when I was working at Wizards of the Coast as a RPG designer, I was assigned a book called *Planar Sites* [later published as *Vortex of Madness*]. This was my chance to add a chapter to the story of the githyanki and [with Citadel of Gith Reborn] I was certainly going to take it.”

—Chris Pramas, President of Green Ronin Publishing

AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF THE GITHYANKI



DRAGON, #309

POLYHEDRON, #159

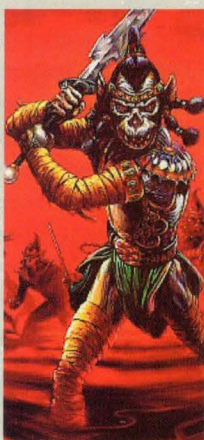
DUNGEON, #100

Fiend Folio,
1980

Tales of the
Outer Planes, 1988

Monstrous Manual,
1993

Monster Manual,
2000





THE ECOLOGY OF THE DRACONIAN

*“...when three moons rose from the lap
of the forest, dragons, terrible and great,
made war on this world of Krynn.”*

—The Canticle of the Dragon

Charging through the acrid smoke of the battlefield, wings flapping, swords drawn, a company of draconian shock troopers terrifies even the most hardened knight. Nobody could have imagined such creatures before the War of the Lance. Since then, draconians have left an indelible impression upon Krynn—the DRAGON-LANCE campaign world—one colored by rumor, supposition, and fear.

HISTORY OF THE DRACONIAN

Legends say that in the ancient days of Krynn, Paladine, the noble ruler of the gods, and Takhisis, the Queen of Darkness, bent their divine wills upon the elements and created the first dragons from base metals. Dragons of tin, lead, nickel, zinc, and iron, these creatures were the blessed of the gods. Covetous Takhisis, however, wanted the dragons as her own and, whispering corruption into their ears, they became tarnished and wicked. Sorrowful, Paladine sought to create five more breeds of dragons, this time from precious metals, and set them in opposition to their now chromatic cousins. Thus the gods set the stage for the world of Krynn and the many wars that would play out upon it.

Takhisis repeatedly attempted to conquer Krynn, her cause championed by ogres, lizardfolk, evil humans, and goblins.



Each time, knights, elves, and Paladine's dragons defeated her. Bitter at the failure of her armies, Takhisis plotted revenge after revenge, finally striking upon an answer. She needed a new race of warriors and servants, loyal to her alone, a living symbol of her hatred for the dragons of light.

She gave her servant Harkiel, a sly and crafty female red dragon, the task of secretly flying to the Dragon Isles. There the good dragons had spent the last thousand years apart from the mortals of Krynn. From them Harkiel stole their precious eggs, leaving behind her Dark Queen's threat: stay out of the coming conflict or the eggs would be destroyed. Thus, the good dragons remained in fearful exile, watching helplessly as the powers of evil began to work in secret, readying their armies for war.

Takhisis had no intention of keeping the eggs safe, though. Indeed, they offered the key to her revenge. She imparted upon Dracart, a wizard of the infamous black robes, and Wyrllish, one of her dark clerics, the instructions for a vile ritual. Together with Harkiel, these depraved magic-users corrupted

KNOWLEDGE OF THE DRACONIAN

The following table shows the results of a bardic knowledge or Knowledge (arcana) check related to draconians. As there are several different kinds of draconians, add the listed modifier and the CR of the draconian you're seeking information about to determine the check's DC.

This table assumes that a game takes place after the defeat of the draconians' creators, Dracart, Wyrllish, and Harkiel. Prior to this event most of the information about draconian creation was unknown. Stats for draconians can be found in Chapter 7 of the *DRAGONLANCE Campaign Setting*. Rules for playing a draconian character can also be found there or in *DRAGON* #315.

Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
10 + CR	Draconians are brutal dragon-men. Most have wings and scales and walk on two legs. Less savage than hobgoblins or goblins, they wear armor and use weapons like trained warriors. You recognize this particular creature as a draconian.
15 + CR	There are different breeds of draconian, and they die in varied, dangerous fashions. You know the type of draconian you are facing.
20 + CR	The presence of evil dragons boosts the confidence of draconians. You know the death throes of this particular draconian.
25 + CR	Despite being creatures of dark magic, some draconians overcome their evil tendencies and seek to live peacefully. You know the special abilities of the draconian before you.
30 + CR	A corruptive ritual involving the eggs of good dragons creates draconians. An evil wizard, a dark cleric, and an evil dragon are required to perform this rite. You know the type of dragon this draconian was spawn from.



the good dragons' eggs with dark magic, blasphemous invocations, and dragon ichor, deep within the dungeons beneath the city of Sanction. When these eggs hatched, an entirely new race spilled forth from the defiled shells—draconians.

The forces of the Queen of Darkness made quick use of this new secret weapon. Growing rapidly, the draconians matured, trained, and formed a powerful appendage of the rising dragonarmies, swiftly convincing Ariakas, Takhisis's chief Highlord, of their effectiveness. As the War of the Lance unfolded, refugees spread word of monstrous dragon-men, but the world had not seen dragons in more than a thousand years and the general populace largely considered these reports the ravings of madmen—at least, until the abominations took to the fields of war en masse.

After months of battle, the beleaguered forces of good discovered the secret behind draconian creation, a revelation that proved a turning point in the war. Gilthanas, an elven prince of the Qualinesti, and D'Argent, a silver dragon who had defied her oath of non-intervention, infiltrated the tunnels underneath Sanction and learned the truth. The heroes defeated Dracart, Wyrllish, and Harkiel, and brought draconian creation to a standstill. D'Argent and Gilthanas returned the uncorrupted dragon eggs to the Dragon Isles, freeing the dragons of light from their oath. The good dragons released their fury by striking back at evil dragons, avenging their murdered young and aiding the allied goodly races in resisting the previously unstoppable dragonarmies.

Defeated, scattered to the four corners of Ansalon, and deprived of many of their highest-ranking leaders, the dragonarmies continued to lash out for years after the War. The draconians, trained for nothing but battle and terror, remained a dangerous and capable enemy even in a time of peace. Eventually, though, factionalism and rivalry erupted among draconian units and breeds. Lacking the cohesion of the dragonarmies, the draconian race split apart into like-minded groups, each seeking its own fate.

Soon the real question arose: could a race of warlike, unstable, and cruel creatures ever hope to regain some of the noble potential of their draconic sires? Would they simply go violently into history's night, a footnote of corruption doomed to extinction? The answer remains unclear.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE DRACONIAN

As scaly bipedal creatures with claws, snouts, and tails, draconians superficially resemble lizardfolk or troglodytes. In truth, they bear a closer relation to their draconic progenitors than to humans or reptiles. This becomes more obvious when examined internally, for a draconian is a dragon forced into humanoid form. Most possess wings like dragons, share the same ocular structure that gives dragons their exceptional eyesight and darkvision, and rely upon the same heightened auditory and olfactory senses. Draconians even possess many draconic glandular systems such as the *draconis fundamentum*, a gland attached to the heart and central nervous system that regulates and charges the draconian's body with the elemental power inherited from its dragon "parent." As a result, draconians are immune to almost all pathogens and can survive for long periods with very little food or water.

The draconian creation process, however, sabotages this otherwise delicately balanced internal physiology. When a draconian meets its end through violent means, magical forces erupt within the draconian and cause the *draconis fundamentum* to essentially overload. Sages know this phenomenon as a draconian's death throes, which presents a particular danger for any opponent who slays a draconian. The specific nature of these death throes, and other distinguishing characteristics, vary from one breed to the next.

Although only one race, there exist five different breeds of draconian, one spawned from each type of metallic dragon.

Baaz: Baaz draconians are the shortest and most capable of passing as other humanoids—with a little help from cloaks and masks. Their scales are brass colored, acquiring a greenish-brown patina as the draconian ages. Baaz frequently display ramlike horns or thick curving plates around their skulls, reminiscent of the brass dragons they're spawned from. Their features are considerably less reptilian in appearance than

SAMPLE DRACONIAN WARBAND

The following represents a typical elite draconian warband attached to the Green Dragonarmy, operating out of the desert region of Khur. The Green Dragon Highlord, Salah-Khan, favors kapaks and bozaks, assigning skilled bozak leaders to units of kapak skirmishers and archers. Sakiel's company consists of two strike teams, two groups of archers, and a command retinue.

Sakiel's Company

A relatively small company numbering only thirty-three bozak and kapak draconians, Sakiel's Company excels in swift ambushes and hunting down small bands of enemies.

Command Retinue (EL 11): Sakiel's Company maintains a tightly focused core command of three bozaks, including Sakiel himself (LE bozak fighter 3/sorcerer 2, CR 9, uses a +1 *seeking longbow*). Sakiel's lieutenants Dengath and Torrek (both LE bozak fighter 2, CR 7) each lead a strike team. Sakiel, a deadly marksman in his own right, often commands the archers directly.

Strike Team (EL 13): Kapaks, equipped with scimitars and studded leather armor, make up each strike team. Both teams consist of ten kapak skirmishers (LE kapak rogue 1/fighter 1, CR 6). The EL of a strike team increases to 14 if Dengath or Torrek commands it.

Archers (EL 10): The archer units use shortbows of masterwork quality. Each squad of archers is made up of five kapak archers (LE kapak fighter 1, CR 5). The EL of a band of archers increases to 11 if Sakiel leads it.

DRACONIAN MEASURES

Draconians first appeared in 1984 in the simultaneously designed adventure *Dragons of Despair* and the first of Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's *Dragonlance Chronicles* series, *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*. Since then, draconians have returned in every edition of D&D, most currently appearing in the *DRAGONLANCE Campaign Setting*, the *Dragoneye* set of *D&D Minis*, and the ongoing *DRAGONLANCE* adventures and accessories from Margaret Weis Productions. "The Ecology of the Draconian" was first printed in *DRAGON* #339.



other draconians, with blunt snouts and thin lips, but undisguised they are never mistaken for humans. When a baaz draconian dies, the *draconis fundamentum* causes widespread calcification, possibly related to the brass dragon's stasis-inducing breath weapon. The outward result is that the baaz becomes a stonelike statue that crumbles to dust minutes later.

Kapak: Slightly taller and sleeker than baaz draconians, kapaks have longer snouts and snaggle-toothed jaws. Their whiskers, a mane of thin, dark hair, and softly padded feet give them an almost catlike appearance, but the coppery-

brown scales and wings indicate otherwise. Kapaks possess a set of two glands underneath their tongues, which constantly produce venomous saliva. This, together with the acidic quality of the *draconis fundamentum*, betrays their copper dragon progenitor. When a kapak dies, this caustic fluid quickly reduces the kapak's body to a hazardous pool of acid.

Bozak: Bozak draconians boast broader, more prominent wings and smoother scaled hides than baaz or kapaks. Their bronze scales darken as bozaks age, while their claws, teeth, and eyes grow lighter. Along with this

THE DRACONIAN CREATION RITUAL

By all accounts, Takhisis only entrusted the secret of creating draconians to Dracart, Wyrllish, and Harkiel. Historians report even earlier experiments, however, and almost all of them failures. The true ritual involves vile incantations and prayers to Takhisis, chanted in unison by a dark priest and an evil wizard, preparing the egg of a good dragon placed upon an altar consecrated to the Dark Queen. At the climax of the ritual, the saliva of an evil dragon provides the final essence of corruption, harkening back to Takhisis's defiling of the first five dragons. The number of draconians produced always depends on the type of dragon. Brass eggs produce as many as twenty baaz, while a gold egg yields only one or two auraks.

coloring, a bozak's flesh and blood are charged with seemingly uncontrolled magical currents. This resonance allows a bozak to more easily align itself with the ambient magic of Krynn, granting it a natural affinity for sorcery. Unfortunately, it also means that when a bozak dies, the draconian's soft tissue, skin, organs, and scales rapidly shrivel as if unable to withstand the unfettered power, which soon after causes the bones to explode outward with considerable force.

Sivak: The broad-shouldered sivak draconians easily top 8 feet in height, making them the tallest of the draconians. Their fully-functional wings, unlike those of the other breeds, permit them the ability to fly as well as glide. Underneath their silver scales sivaks are muscular and powerful, and the transformative magic of their silver dragon progenitors allows them to easily take the physical forms of opponents they slay—often to the horror of those who witness such transformations. Such transformations take on a morbid cast when sivaks die, as they take on the appearances of whatever beings killed them. These deceptions, however, reveal themselves three days after sivaks die, as their bodies collapse into piles of ashes.

Aurak: Aurak draconians are uniquely wingless and comparatively weaker than the other breeds. As tall as a bozak, the slender, gold-scaled auraks possess many of the same cosmetic features of gold dragons: catfishlike frills and

whiskers around the jaw, elongated fangs, and sweeping spiked horns and spines. Arcane magic comes naturally to auraks, even more than with bozaks, as their *draconis fundamentum* acts as a volatile furnace of sorcerous power. By tapping into this reservoir of magical energy, auraks direct rays of pure force, transform or alter their physical form, and even slip through extradimensional pockets. Auraks can also release a noxious cloud of gas that atrophies muscle mass and blinds those caught within it. When slain, an aurak combusts, overloading the energy reservoirs stored within its body, causing it to explode in a fiery blast.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE DRACONIAN

As a created race, draconians respond to the social behavior instilled in them as they mature. The Dark Queen's armies intended to use them as soldiers and strict disciplinary methods employed by their superiors ensured that the dragon-men served loyally and effi-

ciently. Before reaching fullsize, leaders assign each draconian to a training group, where it remains until mature. A draconian first sees a member of another breed only when ready to go to war. Their wartime roles therefore dictate the structure of their society.

Ironically, their progenitor dragons bequeathed their strongest and most prevalent social traits to the draconians, albeit twisted by the corruption ritual and its lingering instability. This dark mirror of the souls and personalities of the good-aligned dragons color much of what the draconian experiences and, despite the rigorous social conditioning of their dragonarmy masters, each breed naturally manifests distinct stereotypes.

Baaz and Kapak: Cruelty and cunning are common traits in both of these breeds. Baaz tend to be clanish and subject to forming brute squads, a twist on the brass dragon's social tendencies, while kapaks more commonly embody malicious or devious behavior, a perversion of the copper dragon's trickster nature. Neither breed produces above-average leaders, so the dragonarmies typically assign command of a baaz or



kapak unit to either a non-draconian or a draconian of a different breed. Attitude with regard to structure and rank provides the key difference between the two: the self-serving baaz find strength more impressive than titles, whereas kapaks like to follow orders and rely on the tactics of their assigned superiors.

Bozak: Bozaks make exceptional sergeants, lieutenants, and political officers. Their training includes a significant amount of spiritual education, and most bozaks learn from their educators that their innate spellcasting powers come from devotion to Takhisis. Combined with a love of psychological warfare inherited from their bronze dragon parentage, bozaks exhibit a sense of earned authority over the lesser draconians. Many feel their gifts bring with them a tremendous responsibility and their role is one of faith as well as leadership.

Sivak: Like bozaks, these draconians make effective leaders and commanders. They are fewer in number than all but aurak draconians, and this makes them a precious commodity in the eyes of the Dragon Highlords. Sivaks train intensively and undergo rigorous conditioning. When twisted into a sivak, a silver dragon's deep affection for mortals becomes an obsession

with espionage and covert activity, sometimes leading them to assassinate and impersonate the enemy. Most sivaks know that their assignments demand restraint and prudent action, and act accordingly.

Auraks: The least common of the draconian breeds, auraks are also the most independent. Few in number, immature auraks grow up in small, focused training groups of three or four individuals. Intelligent and insightful, an aurak quickly learns that it occupies the top rung of draconian society. Each develops a feeling of superiority and privilege, a twisted remnant of the gold dragon's nobility and sense of purpose. Auraks thus master strategy, manipulation, and politics, never happy unless they are controlling something or someone.

While many of the draconians who survived the War of the Lance struggled with both their innate natures and the cruelty ingrained within them, their place in Krynn remains in question. Dark powers seek to control draconian hearts and many of even the most forgiving races refuse to forget the atrocities committed by draconians during the War of the Lance. Thus, the future of the draconian race seems to be one doomed to hatred, strife, and the purpose they were created for—war.

ADVANCED DRACONIAN

While most draconians advance as fighters, auraks and bozaks often take levels of sorcerer, and kapaks are likely to take levels of rogue. This example baaz draconian is an elite soldier in Dragon Highlord Ariakas's Red Dragonarmy.

SHOCK TROOPER KURZ CR 6

Male baaz draconian fighter 4
NE Medium dragon

Init –1; **Senses** darkvision 120 ft., low-light vision, scent; **Listen** +2, **Spot** +3

Languages Common

AC 19, touch 9, flat-footed 19

hp 53 (6 HD)

SR 12

Immune disease, paralysis, sleep

Fort +11, **Ref** +4, **Will** +5

Spd 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee +1 scimitar +10 (1d6+4/18–20) and bite +4 (1d4+1)

Base Atk +6; **Grp** +9

Abilities Str 16, Dex 8, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 11, Cha 12

SQ death throes, glide, inspired by dragons, low metabolism

Feats Die Hard, Endurance, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack, Run

Skills Intimidate +5, Listen +2, Spot +3

Possessions +1 scale mail, +1 light steel shield, +1 scimitar, cloak of resistance +1

Death Throes (Su) Kurz's body turns to stone the moment he dies. If killed by a slashing or piecing weapon, the wielder must make a DC 16 Reflex save or have the weapon trapped. The statue crumbles to dust after 1d4 minutes, releasing trapped weapons. Items carried by Kurz or trapped within his body are not petrified.

Glide (Ex) Kurz can use his wings to negate falling damage. While gliding, he may travel horizontally up to four times the vertical distance descended.

Inspired by Dragon (Ex) Kurz receives a +1 bonus on attacks and saving throws when within sight of an evil dragon.

Low Metabolism (Ex) Kurz can survive on one-tenth the food and water it takes to sustain a human. 

"Draconians are my all-time favorite 'monster.' So much so that I don't consider them 'monsters.' The two books I wrote about draconians, Doom Brigade and Draconian Measures, were immense fun to write, essentially turning fantasy upside-down, making the bad guys the heroes and the good guys the villains. The books view the draconians—generally considered a race of evil beings—from their point of view, allowing the reader to consider the nature of good and evil. These draconians were on the losing side of the war and now they're simply trying to survive in a world that is out to destroy them. Draconians turn out to be complex creatures. Some are good. Some are bad. Just like elves. Just like humans. Many draconians have characteristics that are considered 'good.' They have their own code of honor. They are reverent, devoted to their goddess. They are loyal to their friends. They look out for each other. True, they consider kender to be tasty midday snacks and the dracos would like nothing better than to slaughter all the elves in the world, but when you look at things from the draconian viewpoint, it makes sense. After all, the elves are out to slaughter all the draconians. Which I guess makes elves the monsters..."

—Margaret Weis, Author of the DRAGONLANCE Chronicles



THE ECOLOGY OF THE

ETTERCAP

“Suddenly he saw, too, that there were spiders huge and horrible sitting in the branches above him... Standing behind a tree he watched a group of them for some time, and then in the silence and stillness of the wood he realised that these loathesome creatures were speaking to one another...”

—J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, “Flies and Spiders”

In the darkened tangles of the deepest forest mazes, where eldritch boughs create an endless green night, hang the grasping webs of the degenerate ettercap. Gifted with the cunning patience and bloodthirsty tenacity of the spiders they so closely resemble, ettercaps are master predators and trappers with few peers. Perverted and alien, they attempt to blend in with the natural world. Parasites trying to pass as children of nature, their terrible forms and insatiable, verminous hunger for warm flesh belie their true spirits.

HISTORY OF THE ETTERCAP

Most people believe ettercaps somehow evolved or were magically manipulated from arachnid stock, but their horrible origins actually occurred well outside of any natural order. Predictably, drow experimentation is often presumed in these beings' genesis, yet the worshipers of Lolth fervently and disgustedly deny the Spider Queen's involvement. The truth, instead lies less in external evils and more in the simple, willing corruption of what was once a pure intention.

Upon great menhirs and carved upon living guardians, pulses the vast, cultic knowledge of the druids. Within their secret circles, druids worship all facets of the world's being, and for each of nature's countless aspects there are corresponding druidic rituals and inspired ceremonies. One such fragment of ancient natural lore mentions a secret cannibalistic tradition, a disgusting rite overlooked or marginalized by many nature worshipers. There were once—and some say still are—druidic



sects that adhered to these natural predatory truths of betrayal and blood. One such flesh-tearing sect is held responsible for fathering the ettercap race.

These deranged druids embraced vile aspects of nature, particularly the invasive, fecund, and unkillable virtues of vermin. Thus, in a time long past, when a terrible spider fiend came upon their ranks, the druids took its presence as the ultimate validation of nature, seeing the monstrosity as a prophet and embodiment of all they held sacred. What this foul being was remains disputed. Perhaps it was some demonic bebilith or even a corrupt servant of the ancient demon prince Mishka the Wolf Spider. Regardless, the foul thing delighted in the adoration of an army of devout—if insane—fanatics.

At the behest of the new avatar of its faith, the murderous cult began indulging in increasingly arachnid practices. What began as living in webs and with spiders turned to eating living spiders and imbibing venom, and finally to taking demon-brewed magical infusions and adopting arachnid grafts. Eventually, these broken-minded druids gained a measure of kinship with the arachnids

they revered. Slowly, by degrees, they lost their humanity.

At some point, the fiendish leader of the spider cult was either slain or grew bored and departed. The druids, however, retained their corrupt, false faith and rituals. Eventually, from inbred generations of malformed, envenomed, and increasingly heavily grafted devotees emerged the first true ettercaps. Over time, these “perfect born” came

to outnumber the humanoid members of their order, and what had been the quest and religion of their ancestors was forgotten. Having no need to attain a more arachnid state, ettercaps abandoned their druidic traditions and forgot their forebearers, embracing their instincts, hunting and living as spiders, exulting and indulging in the profane knowledge of their perverse perfection.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE ETTERCAP

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (dungeoneering) check as it relates to ettercaps. Those who study arachnids or aberrations, as well as those who inhabit or make their living in the forest, are most likely to possess this information. The ettercap appears on page 106 of the *Monster Manual*.

Knowledge (dungeoneering)

DC	Result
13	Ettercaps are evil forest-dwelling creatures that resemble bloated humanoid with distorted arachnid features.
18	Ettercaps create and hunt with webs, ensnaring prey in their sticky folds. They surround themselves with arachnid pets and prefer to eat live prey.
23	Like many spiders, ettercaps are venomous, possessing a poisonous bite that stiffens and slows victims. Despite their horrific appearance, ettercaps are relatively intelligent and can speak Common.
28	Ettercaps are skilled at climbing, hiding, and trapmaking. Typically loners, they riddle their territories with snares and traps incorporating their webs and venom, waiting until victims are defenseless before approaching.

ETTERCAP BROOD SWARM

Countless tiny horrors gibber and trample one another as they surge toward you, their features something between those of hairy black spiders and sickly pink newborn humans. Dozens of tiny mandibles click and chatter as they come, dripping a mixture of poison and anticipatory drool.

ETTERCAP BROOD SWARM

CR 2

NE Tiny aberration

Init +2; Senses low-light vision; Listen +6, Spot +5

AC 14 (+2 size, +2 Dex), touch 14, flat-footed 12

hp 18 (4 HD)

Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +4

Spd 15 ft. (3 squares), climb 15 ft.

Melee swarm (2d6 plus poison)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; Grp —

Special Atk distraction

Abilities Str 2, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 10, Cha 2

Feats Alertness, Great Fortitude

Skills Climb +10, Listen +6, Spot +5

Environment warm forests

Organization solitary, tangle (2–4 swarms), or infestation (7–12 swarms)

Treasure none

Advancement none

When it hatches, an ettercap egg sack releases a swarm of starving, underdeveloped ettercap young. These malformed, pink hatchlings attack anything to sate their fetal hunger. See page 237 of the *Monster Manual* for special combat rules for swarms.

Combat

Distraction (Ex): Any living creature that begins its turn with an ettercap brood swarm in its square must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save is Constitution-based.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 14, initial and secondary damage 1d3 Dex. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus.

Skills: An ettercap brood swarm has a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks. It uses its Dexterity modifier instead of its Strength modifier for Climb checks. It can always choose to take 10 on a Climb check, even if rushed or threatened.

speedily as its lower abdominal spinnerets looses strands.

Ettercaps conceive young through normal sexual reproduction, but the gestation and birth cycle results in a large external egg sac filled with scores of tiny ettercap young. These egg sacs are 2- to 3-foot ovoids, wrapped in sticky, protective webs, that allow them to be easily hung in clusters from cave walls, tree boughs, web structures, or other easily defensible locations. Upon hatching, a process that takes nearly three months, thirty to eighty tiny, half-formed ettercap young spill forth with ravenous intent (see the Ettercap Brood Swarm sidebar). Ettercap mothers try to keep an immobile but living food source near the eggs—sometimes storing such a creature alive for weeks—so their newly hatched young don't cannibalize too many of their siblings. If a mother fails to find suitable prey, she flees to escape her starving children, returning only after the swarm has had time to sate itself or its numbers have thinned. Thus, these swarms of mindless newborn ettercaps can threaten not just those who stumble across a web-filled ettercap nursery, but whole regions. In the weeks after hatching, the number of young ettercaps dwindles through exposure, starvation, birth defects, and the predation of their parents, their peers, and other creatures. The mother collects the most promising youngsters (no more than three) and raises them until they reach maturity in four years. The rest are left to their near-inevitable demises.

An ettercap grows throughout its life, some that lives long enough reaching heights of more than 8 feet tall. They can live for approximately 50 years, though, violence ends the lives of most ettercaps, before age 20.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE ETTERCAP

Ettercaps' mixed arachnid-humanoid brains set a natural limit on their emotional and intellectual capacity. Rooted in their collective consciousness, however, is a connection to arachnid life that extends far beyond shared appearance—a holdover from the druidic rites

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE ETTERCAP

An ettercap looks like nothing so much as a disgustingly bruised, rotund, humanoid warped with arachnid features and mounted with a multitude of insectial eyes. Sickeningly pale, sagging skin covers its bloated abdomen while splotchy pinks and purples color the rest of its body.

Ettercap physiology relies on a blend of humanoid and arachnid organs and processes. An ettercap's prominent venom-injecting fangs conceal its near-human, yet totally fleshless, mouth.

Its exposed teeth allow it to chew meat, while a hidden tubelike tongue allows it to drink its prey's bodily fluids. Like a true arachnid, an ettercap drools enzyme spittle on its meals to start the digestive process. Its muscular and flexible fangs display an ability to manipulate small items, and an ettercap sometimes uses them like a third hand when crafting traps and other items. Its clawed hands also show great versatility, despite their lack of opposable thumbs. With a few quick gyrations and clips, an ettercap quickly weaves, cuts, and casts web nets as



that ultimately inspired the race's creation. Ettercaps feel instinctually obligated to serve as a kind of warden to all arachnid life and to increase their own numbers. Excessive sentiment results in survival risks. Other ettercaps are only needed for breeding, and thus groups of ettercaps larger than a pair are rare. They believe that life and death serve as the only real, tangible truths, and thus they do not recognize any deities or other moral codes. Religion and higher thought do not place victims in the web.

In some extraordinarily rare conditions, a particularly intelligent ettercap—usually a female—appears and gathers a large number of ettercaps and other arachnids around her. These leaders are often motivated, by destructive humanoid incursions and great loss of arachnid life, to strike out from their webs and stalk prey back to its home. These forays can lead to whole humanoid communities besieged by swarms of ettercaps, monstrous spiders, spider swarms, and other arachnid monstrosities.

An ettercap acts as a lone shepherd in relation to other ettercaps and true spiders. As keepers of their kind, they dispose of (eat) the weak and sick, while

THE REAL HISTORY OF THE ETTERCAP

The name ettercap can be traced to the Old English word for spider, *attercoppe* (“atter” meaning “poison,” and “coppe” meaning “head”). Middle English *coppe* (or *cob*) was synonymous for spider, as in cobweb or spider web. J.R.R. Tolkien gave this name to his intelligent spider monsters in *The Hobbit*.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS' ettercap first appeared in the original *Fiend Folio* and has been resurrected in every edition since. An Ettercap miniature also appeared as part of the *D&D Miniatures Giants of Legend* set. “The Ecology of the Ettercap” first appeared in *DRAGON* #343.



nurturing the specimens most likely to thrive and fulfill their intended roles in nature. Their ability to commune with normal spiders results naturally from their inherited spider traits. To an arachnid, an ettercap is just another spider. Ettercaps exude powerful pheromones and bodily resins that have euphoric effects on other arachnids and mask any hint of residual humanity. Thus, spiders are more active and seem more content whenever an ettercap is near.

Despite their isolationist attitudes and alien thoughts, ettercaps speak Common. They simply call it “The Old Tongue” and use it on the rare occasions they need to speak to one another or, more often, when they must communicate with outsiders. While etter-

caps most often talk to humanoids when attempting to taunt or deceive their prey into following them into an ambush, ettercaps might try to parley their knowledge of the forest and its dangers when a superior enemy prevents their escape. Ettercaps sometimes use coins or other treasure as bait for humanoid prey, although few truly want such treasure for its own value.

ETTERCAP LAIRS

An ettercap's lair defines the creature as much as any of its traits and abilities. Its lair serves many purposes: shelter, food storage, and the nerve center of its trap system. An ettercap builds its cocoonlike home out of specially treated, hardened webbing camouflaged

SPIDER SPELLS

Ettercaps regularly make use of a variety of spider-related magic. Spells like *creeping doom*, *summon swarm*, *giant insect*, and various *summon monster* spells that summon monstrous spiders are particular favorites. The following spider-themed spells first appeared in the *Book of Vile Darkness*.

Spider Hand

Transmutation

Level: Clr 1, Drd 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Personal

Target: Caster's hand

Duration: Concentration (up to 1 minute/level)

You detach your hand, which transforms into a Small monstrous spider (see the *Monster Manual*) that you control. You can see through its eyes, and it can travel up to 20 feet per level away from you. If the spider is killed or prevented from returning to you, your hand is restored when the spell ends, but you take 1d6 points of damage. If you direct the spider to return to your arm (a move-equivalent action), then let the spell end, you take no damage.

Spider Legs

Transmutation

Level: Clr 2

Components: V, S, F

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Personal

Target: Caster

Duration: 1 minute/level

You grow four long spider legs from the sides of your torso. You can use these legs to move at a speed of 30 feet, no matter what your normal speed is, as long as you carry less than your maximum load. You can also use the legs to cross vertical surfaces or even traverse ceilings with a climb speed of 15 feet.

A creature with a Strength score of at least 20 + 1 per caster level can pull you off a wall or ceiling.

with branches and leaves and suspended from large boughs high in the forest canopy, allowing it to spend much of its time—like a spider—lying in wait.

Aside from shelter, a complex network of web strands runs from an ettercap's lair. Some of these might connect with the lairs of other ettercaps, directly linking several ettercaps in a region to a complex webcraft community. More commonly, a single strand of webbing connects each of an ettercap's traps to its lair. If a trap is disturbed, the strand shakes violently, alerting its creator to the disturbance and leading him to investigate. Ettercaps regularly crisscross

their territories with such strands, which prove so light and difficult to notice that many creatures disturb the webs without ever knowing. As such, an ettercap's lair serves not just as its home but as the center of a complex web that encompasses its entire territory. A character must make a DC 18 Search check to reveal the presence of these warning webs in a 5-foot square. Characters who have gained access to an ettercap's lair might also notice webs vibrating in alarm with a DC 18 Spot check, but they might not realize its meaning without making a DC 20 Knowledge (dungeoneering) or Knowledge (nature) check.

ETTERCAP WEB TRAPS

Insidiously imaginative and innately skilled, ettercaps are natural trap makers and create a wide range of booby traps and pitfalls. Usually incorporating their natural webbing and leftovers bits from past meals, some of these arachnid monstrosities' more cunning traps are detailed here.

Baited Limb and Poison Spikes:

The most intelligent ettercaps have noticed that a humanoid creature, wrapped tight in webs and suspended as bait from a weakened tree limb, often attracts other humanoids. The victim moves out onto the limb, which breaks, dropping him and the bait into the ettercap's web. The trap is even more effective if the bait is left screaming for help and the ground is planted with sticks covered in the ettercap's poison.

CR 4; mechanical; location trigger; no reset; DC 22 Reflex save avoids; 20 ft. high (2d6, fall); crude ground spikes (Atk +5 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+2 each plus poison); poison (ettercap poison, DC 15 Fortitude save resists, 1d6/2d6 Dex); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 17.

Dancing Dead Man: Ettercaps create dancing dead men by filling a humanoid husk with rocks, wet leaves, and liquid webbing. Once attached to a strong web and placed to swing into the victim's path, the device behaves as a pendulum-style giant sap that bursts upon hitting a target, covering it in webs.

CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +5 melee (4d6 nonlethal plus liquid webbing); liquid webbing (ettercap web, DC 13 Escape Artist or DC 17 Strength check to escape; 6 hp, Hardness 0, double damage from fire); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 15.

Camouflaged Tripping Strand: As a simple trap, ettercaps simply hide strong, braided strands of webbing across a path, causing creatures to trip and fall into a web hidden just a few feet ahead.

CR 1; mechanical; location trigger; automatic reset; Atk +15 melee touch (trip plus entangle); entangle (ettercap web, DC 13 Escape Artist or DC 17 Strength check to escape; 6 hp. Hardness 0, double damage from fire); Search DC 27; Disable Device DC 15.

ADVANCED ETTERCAP

Ettercap males most often advance by Hit Dice, becoming stronger, larger hunters. Females, typically being more intelligent, might advance by Hit Dice but frequently take levels in druid, fighter, ranger, rogue, or sorcerer. The Matriarch is an ettercap leader, readying her spider minions for an attack on a nearby humanoid community.

THE MATRIARCH

CR 13

Female ettercap druid 7/ vermin lord 4*

NE Medium aberration

Init +3; Senses low-light vision; Listen +2, Spot +8

Language Common, Sylvan

AC 23, touch 13, flat-footed 20

hp 100 (16 HD); 20 point swarm armor

Fort +9, Ref +4, Will +13

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares), climb 30 ft.

Melee bite +12 melee (1d8+2 plus blood drain and poison) and 2 claws +10 melee (1d3+1)

Base Atk +10; Grp +11

Special Attack blood drain, poison, web

Combat Gear wand of shield (16 charges), potion of haste

Druid Spells Prepared (CL 9)

5th—insect plague, tree stride

4th—dispel magic, giant vermin (2)

3rd—contagion (DC 18), greater magic fang, poison (DC 18), snare

2nd—barkskin, summon swarm (3), warp wood (DC 17)

1st—entangle (2, DC 16), long strider, jump, obscuring mist (2)

0—detect magic (2), detect poison (2), guidance, know direction

Spell-like Abilities (CL 9)

1/day—spider hand*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 20, Cha 12

SQ animal companion, chitin +2, spontaneous casting (summon nature's ally spells), swarm armor, vermin servant, wild empathy +8, wild shape 3/day

Feats Ability Focus (poison), Dodge, Great Fortitude, Multiattack, Natural Spell, Run

Skills Climb +17, Craft (trapmaking) +11, Hide +14 Listen +12, Knowledge (nature) +14, Move Silently +10, Ride +5, Spellcraft +6, Spot +16, Survival +12

Possession combat gear, ring of protection +2, bracers of armor +4, gloves of Dexterity +2, dusty rose prism ioun stone

Blood Drain (Su) The Matriarch has enlarged mandibles. As part of her bite attack she can start a grapple without provoking an attack of opportunity. If successful, the mandibles automatically deal 2d6 points of damage each round as they suck blood

from her victim. The blood drain ability only works on living creatures.

Chitin (Ex) The Matriarch has chitinous plates that grant her a +2 natural armor bonus.

Poison (Ex) Injury, Fortitude DC 24, initial damage 1d6 Dex, secondary damage 2d6 Dex.

Swarm Armor (Su) Every day, upon regaining her spells, the Matriarch is covered by a swarm of spiders. These arachnids absorb up to 20 points of damage from any damaging attack (weapon or spell). The spiders die off when then they absorb such attacks. Swarm armor has no effect if the Matriarch is wearing armor.

Web (Ex) An entangled creature can escape one of the Matriarch's webs with a DC 20 Escape Artist check or burst the web with a DC 24 Strength check. See page 106 of the *Monster Manual* for a full description of this ability.

* From the *Book of Vile Darkness*. ☞





THE ECOLOGY OF THE INEVITABLE

"Let justice be done, though the heavens may fall."

— Roman maxim

Implacable agents of law, the inevitables dispense justice without regard to race, creed, or station. If you have broken one of the natural laws of the multiverse there might be an inevitable on your trail right now.

HISTORY OF THE INEVITABLES

By the standards of the eons-old multiverse, the rise of the inevitables is a relatively recent occurrence. Some historical texts (most notably Ganthros the Elder's *Accounting of the Realms Beyond* and Hannak Lathar's *Verses of the Blood War*) trace their emergence to 10,000 years ago. At that time, angelic

creatures called aphanacts called the plane of Mechanus home. Ambitious and obsessed with justice, the aphanacts raised great armies that crusaded on other planes, bringing vast swaths of the multiverse under their rigid code of laws.

Ganthros's writing hints that the deities themselves ended the aphanact crusades, while Lathar posits an alliance of convenience among the fiends of the Lower Planes and the archons, angels, and eladrins of the Upper Planes. In any case, every last aphanact disappeared 10,000 years ago.

In their place rose the first inevitables. Massive, fortress-like crèche-forges appeared amid the spinning gears of Mechanus. For a decade they softly hummed, impervious to any effort to penetrate them or divine their purpose. Then maruts started to emerge from the crèche-forges, striding



across the planes. Other sorts of inevitables followed in centuries to come.

Neither Ganthros the Elder nor Hannak Lathar can identify the creators of the crèche-forges (and consequently the inevitables) with any certainty. That doesn't stop them from speculating, of course. The inevitables have no larger society; their application of justice is absolutely an individual one. Each inevitable has a tightly defined purpose and no interest in matters beyond the next target brought to justice. Thus, planar historians speculate that whomever created the inevitables wanted to avoid a repeat of the aphanact crusades. Without broad ambition or the inclination to organize in groups, the inevitables remain individually powerful, but collectively dormant.

Whether one god, many deities, or other powerful denizens of the outer planes created the inevitables remains a mystery. Because inevitables periodically return to their crèche-forge to have their memories removed, even

the oldest inevitables don't remember who created them.

LIFE CYCLE OF THE INEVITABLE

When an inevitable first emerges from a crèche-forge on Mechanus, it seems to possess very little knowledge beyond the identity of its first target and a sense of how its powers work. It speaks little and generally refuses to interact with bystanders unless they directly aid or hinder its current mission of justice. Maruts, quaruts, and varakhuts *plane shift* to the appropriate plane to begin their mission, while zelekhts and kolyaruts start seeking a natural portal to the relevant plane.

Because *plane shift* is imprecise and portals rarely emerge at a convenient spot, the inevitable often has a long journey ahead of it—even if their target isn't on the move. During this journey, the inevitable observes its surroundings, recording its observations and soaking up information like a sponge. It starts to interact in simple ways with passersby, asking for

directions and questioning witnesses. An inevitable's first interactions are often awkward, as it struggles to make itself understood and tries to deal with creatures that don't share its single-minded purpose. Inevitables are reasonably intelligent, so they develop rudimentary conversation skills within a few weeks of travel in populated areas.

When an inevitable's first mission is complete, it uses what it's learned about its surroundings to identify a new target. Sometimes the identification is instantaneous. If a zelekht tracks a fugitive to a hidden colony of exiles under the city, it might apprehend a second fugitive mere seconds after the first, because the exile colony is essentially an immense cluster of fugitives. Sometimes, catching another fugitive can take weeks, months, or years. In one notable example, the marut known as Gantrenacht waits outside the ruined walls of the Crucible of Fears because it knows the prophecy that every 500 years, a lich-lord emerges from the crucible.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE INEVITABLE

The following table shows the results of a bardic knowledge or Knowledge (arcana) check related to inevitables. Because there are many sorts of inevitables, the DCs are listed as formulas, not specific numbers. When the PCs are inquiring about a specific kind of inevitable, plug the relevant CR of a typical example of that type into the formula. For example, PCs researching kolyaruts, which are usually CR 12, learn the first result on the table on a result of 22 or higher. Planar travelers, powerful lawful clerics, and servants of the forces of order typically possess this information. Inevitables appear on page 158 of the *Monster Manual* and on page 101 of the *Fiend Folio*.

Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
10 + CR	Each inevitable is obsessed with one particular aspect of justice and you know the purpose of this particular inevitable. All inevitables have the ability to repair themselves at an astonishing rate, but weapons infused with the power of chaos can bypass their self-repair functions.
15 + CR	Inevitables bring those they consider wrongdoers to justice, although this doesn't always mean a death sentence. They don't brook distraction or interference with their work and defend themselves with lethal force. The particular inevitable in question has a key attack power (a kolyarut has <i>enervation/vampirity</i> , a marut has fists of thunder and lightning, a quarut has <i>temporal stasis</i> , a varakhut has dispelling blast, and a zelekhut has an electric spiked chain).
20 + CR	Inevitables wander the planes in search of targets to bring to justice; if you can bring them evidence of wrongdoing, sometimes they'll start hunting down whomever you suggest. This particular inevitable has the following important spell-like abilities (list three or four the inevitable is likely to use in a battle).
25 + CR	In their travels, inevitables gradually develop distinctive, idiosyncratic personalities. Eventually, this develops into a drive to return to their "birth-places," mysterious crèche-forges on Mechanus, and have their memories and personalities wiped away. This particular inevitable has the following spell-like abilities (tell the players about most or all of them).

Inevitables are capable of learning and remembering, so some of them recall transgressors they meet in the course of a mission and revisit the wrongdoers once the mission is complete. This is more common among inevitables that have been away from the crèche-forges of Mechanus for a long time. For example, shortly before its return to Mechanus, the kolyarut known as Janu-Harim told the viziers of Queen Marnau III that it had prioritized two hundred forty-two contract-breakers on a mental list and was bringing each "back into compliance." Some inevitables, especially newer ones, ignore all other transgressions until their current missions are complete and then seize the next transgressors they come across.

The sages also agree that inevitables occasionally gain intuitions regarding events impossible for them to know anything about. Like the orders these constructs leave their crèche-forges with, some power, hidden deity, or collective redistribution of information assures that inevitables of the appropriate types become aware of the greatest transgressors in their areas of concern. Thus, even the most secretive archmage might gain the attention of a quarut even though no other creature could possibly know about his time altering works.

Regardless of how they acquire new targets, inevitables ceaselessly seek out each wrongdoer in turn. As they grow more experienced, they grow more comfortable working with

other creatures toward a common purpose—as long as the purpose puts the inevitable tangibly closer to its target. An inevitable starts to refer to itself by a name (one given by others or one it invents itself) at some point. It also develops the rudiments of a distinctive personality, shaped by interactions with other creatures. Inevitables remain totally singular of purpose and largely emotionless, but they can evince basic empathy or hostility toward allies or enemies.

An inevitable's personality develops only so far. With each successful mission, the drive to return to the crèche-forge grows slightly stronger. Eventually, an inevitable stops chasing transgressors and starts its journey back to Mechanus with the same single-minded purpose it displayed during its missions. When the inevitable gets back to the crèche-forge, it is swallowed up and emerges weeks later, remembering nothing of its previous existence. Whether the crèche-forge wipes away those memories, stores them, or transfers them to another entity is unknown.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE INEVITABLE

Inevitables have no culture of their own, and they're too single-minded to fit well in the societies of other creatures. A typical inevitable leads a lonely existence, making friends only when convenient and having no enemies beyond the current target. It's a creature of such singular purpose that emotions and moods are irrelevant, although some inevitables feel a vague, brief sense of satisfaction when they bring someone to justice.

The mind of an inevitable is the mind of a hunter—an endlessly patient hunter willing to overcome any hardship or obstacle to reach its prey. Even inevitables that have developed a measure of self-awareness and personality put that personality to work in the service of the single-minded pursuit of enforcing a natural law of the universe.

Kolyarut: Both written and oral contracts are the purview of the kolyarut, which regards itself as an impartial "enforcement clause." A kolyarut undertakes a mission only when it has a complete understanding of the terms of a contract and evidence that these conditions were violated. Sometimes these inevitables study an actual copy of a contract or is present when the oral bargain is made, but more often it acquires a mystical understanding of the provisions of a contract in a flash of inspiration. This instinctive understanding is beyond the control of the kolyarut, but it seems to require a degree of proximity to one of the parties to the contract, oath, or bargain. Thus, a kolyarut in search of its next mission tends to gravitate to royal courts, magistrates' benches, temples, and other places where oaths are frequently sworn and contracts made.

Because it regards itself as part of the contract, a kolyarut is simultaneously the easiest and most difficult kind of inevitable to negotiate with. A kolyarut won't be swayed by an oathbreaker's claim of "extenuating circumstances." The kolyarut, if given to conversation, would reply: "The circumstances are indeed extenuating, but they aren't part of the contract. You are thus in breach." Avoiding a confrontation with a kolyarut is as simple as returning to compliance, or (if it's a two-party contract) providing convincing evidence that the other party has also broken its part of the deal. Kolyaruts simply walk away from situations where both sides have broken a bargain.

Kolyaruts rarely kill except in self-defense; their concept of what constitutes appropriate justice is usually spelled out in the oath, bargain, or contract. They use *suggestion*, *mark of justice*, and *geas/quest* to compel compliance, resorting to violence only if such measures fail or lethal force is part of the bargain to begin with (like an oath on one's life that is subsequently broken).

Marut: Maruts almost always enforce their

natural laws by killing transgressors. They hunt down those who would cheat death by extending their lifespans unnaturally. Some maruts also bring justice to those who engage in large-scale necromancy (raising undead armies, for example), because doing so cheats the inevitability of death for others.

The quarry of a marut is, by definition, powerful enough to keep the grave at bay. A marut's foe is also either immortal or very long-lived. So a marut must be patient itself, spending years or decades on a single foe such as a necromancer, lich, or cult leader seeking immortality.

The target of a marut is often set apart from society by the nature of the transgression, so maruts get little practice interacting with other creatures. Thus, they develop distinctive personalities much more slowly than other inevitables.

Quarut: The target of a quarut is also a potent foe, capable of reordering time and space in dramatic, dangerous ways. A quarut's target list consists of creatures that can stop the

flow of time itself or wish a new reality into existence, so it approaches its targets with patience and caution. A quarut is unlikely to stride into an archmage's floating tower, shackles in hand. Instead, the quarut interrogates former associates and minions, seeking out weaknesses. The quarut employs proxies to engage the archmage in battle, using the opportunity to assess the capabilities of its quarry.

While some transgressors are able to defeat the quarut in battle, others are able to reach accommodation with the inevitable by setting aright whatever dramatic change they made to space or time. Simply undoing the change in reality is rarely enough to satisfy a quarut, however. A transgressor eager to be free of a tenacious quarut must rework time itself so that the change in reality was never made in the first place.

Varakhut: Those who seek mere immortality are the province of the maruts, but those who seek godhood are considered transgressors to the varakhuts. A rare type of inevitable, varakhuts hunt down those who make credible bids for godhood.

To attract the interest of a varakhut, the attempt at godhood must be legitimate. Not every two-bit cult leader and



ORIGIN OF THE INEVITABLE

"When Jeff Grubb, Bruce Cordell, and I split up the writing duties for the 2001 *Manual of the Planes* sourcebook, I was lucky enough to get the monsters chapter. At the time, the only monsters anyone had were the ones in the *Monster Manual*, because the third edition of the D&D game was less than a year old.

"First, I wanted to check for gaps in the existing supply of monsters to make sure we had at least a starting point for adventures on every plane. Second, I pored through first- and second-edition sources looking for planar monsters that I could 'promote' into the new rules set.

"I saw a gap in the available denizens of Mechanus. At the time, the formians were the sole denizens of the plane. They're great monsters, but it strained the imagination to have formians enforcing laws, chasing down criminals, and meting out punishment from within their hives. The same held true with second edition's modrons.

"Eventually, as I was at my desk flipping through the *PLANESCAPE Monstrous Compendium Appendix*, looking for good monsters, I came across the marut.

"The marut entry included a bit of fiction that was a riff on Poe's 'Masque of the Red Death,' so it wasn't much of a stretch to imagine these guys as enforcers of a 'don't try to cheat death' natural law. The marut thus became the first example of a class of creatures we eventually called the inevitables.

"The marut was on board, and his natural law was one that would make him a useful ally or a potential opponent. Because the inevitables are lawful neutral, I wanted them to function as enemies or allies. Thus their natural laws had to be laws that you could imagine PCs upholding or breaking, depending on the circumstance. Thus came the kolyarut (don't break a contract) and the zelekhut (don't escape justice), and with the *Fiend Folio* the quarut (don't mess with space and time) and the varakhut (don't mess with the gods)." —David Noonan, *Designer at Wizards of the Coast*

"The Ecology of the Inevitable" first appeared in *DRAGON* #341.

would-be demigod is subject to the justice of a varakhut, only those on the cusp of becoming true deities. In some cases, powerful outsiders or would-be godlings intentionally antagonize varakhuts in an attempt to legitimize their bids for godhood.

Once a varakhut identifies a credible attempt at godhood, it studies its enemies like a quarut does, learning as much as it can about its target before making a direct confrontation. The varakhut prefers to thwart would-be deities by eliminating them directly, but it isn't above destroying artifact-level power sources or wreaking havoc on minions and worshipers if doing so weakens the prospective godling.

Only two ways of forestalling a varakhut exist. The first is obvious: destroying it. The second way is to actually achieve deityhood. Once a creature becomes a demigod, varakhuts regard the new deity as part of the natural order they're charged with enforcing.

While most varakhuts search the cosmos for those trying to join the pantheon of deities, occasionally varakhuts target those attempting the reverse: decide, the act of killing a deity.

Zelekhut: Because they're charged with hunting down fugitives, zelekhts spend more time traveling and doing detective work than perhaps any other inevitable. More so than the targets of other inevitables, the quarry of a zelekhut certainly doesn't want to be found. Zelekhts thus interact with passersby more than other inevitables and develop distinctive personalities faster. A zelekhut often brings a fugitive back to authorities alive, employing *mark of justice* and *lesser geas* to augment the mundane shackles and other restraints on the prisoner.

A zelekhut often has to interrogate witnesses who might know something about the whereabouts of its quarry. A zelekhut recently emerged from its crèche-forge asks direct questions and

might resort to physical violence if it thinks it'll gain better information that way. A more experienced zelekhut is a subtler interrogator, using *Sense Motive* to ferret out witnesses who are withholding information important to the zelekhut's search.

INEVITABLE ENCOUNTERS

Encountering an inevitable can result in a range of different adventures depending on what type the PCs ally with or run afoul of.

Honest Deal Breaker: A whimsical lillend has been sending mercenaries—including the PCs—on far-ranging quests for the cause of good. Each time she promises fantastic wealth, but flees any who try to claim their payment, seeing the good done as reward of its own. Her actions have finally attracted the attentions of a kolyarut, who has gathered a small army of those the lillend has scammed, some who now want payment in blood. Do the PCs aid the inevitable and seek their just payment, or help the flighty but well-intentioned outsider hide?

Death Sentence: Sometimes—however rarely—even the inevitables make mistakes. A marut inevitable begins hunting one of the PCs, insisting that he has lived beyond his time and must now submit to death. Now the PC must somehow prove to the determined colossi that his time isn't up quite yet.

Moment In Time: The vampire Baucojin recently plotted to make use of a supremely deadly planar weapon, the Quicksilver Hourglass, and accelerate time throughout the Material Plane (see "Quicksilver Hourglass" in *DUNGEON* #123). Although he was defeated, Baucojin's surviving allies, the Union of Eclipses, have sought to continue his work. A quarut entreats the PCs to aid it in hunting this cabal of undead spellcasters and putting their bid for temporal power to an end.

ADVANCED INEVITABLE

Inevitables most often advance by Hit Dice, as they forget their classes upon returning to their crèche-forges.

Occasionally, kolyaruts become fighters or clerics of deities of order, and zelekhts sometimes take levels of ranger, choosing humanoid favored enemies. Maruts most rarely take levels in specific classes, their already massive bulks added to with each return to the forge, eventually growing to truly epic proportions.

GANTRENACHT

CR 22

Advanced marut inevitable

(extraplanar, lawful)

LN Huge construct

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; **Listen** +24, **Spot** +27

AC 37, **touch** 9, **flat-footed** 36

hp 276 (43 HD); **fast healing**; 10 **DR** 15/chaotic

Immune construct traits

SR 25

Fort +16, **Ref** +15, **Will** +19

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee* 2 slams +25 **melee** (3d6+43 plus 3d6 sonic or 3d6 electricity)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

Base Atk +32; **Grp** +60

Attack Options Awesome Blow, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Overrun, Improved Sunder, Power Attack; fists of thunder and lightning

Spell-like Abilities (CL 14)

At will—*air walk*, *dimension door*, *fear* (DC 19), *greater command* (DC 20), *greater dispel magic*, *mass inflict light wounds* (DC 20), *locate creature*, *true seeing*

1/day—*chain lightning* (DC 21), *circle of death*

(DC 21), *mark of justice*, *wall of force* 1/week—*earthquake* (DC 23), *geas/quest*, *plane shift* (DC 22)

* Includes adjustment for 25-point Power Attack.

Abilities Str 46, Dex 12, Con —, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 20

Feats Ability Focus (fists), Awesome Blow, Cleave, Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Natural Armor, Improved Natural Attack, Run

Skills Concentration +18, Diplomacy +16, Knowledge (religion) +21, Listen +24,

Search +13, Sense Motive +12, Spot +27, Survival +16 (+18 following tracks)

Fists of Thunder and Lightning (Su)

Gantrenacht's left fist deals 3d6 points of sonic damage and deafens the target for 2d6 rounds (Fortitude DC 51 negates the deafness).

Its right fist deals 3d6 points of electricity damage and blinds the target for 2d6 rounds (Fortitude DC 51 negates the blindness). 



"Monsters are easily my favorite part of D&D, and as such it's difficult for me to pin down which one's my favorite. Most of the frontrunners on James' Top Monster List are old classics like mind flayers, aboleths, koprur, spawn of Kyuss, and of course all of the demons (especially Demogorgon and those slinky succubi). If I had to pick one, though, it'd have to be the frogemoth. That guy just loves his job! I wish I were a frogemoth, sometimes.

"I've had the good fortune to have a chance to introduce some of my own creations to the world of D&D as well, including the kaorti, the obyrith demons, the kaiju template, the wendigo template, and the tough-for-everyone-else-to-spell ulgurstasta. But the one that I'm probably the most proud of is also the first new monster I ever had published—the ulitharid, back in DUNGEON #24. It was kind of weird running into a monster I'd created in "Baldur's Gate II," only to have it single-handedly wipe out my party. And of course, the ulitharid would likely have never even come to be had I not read Roger Moore's classic "The Ecology of the Mind Flayer" back in issue #78 of DRAGON, which included tantalizing hints that the mind flayers I knew and loved were just the tip of the illithid-berg. It was the first Monster Ecology article I ever read, and it remains my favorite to this day.

"It could have used more frogemoths, though."

—James Jacobs, Editor-in-Chief of DUNGEON



THE ECOLOGY OF THE KENKU

"He that first cries out stop thief, is often he that has stolen the treasure."

—William Congreve, *Love for Love*

In the dark places of many cities, hidden by the refuse of those who walk the streets by day, run ominous markings, scores in the stone left by the unseen passage of razor-sharp talons. Although dark figures lurk in the alleys of any city, in some skulk deadlier avian intruders. These interlopers, kenkus, are a vagrant people akin to crows and other filthy avian scavengers. Hidden by shadows and tattered rags, they plot in larcenous flocks, taking what they please and preying off their unsuspecting neighbors.

Without homes of their own, these greedy, raptors scheme against their enemies from within, thieving and murdering for even the most trifling copper. Yet, beneath the guise of sinister vagabonds, kenkus hide far darker secrets and ties to powers both ancient and foul.

HISTORY OF THE KENKU

Secretive and reclusive, kenkus reveal little about their true origins—if indeed their scattered communities even know them. Scholars who delve into their history find that for centuries kenkus have existed as a ubiquitous part of most large urban areas—the largest cities always having aeries of kenku lurking in the darkest parts of town.



What few details the eldest and most learned kenkus let slip indicate that their race came into existence as the result of tragedy piled upon tragedy. One legend tells that, long ago, kenkus existed as a race of large, intelligent ravens that lived in the shadows of other races. During a time of strife, a great plague spread among their hosts. In desperation, these proto-kenku resorted to theft and blatant raids, and in doing so spread their disease among the neighboring peoples. Infuriated, many races took up hunting the sentient birds and destroying their mountainous nests—almost universally aided by giant eagles, who bore a long-standing rivalry with the massive ravens. Driven nearly to extinction through assaults on their homes, the ravens' various aeries came together into a single massive flock. Their numbers blackening the sky, they squawked and cried out to something, anything, to save them from their unrelenting enemies and

KNOWLEDGE OF THE KENKU

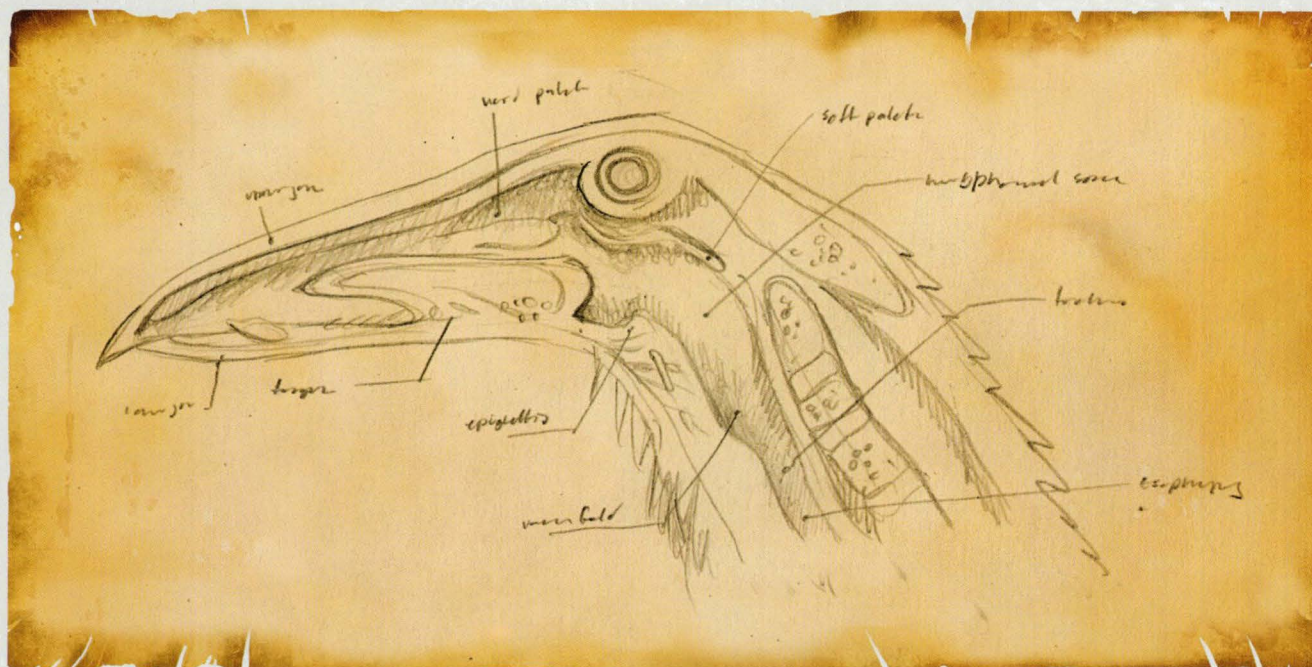
The following table shows the results of Knowledge (local) checks related to kenkus. Those who inhabit large cities most often learn this information, commonly from victims of the insidious plots of these avian humanoids. Kenkus appear on page 86 of the *Monster Manual III*.

Knowledge (local)

DC	Result
10	Kenkus are birdlike humanoids who skulk in the back alleys and abandoned areas of most major cities.
15	Kenkus are extremely greedy, vicious beings, but work closely with each other. They prove deadly in groups, but are often cowardly if caught alone. It's extremely difficult to force a kenku to turn against its kin.
20	Kenkus can mimic almost any sound they hear and use this ability to sow lies and mistrust among their enemies. Their aeries are most commonly found at heights of tall abandoned buildings or within sewers.
25	Kenkus are consummate assassins, often hired by other races to do their dirty work. Being that they fill a similar niche in a city's underworld, kenkus and thieves guilds often fight ongoing criminal wars for territory.

seemingly incurable disease. The answer came in the form of an enormous raven, its unnaturally white feathers soaked and stained red with gore. Descending from the moonless sky and speaking in all the languages

of the world, this raven agreed to grant the petitioners their wish; but at a price. In that single night, the ravens' plague was miraculously cured and all giant eagles and their eggs within 100 miles were laid to bloody ruin—a



nightmare that race vengefully remembers to this day. In exchange, the cruel birds agreed to call one lord, Pazuzu, Prince of the Lower Aerial Kingdoms, their true master and spread his name among the creatures of the world.

Yet even in those times, the creatures that would be kenkus were a fickle, deceitful lot. Their proselytizing in honor of the demon prince proved to be short lived as their attentions were drawn to the treasures of those to whom they preached. Within a generation the ravens grew bored with their piety, some even turning to the worship of humanoid deities promising greater wealth and power. Enraged, Pazuzu, in the guise of the gory raven, returned, slaughtering many of the ravens and cursing the survivors with an affliction far greater than that which he removed. From that day on, the giant ravens' fledglings hatched without wings, instead possessing scaly arms and legs, forever exiled from the skies for their betrayal. Thus, kenkus were born.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE KENKU

Although humanoid, kenkus clearly come from avian stock and retain many features common to birds. Kenkus average 5 feet in height, but

because of their partially hollow bones, commonly weigh a mere 75 pounds. Their heads are the most distinctive part of their bodies—resembling those of oversized ravens or crows—complete with large, inquisitive black eyes and short beaks. Lacking wings, kenkus possess scrawny arms that end in powerful claws and legs supported by taloned feet. (As a result, kenkus are unable to don normal shoes or other footwear, magical or otherwise, unless such items were created to fit taloned wearers.) Born from large eggs, young kenkus naturally have soft, dark feathers, typically a shiny black in color, which cover their heads and torsos, although variations do occur. As kenkus age, their feathers—beginning on their heads and slowly extending to the rest of their bodies—turn a pure, ivory white. These aging creatures typically retain their intellect and cunning until the moment of their death, becoming true masterminds and pulling the strings of entire aeries from afar. Despite their kin's superficial loyalty, however, the competitive nature of kenkus requires elders to maintain a constant vigil as there is always a potential rival or ambitious child plotting to take over.

Kenkus are omnivores perfectly adapted to eating the abundant scraps found on and under city streets. They enjoy carrion intermixed with the occasional bit of rotting vegetable or fruit.

Although they possess beaks like birds, the throat and tongue of kenkus resemble elongated humanoid structures, granting them the ability to mimic almost any sound, voice, and even accent that they overhear. Kenkus might not understand the meaning of the words they mimic, but they do so with astounding accuracy. They typically use this ability to guide unsuspecting victims into ambushes, often tempting victims with the voices of allies or threatening them with monstrous growls. Kenkus speak flawless Common, but possess their own language filled with squawks, caws, and other sounds similar to crows and ravens. An angry or excited kenku sometimes slips, interspersing these sounds with the Common tongue.

Light does not harm kenkus, but they commonly only venture onto the streets at night, when their black coloration and natural stealth best aid them. Kenkus seriously dislike traveling in sunlight and garb themselves in dark, tattered clothing to help them blend into surrounding throngs. Regardless,

only the most elaborate disguises allow kenkus to hide their prodigious beaks.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE KENKU

Unlike many fractious evil humanoids, kenkus get along well and work best with others of their own kind. This tight-knit attitude ensures that they never lack for allies to assist them in their sinister schemes.

Kenku society resembles that of some birds, with several family units dwelling together in aeries located in or near large cities. Like other avians, kenkus prefer creating lairs on the highest ground possible in order to keep an eye out for attacks—towers and minarets proving the most valuable real estate in their minds. Failing to find a tall place to make their lair, kenkus take the opposite route, squatting in sewers and long-forgotten basements. Because they never announce their presence unless sorely pressed, kenkus have secretly migrated into such places for millennia, with the original occupants none the wiser. Despite the efforts of law-enforcement and other power groups, kenkus excel at infiltrating communities where they aren't wanted. Once an aerie establishes itself, it's extremely difficult to root out.

Even in these communities, kenkus stick close together and spend most of their time interacting with their immediate family or in coterie of like-minded individuals. Kenkus rarely travel anywhere alone, preferring multiple eyes to warn each other of danger or to watch for opportunity.

Much like crows and ravens, kenkus greatly desire wealth and often obsess over collecting shiny things. Status within kenku society is measured almost exclusively by ostentatious displays of wealth, regardless of how it was amassed. Theft is perfectly acceptable among kenkus and most aeries are rife with petty bickering as the result of one kenku stealing from another. Kenkus desire knowledge almost as much, particularly dark secrets they can use for blackmail and extortion.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER...

Kenkus were first introduced to the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game as part of the original ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *Fiend Folio*. These original kenkus were telepathic, hawk-headed kidnappers who commonly wielded quarterstaves or samurai swords. Related to tengus, shape-shifting birdmen of Japanese myth, kenku have appeared in numerous adventures throughout D&D's history, as well as being memorably featured in the popular D&D computer adventure *Eye of the Beholder*. These flightless pilferers make prominent appearances in the *Deathknell* expansion for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Miniatures and in DUNGEON #120 with the adventure, "Forsaken Arch." The "Ecology of the Kenku" first appeared in DRAGON #329.



Ever mindful of their duty to the aerie, even the most selfish kenkus offer a portion of what they find or pilfer to the rest of the flock. Such distributions of food and treasure become true tests of the kenku pecking order, as elder kenkus squawk, squabble, and fight for the finest scraps, while the young and weak look on greedily. Unsurprisingly, even in a city filled with garbage and abandoned food, starvation proves the primary cause of death among kenkus, followed closely by disease and death by violent wounds. While many races care for their ill and infirm, kenkus have no sympathy for their brethren who lack the cunning and skill to survive.

Reproduction and child rearing is an odd dichotomy of protectiveness and negligence in kenku society. Kenku females lay eggs like regular birds, but leave the protection of their group's aerie to do so. Creating nests in high, hidden places, mothers seek to avoid scheming eyes and hungry mouths, especially those of their own race. Commonly laid in clutches of three to seven, these eggs hatch after only a month. Once the eggs hatch, the nest is abandoned and the newborns are introduced to the rest of the aerie. Staying close to the communal nests for nearly nine years, the young kenkus learn the valuable skills of hiding, taunting others, and stealing unattended objects, all the while forced to fight for even the most meager scraps of food. Attrition is high

among young kenku: typically only half survive the first month.

Kenkus commonly show little remorse for the dead. The bodies of young kenkus who have not yet proven themselves valuable to the community are dumped in lonely, forgotten spots or given to the aerie's clerics for unspeakable purposes. Older kenkus who die, however, undergo an elaborate ceremony in which the corpse is placed upon a significant height for winged scavengers to feed on and carry the remains aloft. In this way, all kenkus hope to regain their lost ability to fly after death. The height at which a kenku is placed is directly proportional to its usefulness and respect within the community, with most kenku corpses being placed upon tall hills or castle spires. Particularly honored elders might have their bodies borne all the way to a mountain top. The greatest insult the deceased can face is to merely be deposited on the street, left for the dogs and other land-bound scavengers. In all cases the bodies of the dead are, of course, thoroughly stripped of valuables first.

Pious kenkus are a rare sight and few feel the desire or inclination to become clerics. Those who do find themselves drawn to darker deities, most notably Vecna, the god of secrets, whose dogma parallels the kenku lust for the forbidden. Some particularly sinister kenku—hoping to garner his favor and return to the skies—turn

TALONS OF REKROK—A KENKU THIEVES' GUILD

The Talons of Rekrok is a band of kenku thieves, assassins, and information brokers typical to most large cities. Named after its leader, the white-feathered elder rogue Rekrok, the Talons maintain a low profile, but are willing to use their impressive skills for anyone willing to pay their exorbitant prices. Primarily focusing on breaking-and-entering, theft, and murder for hire, this group has garnered a well-deserved reputation for efficiency and a lack of scruples.

In order to employ the Talons, the prospective client must proffer his interest in meeting with a member of the guild to the barkeep of the Skewered Swan tavern. She'll arrange a meeting with one of the guild's agents atop a high place—a castle spire, a watchtower roof, or some other rendezvous uncomfortably far off the ground. With little chance of escape should things go awry, the client must offer, up front, a combination of treasure (the shinier the better) and tidbits of information. Once the kenku operative—usually one of Rekrok's lieutenants—feels the gesture is made in good faith, the client must offer additional loot, serving as the true heart of the deal. While expensive, the client gains the services of a dedicated band of murderers, thieves, and other unsavory types for whatever job necessary. As might be expected, however, the Talons are perfectly willing to sell out a potential client for a better deal, especially if the risk proves low.

As with any band of kenkus, the Talons of Rekrok work best together, forming small teams composed of specialists who augment each other's skills. A typical band for a common breaking-and-entering job is comprised of two rogues, two warriors, and an assassin/rogue.

KENKU MIMICRY

One of kenkus' most distinctive abilities is their power of mimicry. While imitating familiar voices to lure victims into ambushes is a tested staple of their strategy, these cunning birdmen have been known to use this ability to many other devious effects.

City Code: On the bustling streets of any large urban center, no one pays any attention to the whiney of horses, the creaking of wagon wheels, or the tolling of distant bells. Yet if such sounds are part of an elaborate kenku code, they might foreshadow some elaborate concerted crime.

Distractions: The sounds of a battle, breaking glass, or a watch whistle are all sure ways to call attention to an area. Or, in cases where kenkus employ these sounds as distractions, might serve to divert even the most attentive eyes.

Gaslighting: Blindfolded and trapped, surrounded by the sound of sharpening metal, monstrous snarls, and pain-filled screams, a victim might reveal anything—never realizing he is actually being held by only a single kenku.

Performance: No sound is too complex for a kenku to mimic, not even those of elaborate musical instruments. Kenkus might use their mimicking ability as a means of performance or to weave elaborate musical illusions.

Pseudo Spellcaster: Hooded and cloaked, a kenku might perfectly mimic the chanting prayers and arcane sounds of spellcasters. Although their words hold no magic, those they're trying to intimidate probably don't know that.

Sow Dissension: Another way for kenkus to use voices they overhear is to try to pass themselves off as the original. If the kenku can convince—or even just confuse—a party into thinking that one of their allies is a doppelganger or shape-shifting spellcaster, such dissension might be turned to their advantage.

to the worship of Pazuzu. The demon prince has not forgotten the kenkus' ancestors' betrayal, however, demanding far more of cults with kenku members, who in turn seek to placate him with grotesquely elaborate sacrifices. Among kenkus, such demon cults are known as "murders."

KENKU ENCOUNTERS

While well suited to urban encounters, most kenkus' lust for wealth and power means that these cunning raptors might be found nearly anywhere or in the service of any well-paying employer.

Birdcage: In a mere week, overheard conversations, anonymous tips, and lucky circumstances have led to the capture and incarceration of several of the city's most dastardly criminals and crime bosses. Scoundrels of all stripes are on the run, but some whisper that shadowy, beaked forms are behind the tip-offs and fake confessions, seeking to remove potential threats to their brewing underworld coup.

Family Treasures: One of the Collectors, a band of kenku thieves, spies, murders, and worse, "collects" a young girl with beautiful emerald eyes, kidnapping her back to the Styes (see "The Styes" *DUNGEON* #138). Her mother, a local magistrate, hires the PCs to bargain with the kidnappers and secure her daughter's return.

ADVANCED KENKU

Specially suited to advance by character class, kenkus most often take levels as fighters, rogues, and warriors (see the examples in the *Monster Manual III*). Kenku spellcasters are usually bards, clerics with the Trickery domain, and illusionists, and choose spells that allow them to employ their mimic abilities in clever ways. Many high-level kenkus take levels as assassins.

Corvisclaw Kree is a member of the Bonebeak Aerie. A young, skilled member of his flock, he plots to eventually murder the aged white-feathers who lead the aerie, taking their wealth and prestige as his own. To aid

him, he dedicates each of his kills to Vecna, Lascr, or Pazuzu, hoping that eventually one of the powers might take note of his fickle reverence and grant him a measure of their might.

CORVISCLAW KREE

CR 8

Male kenku assassin 3/rogue 5

NE Medium humanoid (kenku)

Init +4; Senses low-light vision; Listen +5, Spot +5

Languages Auran, Common, Kenku, Undercommon

AC 19, touch 14, flat-footed 15; uncanny dodge

hp 28 (8 HD)

Fort +2 (+2 versus poison) Ref +7, Will +2; evasion

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee +1 short sword +11 (1d6+1/17–20) or 2 claws +5 (1d3)

Base Atk +5; Grp +5

Atk Options death attack (DC 15), sneak attack +5d6

Combat Gear *potion of haste*, small centipede poison (3 doses)

Spell-like Abilities (CL 3rd)

2nd (1/day)—*invisibility*, *spider climb*

1st (3/day)—*feather fall*, *jump*, *obscuring mist*

Abilities Str 11, Dex 19, Con 10, Int 14 Wis 8, Cha 12

SQ great ally, mimicry, poison use, trapfinding, trap sense +1

Feats Improved Critical (short sword), Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (short sword)

Skills Balance +10, Bluff +5, Climb +4, Disguise +11, Escape Artist +8, Forgery 4, Gather Information +5, Hide +17, Jump +4, Knowledge (local) +6, Listen +5, Move Silently +17, Open Lock +10, Search +6, Sense Motive +3,

Sleight of Hand +6, Spot +5, Tumble +10, Use Magic Device +3
Possessions combat gear, +2 leather armor, +1 short sword, ring of protection +1

Great Ally (Ex) Corvisclaw works exceptionally well with his allies. When successfully aided on a skill check or attack roll by an ally, or when aiding another, he applies or gains a +3 bonus on its check or attack roll (instead of the normal +2 bonus). Furthermore, Corvisclaw gains a +4 bonus on attack rolls against an opponent flanked by an ally (instead of the normal +2 bonus).

Mimicry (Ex)
Corvisclaw can perfectly mimic familiar sounds, voices, and accents.

This ability does not enable him to speak languages he can't normally speak. The duplicate a specific individual's voice, he makes a Bluff check; a listener familiar with the voice being imitated must make an opposed Sense Motive check to discern that the voice isn't genuine.
Skills Kenkus have a +2 racial bonus on Hide checks and Move Silently checks. 



"My favorite monsters have always been the ones I made up. In 4th grade I made up this really cool one that I remember to this day. It was the "spongerhi"—pronounced like "sponge" plus "air he." It was a two-headed dragon that could absorb magic and redirect it at the attacker—like a sponge! Get it? For a 4th grader this was a big deal. I set up this cool adventure where the party (my brother and some kids from the neighborhood) had to navigate the Isle of Dread (from the classic X1, which I modified) to reach the spongerhi's lair, where he proceeded to wipe out the party by sending the wizard's fireballs back at the group. It was nearly a TPK, which in my opinion is how you know you've got a good monster on your hands. Nowadays I'd do it different, of course—starting with a different name—but I have fond memories of that monster.

—Joseph Goodman, President of Goodman Games



THE ECOLOGY OF THE **KOBOLD**

"Two dogs can kill a lion."

—Arabic maxim

Never has a race been so perilously underestimated.

Countless adventurers' tales describe kobolds as cowardly weaklings easily dismissed by any who encounter them. If kobolds were truly such a pitiful race, however, they would have been exterminated ages ago. Those few survivors of an actual kobold attack tell of devious warriors emerging from the darkness—sometimes through the very walls—in relentless waves of sadistic ferocity and lethal ingenuity.

Brethren of dragons, kobolds are one of the most resourceful, industrious, and tenacious races to ever plumb the reaches

of the Underdark. Hidden beyond labyrinthine tunnels and countless traps, kobolds manage to do more than just survive in the deadliest realms known to explorers; they thrive.

HISTORY OF THE KOBOLD

While not organized enough as a culture to have constructed a common history, kobolds do share a great deal of folklore and a number of heroic stories, most of which vary slightly from tribe to tribe. Not surprisingly, kobold culture lays claim to a few impressive creation myths, including one that traces back through the ages to the earliest times—back to the cavernous lair of the goddess of evil dragons, Tiamat.

Shortly after the Queen of Dragons laid her first clutch of eggs, an army of thieves invaded her lair. Enraged by the



intrusion, Tiamat sprung from her mountainous nest of gold and gemstones to crush the interlopers. Her merciless teeth and claws tore through scores of intruders while her terrible breath weapons destroyed hundreds at a time. The attackers hurled countless swords, spears, and arrows against the Chromatic Dragon. Most of the weapons shattered harmlessly against her formidable hide, but as the battle wore on, those few that hit their mark began to take their toll on the mighty goddess.

Amid the chaos of the frenzied attack, the swiftest of the bandits snatched up fistfuls of treasure and attempted to flee. The boldest of these struggled under the burden of even the smallest of Tiamat's magnificent eggs. Upon noticing the violation of her nest, Tiamat let forth a thunderous roar that brought down the ceiling of her lair and its connecting tunnels, crushing her attackers and trapping the escaping thieves.

Weakened by innumerable wounds, Tiamat crawled through the rubble

KNOWLEDGE OF THE KOBOLD

The following table shows the result of a Knowledge (local) check as it relates to kobolds. Gnomes and those who dwell in or explore the Underdark (or the other dark places kobolds thrive) also might possess this information. The kobold appears on page 161 of the *Monster Manual*.

Knowledge (local)

DC	Result
10	Kobolds are small, cowardly reptilian humanoids who live underground.
15	Kobolds attack in overwhelming numbers using ambush tactics. They foster an intense hatred of gnomes and are sensitive to bright light.
20	Kobolds protect their lairs and their narrow connecting tunnels with deadly traps. They often employ poisons (favoring Strength-draining toxins) and guardian creatures, particularly when fighting larger enemies.
25	A kobold tribe usually hoards its treasure deep inside a temple dedicated to its god, Kurtulmak. Filled with the deadliest traps imaginable, these temples are usually rigged to collapse.

of her lair and collapsed upon her nest. Needing time to recover from her injuries and unable to adequately protect her incubating brood, Tiamat used the last of her strength to cause the first of her precious eggs to hatch early. Punching his way out of his still-hardening shell with a stinger-tipped

tail like that of his mother, Kurtulmak entered the world.

Infused with a fraction of Tiamat's divine power, Kurtulmak understood his situation and immediately set about clearing the fallen rock from his mother's lair. As he worked, he concocted a way to single-handedly defend the entire

cavern from further intrusion. Collecting the weapons strewn about the lair, Kurtulmak constructed hundreds of devious traps to riddle the floor, walls, and ceiling of the vast chamber. Satisfied with the impenetrable perimeter of deadly mechanisms and pitfalls forming around her nest, Tiamat charged Kurtulmak with reopening the tunnels connecting her lair to the planes and then fell into a deep slumber.

In order to foil further intrusions, Kurtulmak began carving a twisting mazelike network of passages, unfathomable to any but himself. After cutting through miles and miles of rubble, earth, and stone, Kurtulmak eventually came across a niche filled with a small portion of his mother's stolen treasure. As he collected the gold and gems that had become fused in the living rock, intending to return them to Tiamat's lair, he also discovered one of her pilfered eggs. Knowing that the egg had been away from the nest for too long and deciding that his immense task would be easier with help, Kurtulmak caused the egg to hatch, creating miniature incarnations of himself. Thus the first of the kobold race was born.

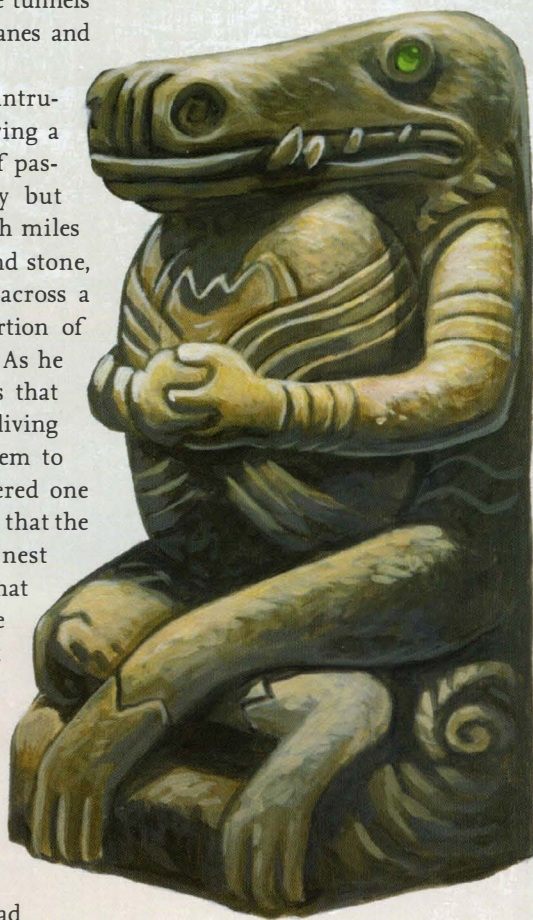
Working alongside their creator, the kobolds quickly learned the art of mining through the earth and soon had discovered other caches of treasure and wayward eggs (which Kurtulmak also caused to hatch, further proliferating the kobold race.) Kurtulmak also showed his people how to construct wily traps and various defenses in order to secure the newly carved tunnels. As creatures began to discover and explore the passageways, Kurtulmak taught the kobolds the art of ambushing enemies and the wisdom of entering battle only with the advantage of superior numbers.

As the kobolds grew in number, they continued digging an ever-expanding network of tunnels, eventually reaching every corner of the Material Plane,

where they established lairs of their own and began to flourish.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE KOBOLD

Standing just over 2 feet tall and weighing around 40 pounds, average kobolds are physically weak but fast and agile. Their thin and wiry frames make



kobolds well suited to moving quickly and fighting within the cramped tunnels of their lairs.

After hatching from its egg, a kobold grows quickly, reaching maturity around the age of six. While the lifespan of an average kobold might be shortened by violence, accident, or disease (in that order), particularly wise and wily kobolds can live up to an astonishing 120 to 140 years (owing to their draconic heritage).

Kobold skulls are often described as being doglike due to their long snouts and sharp teeth. However, many of the characteristics of a kobold's head are

more accurately defined as displaying rudimentary features of dragonkind: forward-facing nostrils, ear holes, a forked tongue, and two short, keratinous horns sprouting from the top of the skull.

Kobolds' remarkably sensitive, glowing red eyes allow them to pick out the smallest details from their surroundings, even in pitch-black caverns. However, intense light (such as bright sunlight or that created by a *daylight* spell) is difficult for kobolds to tolerate and causes discomfort and disorientation (resulting in the dazzled condition). Kobolds also rely on their acute sense of hearing to detect approaching danger and to pick out familiar sounds that help them navigate the confusing maze of tunnels surrounding their tribe's lair.

Ranging in color from dark, rusty brown to reddish black, the toothy scales that cover kobolds' tough hides are similar to those of an iguana or other large lizard. The scales that cover kobolds' short tails are very fine and slightly lighter than the rest of their mottled hides, giving them a smooth, "naked" appearance. While primarily used for balance, kobolds often use their highly flexible yet nonprehensile tails to wield specialized weapons (see the tail blade and tail club in *Savage Species*).

Kobolds can eat just about anything—plants, animals, and even intelligent humanoids (cannibalistic kobold tribes are common). Despite an omnivorous diet, kobolds do not possess differentiated teeth—they are all short and pointed. Interestingly, a kobold loses and grows new teeth throughout its entire life, taking anywhere from two to three years to completely replace an entire set of fifty-four. Kobolds often save their teeth, strung on necklaces or other adornments, as an impressive demonstration of their age.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE KOBOLD

As a relatively small and physically weak race, kobold society revolves around survival. Virtually every aspect

KOBOLD TRAPS

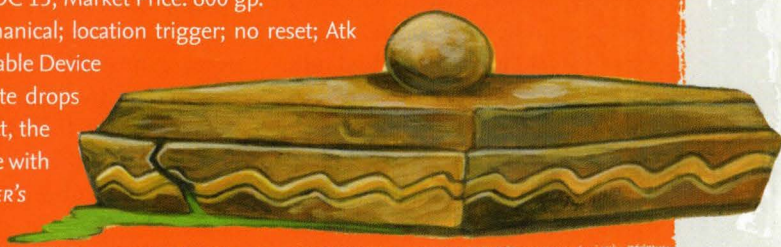
For miles around and throughout every kobold lair are set a dizzying number of traps. Kobolds make use of materials from their surroundings and use weapons and armor from fallen enemies. They fill clay pots with vermin, oozes, and other deadly substances. They lace corpses with vermin eggs, ready to burst into swarms, and cultivate deadly plants, mold, and fungi. They dig pits lined with disease-ridden spikes or containing deadly creatures. Kobold trapmakers are renowned for their enviable skills but feared for their innovation—they're always devising something new.

Ceramic Mines

Commonly fashioned as shallow ceramic bowls, ceramic mines are filled with any of a variety of alchemically prepared substances and then sealed. The creation process, which involves firing the ceramic vessel in a kiln, creates a fragile vessel filled with a pressurized gas or liquid that explodes outward when the mine is broken (Hardness 2, 2 hp). Ceramic mines are often hidden under light stones, dropped on enemies, or sculpted to appear as rock formations or decorative sculptures.

Ceramic Mine (Basic): CR 1; mechanical; touch trigger; no reset; DC 11 Reflex save half damage; 2d6 points of acid, cold, or fire energy damage; single target; Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 15; Market Price: 600 gp.

Ceramic Mine (Green Slime-filled Stalactite): CR 5; mechanical; location trigger; no reset; Atk +15 (2d6, stalactite; see note); single target; Search DC 15; Disable Device DC 15; Note: When targeted square is entered, this stalactite drops from the ceiling, possibly striking the character. Upon impact, the stalactite shatters, covering everything within the target square with a veneer of green slime (see page 76 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide* for effects); Market Price: 2,500 gp.



of all kobolds' activities contribute toward the tribe's survival in one way or another. As such, all kobolds serve their tribes by filling at least one of several predictable roles.

Kobold trapmakers not only create deadly devices that guard against intruders, they also design contraptions to catch or kill animals for food. Farmers cultivate mushrooms and edible plants as well as carnivorous, poisonous, or dangerous vegetation that serve as barriers or deterrents against invasion. Miners extract precious metals, minerals, and gemstones from the earth while carving the intricate tunnels and chambers that form the tribe's lair, its outlying defense, and mazelike escape passages. Animal handlers capture, raise, and train the tribe's guardian creatures while also tending small herds of lizards, centipedes, or other domesticated animals and vermin.

The warriors of a kobold tribe, of course, play the most proactive roles in the tribe's collective effort to survive. Kobold warriors constantly remain active and alert—verging on paranoia. The need for constant watchfulness is such that a warrior

caught sleeping or distracted while on duty faces a death sentence.

Kobold executions usually take the nerve-racking form of forcing the condemned to test the effectiveness of newly created traps. The execution continues until either the condemned kobold is killed or he has sprung or avoided three traps. At that point, the kobold emerges either as a corpse or an exonerated hero worthy of praise and respect from the tribe.

While survival of the tribe is paramount, for an individual kobold self-preservation remains top-of-mind. Because of this "better you than me" mentality, patrols and warbands actively recruit even the weakest, most incompetent, and dull-witted kobolds. That way, when encountering a superior enemy, the clever, swift, and strong kobolds can safely retreat while encouraging their less-apt companions to "hold them off while reinforcements move up." (This explains why the caricature of the bumbling kobold remains so prevalent—those are the ones most adventurers actually see.)

As Kurtulmak teaches, fleeing from certain, probable, possible, or perceived danger is acceptable, intelligent behavior. Most kobolds quickly

come to the realization that "I don't have to outrun a dire bear, I just have to outrun another kobold." Particularly clever kobolds discover that tripping or incapacitating another kobold often makes it even easier to get away. Survivors of these when-push-comes-to-shove situations become envied by their more fleet-footed peers for their ingenuity and superior escape tactics.

The only exception to this cowardly trend arises when a kobold warband encounters a group of gnomes. All kobolds share a vitriolic hatred of gnomes and (unless outnumbered) ferociously ambush them on sight, fleeing only if the tide of battle turns tragically against them.

TRIBAL STRUCTURE

Most kobold tribes form caste-based gerontocracies—where the oldest individual kobold leads the others. Often, this leader is a powerful sorcerer, but occasionally a highly skilled warrior or another particularly talented kobold outlives his contemporaries to assume the leadership of a tribe. Change in leadership usually happens when a leader dies, although some are usurped when the tribe determines that the mere

fact that he continues to draw breath no longer warrants his position of power.

Tribal laws come and go as each leader of a tribe changes rules to suit his personal ideas and vision. Regardless, a constabulary force enforces even the newest laws as if they had always existed, often causing problems for kobolds away from the tribe during a change in leadership. Devious kobolds who come to power occasionally institute laws that enable them to eliminate rivals or make other personal gains.

Clerics of Kurtulmak (known as Eyes of Kurtulmak) rarely live long enough to become chieftains. However, they do possess a great deal of power and influence within the tribe, as their place rests at the center of every important endeavor. The installation of traps and construction of other tribal defenses are always blessed by a cleric of Kurtulmak. Additionally, they oversee a tribe's tunneling and mining efforts, directing new excavations toward "divinely inspired" goals, such as one of the fabled Lost Eggs of Tiamat. Whether exploring new areas, facilitating a trade of commodities, or probing for weaknesses in nearby gnome or dwarf settlements, an Eye of Kurtulmak leads all expeditions. Every warband, hunting party, and raiding party includes at least one cleric, whose presence and prayers draw the favor of their deity down upon them.

While worship of Kurtulmak is prevalent in kobold societies, organized religious services are virtually nonexistent. However, all kobolds utter small prayers and makes observations to their deity regularly throughout the day. This is largely because Kurtulmak takes a very active interest in his people, to the point that he regularly sends an aspect of himself to assist in particularly important raids, battles, or other crucial undertakings.

A kobold tribe's activity continues around the clock, with each kobold's work, rest, and recreation time broken into shifts based on the amount of time it takes a patrol to make one or more tours of the tribe's longest patrol route. (Kobolds keep track of time in

PINT-SIZED DRAGONS

Kobolds have been a part of D&D history since the original first edition *Monster Manual*.

For much of this time, these craven pests have had a distinctly dog- or rodent-like demeanor, only adopting draconic traits in third edition, an aspect cemented by their inclusion in accessories like *Races of the Dragon*. D&D *Miniatures* provides a host of miniature kobolds in *Aberrations* (Kobold Champion and Kobold Sorcerer), *Angelfire* (Kobold Soldier), and *War of the Dragon Queen* (Meepeo Dragonlord) just to name a handful. "The Ecology of the Kobold" first appeared in *DRAGON* #332.



"watches," rather than "hours," making each tribe's unit of measure different.) This perpetual activity keeps a tribe extremely vigilant.

As a caste-based society, certain occupations afford greater privileges. Each caste, in turn, forms a sort of pecking order that determines leadership and differentiates a master from an apprentice. (Positions in this chain of command shift with regularity, as talented and determined kobolds supplant those above them.) Gender has no bearing on the structure of kobold society—roles and responsibilities fall upon the most suitable or convenient individual.

The most coveted and privileged roles for a tribe member are trapmaker, sorcerer, caretaker, and warrior. Clerics, farmers, and miners make up the bulk of the tribe's second-class. Animal handlers, craftsfolk, and those with other abilities usually fill the lowest rank in a kobold tribe, as their contribution to the welfare of the tribe doesn't immediately impact its survival.

NEST TO PYRE: GROWING UP KOBOLD

Kobolds rarely mate for life. Typically, a romantic bond between an adult male and female lasts no more than a few months, often culminating in the female laying a single egg. Kobolds of both genders remain fertile throughout their adult lives, with females capable of laying around a half dozen eggs over the course of a year.

Kobolds are partially ovoviviparous—the embryonic kobold develops

inside its egg for two months before its mother lays the egg and another two months before hatching. Once laid, each egg is carefully collected in a central nursery where caretakers and an array of traps keep them safe. (Once an egg has been moved to the nursery, neither parent takes much interest in its welfare—a task left to the caretakers.) A typical clutch of eggs for a tribe of two hundred kobolds ranges anywhere from twenty to fifty. Upon hatching, kobolds are fully formed and somewhat self-sufficient (able to derive nutrition from just about anything they can chew), but aren't strong enough to fend for themselves against predators.

During the first six months of life, hatchlings form powerful emotional bonds with their clutch mates—other kobolds who hatch within a month of one another. The intense rivalries and friendships developed between clutch mates are the strongest in kobold culture.

Hatchlings quickly develop motor skills and a rudimentary understanding of the Draconic language. Also among the first things taught to hatchlings are fundamental survival skills—ranging from rock throwing and digging holes to running away and hiding. Kobolds' natural talents for trapmaking are also fostered at an early age. Kobolds learn to use simple weapons, such as slings and spears, as soon as they're coordinated enough to survive the learning process. Caretakers note each hatchling's particular skills and aptitudes (or lack thereof), watching for that first spark of sorcery, gift for trapmaking, skill with a weapon, or any other trait that could pigeonhole where a kobold might fit into the tribe.

By age two, a kobold may petition to leave the nursery by enduring a private ceremony known as the Blessing of the Pit. Presided over by a caretaker and an Eye of Kurtulmak, the simple ritual requires the kobold to cross a 10-foot-wide pit constructed with a variety of hazards. Pit dimensions and contents vary from ritual to ritual as determined by the presiding priest. How the young kobold leaps over, climbs around, drops down to navigate through, or otherwise circumvents the danger is irrelevant—the end result being what’s important. By successfully reaching the far side, a clever or capable kobold earns the Blessing of the Pit and the right to join the rest of the tribe as a juvenile. Failure to cross the pit invariably results in the unremarkable death of a particularly clumsy or dull-witted kobold.

The Eye of Kurtulmak who presides over the ceremony assigns the young kobold her first role in the tribe. The assignment usually follows the suggestions of the nursery’s caretakers, but might differ depending on the presiding cleric’s whim or the immediate need of the tribe. (If an entire warband has recently been slaughtered, the nursery produces a surprising number of new warriors.)

Non-warriors aggressively seek out apprenticeships in accordance with their assigned roles, trying to impress would-be mentors with demonstrations of talent or capacity for a chosen vocation. An apprenticeship might last anywhere from six months to several years, terminating when the student demonstrates a higher degree of skill than the master (at which point, their roles are reversed).

A significant number of kobolds (often those without any noteworthy talents or ambitions) become miners. Fortunately, few races possess a greater inborn proclivity for mining than kobolds. The unrivaled industry and skill of a kobold workforce produces a remarkable amount of gold, iron, coal, and other valued substances in a stunningly short

time. Governments and crafts guilds often secretly employ kobolds for just this reason.

Kobolds most commonly mine in one of two ways, as dictated by threats within those regions and the ambitions of their leader. Some skittish kobold miners venture far from their lairs, yet avoid lingering around large deposits of precious metals and gemstones for very long, as too many other races seek such treasures. When encountered, these miners usually extract a few cartloads of these valuable substances and then hurry back to their lair. Alternatively, more ambitious kobold tribes covetously guard precious deposits and mine them until depleted. Rather than hoarding such wealth, such tribes usually turn their treasures toward currying the favor of more powerful allies, like derro, troglodytes, and deep-dwelling dragons.

Working in tandem with miners, tunneling crews are charged with exploration and crafting defensive mazes around a tribe’s lair. They often employ trained or magically controlled burrowing creatures, such as dire badgers or thoqqas, to speed their efforts.

Budding warriors are assigned to the tribe’s constabulary, the least-respected role in the warrior caste, where they

gain additional training with weapons and simple tactics. By the time a kobold outgrows her first set of teeth, she is considered old enough to join a patrol. (Some kobolds, eager to see action before their third year, attempt to collect or claim other kobolds’ teeth as their own.) In order to join, a kobold must prove herself worthy by defeating and taking the place of a superior. Such challenges rarely prove fatal, but the grudges they often produce frequently end in accidents in the field.

By the onset of adulthood, a kobold usually settles upon a vocation, although this role commonly changes several times over the years depending on the fluctuating needs of the tribe. At this point, a kobold focuses on honing her skills in order to increase her standing in her caste and value to the tribe. Age and ability are the two most attractive qualities a kobold can possess, warranting larger shares of food, safer sleeping arrangements, better weapons and gear, and increased interest from the opposite gender. An adult kobold’s life consists of perpetual jockeying to gain more of all of these.

Kobolds usually meet their end in combat, during a cave-in, or in a messy accident involving a newly installed trap. In order to avoid attracting scavengers, and not wanting to waste perfectly good meat, the remains of a slain kobold are usually cooked and eaten. Hunting parties use the bodies of kobolds who died of disease or poison as bait. Tribal heroes and those few kobolds who live long enough to die of old age receive the honor of being burned on a funeral pyre (after they’ve been stripped of particularly valuable items and gear).

KOBOLD LAIRS

Kobolds have been encountered in just about every location that is suitably dark and restricts the movement of Medium or larger creatures, such as heavily overgrown forests, jungles, and swamps. However, most kobold lairs are located underground, formed





by series of interconnected caves surrounded by a snarl of trap-laden tunnels and shafts that might span several miles. Innumerable intersections, unexplained dead-ends, and concealed passages make navigating the labyrinthine network all but impossible for any outsider. While even the largest tunnels usually hamper

the movement of anything much bigger than a kobold, some narrow to a point so that even Small creatures must squeeze in order to pass.

At least one section of virtually every kobold tunnel is rigged to collapse, enabling a tribe to quickly and easily seal off a passage in the event

of an invasion or other imminent danger. To prevent accidents, these areas are usually constructed with two or three fail-safes (requiring the removal of multiple bypasses before triggering the cave in), although some function as particularly deadly traps.

THE ORIGIN OF KURTULMAK'S RIVALRY WITH GARL GLITTERGOLD

From a young age all kobolds learn to hate gnomes and crave to confound all their efforts. This rivalry amounts to far more than ingrained racial hatred, however. Rather—as kobold priests often relate—there is a very specific reason for this centuries-long blood feud, which traces back to their very gods.

The Kobold Myth

Long ago, Kurtulmak set about carving an immense cavern, the grandeur of which soon rivaled the audience chambers of any of the other deities. Kurtulmak intended to use the magnificent grotto as the setting for the greatest prank ever played—he planned to invite all the other deities to dinner, and as entertainment he would tell the tale of “The Violation of Tiamat’s Lair,” ending when he dropped the cavern on their heads.

As a miner without equal, Kurtulmak skillfully cut from the roof and walls ponderously large slabs of rock and held them in place with a complex, interconnected series of cunningly wrought and artfully concealed beams. The entire devious construction, which ranged over the whole cavern, would collapse in rapid

succession after the removal of a single golden keystone.

One day, while looking for shiny gemstones, Garl Glittergold passed near Kurtulmak’s cavern and heard the toil within. Ever curious about Kurtulmak’s activities, Garl crept nearer in order to spy upon the kobold god, as he so often did. As he caught sight of the grand cavern, the gnome god stopped to observe Kurtulmak’s breathtaking endeavor.

While puzzling over the intricately crafted stonework, Garl’s eye was caught by the twinkle of a small, gold-colored stone wedged tightly into a nearby wall. Greedily, he tugged and tugged on the sparkly stone, but it wouldn’t come loose. Frustrated, Garl gave up his struggle in order to further marvel at the work that sprawled overhead. Slowly, the nature of Kurtulmak’s construction dawned upon the gnome god who then guessed at the keystone’s purpose, becoming awed by Kurtulmak’s incredible skill.

Stricken with jealousy, Garl became intent on destroying Kurtulmak’s brilliant creation before anyone else witnessed its subtle majesty. He seized the keystone once more, twisting and turn-

ing it every possible way until he finally wrested it free from its socket. As Garl dropped the golden prize in his pocket, a sudden rumbling noise filled the enormous cave. Frightened, he fled down a nearby passage and hid from the catastrophic cave-in that followed. As a souvenir of his harrowing experience, Garl pierced the stone and hung it on a chain around his neck, adopting it as his own holy symbol.

Kurtulmak, furious at the cavern’s impossibly premature collapse, quickly dug his way out from under countless tons of stone. Soon afterward, the kobold deity discovered the culprit responsible for the calamitous event when he noticed Garl wearing his keystone like a trophy around his neck. Kurtulmak confronted the gnome god, who nervously chuckled, dismissed his disastrous act as an episode he’d long forgotten, and hastily excused himself.

His legendary stunt spoiled, Kurtulmak vowed to exact a slow and terrible revenge upon the gnome god. Kurtulmak’s intense hatred for Garl Glittergold sparked a feud between the two that spread across the



The actual inhabited area of a tribe's territory consists of an ant-hill-like combination of natural and kobold-made chambers often adorned with simple carvings, murals, and totemlike trophies. Aside from these rudimentary decorations, most kobold lairs are fairly

Spartan, as individual kobolds keep all of their personal possessions with them at all times. Usually shared by several kobolds at a time, in shifts as each day progresses, living and sleeping quarters take the form of ledges, nooks, and small caves fashioned to conceal their occupants from casual

observers (Spot DC 14). Kobold lairs are very clean and sanitary; waste is disposed of by dumping it down a deep shaft or by feeding it to a captive creature that subsists on refuse, such as an otyugh or gelatinous cube.

planes, touching the races created by each of the deities, which explains why kobolds and gnomes hate one another.

Gnomish Revisions

While the basic points of the story of how Garl Glittergold collapsed Kurtulmak's cavern remain irrefutable, most gnomes point out a few misconceptions about Garl's intent and involvement with the kobold god's schemes.

Never having taken any real interest in Kurtulmak, Garl found himself at the entrance to the kobold god's cavern only because of the tremendous racket echoing from within. Having followed the cacophony of hammer, pick, and chisel, Garl became somewhat curious about the work going on inside. Renowned for his masterful execution of countless practical jokes, The Joker quickly surmised what Kurtulmak was up to. When the twinkling keystone caught his eye, Garl smiled as he instantly understood its function and decided to put Kurtulmak's work to the ultimate test—just to see if it would work. The gnome deity was pleasantly surprised when the entire cav-

ern actually did collapse, toppling Kurtulmak from his ladder and burying him under enormous slabs of stone. The gnome god decided to keep the nugget-shaped keystone both since it so closely resembled his long-held holy symbol and as a souvenir of his quickly forgotten little joke.

As Garl has greater cosmic concerns and distractions, the conflict between he and Kurtulmak continues, for the most part, to be a one-sided battle. However, as kobolds developed a deity-fueled hatred for gnomes, they came to pose a very real danger to his people. Because of this, Garl keeps a casual eye on his self-proclaimed "archenemy" and warns his followers to never underestimate the threat posed by Kurtulmak's vicious spawn.



LAIR of the BLACKTONGUE TRIBE



1. Main Cavern & Living Quarters
2. Temple of Kurtulmak
- 3a. Nursery
- 3b. Hatchery
4. Mushroom, Lichen, and Moss Farms
- 5a. Giant Cave Cricket Corral
- 5b. Giant Centipede Corral
6. Food & Supply Storage
7. Secondary Cavern & Living Quarters
8. Craftsfolk Workspace

Trapped Areas

Concealed Doors

Vertical Passages

Rubble

1 square = 10 feet

WEST



Every kobold community contains a temple or shrine to Kurtulmak carved from solid rock and accessed through twisting, trap-filled tunnels. The skulls of all the gnomes slain by the tribe festoon the interior of the temple. Deep within the structure, the accumulated wealth of the tribe lies secured within a heavily trapped vault. (Reliable sources report that kobold temples are always constructed in such a way that they collapse when triggered purposefully by attendant clergy or accidentally by unwitting thieves.) Few kobolds, aside from the clerics who know the secrets to the temple's many traps, actually ever set foot inside the temple. Instead, kobolds offer prayers at its entrance with the belief that Kurtulmak hears them.

While the temple to Kurtulmak is a lair's dominant edifice, the most important structure to a kobold tribe is its well-concealed and trapped nursery, with hatchlings raised in a secured cavern and eggs locked away in a well-protected hatchery. Safe passage into and through the nursery

requires admittance and guidance by one of its caretakers.

Other structures commonly found within a kobold tribe's lair include a small forge, an oven or kiln, a well or cistern, and a chamber that serves as a storage locker for food gathered by the tribe's farmers, foragers, and hunters. Large caverns nearby are often reserved for cultivating foodstuffs and raising livestock. Located throughout a kobold lair, particularly at every entrance and major intersection, signal devices such as gongs, drums, or horns contribute to the tribe's collective vigilance.

The layout of a kobold tribe's lair is extremely fluid—workers regularly collapse or seal off tunnels and caves as they carve new ones. This makes any information about the layout or location of areas inhabited by kobolds progressively less reliable over time. In fact, a kobold lair actually migrates slowly through the Underdark as its miners and priests cautiously search for a defensible, safe area in which to establish a more permanent kobold settlement.

ADVANCED KOBOLD

Kobolds typically take levels as warriors, fighters, and rogues. The sneakiest, though, devote themselves to Kurtulmak and advance as clerics.

MOKUMOK THE SHAMAN

CR 6

Male kobold cleric 3/rogue 3

LE Medium humanoid (reptilian)

Init +3; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +10, Spot +10

Languages Common, Draconic, Undercommon

AC 20, touch 14, flat-footed 17

hp 24 (6 HD)

Fort +4, Ref +7, Will +6; evasion

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee mwk shortspear +5 (1d4-1)

Base Atk +4; Grp +0

Atk Options sneak attack +2d6

Combat Gear *potion of cure light wounds* (2), *potion of sanctuary*, *wand of color spray* (23 charges)

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 3rd)

2nd—*cure moderate wounds*, *invisibility*^D

1st—*disguise self*^D, *magic stone*, *summon monster I*

0—*create water*, *cure minor wounds*, *purify food and drink*, *mending*

D Domain spell; Domains Luck, Trickery

Abilities Str 8, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 12

SQ light sensitivity, trapfinding, trap sense +1

Feats Alertness, Dodge, Run

Skills Craft (trapmaking) +12, Bluff +10, Concentration +1, Diplomacy +9, Disable Device +8, Hide +13, Knowledge (religion) +2, Listen +10, Move Silently +6, Open Lock +8, Search +4, Sleight of Hand +8, Spellcraft +2, Spot +10

Possessions combat gear, +1 *hide armor*, *masterwork shortspear*, *ring of protection* +1, *dust of illusion*, 50 gp worth of jewelry and clerical vestments

Light Sensitivity (Ex) Mokumok is dazzled in bright sunlight or within the radius of a *daylight* spell.

Skills Mokumok has a +2 racial bonus on Craft (trapmaking), Profession (miner), and Search checks. 



THE ECOLOGY OF THE

KRAKEN

"Let that night be solitary, and not worthy of praise. Let them curse it who curse the day, who are ready to raise up a Leviathan."

—Job 2: 7–8

They rule the mightiest kingdoms, lightless trenches of crushing pressures where the sun never touches, unreachable seas that writhe in anger, jagged depths under sheer black cliffs. Their home is alien, elemental, and unforgiving. And here they are masters. Cruel geniuses possessing vast strength, they wait in the dark, weaving their plots, slowly considering their next abomination, their next move in an endless evil game of vast complexity. Not merely

hulking mindless brutes nor cathedrals of flesh given fury, but sadists, torturers, and unspeakable terrors, thinking goliaths of calculating hate. So many places exist where the sea touches the land and sky, so many places where krakens—the unseen masters of the oceans—might reach out their cruel tentacles to afflict the lives of men.

HISTORY OF THE KRAKEN

Festering within the depths of vast watery abysses lie the lightless domains of the mercifully elusive krakens. Only the foolhardy or insane try to learn more of these terrible leviathans, as even the mere rumor of a kraken can turn back a fishing vessel or force a captain to hastily beach his



ship. Those who learn much of krakens speak of scattered island communities or remote coastal villages that worship these tentacled horrors, even supplicating them with slave offerings to stave off their fury. Yet the most terrible reports arise only occasionally, ever so rarely, when some insane escapee emerges from decades in the dark to tell of air-filled prisons far below where there is no hope. These escapees never live long in the light.

Some whisper that evil gods made krakens so the creatures of the land would never dare stray far from their homes. Others argue—primarily against those who posit the opposite—that aboleths created krakens. Regardless, scant knowledge leads to conjecture, as krakens share nothing, least of all their secrets. Most laymen accept that there are fathoms where the ocean is blackest and the sea most elemental, and from these trenches of primordial fluids and infinite darkness krakens first emerged.

Krakens themselves believe they came from the mouth of the Great Unbeheld, a kraken of impossible size who sleeps within the deepest ocean

KNOWLEDGE OF THE KRAKEN

The following table shows the results of a bardic knowledge or Knowledge (arcana) check related to krakens. Any sailor, port-town tavern owner, or scholar of the seas might know varied pieces of the following information. As every deckhand and dockside drunkard weaves tales of sea monsters, truths about krakens are often garbled by the fictions of the uninformed, superstitious, and wildly imaginative. As such, some of the information provided at low DCs (15 and lower) is blatantly false. However, higher DC results (22 or greater) contradict such yarns with actual facts. The kraken appears on page 162 of the *Monster Manual*.

Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
10	Krakens are brutish gigantic squids that plunder ships and coastal communities in search of food and wealth, which they collect in vast coral palaces deep underwater.
15	Krakens can snatch sailors off the decks of their ships with two massive, barbed tentacles. A ship might ward off a kraken attack by hauling five dead bodies and a chest of copper behind it.
22	Krakens are loners with an astonishing sense of their own importance and a hard and cruel intelligence. They can also dominate native animals and often press intelligent undersea creatures into their service.
27	Krakens can shoot clouds of murky black ink and jet through the water with near-unparalleled speed. Their lairs deep below the waves often hold huge air-filled caverns to keep and breed hopeless generations of slaves but rarely any substantial material wealth.
32	Krakens possess the ability to control the weather and winds. Rumors persist of islands and ports where whole populations worship an individual kraken. These locals make living sacrifices to the kraken and act as its eyes and ears on land.

THE CALL OF THE KRAKEN



creatures. Such tales even provided the inspiration for the poem "The Kraken," by Alfred Lord Tennyson:

"Below the thunders of the upper deep,
Far, far beneath in abysmal sea,
His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep,
The Kraken sleepeth: faintest sunlights flee..."

"The Ecology of the Kraken" first appeared in *DRAGON* #334.

to hunt in total darkness. Most krakens spend their lives at incredible ocean depths, but some make lairs near the lands of men where there are plentiful supplies of food and slaves. Voracious carnivores, krakens need vast territories in which to feed, the greatest whale constituting little more than a fair meal to a kraken.

Despite their formidable shapes, krakens do not view their own forms as sacred and willingly alter themselves if they believe it might benefit them in any way, whether it be with increased power or simply a more threatening appearance (grafts, templates, and prestige classes—especially those in *Lords of Madness*—see regular adoption by krakens).

Krakens lay cylindrical membranous eggs, but these are rarely seen. Indeed, krakens seem to mate only every century or so in a ritual known to them as the Hateful Compulsion, where the seas churn as though in the grip of some dreadful storm.

abyss and whose great tentacles thread through the depths of the entire world. Only by claiming all oceans as their own and enslaving every other sea-bound race might the Great Unbeheld rise and flood the world, giving them dominion over all. Although krakens don't worship the Great Unbeheld as a god, it is treated as a communal ancestor and is often touted as a favored child of Panzuriel or even as the guard of his severed limb (see the Panzuriel sidebar).

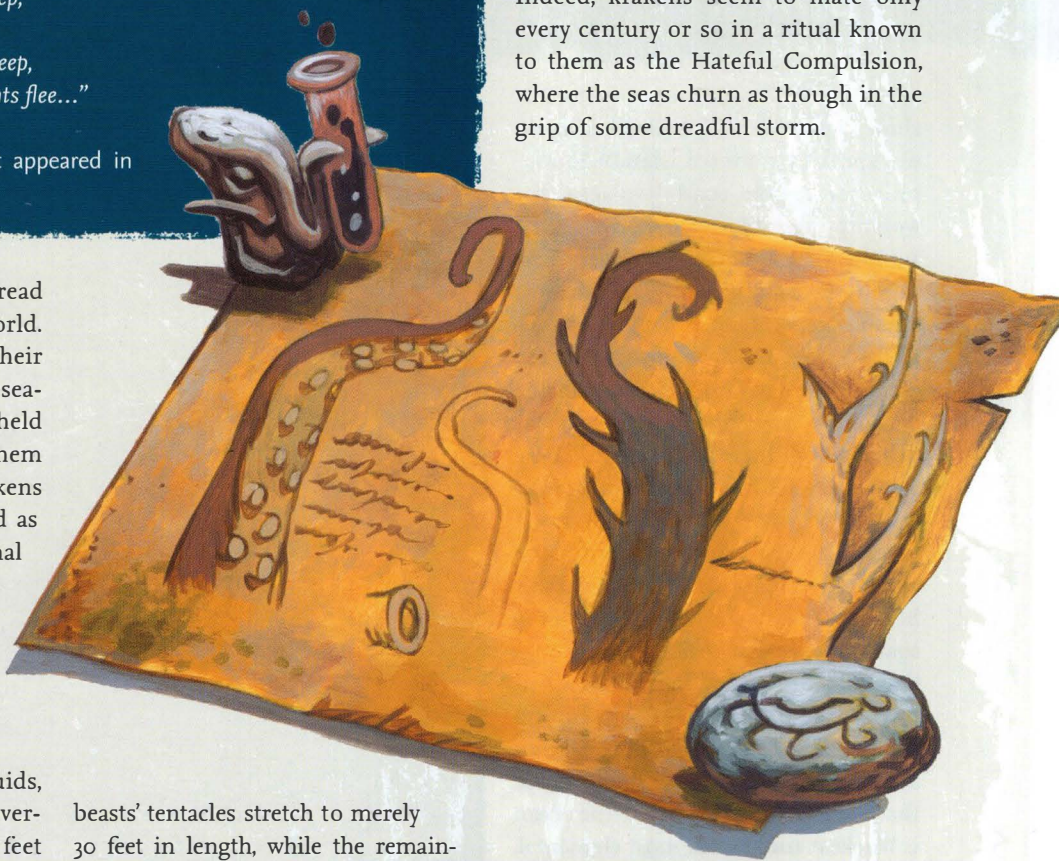
PHYSIOLOGY OF THE KRAKEN

Essentially huge intelligent squids, krakens never stop growing. The average kraken measures around 100 feet long. However, the near-immortality of these creatures leads to tales of staggeringly huge beasts that sailors mistake for small islands.

Average krakens possess a distinctive head, bilateral symmetry, and tentacles with suckers and hooks. Six of the

beasts' tentacles stretch to merely 30 feet in length, while the remaining two, covered in cruel barbs, writhe to nearly 60 feet long. A huge beak, curved and capable of tearing apart whales, nestles at the point where the tentacles meet the creature's bloated head.

Krakens have huge eyes, which give them formidable sight and the ability



PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE KRAKEN

Loners—primarily because of their evil, selfish minds and huge appetites—krakens claim territories ranging over hundreds of miles. However,

once every century or so, krakens instinctually come together in deep ocean trenches to mate. This fleshy, feeling ritual is abhorrent to the coldly calculating minds of krakens and is known to them as the Hateful Compulsion. Krakens from vast areas of the ocean gather, both fearful of the danger in doing so but unable to control their lustful compulsions. Males frequently get torn to pieces by the less numerous females in their insane desire to be fertilized, turning the sea black with kraken blood and causing parts of limbs and heads to wash ashore in oily froths. (This black rotting flesh has an appalling odor and is avoided by living animals.) In their coitus-fuelled madness krakens involuntarily create cataclysmic storms (see page 94 of the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*), leading to horrifically sized whirlpools and waves, which might rage for months or even years. The Hateful Compulsion continues until all the assembled females are impregnated, an act that forces a male to struggle for life within his mate's grip, a lustful battle capable of lasting for months. Fearing such eventualities, some krakens have risked the most extreme measures—including self surgery and undead—to avoid these spawning moots.

After mating, great black eggs soon fill deep oceanic trenches. Kraken young take a decade to hatch, and—mercifully—over this time even the brood-mothers who watch their spawn lose many of their eggs to daring predators. Occasionally, and for reasons even krakens cannot understand, some brood-mothers devour their whole clutch, an act that always leads to the loss of the kraken's sanity. Such an insane kraken is a terrible foe indeed, as its calamitous psychosis menaces anything that lives in or near the sea. Some suggest that this madness is connected with the insane god, Tharizdun, as part of some unfathomable plot he weaves from his prison. The few krakens who don't worship Panzuriel often turn to Tharizdun,

PANZURIEL

Intermediate God (Neutral Evil)

The god of the seas' foulest evils, Panzuriel ever seeks twisted minds and abominable visionaries to carry out his will both below and above the waves. The Writhing One welcomes all evil ocean-dwelling creatures into his crushing fold with sahuagin, sea hags, scrags, and kuo-toas (heretics against Bildooplpoolp) proving particularly prevalent. However, Panzuriel prefers creatures warped of body as well as of mind, making koprus and krakens his favored children.

Panzuriel bears an ancient hatred for Deep Sashelas, patron of aquatic elves. In aeons long lost, Panzuriel sought to make the darkened lands below the sea his exclusive dominion, perverting them into roiling oceans of fluid horrors. An alliance of opposed gods, led by Deep Sashelas, rose to resist the Writhing One, driving his corruptive ambition from the Material Plane and cutting off his left foot. The god's massive, gnarled appendage fell into the ocean but was never found. Thus, Panzuriel retains his link to the mortal world and, through his favored minions, seeks to corrupt the seas and avenge his ancient exile.

Symbol: A left footprint, kraken head, or squid eye surrounded by nine tentacles.

Portfolio: Confusion, murder, subversion, and evil aquatic creatures.

Domains: Corruption¹, Darkness, Evil, Water.

Favored Weapon: Whip (for land-dwelling worshipers) or net (for use underwater).

Clerical Trainings: Worshipers must sacrifice a sea elf in a ceremony known as the Endless Revenging.

Quests: Panzuriel sends visions to his servants to destroy specific ships, raid undersea and coastal communities, and defile the temples of all other aquatic deities.

Prayers: Hugely complex low tonal chants, usually conducted in vast groups, the echoing songs of Panzuriel's worshipers are sometimes heard even on the surface, where mariners refer to the doleful droning as the "Wail of the Severed God."

Temples: Huge cave complexes deep underwater or simple stone circles centered around tentacled idols serve as Panzuriel's temples. Krakens often force slaves to toil for centuries, digging unholy trenches deep enough to reveal portals leading to the Pool of Panzuriel (said to fester somewhere in Carceri).

Rites: Panzuriel regards the sea as a battleground between himself and the hated sea elves, making raiding and slaughter the only rites he demands.

Herald and Allies: Panzuriel's herald is a 50 HD pseudonatural kraken known as Tirbitus. Corrupted by Panzuriel's maddened will, Tirbitus hardly resembles a kraken anymore, appearing more like the Writhing One's symbol made flesh: a swollen red eye surrounded by countless flailing tentacles. Panzuriel's allies and those he most commonly sends to fulfill *planar ally* spells are callers from the deeps³, half-fiend krakens, and scyllans.

¹ Detailed in the *Book of Vile Darkness*.

usually after witnessing a brood-mother consume her young.

All krakens believe themselves to be divine creatures and the rightful rulers of the deep. As such they cannot conceive of a sea without their presence. Thus, they never knowingly put



themselves at physical risk and always plan a hundred cunning escapes. Krakens possess cruel, calculating intelligences and use them to move events to their own advantage. Effectively immortal, krakens patiently plot over centuries to concoct elaborate escapes, hatch

KRAKEN CULT: THE BROOD OF WORSHIPFUL K'THURALL

For centuries, the people of remote St. Telers island have kept a deadly secret. Their religion, on the exterior nothing more than a quaint island tradition of worshiping spirits of the sea, in fact reveres the depths-spawned abomination they know as Worshipful K'thurall.

Having lived below the island for countless ages, Worshipful K'thurall claims St. Telers and the seas around it as his personal dominion. In the centuries since worshipers came to his island, K'thurall has styled himself as their patron deity and the sole source of either their prosperity or annihilation. Fearful and reverent toward their worldly god, all the people of St. Telers devotedly serve the kraken—whispering frequent prayers and decorating their structures with countless ichthyoidal shapes—dreading his anger and the storms and droughts it incurs.

Worshipful K'thurall forces two obligations upon his cultists: sacrifice and service. Sacrifice to K'thurall is conducted in a yearly ceremony known as the Drowning Man. In this ritual a dozen men and women are imprisoned within the belly of a gigantic man-shaped wicker cage, then slowly lowered off a vast cliff known to the locals as the Despair of Salvation. K'thurall accepts the drowning victims and dines not only upon their flesh, but their very souls, as the rite has long since transformed him into a soul eater (see page 66 of the *Book of Vile Darkness*). Some sacrifices he lets drown, transforming them into drowned undead (see page 46 of the *Monster Manual III*), which he then sends to attack ships and bring him more victims.

Even as a yearly offering, the Drowning Man ceremony threatens to deplete the adult population of St. Telers. Thus, many of Worshipful K'thurall's cultists travel to distant lands, telling of their home as either an island paradise or an oppressed slave-state in need of a savior, all in hopes of luring victims to the Drowning Man.

For their life-long service, Worshipful K'thurall blesses his most pious followers with his touch: a "gift" his cultists claim brings them "closer to the sea," but in fact begins the transformation into a deep thrall (a kraken monster cultist prestige class from "The Minions of Darkness" in *DRAGON* #300). The island elders exhibit the most obvious changes, as they are afflicted with huge bulbous eyes, tentaclelike limbs, gasping breath, and innumerable skinless abscesses—marks from the touch of K'thurall's powerful suckered arms. Once these cultists complete their apotheosis into creatures more kraken than humanoid, Worshipful K'thurall accepts their leap from the Despair of Salvation. Upon taking this final step, K'thurall welcomes his deluded children into the ranks of an aberrant generation of cultists that he sequesters beneath the island in a hellish, tentacular mockery of life above.

Those krakens truly devoted to keeping slaves might house whole degraded societies within their lairs, as generation after generation of servants are born, serve, and die, never knowing a world of light and open air. Even if liberated, such slaves rarely flourish if brought to the surface, as all their minds know are the horrors of worshiping a living god and its foul experiments. This is to say nothing of the scars, grafts, and other manipulations krakens regularly inflict upon their servants to better serve their needs.

Besides slaves, krakens often maintain relationships with groups of other underwater-dwelling evil creatures. While such associations are rarely equal, creatures like sahuagin, scraggs, and sea hags frequently worship krakens or pay them tribute in return for aid or protection. To a kraken, such arrangements serve merely as preliminaries to it claiming an entire tribe, society, or race as its slaves.

ADVANCED KRAKEN

Although already fantastically large creatures, the eldest krakens are Colossal horrors capable of smashing even the sturdiest vessels. Rarely taking class levels, krakens are much more likely to seek the favor of dark powers to gain a variety of suitably foul and destructive templates.

K'THURALL

CR 19

Advanced elite male kraken

NE Colossal magical beast (aquatic)

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; **Listen** +48, **Spot** +48

Languages Aquan, Common

AC 25, touch 6, flat-footed 25

hp 647 (35 HD)

Fort +32, **Ref** +19, **Will** +19

Spd swim 20 ft.

Melee 2 tentacles +50 (4d8+19/19–20) and 6 arms +48 (1d8+9) and bite +48 (4d8+9)

Space 30 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft.

Base Atk +35; **Grp** +70

Attack Options Combat Expertise, Power Attack; constrict 2d8+12 or 1d6+6,

fearful schemes, and breed loyal servants in their sightless lairs deep below the waves. While nearly all krakens keep slaves or dupe worshipers, kraken elders often manipulate the younger of their kind, sacrificing them to enemies or duping them into performing dangerous undertakings. The prevalence of such trickery causes krakens to wisely avoid others of their kind and hold them in constant suspicion.

Many krakens—but by no means all—keep lairs in caves deep below the waves. These dens often serve as little more than hiding places, both for the kraken and the useful

treasures it might collect. To krakens, prime among such exploitable valuables are slaves, and as such a kraken's lair might hold several leaking air-filled chambers. Egotists of the highest degree, krakens never deign to sully their tentacles with simple chores. Whether its desires entail carving its lair to meet its whims or spying upon land-dwelling creatures, a kraken's slaves serve out of fear and the knowledge that escape means only a crushing death miles below the surface. Regardless of their uses, to krakens, the word "slave" and "meal" often prove interchangeable.

improved grab

Special Actions ink cloud, jet

Spell-like Abilities (CL 9th)

1/day—*control weather*, *control winds*,
dominate animal (DC 18), *resist energy*.

Abilities Str 48, Dex 10, Con 37, Int 33,
Wis 22, Cha 21

Feats Alertness, Awesome Blow, Blind-Fight, Combat Expertise, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (tentacle), Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (tentacle), Improved Trip, Iron Will, Power Attack, Multiattack

Skills Concentration +43, Diplomacy +40, Hide +32, Intimidate +35, Knowledge (geography) +49, Knowledge (nature) +47, Knowledge (the planes) +49, Listen +48, Search +49, Sense Motive +36, Spot +48, Survival +41 (+43 following tracks), Swim +57, Use Magic Device +43

Constrict (Ex) K'thurall deals automatic arm or tentacle damage with a successful grapple check.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, K'thurall must hit with an arm or tentacle attack. He can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If he wins the grapple check, he establishes a hold and can constrict.

Jet (Ex) K'thurall can jet backward once per round as a full-round action, at a speed of 280 feet. He must move in a straight line, but does not provoke attacks of opportunity while jetting.

Ink Cloud (Ex) K'thurall can emit a cloud of jet-black ink in an 80-foot spread once per minute as a free action. The cloud provides total concealment, which the kraken normally uses to escape a fight that is going badly. Creatures within the cloud are considered to be in darkness.

Skills K'thurall has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. He can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. He can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line. 





THE ECOLOGY OF THE LIZARDFOLK

"There are people. There are stories. The people think they shape the stories, but the reverse is often closer to the truth."

—Alan Moore, "Down Among the Dead Men"

Hidden behind walls of tangled vines, towers of primordial willows, and moats of slow-moving waters brimming with a thousand different deaths, lizardfolk claw out their savage domains. From the hearts of the deadliest swamps, dark places where sinister things crawl and forgotten evils lurk, these reptilian primitives thrive in savage solitude. Often numbered among the evils that stalk such wetland wilds, lizardfolk are far more than simple-minded raiders and territorial murderers—although they are exactly those things too.

HISTORY OF THE LIZARDFOLK

Lizardfolk have a strong oral tradition, and the story of how they came to exist is the first legend taught to hatchlings.

Semuanya, the breeder of all lizardfolk, had a mate in the long ago times. Kecuala and Semuanya lived in harmony together, neither one dominant. Each of them was a Watcher who prowled the primordial jungles, seeking out their enemies, a Survivor who plucked edible things from the ground and slew wild beasts for their flesh, and a Breeder who bore clutches of soft eggs and buried them in the ground to keep them warm and safe.

While Semuanya settled contentedly into its life, Kecuala did not. Kecuala worked its soft, gray brain with pointless questions. It made no decisions, squatting and thinking while life went on around it. When Semuanya chided Kecuala, Kecuala cried, "How can I watch or hunt or breed without first thinking? The decisions are so many and so great! What if my actions bring trouble? I must be cautious, must be careful, must think things through!"

Semuanya shook its head and went out to hunt, and when it returned it found Kecuala gone. Unable to conquer its



indecisiveness, it had split in half and left two smaller Kecualas behind. One of the small new lizardfolk waved its sharp claws in the air, growling its desire to fight and hunt. The other hid behind its partner, hissing its will to stay home and breed, and to cover its clutch with earth to keep it warm and safe.

Semuanya in its wisdom called the aggressive Kecuala “male” and the passive Kecuala “female” and helped them to build a place to live and breed. Semuanya watched over the Kecualas—which lizardfolk still call themselves to this day—and continues to guard their progeny, hoping that one day Kecuala will stop thinking so much and join its halves together again so it can watch and hunt and breed with Semuanya once more.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE LIZARDFOLK

While at first glance lizardfolk bodies seem as straightforward as their culture, in reality they are much more complex. Lizardfolk weigh from 200 to 280 pounds and possess powerful builds. Their stout frames stand 6 to 7 feet tall—in addition to 3-to-4-foot-long nonprehensile tails that they use for balance.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE LIZARDFOLK

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (local) check as it relates to lizardfolk. Those who live in or near swamps, hunt the marshes, or have dealings with lizardfolk communities might possess this information. Lizardfolk appear on page 169 of the *Monster Manual*.

Knowledge (local)

DC	Result
11	Lizardfolk are monstrous scaled humanoids that stalk swamps and live in small, primitive tribes.
16	As skilled warriors, lizardfolk respect strength and martial prowess, but most seek peaceful existences. Many settlements of lizardfolk live harmoniously alongside communities of other humanoids.
21	Lizardfolk are not amphibious, but they can remain underwater for long periods of time. Separate lizardfolk tribes vary greatly in technological advancement, alignment, physical stature, and racial abilities.
26	Lizardfolk revere an androgynous deity named Semuanya. Their tribal leaders are commonly the most powerful of the tribe's warriors. Lizardfolk almost never count arcane spellcasters among their ranks.

Lizardfolk skin is a thin white membrane that grows hard scales ranging in color from onyx black to olive green to mud brown, sometimes with mottled or even striped patterns. As their eggs have porous shells, the pigmentation of mud and water seeps in during development, determining a hatchling's coloration. This means that if lizardfolk move from one area

to another, new hatchlings might possess different colorations than their parents, although body size, eye color, and the number of serrations on their crests are inherited traits.

The jaws of lizardfolk bear a unique construction of solid bone plates with a serrated front edge. The sharp edge of the jawbone protrudes through the gum line, functioning as canines for



ripping meat while molarlike ridges run along the rear of the jawbone.

Crests are another distinctive physiological trait of lizardfolk. Males possess large crests that run from the tops of their heads down between their shoulder blades, while females have two smaller

crests running parallel along their heads down to the backs of their necks.

Lizardfolk reproduce sexually. A female lizardfolk lays a clutch of one to three eggs several weeks after mating and buries them in mud and composted plant matter. These eggs,

each just larger than a foot in diameter, absorb water and plant matter to feed the growing embryo inside. The fetus does not develop genitalia until approximately a week before it hatches, which develop in response to the type and amount of nutrients

SEMUANYA

Lesser God (Neutral)

The dualistic deity of the lizardfolk, Semuanya embodies the chief facets of lizardfolk life: hunting and breeding. During times of peace and plenty they speak of Semuanya as “she” and worship her as the Breeder. During times of strife and hardship they speak of Semuanya as “he” and offer sacrifices to him as the Watcher or the Seeker.

Symbol: A reptile egg.

Portfolio: Fertility, the hunt, lizardfolk, swamps.

Domains: Animal, Plant, Water.

Favored Weapon: Greatclub.

Clerical Training: New shamans learn at the feet of the previous generation’s healers, replacing them when they can

no longer fulfill their duties.

Quests: Semuanya instructs its worshipers to serve where needed, frequently questing them to aid warbands or recover a tribe’s lost eggs.

Prayers: In times of war, prayers to Semuanya take the form of short hisses and reptilian barks made before battle. When a tribe is at peace there is time for longer chants and epic songs intoned in Draconic.

Temples: Semuanya’s only temples are in the hearts and minds of its worshipers. Only the occasional symbol or idol is made as a physical representation of its worship.

Rites: Breeding and battle as they benefit lizardfolk tribes.



Herald and Allies: Semuanya’s herald is an 18th-level albino lizardfolk druid called Spirit Scale. Semuanya’s allies and those it most commonly sends to fulfill *planar ally* spells are celestial or fiendish dinosaurs, giant crocodiles, hydras, or tendriculoses.



the fetus receives. A prosperous tribe that has an abundance of compost hatches an equal number of males and females. A less well-off tribe that has few scraps to bury its eggs in produces mostly males. This adds valuable hunters to the tribe while reducing the number of needy offspring the next generation hatches. Irregularly, lizardfolk hatchlings are born with both male and female sex organs—neither set functional. Such sterile offspring often possess female crests, unusually complex brains, and correspondingly greater intellects.

Several atypical varieties of lizardfolk exist, the most common being brutish blackscals and the cunning pygmy poison dusks (see the *Monster Manual III*). Each breed exhibits traits suited to the lands it inhabits, as well as customs

DOGON TO DUNWATER

References to lizardlike people exist in the mythology of many different cultures. The Dogon tribe of Africa believes that human beings are descended from a race of reptilian aliens called the Nummo. The Hopi tribe supposedly has legends about a race of lizard people who lived on the earth five thousand years ago, and who all died in a rain of fire. In D&D, lizardfolk (formerly lizard men) made their first appearance in 1976's *Supplement I: GREYHAWK*. They are also prominently featured in the first edition adventure *U2: Danger at Dunwater* and more recently in Chapter 4: Saltmarsh of the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide II*. "The Ecology of the Lizardfolk" first appeared in *DRAGON* #335.



and practices that vary radically from tribe to tribe. As such, it proves as difficult to predict the temperament and actions of lizardfolk as it would be to do so for humans or elves. Varying breeds of lizardfolk rarely occupy the same areas, but when they do, tribal conflicts prove just as likely as unified societies.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE LIZARDFOLK

The societies of most lizardfolk tribes seem simple by the standards of nonlizardfolk, but this simplicity has developed as a reflection of their deep-rooted faith. The story of their origins has led most lizardfolk to condemn intelligence as pointless and wasteful. Lizardfolk believe, like their deity Semuanya, that life is meant to be lived and that hunting, fighting, and breeding matter most. Intelligence leads to overthinking situations and to the corruption of their straightforward culture.

The exception to this philosophy comes in the form of the occasional sterile, hermaphroditic lizardfolk hatched with superior intelligence. Often taking up the mantle of shaman, lizardfolk of this uncommon breed advise the tribe but rarely rise to positions of true power. Lizardfolk revere such shamans as touched by the divinity of Semuanya—paragons closer to returning the broken halves of Keczula to a unified state. As these shamans cannot breed, and lizardfolk females reject mates who display above-average intellects, lizardfolk technology rarely advances.

Survival is of key importance to lizardfolk society, and so the tribe treats the strongest and hardiest males and females with the greatest respect. The most powerful male warrior takes command of the tribe and selects the healthiest and strongest females to mate with. Although exceptional intelligence is disdained, cunning and tactics in battle are highly respected, especially when combined with the prowess to implement such strategies. Thus, many lizardfolk leaders show exceptional canniness in leading their people, both on and off the battlefield. When multiple lizardfolk lay claim to the position of leader—or there is any dispute within the tribe—the feuding parties fight to the death, the victor proving that Semuanya favors him.

Due to their martial culture, most other humanoids view lizardfolk as a violent, cannibalistic, savage race, but in reality lizardfolk tribes vary in their methods of dealing with outlanders. Lizardfolk as a whole have no strong leaning toward any extreme alignment or particular ruling philosophy other than survival of the fittest. They defend their territories ferociously, but when approached respectfully most tribes trade and negotiate with other races willingly. Some tribes, however, attack strangers on sight—especially those of the primal blackscale tribes—but such aggression usually results from years of fighting off invading races.

Lizardfolk disdain intricate deceptions and politics. If they desire something another race possesses, they might

try to trade for it or take it by force. A few nomadic tribes—largely among the poison dusk—prefer stealth and theft over diplomacy or aggression. Each tribe differs, but most broadcast their intentions straightforwardly and openly.

In general, lizardfolk make permanent homes in temperate, swampy lands, although the differing breeds prefer some variations. Some of the more advanced tribes build crude huts, but most find natural shelters in underwater caves containing air pockets or large copses of swamp trees with canopies big enough to shield the tribe from the elements. Females and children guard the settlement and gather edible roots and plants for the tribe. Males serve as scouts, hunters, and warriors.

LIZARDFOLK IN EBERRON

The best-known lizardfolk in EBERRON are the blackscales, poison dusk pygmies, and twenty-four Cold Sun Tribes of normal lizardfolk living in Q'barra. All three varieties are extremely dangerous, although some of the Cold Sun Tribes have made peaceful overtures toward nonlizardfolk. Many of the Q'barra lizardfolk serve the great black dragon Rhashaak and seek to protect their lands and holy grounds from outsider settlers new to the region. Lately, blackscale raiders have captured numerous residents of Newthron's outlying lands and even Cold Sun lizardfolk to sacrifice to Rhashaak in the great volcano-city of Haka'torvhak. This especially disturbs the Cold Sun lizardfolk as they fear some dark plot on the part of Rhashaak. In addition, the agents they dispatched to investigate the blackscales' plots have returned with broken minds and terrible mutations.

LIZARDFOLK IN FAERÛN

Large lizardfolk tribes exist in the southernmost reaches of Faerûn, mainly in the swampy areas of the jungles of Chult and Rethild, the Great Swamp, between Halruaa and

LIZARDFOLK FEATS

The new feats presented here are frequently used by lizardfolk but might be suited to any creature that meets the prerequisites.

Deep Breather

You can hold your breath much longer than normal.

Prerequisites: Con 16.

Benefit: You can hold your breath for double the normal number of rounds before you risk drowning (see page 304 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*). For example, a human with this feat can hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to four times his Constitution score before he risks drowning.

Normal: A human can normally only hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to two times his Constitution score before he risks drowning.

Chameleon Blood

Lizardfolk with this feat can slightly shift the color of their scales, aiding them in blending in with dense vegetation.

Prerequisites: Lizardfolk, Cha 14.

Benefit: Lizardfolk with this feat gain a +6 racial bonus on Hide checks made in forested or swampy environments.

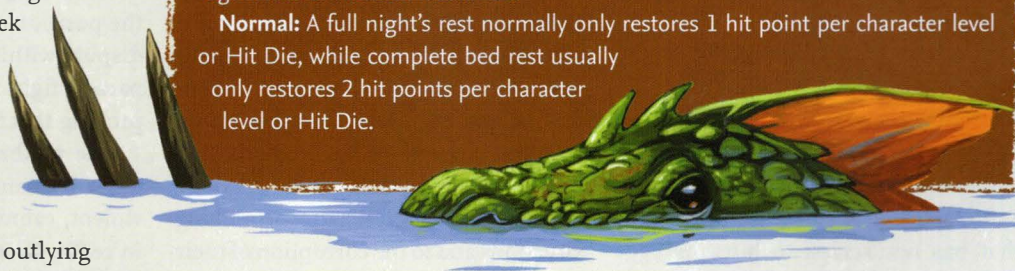
Reptilian Healing

Lizardfolk with this feat heal at an increased rate, much like many lesser reptilian creatures.

Prerequisites: Lizardfolk, Con 16, Great Fortitude.

Benefit: Lizardfolk with this feat regain hit points from normal healing at double the normal rate. For example, a full night's rest allows a lizardfolk with this feat to regain 2 hit points per character level or Hit Die, while complete bed rest restores 4 hit points per character level or Hit Die. This ability does not allow a lizardfolk to regenerate or reattach lost limbs.

Normal: A full night's rest normally only restores 1 hit point per character level or Hit Die, while complete bed rest usually only restores 2 hit points per character level or Hit Die.



Dambrath. Rumor has it that a ruined city in the heart of Rethild has had a corrupting influence on the lizardfolk tribes, spawning demonic lizard kings and queens. These half-fiends have united many tribes of their weaker kin and are slowly conquering the enormous swamp (see *Serpent Kingdoms*).

Lizardfolk also populate the warm marshes of the Western Heartlands, most notably the Lizard Marsh and the Marsh of Chelimber. Some lizardfolk have recently started singling out and attacking Zhentarim caravans that pass

too close to the Marsh of Chelimber. In response, the Zhents now spread rumors of lizardfolk assaulting and devouring innocent travelers, hoping that someone eliminates the reptilian threat for them.

LIZARDFOLK TACTICS

Skilled guerilla combatants, lizardfolk warriors are experienced at fighting in small hunting parties or warbands. In such groups they make use of a variety of tactics effective against prey, whatever shape it might take.

Scaled Squads: Obedient to powerful leaders, warbands of six to ten lizardfolk commonly follow commanders with barbarian or ranger levels. Skilled ambushers, frequently only half of a lizardfolk warband charges from cover into melee, leaving a reserve group to attack from range and cover the vanguard's retreat. Lizardfolk rarely fight to the death and commonly withdraw once reduced to half their hit points.

Deep Divers: Lizardfolk prefer to engage enemies in or near water. Using their hold breath ability to hide or retreat underwater, they regularly take advantage of the improved cover wading in water provides (see page 93 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*). Heavily armed lizardfolk often drop their shields to fight underwater, as shields hamper their swimming abilities.

Swamp Stalkers: While the dense vegetation of their swampy homes makes the mounts of other humanoids impractical, lizardfolk frequently domesticate animals for their cunning in battle. Creatures like crocodiles, deinonychuses, megaraptors, mudmaws (see the *Monster Manual II*), Medium or larger snakes, or nearly any creature from Chapter 6 of *Serpent Kingdoms* might follow or even be ridden by lizardfolk into battle. In addition, tyrannosauruses or other Huge or larger dinosaurs, black or green dragons, and wyverns might carry entire lizardfolk warbands into battle. Skeletal dragons (see the *Draconomicon*) and various plant creatures are sometimes created or cultivated by lizardfolk shamans to protect their tribes.



ADVANCED LIZARDFOLK

Most lizardfolk tribes adhere to proud warrior traditions. As such, advanced lizardfolk regularly take levels in barbarian, fighter, or ranger. Lizardfolk following the path of the shaman might instead take levels of adept, cleric, druid, or—rarely—sorcerer.

SWAMP STALKER CHAKSHAEL CR 5

Lizardfolk barbarian 2/fighter 2
LN Medium humanoid (reptilian)
Monster Manual 169

Init +0; **Senses** Listen +1, Spot +1

Languages Draconic

AC 22, touch 12, flat-footed 20;
uncanny dodge

hp 45 (6 HD)

Fort +8, **Ref** +5, **Will** +1

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee 2 claws +7 melee (1d4+2) and
bite +5 (1d4+1) or
mwk trident +9 (1d8+2) and
bite +5 (1d4+1)

Ranged: javelin +7 (1d6+1)

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +7

Special Attack Rage 1/day

Combat Gear oil of bless weapon,

potion of bear's endurance

Abilities Str 15, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 8,
Wis 12, Cha 10

Feats Multiattack, Point Blank Shot,
Weapon Focus (trident)

Skills Balance +6, Handle Animal +2,
Intimidate +5, Listen +5, Jump +6,
Ride +3, Survival +3, Swim +8

Possessions combat gear, masterwork
studded leather armor, spiked
heavy wooden shield, masterwork
trident, 4 javelins, 2 *potions of pass
without trace*, 39 gp.

Rage (Ex): When he rages, Chakshael
has the following changed statistics:

AC 20, touch 10, flat-footed 18

hp 55 (5 HD)

Fort +10 **Will** +3

Melee 2 claws +9 melee (1d4+4) and
bite +7 melee (1d4+3) or
mwk trident +10 (1d8+4) and
bite +7 melee (1d4+3)

Grp +9

Abilities Str 19, Con 18

Skills Climb +4, Jump +10, Swim +7

"I hate and fear the neogi, and that makes them great monsters. My dislike dates back to college, when I was fortunate enough to meet the neogi for the first time in Steve Kurtz's *SPELLJAMMER* campaign. We started a boarding action on a strange ship, and we saw first one umber hulk, then several (as they say, WTF?). Then we saw creatures commanding the umber hulks, which freaked us out further. I mean, what kind of monster controls umber hulks? Kind of Cthulhu alien beasties, that's what.

"Partly, the great impression comes from a monster that was new to our party (only the DM had the *SPELLJAMMER* box and supplements). Then there's the way I remember their hissing, nasty voices, their vaguely spidery way of crawling around spelljamming ships, the way they perched on the backs and shoulders of umber hulks, and their despicable role as slavers. Sure, the neogi had decent stats, but the flavor was what generated the gut-level reaction. I can't remember who said "We gotta kill these things. Every. Last. One.", but that became our mission, and they were treacherous and vile to the last. Can't ask for more from a villain."

—Wolfgang Baur, Former *DRAGON* Editor-in-Chief



THE ECOLOGY OF THE MOONCALF

"Something terrible came to the hills and valleys on that meteor, and something terrible—though I know not in what proportion—still remains."

—H.P. Lovecraft, "The Colour Out of Space"

Massive and alien, rumored and feared, where the shadow of a mooncalf falls, tragedy follows. The living tools of beings distant and unfathomable, these flying terrors—masses of wings, tentacles, and sopping rubbery flesh—possess great intellect and even greater powers. Beholden of philosophies, goals, and motivations incomprehensible to any humanoid race, they cling to the highest reaches of

the world, watching and waiting, malformed voyeurs and harbingers of doom.

HISTORY OF THE MOONCALF

It is no surprise that mooncalves seem otherworldly, for their racial origins trace back to beings beyond any world. From the airless voids between worlds, titanic things of immense power known only as "moongods" came into being. While other races first developed awareness on worlds nurtured by water, air, and earth, only endless expanses of cold and darkness nursed the moongods. Learning from the motion of the stars, their thoughts formed in ways utterly alien to any creature bound beneath a single sky, harmonizing them to the



secrets of heavenly motions. Thus, the moongods developed astrology before any other art, holding the constellations themselves as deities of a kind.

Guided by their sacred stars, the moongods drifted through the void, eventually coming upon whole worlds of other beings. Fascinated by these blue-green orbs, the moongods sought to explore them but discovered they could not survive in the thick chemicals of air and water. Overly curious, though, many moongods peered too close, being drawn to their deaths like moths to a flame.

Thus, the moongods created mooncalves—lesser aspects of themselves—better suited to explore these worlds. The mooncalves were given wings to fly through the thick resistance of air, as well as forms enabling them to survive and experience these new expanses of soft wetness. Birthed into the upper reaches of each world the moongods wished to explore, these creatures—half children, half living tools—were left to make whatever discoveries they could. As such, the first mooncalves came to ground, fully

KNOWLEDGE OF THE MOONCALF

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (arcana) check as it relates to mooncalves. Diviners, astrologers, and others who study omens and the stars might possess this information. The mooncalf appears on page 150 of *Monster Manual II*.

Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
20	A mooncalf is an intelligent, flying monstrosity that prefers high, solitary places and is often seen as an omen of ill fortune.
25	Mooncalves have keen senses and can see without the need for light. They hold control over storms and can command animals. Their strange flesh proves resistant to all but magical weapons.
30	Mooncalves are drawn to witness epic disasters. If they cannot find one occurring on their own, they are willing to manipulate events to create one. Thus, spotting one is not just an omen, but likely evidence that something cataclysmic might soon happen nearby.
35	Mooncalves believe themselves to be the tools of strange, otherworldly beings known as the moongods.

aware of their racial quest, the orphans of great powers that they only instinctually understand and can never reach.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE MOONCALF

Winged, tentacled masses of muscle, cartilage, and mucus, mooncalves are

horrors to behold. Bulbous and uneven, their bodies resemble large brains fixed with dead white eyes, two thick tentacles longer than their wingspan, and a protective cluster of numerous smaller tentacle arms. Nestled at the base of this mass of smaller tentacles is



a razor-sharp beak similar to a squid's, within which coil a pair of long, whip-thin tongues. The flesh of a mooncalf is much denser than most terrestrial creatures, making it strangely resistant to nonmagical attacks. Awkward flyers, mooncalves jerk about like bait dangling on an invisible lure, but their powerful wings allow them to move like this at great speeds. Ill adapted to ground movement, earthbound mooncalves seem vulnerable. In truth their long tentacles have more than enough strength to drag their bodies about in swift, yet ungainly twitches and wet flops. A typical mooncalf's core body measures 8 feet in diameter, with a total body weight of approximately 600 pounds.

Mooncalves don't have dietary needs like other creatures. Rather than requiring certain materials and minerals to

survive, mooncalves flourish by consuming any substance—organic or inorganic. While they still starve if they don't consume at least their body weight in materials every week, such a possibility seems unlikely. Mooncalves prefer a variety of food sources, and actively avoid eating the same material twice. Living organisms, however, seem to prove different enough that a mooncalf considers two different beings two different meals. Those few who have examined dead mooncalves have found that their bodies are essentially alchemical laboratories, capable of distilling and dissolving nearly any substance the creatures consume. In effect, they can digest nearly anything that they can eat. Thorough physical examination and observation of their eating habits, some scholars have proposed that mooncalves are capa-

ble of "memorizing" whatever they eat, becoming familiar with not just their meals' tastes and textures, but gaining intimate knowledge of every element and chemical that comprised the substance or being.

These powers of perception also reveal themselves in mooncalves' telepathy, allowing them to communicate with any being within 100 feet. Although they rarely converse with creatures they deem food or part of their experiments, more cunning mooncalves sometimes use this ability to manipulate lesser beings. Their strange minds also provide them with a variety of powerful abilities, allowing them to dominate the senses of weak-willed creatures and even alter their environments, either to better suit their needs or drive off threats.

Mooncalves do not sleep, although they have no immunity to magical sleep.

THE MOONGODS

Demigods (Neutral Evil)

Although distant, uncaring deities, the moongods do attract a small number of humanoid worshipers. Mostly, these worshipers are those seeking power through knowledge—evil diviners and astrologers who form small cults, revering the secrets the moongods possess as much as the deities themselves. Occasionally, a mooncalf forms a cult to aid it in sowing dissent and disaster.

The moongods are symbolized by a moon shrouded by the shadows of tentacles. They have no true enemies, and no driving goals, making them unusually apathetic for deities.

Portfolio: Astrology, disasters, hidden knowledge, mooncalves.

Domains: Darkness*, Evil, Knowledge, Travel.

Favored Weapon: Tentacle (for creatures that possess them) or spiked chain.

Clerical Training: Worshipers must learn all the constellations, and witness at least one major disaster during the course of their training.

Quests: The moongods are uncaring and unhearing, so they do not give their followers specific quests.

Prayers: Silent intonations of events the cleric has witnessed, which must be done while open to the night sky.

Temples: Windswept peaks far from any other habitation, with astrological signs and constellations carved into great circles of rock.

Rites: A major event, one that impacts no fewer than a thousand living, thinking creatures, must be witnessed at least once a decade. If such an event does not occur naturally, the cleric is required to arrange for one.

Herald and Allies: The moongods' herald is a massive 60 Hit Die moonlord known only as the Endless One. It has appeared over numerous epic disasters, many of which it is thought to have manipulated in their masters names. The moongods have no planar allies, and clerics often summon common fiends with *planar ally* spells.

*Detailed in the *Book of Vile Darkness*

Many mooncalves fly constantly, spending days or even weeks in the air. On worlds where low-hanging moons or floating chunks of land can be reached through flight, mooncalves prefer these as homes, but otherwise they find high mountains, hills, or ominous abandoned towers to serve as their lairs.

No young mooncalves have ever been sighted, leading to the belief that all mooncalves are the same age, spawned from the same single mass

birth. Only slight color variations, differing numbers of tentacles, and size distinguish between individuals. Size variation among mooncalves also proves strange, as it appears to relate to experience, events witnessed, and variety of creatures consumed. In short, every tidbit of information a mooncalf gathers seems to imperceptibly add to its bulk, eventually adding up, increasing its size as well as its already considerable powers as a moonlord.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE MOONCALF

Mooncalves were spawned fully knowledgeable and aware of their uncaring gods. Each inherited the drive to observe and the dispassionate superiority its parents hold over all other living creatures. As such, they often seek homes upon high mountains or spires—comforted by the nearness of the stars—close to areas densely populated with animals and sentient creatures, between which they make no distinction.

Thus, mooncalves spend their lives in research and observation, but they are rarely unobtrusive onlookers.

Mooncalves seek to witness major events—particularly conflicts.

While a small skirmish or minor fire might sate their curiosity for a few days, mooncalves seek truly epic battles, natural disasters, and upheavals of broad scope. As they come to understand the beings they observe more thoroughly, they grow in cunning and power, learning to engineer such events. Some even turn to divination magic and astrology to predict such catastrophes, ranging far to witness titanic calamities. Regardless of their methods, those who know of mooncalves know them as harbingers of dreadful events

With no need for tools, equipment, companionship or dwellings, mooncalves have no need to develop a society of their own, never seek companionship, and are not known to mate. Rarely, more experienced mooncalves build cults or networks of spies to help them find or create the disasters they seek. Besides such exceptions, however, the only company mooncalves long for



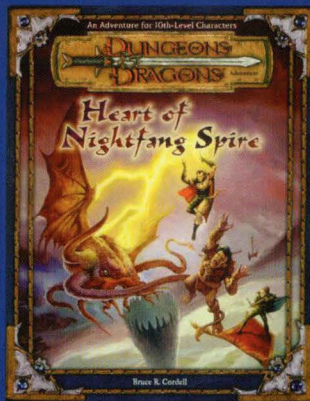
ORIGINS OF THE MOONCALF

The otherworldly mooncalf first appeared in *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* in the opening scenes of the adventure *Heart of Nightfang Spire*. Alien and unknown, this monstrosity graced the module's cover with its pseudo-natural presence.

Besides merely being a creation of D&D, however, the word "mooncalf" appears in many dictionaries, defined as a fool, a freak, or an deformed embryo, afflicted by the corruptive influence of the moon. The word also appears most notably in the works of Shakespeare as an insult leveled toward the character Caliban in Act III of *The Tempest*.

The mooncalf currently appears in the *Monster Manual II* and has statistics updated to D&D 3.5 available at wizards.com/dnd/files/DnD35_update_booklet.zip.

"The Ecology of the Mooncalf" first appeared in *DRAGON* #340.



is the return of the moongods and the cold embrace of the stars above.

MOONLORDS

Although all mooncalves begin life as Large creatures, as long as they continue witnessing and experiencing new events they never stop growing. Some mooncalves have been documented as having grown to nearly 20 feet in diameter with tentacles more than 50 feet long. As the creature grows, it becomes more and more like the unknowable moongods that spawned it, gaining a touch of their otherworldly abilities. Many mooncalves turn to spellcasting at some point in their lives, channeling their innate power into magic. Those that don't, however, eventually become Gargantuan and are considered moonlords, creatures that challenge even evil dragons as threats to the world around them.

HARBINGER FEATS

Upon advancing to 28 Hit Dice, a mooncalf becomes a moonlord and gains the potential to actually bring about evil omens. These are acquired in the form of harbinger feats, motes of otherworldly power moonlords use to tap into their moongod heritage. All harbinger feats are supernatural abilities, and require an hour to use, creating an aura centered on the moonlord that

lasts for 24 hours. A moonlord can only use one harbinger feat per week. Characters within an affected area may make a DC 25 Knowledge (arcana) check to realize the omens they are seeing point toward a single, magical source for the ill fortune befalling the area.

MIXED OMENS

Multiple bad signs appear throughout the land.

Prerequisite: Any three harbinger feats, mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Mixed Omens can use two different harbinger feats in one week. The feats may be used concurrently.

Normal: A mooncalf can only use one harbinger feat a week.

OMEN OF BONES

A faint breath of rot pervades the land.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with this feat taints the region in an aura of death. All undead within a 50-mile radius gain turn resistance +2. This stacks with any turn resistance the creature might already possess.

Ghostly glimpses, distorted reflections, and eerie mirages haunt an area under an Omen of Bones.

OMEN OF CROWS

The land seems dark, as though it were but one vast graveyard.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Omen of Crows can create an aura that dampens healing magic. Within a 50-mile radius, all cure spells heal one less hit point of damage per casting.

An area under an Omen of Crows is often infested with crows or similar scavenging birds.

OMEN OF FLIES

Pestilence spreads through the land.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Omen of Flies can create an aura that strengthens diseases of all kinds. Within a 50-mile radius, all saving throws against disease take a -2 penalty.

An area under an Omen of Flies is often infested with flies, maggots, and other insectile vermin.

OMEN OF LEECHES

Enervating and draining attacks become more deadly.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Omen of Leeches can create an aura that makes ability damage and drain more difficult to resist. Within a 50-mile radius, all saving throws against spells and special abilities that cause ability drain or ability damage take a -2 penalty. The effects of this feat do not stack with Omen of Flies.

An area under an Omen of Leeches is overrun with slugs, leeches, and worms.

OMEN OF LOSS

Memories become lost and history fades away.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Omen of Loss can create an aura of forgetfulness. All creatures within a 50-mile radius take a -2 penalty on all bardic knowledge rolls and Knowledge skill checks.

A thick mist and haunting lights settle over a land afflicted by an Omen of Loss.

OMEN OF SNAKES

Poison becomes more virulent.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Omen of Snakes can create an aura that strengthens poisons and venoms of all kinds. Within a 50-mile radius, all saving throws against poison take a –2 penalty.

An area under an Omen of Snakes is often infested with snakes.

OMEN OF STORMS

A feeling of dread settles over the land.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Omen of Storms can create an aura that spreads fear and unease. Within a 50-mile radius all creatures with an Intelligence score of 3 or lower must make a DC 15 Will save or be shaken for the whole day.

An area under a Omen of Storms has cloudy, stormy weather.

ALTERNATIVE MOONCALF ORIGINS

The idea of mooncalves being spawned by a race of alien gods that exist in the void between worlds isn't appropriate for all cosmologies. Without changing their basic behavior, it's possible to use an alternative origin for mooncalves to bring them more in-line with any campaign world. A few examples are presented here:

Aberrant Creations: Although mooncalves believe themselves to be the spawn of otherworldly deities, they might in truth have been constructed as servants of illithids, grell, or any number of other aberrant creatures. Mooncalves might have escaped their original masters, or they might be unknowingly vulnerable to the magic or psionic powers their progenitors use to secretly control them.

Alternatively, within recent memory the illithid god Maanzecorian was destroyed. The moongods might embody the lingering fragments of that deity's sundered divinity, or be the remnants of Maanzecorian's orphaned herald.

Fiendish Origins: The moongods might actually be a single evil deity who uses mooncalves as its primary agents in the mortal realm. Alternatively, mooncalves might be a new breed of fiendish inhabitant belched from the pits of Carceri, Gehenna, or Hades.

Other Planes: The unknowable creatures that created the mooncalves might actually be natives of the Astral Plane. It's not the space between worlds they inhabit, but the space between realities. Mooncalves seek high places because the rarified air is more like astral space, which they have no innate way of returning to.

Alternatively, mooncalves are inscrutable, alien horrors, making them perfect vanguard agents of some intelligence from either the depths of the Ethereal Plane or the Far Realm (see *DRAGON* #330).

ADVANCED MOONCALF

Most commonly, mooncalves advance by Hit Dice, gaining power as they witness more and greater tragedies, becoming titanic moonlords. Sometimes, however, they take levels of cleric, worshiping the enigmatic moongods, or adopting the path of the diviner to magically learn of impending calamities.

MOONLORD

CR 16

Advanced mooncalf

NE Gargantuan magical beast

Init +6; **Senses** blindsight 100 ft., darkvision 100 ft., keen senses, telepathy; **Listen** +15, **Spot** +19

AC 27, **touch** 8, **flat-footed** 25

hp 465 (28 HD); **DR** 10/magic

Fort +23, **Ref** +21, **Will** +16

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares); fly 150 ft. (poor)

Melee 2 tentacle rakes +27 melee (4d6+23/19–20) and

6 tentacle-arms +22 (2d6+16)*

Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft., 50 ft. with tentacle rake

Base Atk +28; **Grp** +53

Attack Options Cleave, Power Attack

Special Attack bite, improved grab

Spell-like Abilities (CL 9):

1/day—*call lightning* (DC 13), *control weather*, *control winds* (DC 15), *dominate animal* (DC 13), *greater magic fang*, *protection from elements*, *quench* (DC 13), *resist elements*

* 10-point Power Attack.

Abilities Str 36, Dex 14, Con 32, Int 22,

Wis 22, Cha 11

SQ Tentacles

Feats Alertness, Blind-Fighting, Cleave, Combat Expertise, Improved Critical (tentacle rake), Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Omen of Crows, Omen of Storms, Power Attack, Toughness

Skills Concentration +39 Hide +26, Knowledge (arcana) +36, Knowledge (history) +36, Knowledge (local) +36, Listen +36, Spellcraft +36, Spot +36

Bite (Ex) With each successful grapple check a mooncalf automatically hits a grabbed opponent with its bite attack, dealing 4d8+6 points of slashing damage.

Improved Grab (Ex) If a moonlord hits an opponent of Gargantuan size or smaller with a tentacle rake attack, it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it gets a hold, it automatically hits with its bite attack in the same round. Thereafter, the moonlord has the option to conduct the grapple normally, or simply use its tentacle to hold the opponent (–20 penalty on grapple check, but the moonlord is not considered grappled). In either case, each successful grapple check it makes during successive rounds automatically deals tentacle rake and bite damage.

Tentacles An opponent can attack either of a moonlord's tentacles as if they were weapons (see *Sunder* on page 158 of the *Player's Handbook*). Both of a moonlord's tentacles have 20 hit points. If the moonlord is currently grappling a target with a tentacle, it usually uses another limb to make its attack of opportunity against the sunder attack. Severing a moonlord's tentacle deals damage to the creature equal to half the limb's hit points. A moonlord regrows a severed limb in 1d10+10 days.

Keen Senses (Ex) A moonlord sees four times as well as a human in low-light conditions and twice as well in normal light.

Spell-like Abilities A moonlord's spell-like abilities are Charisma based. ■



THE ECOLOGY OF THE NIGHTHAG

*Begone, you hag who lurks in dreams,
Who drains our life through cries and screams,
Gods bless this ward to keep me whole,
And keep the night hag from my soul.*

—Anon., from the archives of the Hospice of the Healing Hands

Wickedly toiling upon the bleakest hells of the Outer Planes' endless infinities, countless creatures embody the most potent of mortal fears. Yet, among these extraplanar terrors, no cruel fiends covet mortal suffering and their eternal souls more than the nightmare queens of Hades, the sinister and hateful night hags. Having preyed upon the living for countless centuries, warnings of night hags and their powers have become the stuff of superstitions and old wives' tales. Although little truth remains in such country advice, many such stories find their basis in actual practices capable of warding off a night hag's infernal hunger.

HISTORY OF THE NIGHT HAG

When discussing many extraplanar creatures, it is enough to say that they always were, and thus they are now. Although night hags are as ancient as any fiend, their similarities to the hags of the Material Plane raises peculiar questions regarding their origins.

Many scholars speculate that night hags are merely planar relatives of normal hags—another breed, native to the Outer Planes, and different only in the same ways that annis hags differ from green hags or sea hags. Their fearful abilities and cruel cunning, though, makes them paragons of their race, suggesting that the hags of the Material Plane might have descended from them.

Others suggest that night hags are the daughters of Cegilune, direct inheritors of the hag goddess's foul blood (see *DRAGON* #345 for more on Cegilune). While a valid possibility, Regardless of her role as their matron, Cegilune finds



night hags despicable, undeserving, hateful creatures who steal the souls that would otherwise be rightfully hers. While some claim the goddess's disgust makes her an unlikely source of the night hag race, others see Cegilune's malicious greed reflected in her erstwhile offspring, lending credence to theories of their relation.

Regardless of the night hags' origins, most who investigate them are interested in histories of a different type: the countless stories and towering records of terrorized countries and lifeless villages that owe their ruin to these hag queens.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE NIGHT HAG

Even when compared to other hags, night hags appear as grotesque crones. Said to look like extraordinarily ugly human women, such a statement does an irreparable disservice to the gender of that species. Thus, a more apt description might compare them to small female trolls: their skin ranges from a light purple-blue to near black, and is always blistered with the foul planar diseases they carry.

Nearly all night hags wear wild manes of coarse black hair with

bones, severed fingers, and small trinkets woven into them in whatever manner they believe makes them appear most threatening. This grotesque coif often dangles over a night hag's face and much of her body, pos-

sibly hiding her rows of awkwardly protruding pointed teeth. Above, a pair of deep hollows veil hellish red pupils, little more than maddened pinpricks looking out over a sharply pointed nose.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE NIGHT HAG

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to night hags. Fiends, planar travelers, and storytellers are all likely to know tales of these foul crones. The night hag appears on page 193 of the *Monster Manual*.

Knowledge (the planes)

DC Result

- | | |
|----|--|
| 19 | Creatures exist that haunt mortal dreams, feeding on souls and choking the life from unwitting sleepers. Those who wake gasping and panicked are often said to have been "hag ridden." |
| 24 | Night hags are withered, hateful witches of the Outer Planes. Related to but more powerful than the hags of the Material Plane, they can take the forms of mortals in their hunt for the souls of innocent creatures. |
| 29 | Mistresses of nightmares, night hags can invade dreams to sap their victims' life energy. They possess weird magical abilities, including the power to force creatures to sleep, and their bites carry a fiendish disease. |
| 34 | Night hags hold vast knowledge of forbidden and evil lore. They can sometimes be bargained with, though their aid is often priced in manifested evil souls called larvae. Night hags have the ability to turn ethereal and are resilient to all but cold iron weapons. |
| 39 | All night hags carry heartstones, without which they cannot turn ethereal. These heartstones are said to hold the power to cure any disease. |

To augment their fearsome appearances, night hags often cover their grotesquely emaciated bodies in self-inflicted tattoo-like scars. This sickly, tormented facade belies a night hag's significant strength and the threat of her wicked claws. Fortunately, though, many of a night hag's joints seem to bend in awkward ways disturbing to mortal witnesses, which make them relatively slow and ungainly creatures.

Night hags reproduce in a manner exceedingly foul to mortal minds, creating young to serve in their coveys or as servants. Using their ability to polymorph themselves, hags take on the appearances of mortal women, then seduce men into meetings that more likely than not culminate in their deaths. After such a coupling, a night hag becomes pregnant for a length of time normal for women of her mate's species. At the end of this period, she gives birth to a dark-haired female child otherwise indistinguishable from others of her mate's species. Having no concept of maternal instincts, night hags always foster their children, usually to unsuspecting good-aligned creatures—and even with the child's father if he still lives.

At any time between the child's first birthday and puberty, a night hag might return to perform a series of despoiling rites that culminates in the child's transformation into a normal night hag. The process begins with an initial visitation during which the night hag must engage her child in a foul ceremony for an uninterrupted hour. After this initial ritual, the night hag returns three times, each visit thirteen days after the last. On these visits, the night hag must suckle the child and feed it the flesh of a living larva, a process that takes an hour. If any of these feedings are interrupted or prevented, the child cannot be transformed into a night hag. Otherwise, the end of the final feeding initiates a rapid and irreversible transformation, and within an hour the child becomes a full-grown night hag. Uncaring of their daughters but covetous of their uses, night hags often foster more children than they

have any intention of transforming into adult night hags, essentially keeping spare children littered across the planes should their plans require more servants or their current broods dwindle.

In keeping with their unnatural generation, night hags possess a variety of innate, magical abilities. Aside from being able to manifest a range of offensive spells, night hags have an innate sense of the alignments of other creatures. Able to detect such details of an individual's personality, a night hag can root out those most likely vulnerable to her corruptive

manipulations or detect which souls are ripest for slaughter. To aid in their infiltration of mortal societies, night hags also possess the ability to drastically alter their forms, often appearing as exotic beauties, innocent children, or other unassuming forms. It's not uncommon for a night hag to murder and replace a relatively solitary individual, using her victim's life as a cover for her foul work.

Their ability to take on ethereal form and haunt the dreams of mortal creatures is both night hags' most feared and most unusual power. Haunting a mortal while he sleeps, a night hag



NIGHT HAGS AND LARVAE

Night hags engage in a strange connection to the rare petitioners of Hades known as larvae (see page 108 of the *Manual of the Planes*). The manifested souls of unquestionably evil creatures reborn as bloated, yellow, wormlike beings, larvae present one of the great mysteries of the planes. With distorted faces reminiscent of those they had in life, larvae ooze a sickening, bilious fluid and constantly writhe like giant, squirming maggots. Although the specifics of their use remain vague, night hags require these abominations to reproduce. Some night hags even gather and trade larvae to other powerful evil creatures, which use them as food, currency, and as “soul stuff” for unspeakable projects. (Most evil extraplanar creatures can determine the value of a larva with a simple Appraise check.)

Night hags possess an uncanny ability to determine which mortals will become larvae after dying. Knowing that these irredeemably corrupt souls hold value among the most depraved creatures of the planes, night hags often seek out powerful dark-hearted individuals. As the evil a creature commits in life directly relates to its larva’s value after death, some night hags cultivate malicious souls to acts of greater and greater depravity rather than simply harvesting those they find. Regardless, when a night hag does finally claim an evil life, she always innately knows where on the Gray Wastes to collect it after the slaughter. Many night hags covetously protect great herds of larvae, as the most powerful fiends pay dearly for such droves of tainted souls.

A larva can also be used as additional material component in spell casting, increasing the DC of saving throws to resist the spell by +2. Casting a spell in this way destroys the larva and is an unquestionably evil act.



slowly drains the life force of her victim. Yet to what purpose, few can say. Some suggest night hags derive some form of nutrition from this act, satiating a necessary hunger for fear and torment. Others pose the terrifying prospect that those killed by a night hag’s dream haunting turn into larvae after death, regardless of alignment. Although a night hag can never be trusted to give an honest reason for her acts, her rationale and results bode a terrible ill for all mortals faced with the necessity of sleep.

Fortunately, though, a night hag can be prevented from her nightmare hauntings by stealing her *heartstone*: a crude, black stone periapt all hags possess. Such a bauble holds a night hag’s ability to become ethereal and, if stolen, prevents her from escaping to other planes or attacking victims in

their dreams. As such, night hags covet their *heartstones* and unleash furies even devil fear to face upon those who steal these treasures. As a strange side effect to the magics they hold, mortals find that *heartstones* aid in protecting against all manners of diseases, a protection for which night hags have no use. Although most planar scholars dismiss such tales, common folklore says that *heartstones* are just that: the brittle, stoney hearts of the hags themselves, unnecessary organs plucked out and replaced by some more appropriately fiendish rot.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE NIGHT HAG

Naturally cruel beings, night hags obsess over dreams of power and endless feasts of mortal souls. They think nothing of other creatures except in how they relate to their desires. This leads night hags

to view any weaker creatures as either slaves or meals, with “slave” often being a convenient term for “future meal.” Night hags manipulate and bargain with creatures too powerful to simply consume, hoping to extort as much use as possible and leave them vulnerable for future betrayals.

Paying little respect to the concept of racial privilege, night hags contend with others of their kind in the same manner they deal with all other creatures: strong night hags subjugate their weaker sisters. Night hags sometimes deal with the hags of the Material Plane but never as equals and always as masters. These extraplanar hags maintain a deeply rooted sense of superiority when it comes to normal hags and cruelly dominate either an individual or a whole covey. Selfish and supercilious in the extreme, night hags rarely form coveys with their own kind and most assuredly never with lesser hags of the Material Plane. When a covey of night hags does form, it most often consists of a dominant night hag and

MOTHERS OF NIGHTMARE

While night hags are firmly rooted in D&D lore, having appeared in the game since 1977's original *Monster Manual*, stories of such creatures are firmly rooted in real-world legends. Folktales tell of devils or creatures like the Scandinavian mara that sit on sleepers' chests, giving them terrible nightmares or making it difficult to breathe. These stories of nocturnal hauntings were largely used as explanations for myriad sleep-related disorders, most notably somnambulism and sleep paralysis.

DMs running encounters with these crones can find a night hag figure in the *War Drums* set of *D&D Miniatures*. *DRAGON Annual* #2 features "Pox of the Planes," a lengthy article on night hags and their doings, while "The Ecology of the Night Hag" first appeared in *DRAGON* #324.



two weaker night hag servitors—often their mistress's own daughters. A covey of night hags has the same abilities of a covey of normal hags, as noted on page 144 of the *Monster Manual*.

Banes of their own sisters and essentially every goodly creature in the multiverse, only a depraved few willingly have dealings with night hags. Fiends often trade with night hags for information and evil souls called larvae (see sidebar). As they share similar goals, alignments, and methods of trickery, diplomatic yugoloths most often serve as middlemen between night hags and other fiendish or mortal agents. Night hags also find nightmares particularly useful allies, due to their speed, plane-hopping abilities, and foul temperaments. Few displays are considered more disturbing than that of the affection shared between a night hag and her nightmare. Night hags are also adept at creating their own malicious servants, crafting brood swarms from larvae and chunks of their own flesh (see *Fiendish Codex I: Hordes of the Abyss*).

NIGHT HAG LAIRS

Night hags most commonly inhabit the grim plane known as the Gray Waste of Hades, but their cruel ambitions cause them to roam far. Using portals, powerful magic items, and other planar connections, night hags travel quite extensively and know much of the planes.

Only the most powerful night hags make lairs on their native planes, using legions of lesser fiends, extraplanar horrors, and their own daughters to

carve out small personal empires. Weaker hags prefer nomadic existences in such infernal realms but more often haunt wooded ruins and lonely crags near secluded towns and villages on the Material Plane. A night hag's lair often consists of two lairs: one on the Material Plane and another on the Ethereal Plane. Using their etherealness ability to drag matter with them from the Material Plane, they construct simplistic towers of stone and iron—grim, hard edifices among the ghostly vapors. These terrible lairs are little more than planar prisons, holding captives they particularly value or protecting uncorrupted children during their crucial transformation period. Night hags delight in trapping their captives in the dual prisons of their grisly lair and the ghostly Ethereal Plane.

ADVANCED NIGHT HAG

A cunning and unfathomably old night hag, Ravel Puzzlewell once sought to sacrifice all of Sigil, the extraplanar City



of Doors, in a ritualistic bid for arcane power. Thwarted in her attempt by Sigil's ruler, the Lady of Pain, the hag was cast into a demiplanar maze where she slowly lost her grip on sanity. Recent events led the thoroughly barmy—yet nonetheless conniving—crone to fake her death as part of a plot to escape her prison.

Ravel now wanders the planes, intent on having her revenge against the Lady of Pain, Sigil, and countless other—in many cases long dead—enemies. Those who encounter the night hag find her quick to proffer her vast though insanity-veiled knowledge if they can answer one of her infamous riddles, most notably: “What could change the nature of a man?” Those who fail to respond in a way that pleases the hag often become the hag's next meal.

RAVEL PUZZLEWELL

CR 21

Night hag wizard 14

CE Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar)

Init +1; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +13, Spot +13

Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Infernal

AC 30, touch 11, flat-footed 29

hp 181 (22 HD); DR 10/cold iron and magic
Immune fire, cold, charm, sleep, and fear
SR 25

Fort +17 Ref +13 Will +20

Spd 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee bite +19 (2d6+5 plus disease)

Base Atk +15; Grp +19

Combat Gear boots of speed, staff of conjuration (37 charges), wand of dispel magic, wand of fireball (10th)

Special Actions dream haunting

Spells Prepared (CL 14)

7th—forcecage, planeshift*

6th—disintegrate (DC 25), legend lore*, mislead* (DC 23), true seeing

5th—baleful polymorph (DC 24), dismissal (DC 22), telekinesis (DC 24), wall of force

4th—bestow curse* (DC 21), charm monster (DC 21), dimensional anchor (DC 21), scrying* (DC 21), shout (DC 21)

3rd—fly, haste, lightning bolt (DC 20), major image (DC 20), tongues

2nd—command undead (DC 19), detect thoughts (DC 19), glitterdust, touch of idiocy, web* (2, DC 19)

1st—charm person (DC 18), feather fall, shield, silent image (DC 18), Tenser's floating disk, unseen servant
0—detect magic (2), mage hand, prestidigitation

*Spell Mastery

Spell-like Abilities (CL 8th, +16 ranged touch)

At will—detect chaos, detect evil, detect good, detect law, detect magic, magic missile, polymorph (self only, Small or Medium only), ray of enfeeblement, sleep (DC 18)

Spell-like Abilities (CL 16th)

At will—etherealness (with heartstone)

Abilities Str 19, Dex 12, Con 20, Int 24, Wis 17, Cha 16

SQ outsider traits

Feats Alertness, Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Craft Wondrous Item, Greater Spell Focus (transmutation), Mounted Combat, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (transmutation), Spell Mastery, Spell Penetration

Skills Appraise +10, Bluff +20, Concentration +15, Decipher Script +7, Diplomacy +17, Disguise +8 (+10 acting), Intimidate +12, Knowledge (arcana) +27, Knowledge (the planes) +32, Listen +13, Ride +6, Sense Motive +16, Sleight of

Hand +3, Spellcraft +23, Spot +13

Possessions combat gear, bracers of armor +8, crystal ball with see invisibility, headband of intellect +6, heartstone, quicken metamagic rod

Spellbook It can be assumed that Ravel has access to every spell in the *Player's Handbook*, plus an expansive library of even more esoteric arcane secrets

Disease (Ex) Demon fever—bite, Fortitude DC 18, incubation period 1 day, damage 1d6 Con. Each day after the first, on a failed save, an afflicted creature must immediately succeed on another DC 19 Fortitude save or take 1 point of Constitution drain. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Dream Haunting (Su) Night hags can visit the dreams of chaotic or evil individuals by using a special periapt known as a heartstone to become ethereal, then hovering over the creature. Once a hag invades someone's dreams, it rides on the victim's back until dawn. The sleeper suffers from tormenting dreams and takes 1 point of Constitution drain upon awakening. Only another ethereal being can stop these nocturnal intrusions by confronting and defeating the night hag. 

“I’ve always liked gnolls. For some reason, they always inspired me and I developed them in a direction that’s probably different from the original intent, but one that suited my purposes. In my campaign of Chaldea I’ve always played orcs and their variants as strong and brutal, and goblins and kobolds as more cowardly. I wanted to develop a race that would be more tactically interesting. I chose to work with gnolls for this, playing up their canine influence with a natural ferocity backed by the patience of natural hunters with excellent senses, tracking, and ranged weapons.

“My sister Joyce likes to tell the story about coming back to town from the local dungeon. The party was pretty beat up and out of cures and other spells. I rolled for a random encounter (yes, I love rolling randomly for encounters!) and it came up 2d10 gnolls and I rolled max. Meanwhile, Joyce makes the comment, “We’ll probably be attacked by 20 gnolls.” Sure enough, her wish came true.

“I also liked to play gnolls as somewhat less evil than the typical orc or goblin. If you encounter some gnolls when they are well fed they might be open for negotiation or even some fun, if someone in the party has taken the opportunity to learn the gnoll language and study their customs.

“One party encountered a couple of gnolls hanging out in a glacier waterfall one day named Gar and Varek. The friendship started with a common love of archery and comparing gnoll and elven techniques and throughout their story were hilarious moments of cultural misunderstandings, leading to a deeply moving story of redemption.”

—Peter Adkison, CEO of Gen Con LLC



THE ECOLOGY OF THE Rakshasa

"If you speak of the tiger, it will come."

—Korean Proverb

Considered by some to be the very embodiment of evil, rakshasas seek to dominate all they encounter. Masterful manipulators, powerful sorcerers, and terrible foes, rakshasas delight in plotting the downfall of others while raising their own status. In addition to their potent magical abilities, rakshasas are charismatic masterminds who tempt large numbers of minions into their service, working their evil from amid webs of lies, corruption, and double-crosses while indulging in all the worst vices of mortal civilization.

HISTORY OF THE RAKSHASA

A cloud of uncertainty conceals the origins of rakshasas. Numerous tales and legends say that they came from "a distant land," slowly corrupting the societies they encountered before moving on to richer grounds. Rakshasas possess all the earmarks of having the same lineage as devils, although they dwell primarily on the Material Plane. Even if they know their actual background, no rakshasas willingly part with such information and they often spin intricate lies to further confuse the issue. The most popular theories include a race of fiendish animals somewhere in the



rakshasas' distant past, intermingled with some unknown breed of devils. The appearance of demons like bar-lguras and vrock, whose features also combine animalistic and fiendish aspects, seems to support this possibility. Besides this tenuous connection, though, rakshasas hold little else in common with tanar'ri, their penchants for manipulation and subterfuge likening them more closely to devils.

As most rakshasas venerate the patron of their race, many-headed Ravanna, some planar scholars have sought illumination from the followers of the rakshasa god. Ravanna's worshipers claim that "rakshasa" is but a term for the children of their god, and the tiger-headed outsiders most closely associated with the name are but one bloodline of his offspring. Supposedly, rakshasas with visages reflecting each of their god's heads exist, with the tiger-headed variety merely being the most widespread or open in

Knowledge of the Rakshasa	
The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to the rakshasa. Those who hunt these beings or work under their control might possess this information. The rakshasa appears on page 211 of the <i>Monster Manual</i> .	
Knowledge (the planes)	
DC	Result
20	Rakshasas are evil, animal-headed shapechangers.
25	Rakshasas can take the form of almost any humanoid and use this ability to hide among unsuspecting groups in order to sow lies and corruption. They bully or bribe weak-willed individuals to do their bidding.
30	Rakshasas have the ability to read the thoughts of others, which allows them to discover a person's deepest fears and desires. They are resistant to most forms of attacks.
35	Rakshasas are extremely fractious beings that spend as much time fighting among themselves as they do plotting against other creatures.
40	Rakshasas are vulnerable to good-aligned piercing weapons, such as crossbow bolts benefiting from the spell <i>bleed weapon</i> .

their dealings. This possibility gains credence from the variety of tiger-headed rakshasa known to exist, as well as the rakshasas who can manifest the countenances of other animals—like naityan rakshasas or the

Hollow Rajahs that haunt the 176th layer of the Abyss. However much evidence researchers glean from Ravanna's worshipers, though, few accept the words of the deceitful god at face value.

RAVANNA

Lesser God (Lawful Evil)

Ravanna is the ten-headed lord of all rakshasas and embodies the ideals of that race. While decadent and egomaniacal, he possesses a cruel intellect, diabolical cunning, and patient subtleness that all of his minions aspire to.

Portfolio: Deception, intrigue, lies, rakshasas, tyranny

Domains: Destruction, Evil, Trickery

Favored Weapon: Javelin ("Yamafang")

Clerical Training: Few creatures willingly choose to serve Ravanna. Rather, the cunning god chooses his clerics based on their potential to serve him or advance his existing clergy's ambitions. Few who know of Ravanna refuse a summons into his service, as his fury is great and such commands commonly come from a group of powerful existing priests.

Quests: Ravanna demands that his servants constantly expand their power and influence while remaining unseen. This in effect makes his clergy more like a powerful and far-reaching criminal network than most priesthoods.

Prayers: Prayers to Ravanna are lengthy and self-deprecating affairs that extol his wonders while accentuating the unworthiness of his followers.

Temples: Ravanna demands few actual temples, but those that do exist tower as grand complexes made almost entirely of precious materials and rife with terrible artistry. More common are the personal shrines Ravanna requires all his servants to maintain. These shrines are often ornate but portable affairs, both so his worshippers can conceal them at a moment's notice and also to transport them to their meal tables to commit his gory worship.

Rites: Ravanna demands daily sacrifices of both wealth and blood. Devotees of Ravanna make these sacrifices without any specific weapon or tool, but rather their own teeth and claws, regardless of race.

Herald and Allies: Ravanna's herald is a powerful rakshasa maharajah named Loliadac. With five heads—those of an ape, crocodile, mantis, tiger, and human—he commands an army of servants that travel Acheron, the Plane of Shadow, and the Material Plane at their god's command, acting as Ravanna's vengeful claw. Ravanna's allies and those he most commonly sends to fulfill *planar ally* spells are bone devils, hellcats, and, of course, rakshasas.



cunning and intellect that most mortals find extremely disturbing.

A rakshasa's hands are easily its most unnerving feature. The joints on both hands are reversed, causing the creature to bend its fingers in the opposite direction of how most humanoid hands grasp. This quirk of their physiology doesn't hinder rakshasas, and they can grip and manipulate objects just as deftly as other humanoids. Rakshasa do, however, enjoy unnerving other races with this unnatural and seemingly painful feature.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE RAKSHASA

A rakshasa possesses the same size and build as an average human but with the head of some savage animal, most commonly that of a tiger, although those of carnivorous apes, mantises, and crocodiles are only

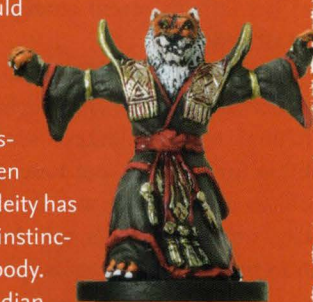
slightly less common. Rakshasas' eyes vary vastly, from the gold and black slits of tigers to the multifaceted protruding orbs of insects, depending on the individual's specific animalistic visage. Regardless of their shape, rakshasas' eyes burn slightly with an infernal light, filled with a deep

AN AMBUSH OF THE RAKSHASAS

Drawn from the stories of the Hindu faith, rakshasas are cannibalistic, shapeshifting *asuras* (demons). In the *Ramayana*, rakshasas serve the king of their kind, the blue-skinned, ten-headed Ravana, the villain of that ancient text. While obviously inspired by the tales of real-world India, the rakshasa of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS have evolved through the years and various editions. For example, the rakshasa of first edition D&D could appear with a number of different animal heads and were immediately slain by specially blessed crossbow bolts—a direct homage to a similar tale of Ravana. Even the rakshasa god Ravanna is unmistakably similar to the Hindu Ravana (sometimes even spelled the same way), although here too the D&D deity has diverged, dwelling on the animalistic features and instinctual cunning the D&D outsiders have come to embody. An extensive discussion of the rakshasa and their Indian roots can be found in the article “Never the Same Thing Twice,” in *DRAGON* #84.

In the modern incarnation of D&D, a wide variety of new rakshasas have appeared. *Monster Manual III* introduces two new breeds of rakshasa, the ak'chazar—undead controlling schemers—and the naztharune—deadly feline assassins. Chapter 11 of the *EBERRON Campaign Setting* also introduces a new breed of rakshasa, the zakya, a warrior breed with the ability to change the direction of its grip. Most recently, *The Book of Nine Swords* presented the naityan, a rakshasa that gains different abilities depending on what form it takes on. The D&D Minis expansions *Giants of Legend* and *War Drums* both also include rakshasa figures.

“The Ecology of the Rakshasa” first appeared in *DRAGON* #326.



Rakshasas prefer their food in the form of raw meat, desiring meals that are still alive when they begin eating, and flavor such meals with rare spices, exotic side dishes, and other expensive delicacies disgusting to the eyes of mortals. Many of their movements and behaviors straddle the line between those of humans and large felines, enjoying long reveries and prowling about unseen but also savoring the finer things in life, such as music, works of art, and literature. They relish expensive clothing, jewelry, and the finest weapons and armor but, like cats, what holds their fancy at one moment might be shredded to ruin the next.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE RAKSHASA

Greedier than most devils, rakshasas insatiably desire wealth and power.

More than just taking what they can, however, rakshasas prefer stealing and looting from those who would suffer most from such actions—the destitute, the desperate, and those who rely on specific items. Rakshasas take great pride in ruining the lives of mortals, stealing everything from them, killing their families, and spreading horrible lies and rumors.

When a rakshasa first enters a territory, it does its best to maintain a low profile, seeking out weak-willed individuals it uses as pawns and lackeys. It finds a base to host its insidious dealings, often fronted by an innocuous business or even a temple to some neutral deity. Over time, however, the rakshasa tightens the reins on both his victims and his lackeys, demanding larger and larger portions of their freedom, wealth, and power.

Rakshasa society could be described as a malevolent meritocracy, where only the fittest survive. Rakshasas constantly rank one another based on the power they accumulate, their cunning and subtlety, and their willingness to show a complete lack of morals. Female rakshasas raise their young alone, punctuating their children's lives with doting praise, constant tests, harsh discipline, and ruthless training. As a young rakshasa matures, it learns the meanings of both loss and power—that which is gained might easily be taken away, often by those who gave it in the first place.

Once a rakshasa reaches maturity, it's already well on its way to carving out an empire of crime and corruption. Newly independent rakshasas commonly head out for unknown territories, far from their parents'—or any other rakshasa's—reach. Using a variety of disguises, the rakshasa spends years investigating a new area. A rakshasa instinctively seeks out a safe house from which to operate, decorating the interior in ostentatious displays of its wealth. It then begins creating a network of spies, informants, and easily bribed officials from which to establish its domain, as well as creating a small cadre of loyal, easily influenced lackeys. The rakshasa then creates or takes over local thieves guilds, mercenary units, and other undesirables, often doing so under one disguise or another. It rarely reveals its true nature to anyone but utterly dedicated lieutenants whose loyalty the rakshasa constantly monitors both via spies and its own ability to read thoughts.

Should a rakshasa encounter another of its kind, a shadowy war of intrigue and misinformation typically begins. This battle of criminal politics culminates in one rakshasa dominating the other and subjugating its network, or in the death of the weaker rival. As a rakshasa grows in power and dominates more and more of its kin, it takes on more and more prestigious titles, such as ruhk, rajah, and even

maharajah, if a rakshasa has subjugated numerous other rakshasas in a region.

Notoriously cruel slavers, rakshasas collect slaves with the same relish they do exotic and rare art. A rakshasa surrounds itself with dozens of servants who cater to its every whim. This serves to stroke the rakshasa's enormous ego as well as to show a level of status among others of its kind—the more slaves at its beck and call, the more powerful the rakshasa.

Using its detect thoughts ability, as well as information provided by spies and informants, a rakshasa searches out every possible weakness, sin, and secret regarding its enemies. It then uses bribes and offers of power to attempt to bring its target into its web. If this fails, the rakshasa extorts, blackmails, or slanders its target to bring about his destruction, resorting to incredibly creative—and often painful—assassination attempts if these methods fail. Primarily, though, rakshasas love nothing more than to see an otherwise good and upstanding citizen brought down by his own kin due to some dark secret.

Rakshasas are natural spellcasters with a deep lust for the acquisition of arcane lore and magic items. They spend a great deal of time researching lost tomes and following up bits of rumors and legend to find powerful spells—especially those of an evil nature. Rakshasas sometimes sponsor adventuring groups to delve into forgotten tombs and forbidding lands in the quest for such items, often portraying themselves as kindly patrons of arcane organizations or ambitious merchants.

RAKSHASA ENCOUNTERS

Creatures of incredible deception, the machinations and depravities of rakshasa know no bounds. “Eternal Evil” in *DRAGON* #337 suggests just a few of the plots and rakshasa minions, specifically for the world of *EBERRON* but easily adapted for any campaign.

Tiger in Sheep's Clothing: A rakshasa has infiltrated the court of a ruler of

the realm, gaining the lord's most intimate confidences. The subtle shapeshifter's machinations has caused the monarch to alienate his other advisers, family, and—gradually—other nations. In disguise, an agent of the princess seeks investigators to subtly discern the root of her father's recent change in attitude.

The King is Dead: A rakshasa has been slain, leaving his lieutenants and lackeys scrambling for position and touching off an all-out gang war in the city slums. The PCs are drug into fighting, either on behalf of one of the warring factions or as agents of the city guard. But is the rakshasa really dead? Or has this been a plot to cull the weak from his ranks and test his most potent agents?

Better to Rule in Hell: Zurathani, the rakshasa ruler of the city of Magghat on the 176th layer of the Abyss, is a connoisseur of profane artwork and an artiste who works in mediums of screaming flesh. Seeking the finest materials, the boar-headed rakshasa sends several of his succubi and glabrezu minions to the Material Plane to tempt mortal innocents back his realms. He plans to use these unwitting victims as the basis of his next masterpiece, “Naiveté in Seventy Skins.”

ADVANCED RAKSHASA

Making his home in a temple high on the slopes of the Yamasha Mountains, Arijani subtly manipulates nearly every aspect of life for the people dwelling in the jungle nation below. A decadent ruler, powerful spell-caster, and talented assassin, Arijani claims that he is the offspring of a priestess of Kali (whom he worships) and the god Ravanna. Conscious of his race's well-known weakness to blessed weapons, Arijani's temple is a maze of deadly



traps and illusions, a spider's web from which he weaves his sinister and wholly debased plots.

ARIJANI

CR 20

Rakshasa cleric 8/sorcerer 5

LE Medium outsider (native)

Init +3; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +20, Spot +15

Languages Common, Infernal, Undercommon

AC 35, touch 12, flat-footed 33

hp 132 (20 HD); DR 15/good and piercing SR 27

Fort +19 Ref +14 Will +22

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee 2 claws +18 (1d4+3) and bite +13 (1d6+1)

Base Atk +15; Grp +18

Combat Options smite 1/day (+4 bonus on attack, +8 damage)

Special Action death touch 1/day (8d6 damage)

Combat Gear wand of cure serious wounds (18 charges), wand of poison (30 charges)

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 8th)

4th—freedom of movement, inflict

critical wounds^D (DC 17), poison (DC 17)

3rd—animate dead^D, bestow curse (DC 16), contagion (DC 16), dispel magic, invisibility purge

2nd—death knell^D (DC 15), enthrall (DC 15), hold person (DC 15), sound burst (DC 15), undetectable alignment

1st—cause fear^D (DC 14), command (DC 14), cure light wounds, detect good, divine favor, obscuring mist

0—create water, cure minor wounds, guidance, light, mending, purify food and drink

D Domain spell; **Domains** Death, Destruction

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 12th, +17 ranged touch attack)

6th (3/day)—permanent image (DC 21)

5th (5/day)—nightmare (DC 20), summon monster V

4th (7/day)—dimension door, greater invisibility, phantasmal killer (DC 19)

3rd (7/day)—gaseous form, haste, major image (DC 18), suggestion (DC 18)

2nd (7/day)—Melf's acid arrow, minor image (DC 17), mirror image, scorching ray, Tasha's hideous laughter (DC 16)

1st (7/day)—charm person (DC 15), mage armor, magic missile, shield, silent image (DC 16)

0 (6/day)—dancing lights, detect magic, light, mage hand, message, prestidigitation, read magic, resistance, touch of fatigue

Abilities Str 17, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 16, Wis 17, Cha 18

SQ change shape, detect thoughts, outsider traits

Feats Alertness, Combat Casting, Dodge, Mobility, Spell Focus (illusion), Spring Attack, Track

Skills Bluff +20, Concentration +13, Diplomacy +23, Disguise +23 (+25 acting), Gather Information +6, Hide +5, Intimidate +16, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (local) +13, Knowledge (religion) +11, Knowledge (the planes) +8, Listen +20, Move Silently +15, Perform (oratory) +19, Sense Motive +13, Sleight of Hand



+2, Spellcraft +15, Spot +15, Survival +7 (+9 on the planes)

Possessions +5 glimmered eleven chain, ring of force shield, ring of protection +2, amulet of proof against detection and location, cloak of resistance +4, rod of alertness, slippers of spider climbing

Change Shape (Su) Arijani can assume any humanoid form, or revert to his own form, as a standard action. In humanoid form, Arijani loses his claw and bite attacks. Arijani remains

in one form until he chooses to assume a new one. A change in form cannot be dispelled, but Arijani reverts to his natural form when killed. A true seeing spell reveals his natural form.

Detect Thoughts (Su) Arijani can continuously use *detect thoughts* as the spell (caster level 18th; Will DC 24 negates). He can suppress or resume this ability as a free action. The save DC is Charisma-based. 



THE ECOLOGY OF THE

RUST MONSTER

"It's better to wear out than to rust out."

—Richard Chamberland

When magic and metal determine one's prowess, a beast capable of crumbling even artifacts with its merest touch holds the power to ruin armies and shatter kingdoms. Such is the might of the universally dreaded rust monster.

As the cost required to imbue even a simple weapon with magical power greatly outweighs that necessary to return life to the dead, many warriors consider tangling with rust monsters a fate worse than death. Ironically, rust monsters

become more dangerous as adventurers become more powerful. As adventurers increase in wealth and experience they possess much more to lose—expensive weapons, magic armor, wonders of sorcerous might, and artifacts from the planes and beyond. While adventuring neophytes might see rust monsters as nothing more than nuisances, hardened veterans speak of these pervasive beasts with a specially held dread—for ruin might be a mere antenna swipe away.

HISTORY OF THE RUST MONSTER

Rust monsters are woefully under-studied, as most adventurers would rather avoid the beasts than observe them. Even more



frustrating, the creatures' peculiar physiology resists dissection by metal scalpels, and such dull-witted beasts have no records or stories of their own. Among the many fanciful theories proposed to explain the origin of rust monsters, scholars favor two.

The majority view holds that rust monsters originated on the harsh plane of Acheron, having carved out a successful niche there. With an infinite number of metal cubes, rust monsters could feast freely on the essence of the plane itself. Some scholars believe that Acheron's crashing cubes were not always the rusted and pitted wrecks seen today, their pristine geometries eroded over the eons by rust monsters' insatiable hunger.

On Acheron, the native bladeling tribes treat rust monsters with respect and dread. The jagged pages of bladeling holy scriptures predict an apocalypse ensuing when these marauding aberrations bore a planar hole into Mechanus and rust away several key

gears, bringing the multiverse to a grinding cataclysmic halt. Lending credence to this belief, some of the best-traveled planar explorers tell tales of planet-sized cubes on Acheron's farthest frontiers, skeletal hulks reduced to little more than rusted frames and home to

populations of rust monsters that dwarf the number residing on all the Material Plane. Whether this doomsday paranoia is founded or not, rust monsters seem to have fared quite well on the Material Plane and now feast upon its metals as ravenously as on Acheron's.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE RUST MONSTER

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (dungeoneering) check as it relates to rust monsters. Underdark explorers, those who study aberrations, and most veteran adventurers are likely to possess this information. The rust monster appears on page 216 of the *Monster Manual*.

Knowledge (dungeoneering)

DC	Result
13	Rust monsters are dog-sized insectal creatures best known for their mothlike antennae, the touch of which corrodes metallic objects.
18	A rust monster's carapace destroys metal—even rare minerals like adamantine—just as its antennae do. Wood, stone, and nonmetallic substances are unaffected by these creatures' touch.
23	While dull-witted, rust monsters are tenacious. They can smell metal at great distances and relentlessly pursue their meals, favoring rare and valuable materials to crude metals.
28	Although they are more resistant than normal metal wares, magic weapons and armor are also vulnerable to a rust monster's corrosive powers.

A divergent view of the origin of rust monsters holds that they were specifically bred to prevent the rise of technology. Some scholars believe an unnamed entity who once ruled several demiplanes far from the Great Wheel pronounced technology and technological creatures to be inimical to magic and the existing planar order. This intelligence—allegedly an amalgam of sentient plant life—created rust monsters from tiny planar parasites in the hopes of eliminating the metal fundamental to many technologies. This rumor is supported in several ancient poetic sagas and songs, especially among nature-loving races and societies. Supposedly, a large concern of adventurers once sought to track down the entity responsible for the genesis of rust monsters. All they found, though, was a land reduced to a crumbled ruin—all vitality sapped from an entire realm collapsed in upon itself.

Despite their base intelligence and manner, rust monsters have come to be potent symbols. Nihilistic groups like the Doomguard favor these beasts as manifestations of the inherent weakness of all matter, while anarchists, freedom fighters, and slaves across the planes cherish the rust monster as a herald signaling the end of shackles and tyranny.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE RUST MONSTER

Aberrant creatures, rust monsters appear to be equal parts overgrown crustacean and impossibly large insect. While most grow to the size of powerful mastiffs or even small ponies, specimens comparable to rhinoceroses in size, weight, and armor thickness are sometimes found in metal-rich areas.

The most noteworthy part of a rust monster is its antennae. Covered with minuscule, stiff hairs, these antennae tie to a number of complex capillary tubes that stretch into the stomach. Rust monsters breathe in carbon dioxide and convert it into oxygen and other caustic gases. These gases are pumped into the small hairs where, upon contact with metal, the gases quickly initiate an oxidation reaction that corrodes the metal. The name “rust monster” is something of

a misnomer, though, as they corrode any metal, not just iron; iron turns into rust, while other metals merely become coarse, worthless dust. A rust monster's carapace is covered in the same hairs as the antennae, corroding all metal coming into contact with its body. Only the bony flanges of a rust monster's tail are devoid of these hairs, a trait useful in the creatures' mating process.

Rust monsters are natural trackers, capable of seeking out an armored opponent as easily as a vein of valuable metal ore. When around bloodshed, the scent of iron in the blood drives hungry rust monsters into a frenzy, and starved specimens have been known to viciously attack wounded creatures.

A rust monster's tail is used for stability and breathing, with a gill-like structure that helps take in—along with the mouth and nostrils—enough carbon dioxide to produce the large supplies of oxygen they need to corrode metal. Males possess larger tails than females, which in addition to breathing they use to attract the attention of potential mates.

Rust monsters hatch from spherical, iron-colored eggs. After a brief pregnancy, a mother lays her clutch of eight to twelve sticky, melon-sized eggs into deposits of metal-rich rock. Although the eggs require no special attention, both of the parents stay nearby to ward away any hunters (particularly umber hulks, which view all rust monsters—but particularly their young—as delicacies). After approximately a month the eggs hatch, each spilling out a tiny larval rust monster about the length of a man's forearm. These young have no appendages and look like nothing more than bloated, brownish maggots



with moist antennae approximately a foot long. These antennae possess the same corrosive effects as an adult rust monster's, and over the next two years grow in size, along with legs, a bony tail, and a hardened carapace. Some adventurers hunt juvenile rust monsters as they are more easily handled and turned to specific purposes than adults.

Being aberrations, mutation is natural to rust monsters, and several regional variants exist. Shaggy, blue-white frostfell rust monsters prowl some arctic regions, supplementing oxidation with extreme cold to shatter metals. Moss rust monsters dwell in damp rainforests and swamps, their infected hides riddled with dripping, mossy spores. Dun and khaki-hued waste rust monsters roam desert landscapes, reducing metal they encounter into sand instead of rust. Legends even say the al-Khalid desert was actually once the great sprawling city of a learned and terrible race that raised buildings made of steel, but a horde of rust monsters reduced it to sand in one fell night.

A few unconfirmed theories imply that rust monsters are the larval stage of some other creature. With little evidence, such theories propose obvious links between rust monsters and destructive rust dragons (see page 186 of the *Draconomicon*) or similarly formed annihilators

(see page 79 of *Underdark*). Certainly many metals have magical properties, which in concert with aberrations' penchant for mutation could have caused strains of rust monsters to evolve into different creatures. Many sages believe a missing link in a rust dragon's origin might be explained by some connection—or processes—involving rust monsters and metallic dragons. Some studies claim that certain breeds of rust monsters seek out the eggs of metallic dragons and either taint the wyrmling within or transform themselves after feasting on the yolk.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE RUST MONSTER

Rust monsters are solitary creatures. Males are uninterested in reproduction until they come into contact with a rare metal—often adamantine or mithral—that triggers psychological changes. The male harvests bits of the metal and scoops uncorroded chunks up with its tail and travels until it finds a female to present it to. Several males often compete to bring a female the largest amounts of the rarest metals, with but one earning her attention. After winning a mate, the male remains with the female until their eggs hatch, then departs. Adventurers with exotic metal items might find themselves harried by waves of hopeful male rust monsters seeking the rare metals they need to impress a female.

Like underground-dwelling locusts, rust monsters wander the depths searching for metal in any form. Upon finding a place with suitable metallic food sources, a rust monster seeks out a den, preferring cramped, defensible tunnel complexes with several exits useful for evading predators—particularly umber hulks.

When injured by metal-using enemies, rust monsters hide in their tunnels, relying on the cramped space to force as much contact with their corrosive carapaces as possible.

Aside from their native Underdark, rust monsters might make their homes in a variety of other regions, eagerly relocating to any environment with an abundant metal food source. While mountains and ore-rich hills attract many of the creatures, the debris and metal-strewn sewers of most cities prove especially hospitable. Many civil officials dread rust monsters and the damage they can do on a community's substructure. Rumors of rust monsters infesting a city's depths often precede retellings of the tale of Haven City, a cliff-side port, half of which supposedly slid onto the sea when rust monsters devoured its underground supports.

Many societies with access to rust monsters seek to domesticate them, hoping to deny their enemies the advantage of metal weaponry (see page 86 of the *Arms and Equipment Guide*). In addition to war, rust monsters

serve other uses. Many duergar train rust monsters to track veins of ore or employ the aberrations against enemy fortifications and spells like *wall of iron*. In some societies, enterprising surgeons use rust monster larva to dissolve and eliminate shrapnel, barbed arrowheads and other invasive metal weaponry. Rust monsters are also extremely useful for destroying cursed items, and many adventurers laden with malignant magic items seek them out. Creatures vulnerable to specific metals also often exploit the defensive potential of rust monsters. Noble fey houses and packs of lycanthropes sometimes train rust monsters as guardians, eager to destroy the substances that would do their masters harm.

ADVANCED RUST MONSTER

Rust monsters advance exclusively by Hit Dice, growing in size as they age. Such oversized specimens might be found wandering metal-rich regions or as domesticated war beasts.

Like a personification of the rage warriors feel toward rust monsters, o-Akasabi-sama is an ancient and cunning creature. Over the decades this monstrosity has destroyed the weapons and holy katanas of numerous master swordsmen, many of whom committed ritual suicide in disgrace. Now the ghosts of these dishonored warriors haunt the seemingly oblivious rust monster, bitterly goading others into o-Akasabi-sama's corrosive reach.



O-AKASABI-SAMA

CR 8

Advanced rust monster

N Large aberration

Init +3; Senses darkvision 60 ft., scent;

Listen +10, Spot +10

AC 20, touch 12, flat-footed 17

hp 142 (15 HD)

Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +11

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee antennae touch +16 melee (rust)

and bite +11 melee (1d6+3)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +10; Grp +20

Abilities Str 22, Dex 16, Con 21, Int 2,

Wis 15, Cha 6

Feats Ability Focus (rust), Alertness,

Combat Reflexes, Improved Natural

Armor, Improved Natural Attack (bite),

Track

Skills Listen +10, Spot +10, Survival +8

Rust (Ex) When o-Akasabi-sama makes

a successful touch attack with

its antennae, it causes the target

metal to corrode, falling to pieces

and becoming useless immediately.

The touch can destroy up to a 10-foot

cube of metal instantly. Magic armor

and weapons, and other magic items

made of metal, must succeed on a DC 28 Reflex save or be dissolved.

A metal weapon that deals damage to a rust monster corrodes

immediately. Wooden, stone,

and other nonmetallic weapons are unaffected.

Spectral Entourage o-Akasabi-sama

is attended at all times by at least

three rust-colored wraiths that harry

well-armed opponents and try to

draw them into the rust monster's

clutches. With his undead entourage,

o-Akasabi-sama is EL 10. 



"There isn't much to relate regarding the rust monster, truth be told. When I picked up a bag of plastic monsters made in Hong Kong at the local dime store to add to the sand table array—we were playing Chainmail Fantasy Supplement miniatures at a 1 : 1 scale, there was the figurine that looked rather like a lobster with a propeller on its tail.

"As we assigned names and stats to these critters, bulette and owl bear for instance, nothing very fearsome came to mind regarding the one with the projecting feelers. Then inspiration struck me. It was a "rust monster," a thing whose touch turned ferrous metals to ferrous oxide, even magical steel armor or enchanted iron or steel weapons.

"The players soon learned to hit one with spells and arrows so as to slay it at a distance. When one appeared in the D&D game, usually in a dungeon setting, there was great haste to remove from its vicinity if there was no sure and quick means of destroying it at hand.

"Sadly, although I do recall that there was an amusing incident or two involving a rust monster in the early days of dungeon crawling, the details are lost to my memory."

—Gary Gygax, Co-creator of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS



MONSTROUS EVOLUTION: MINDEFLAYER

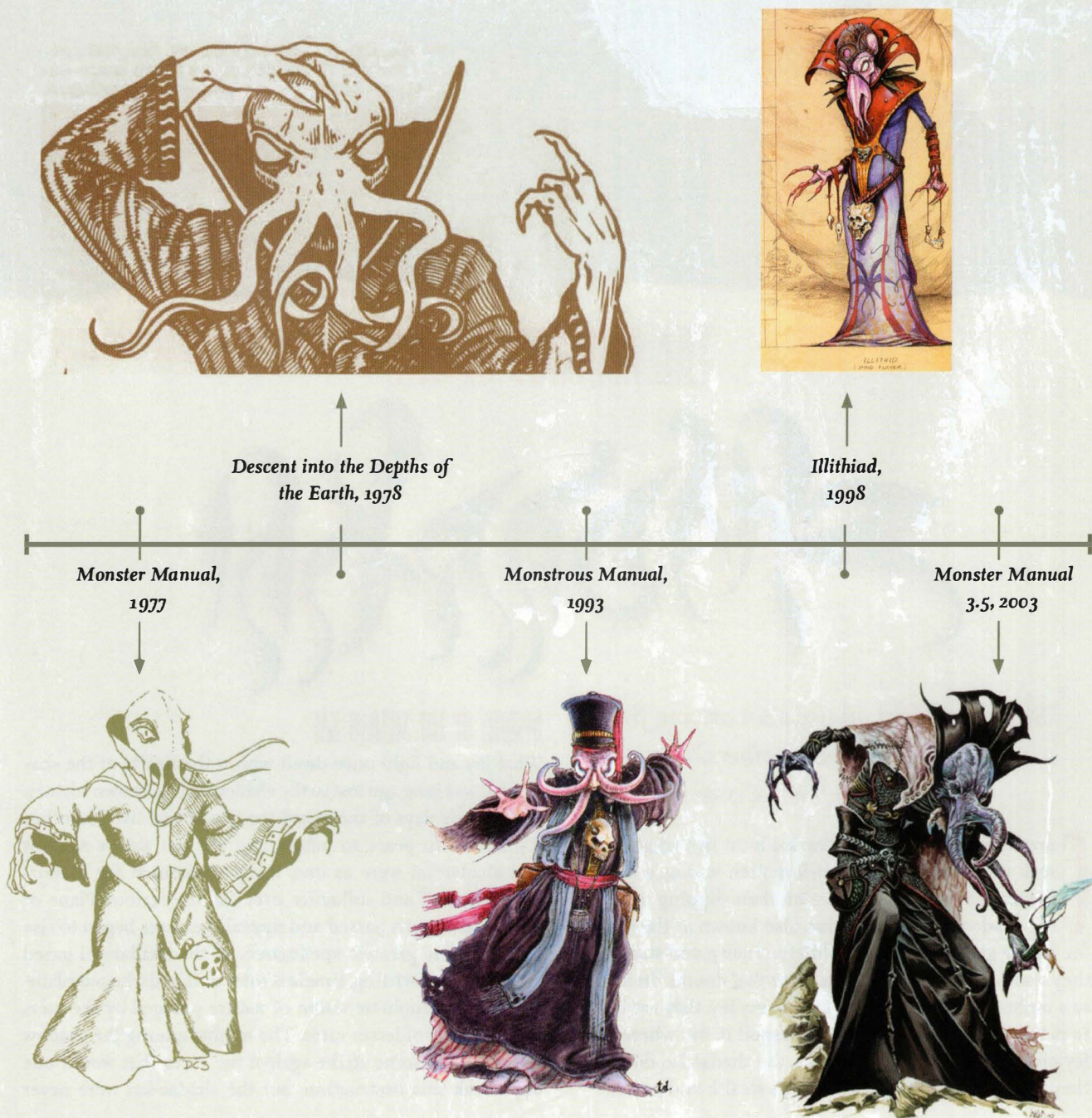
“D&D may be at its best when the PCs are fighting ‘the other.’ That is to say, fighting something that’s clearly different and alien to themselves. Since a D&D group is often quite varied, that means that the ‘other’ has to truly be strange—and therefore turns out to be particularly menacing and creepy. Nothing is more ‘other’ than the mind flayer.”

“I’ve used them in my own campaigns (and published adventures) over and over. Experienced players need only hear the description, ‘humanoid with a squid-like face’ or ‘a bulbous gray head with tentacles where its mouth should be’ and they know that those are key words for: ‘run away screaming.’”

“Plus, you can’t go wrong with something that looks like Cthulhu.”

—Monte Cook, Author of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*

AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF THE MINDEFLAYER





THE ECOLOGY OF THE SHADAR-KAI

*“Strength is just an accident arising from
the weakness of others.”*

—Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Cursed by shadow, the shadar-kai hunt in twilight. They seek revenge for some half-forgotten wrong, emerging to steal power and information then slipping back into the shadows. The shadar-kai, also known as the shadow fey, have a great affinity for subtlety, cruelty, and stealth, yet they also carry a deadly curse, a curse that dooms their souls to a netherworld of shadows. Like many fey, they are bound to nature and despise those who despoil it, but where other fey protect nature for its own sake, the shadar-kai do so that they alone might draw upon nature’s wealth and power.

HISTORY OF THE SHADAR-KAI

What joy and light once dwelt within the hearts of the shadar-kai was long ago lost to the shadows of their own history. In the early days of the world the shadar-kai lived as other fey, bound in peace to nature and life. Yet always shadow and shadar-kai were as one, the pale-skinned fey harboring secrets of and influence over the mysterious Plane of Shadows. As eons passed and mortal creatures began to rise in power, the greatest spellcasters of the shadar-kai gazed deep into the swirling, timeless tides of that darkened plane, revealing a prophetic vision of nature pillaged by the mercurial whims of lesser races. The mighty among the shadow fey called for some strike against the races that would one day wreak this destruction, but the shadar-kai were never



great in number and they could not through might or guile alone prevent the future they foresaw.

Thus, while their goal to prevent a ruinous future might have seemed innocent, their solution was not. Calling upon their innate intimacies with shadow and potent magical skills, the shadar-kai sought a way to darken the world.

The legends of the shadar-kai tell of a hundred shadow fey—each a master of ancient magics—joining together to perform a ritual, one that would irreversibly bind the world of mortals and the Plane of Shadow together. From this twilight, their innate bond with shadow and their long-practiced rituals would give the shadow fey mastery over this new environment, allowing them to secure the sanctity of nature as they saw fit.

Yet even the shadar-kai could not see the dangers lurking within the shadow.

As their mighty ritual progressed, the shadow fey stared into the depths of the realm of shadow and learned that they as an entire race would become that place's conduit into their world.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE SHADAR-KAI

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (nature) check regarding shadar-kai. Those who study the magic of the natural world, the Plane of Shadow, and the most ancient of histories might possess this information. The shadar-kai appear on page 150 of the *Fiend Folio*.

Knowledge (nature)

DC Result

- 11 The shadar-kai are evil fey with a strange relationship to shadow and darkness.
- 16 Shadar-kai are extremely stealthy and skilled at attacking from the shadows. They have the ability to hide in even the obvious, exposed places.
- 21 An ancient curse draws the souls of the shadar-kai to the Plane of Shadow, where they cannot escape without great magic. They make special devices called gal-ralan to help combat this curse.
- 26 The shadow curse affects the shadar-kai constantly, making them partially out of touch with the material world. Certain magic and rendering them unconscious can weaken the shadow fey and eventually banish them to the Plane of Shadow.

Forming a darkened nexus upon the Plane of Shadow, the shadow mages' magics bound the souls of every living shadar-kai to this single point. At the culmination of their great ritual, the very essences of the shadar-kai would drag this shadowy anchor into the Material Plane along with the entire dark realm, joining the two forever.

There were those, however, who opposed the shadow fey. Heroes of this forgotten age, servants of primeval orders, and outsiders guarding what their masters had created sought to stop the shadar-kai and their dark ritual. Through countless shadow fey guardians, these bygone warriors entered the Plane of Shadow and found the cyst the

THE MAGIC OF THE SHADAR-KAI

Since the ritual that brought the shadow curse down upon them, the shadar-kai have struggled to escape its incessant pull, developing a variety of magic—like the *gal-ralan*—meant to loosen its grip or strengthen their own waning abilities.

Shadowslip

Illusion (Shadow)

Level: Brd 3, Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Touch

Targets: Creature touched

Duration: 1 round/level

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

Shadows twist and twine about the target, forcing many blows directed against it to go awry. The subject of this spell benefits from a 20% miss chance as if it had partial concealment.

In addition, any time the creature moves, it can move through the Plane of Shadow rather than through the Material Plane. Moving in this manner slows the creature to half speed, but does not provoke attacks of opportunity. The creature moves only through the fringes of the Plane of Shadow and cannot pass through any barriers or other obstacles on the Material Plane. The creature remains in the Plane of Shadow only while moving and returns fully to the Material Plane at the end of each move action.

Special: Shadar-kai under the effects of a *shadowslip* spell do not suffer the effects of the shadow curse. While any negative levels they had gained as a result of the curse previous to casting this spell still affect them, they cannot gain further negative levels from the shadow curse for the duration of the spell.

Shadowlight Oil

Shadowlight oil is a slow-burning oil that contains some small touch of the Plane of Shadow and can be burnt in any regular lantern. A lantern filled with shadowlight oil does not provide bright illumination over any area, but instead provides double the area of shadowy illumination that a lantern burning normal oil would. The table below summarizes the effects of shadowlight oil in normal lanterns.

Lantern	Bright	Shadowy	Duration
Common	n/a	60 ft.	6 hr./pint
Bullseye	n/a	240-ft. cone	6 hr./pint
Hooded	n/a	120 ft.	6 hr./pint

One pint of shadowlight oil weighs 1 pound, costs 5 gp, and requires a DC 25 Craft (alchemy) check to create.

reversed their pull, dragging their very essences into the realm they had hoped to enslave, forever corrupting the bond into the dreadful shadow curse.

Today, their homes decaying and empty as their populations are claimed by a darkened netherworld, the shadow fey obsess over their past folly and failure. Turning crueler with each generation, the shadar-kai have largely become a race of scavengers and unrepentant murderers, all desperately searching for some means to keep their souls from the shadow's grasp.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE SHADAR-KAI

Shadar-kai stand slightly taller than the average human and move with a speed and grace that few mortals can hope to match. The slender shadow fey weigh about 10 pounds lighter than humans of equal height and their long limbs are swift and flexible rather than delicate. The shadar-kai have extremely keen vision, allowing them to see twice as far through shadow or weak light as even the most keen-sighted elves. Being fey creatures, shadar-kai have incredibly

shadar-kai were creating, the nexus of extraplanar darkness bound to the very souls of the shadow fey. At the apex of the shadow mages' ritual the opposing heroes made a great and forgotten sacrifice, interrupting the rite to bind the two realms. The resulting magical backlash was titanic, scattering and killing countless shadar-kai and scouring

both planes of any evidence of the sinister shadar-kai mages and the mortal realm's champions.

While the eternal twilight of the Plane of Shadow remained apart from the mortal realm, what ties the shadar-kai had forged could not be undone, only altered. The shadowy chains bound to the souls of the shadar-kai





long life spans, possibly even bordering on immortality. Although no—or extremely few—shadar-kai still live who remember the time when the shadow curse was bestowed upon their race, there are many who heard the ancient tale from their ancestors first hand.

Darkness is always with the shadar-kai and their bond with the twilight is easy to see. Shadows seem to bend to conceal the soft movements of the pale fey and with the slightest effort they can wrap this shade around them. This almost physical manipulation of shadow allows the shadar-kai to be seen only when they wish, and even the most wary sentries have failed to notice groups of shadar-kai slipping by in the darkness.

Yet, despite their control over darkness, every shadar-kai lives in fear of the debilitating shadow curse and the ghostly Plane of Shadow. As muted

SHADAR-KAI ON THE PLANE OF SHADOW

Only a small population of shadar-kai actually exists on the Material Plane, the vast majority having been drawn to the Plane of Shadow over the centuries. While shadow fey regain lost levels and abilities upon submitting to the shadow curse, this is of small comfort. Being fey, shadar-kai are creatures of the Material Plane, specifically bound by nature to the world they dwelled upon. Separation from this home is an endless torment and all shadow fey feel like devoted guards forcibly separated from their posts, ever awaiting news of some calamity they've lost all opportunity to oppose.

The shadar-kai of the Plane of Shadow are more subdued than their brethren who still struggle upon the Material Plane. While some still toil to find a way back to their natural homes, most have submitted to a kind of race-wide despair. Living either as crazed brigands or despairing vagabonds in the shadowy doubles of their ruined cities, no passion, happiness, or hope fills the lives of these fallen fey. While these shadar-kai no longer scar and torture themselves, their hatred of all humanoid races is even greater than that of those on the Material Plane, and travelers through their shadowy domains are mercilessly hunted and gruesomely punished. The merest suggestion of a way back to the Material Plane, however, results in the immediate attention—even subservience—of the shadow fey, although those who make and fail to follow through on such claims meet lengthy and unimaginably agonizing ends.



visions and dulled sensations pervade the realm of shadow, the shadar-kai have found that vivid and sharp sensations serve as precious handholds to the Material Plane. While moments of ecstasy and joy might serve their needs, the embittered mindset of the shadow fey makes extreme pain one of the most useful tools for keeping their souls anchored to the mortal realm. As such, shadar-kai regularly scar themselves with deep and complex tattoos, pierce their bodies with hoops and nails, and cut their flesh with blades of cold iron—the bane of all fey. The last of the shadow mages have even invented wearable torture devices called gal-ralans, excruciating cold iron armlets enchanted to further aid their struggle to remain on this world (see page 151 of the *Fiend Folio*).

Shadar-kai hunt and eat much as many humanoids do. With their bodies numbed by the touch of shadow, they seek out the strongest flavors and tastes they can find. Even the most powerful spices seem bland and distant to the shadow fey, though, and few take to food with any joy. For shadar-kai, eating is but another reminder that they will someday be drawn into shadow.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE SHADAR-KAI

The shadow fey were never great in number, raising only a handful of small hidden cites even at the height of their numbers. Once the shadow curse took hold the shadar-kai's sparsely populated holdings began to empty and decay. Now, what shadar-kai redoubts remain are elegant half ruined dwellings cut into the sides of shadowy cliffs and slender towers rising beneath the densest forest canopies, home only to the oldest and most crazed shadow fey.

In the centuries since the fall of their homes, the shadar-kai have lived on the fringes of other societies, clustered in small groups and cabals, often led by skilled shadow mages. These groups of spies, assassins, and the occasional spellcasters haunt the shadows,

hunting for any means of escaping the shadow curse. Rarely numbering more than fifty members, they steal what they need to survive, eagerly attacking any humanoids they encounter along the way.

Despite the bloodthirstiness they indulge upon others, shadow fey bands are savagely loyal to one another, like traumatized siblings clinging to their orphaned brethren. Passions run deep between shadar-kai, but the heights of tenderness this might manifest as in some races instead gives rise to masochistic relationships, sometimes between merely two individuals but just as likely incorporating an entire band. These affairs culminate in agonizing orgies of tattooing, piercing, scarification, and mutilation. Yet, despite their painful nature, these trysts prove just as intimate and cherished to the shadar-kai as do the romances of other races.

As passionately as shadar-kai guard one another, centuries of loss and festering anger have left the shadar-kai intent on taking revenge on the civilized races that drove them to their doom. That the shadar-kai brought the shadow curse upon themselves is of little import to the cunning hunters and devious adepts of the shadow fey. It was the pain of nature giving way to younger races that caused the shadar-kai to seek aid in shadow and it is those younger races that the shadar-kai blame for their curse.

Regardless of their lack of race-wide organization, the shadow fey have universally adopted the spiked chain as their weapon of choice. Both a tool and a symbol of their wrathful crusade against the younger races, the shadar-kai delight in the spiked chain's versatility to mete out a variety of painful deaths, from brutal strangulations to slowly carved mutilations. As such, all shadow fey are skilled in the use of these weapons.

ENEMIES AND ALLIES OF THE SHADAR-KAI

As a result of their attempt to radically alter the natural world, even if

just to protect it, shadar-kai are not well liked by other fey. While the shadar-kai still respect and honor their people and their courts, the shadow fey have been disowned from the hearts and minds of their brethren. As such, the shadar-kai have little to do with other fey, instead utilizing a wide variety of other shadowy creatures in their plots. While shadow mastiffs most commonly appear alongside shadar-kai hunters, shadow asps (see the *Fiend Folio*) and creatures with the shadow template (see the *Manual of the Planes*) might also be trained to serve the shadow fey. Powerful shadow creatures, like darkweavers (see the *Fiend Folio*), shadow dragons (see the *Draconomicon*), and shadow fiends (see the *Book of Vile Darkness*, mature audience only) have also been known to bend shadow fey to their whims, at least for a time. Shadar-kai ally with humanoids only when it serves some greater purpose or to eventually betray and steal from them.

Of all the fey, only the murderous redcaps (see the *Monster Manual III*) willingly have dealings with the shadar-kai, but only out of their wild bloodlust and not out of any sense of kinship. Embodiments of rage and natural bloodletting, redcaps eagerly indulge the shadow fey's fall into frustration and revenge. Sadistic voyeurs, redcaps flock to groups of shadar-kai, opportunistically hoping to bathe themselves in the vengeful ways of shadow fey warriors.

Despite their overlapping tactics and abilities, dark ones (see the *Fiend Folio* and "The Ecology of the Dark One" in *DRAGON* #322) and shadar-kai share a violent hatred of one another. While the dark ones revile the shadow fey out of jealousy and their isolationist tendencies, the shadar-kai seem to hold a deeper grudge. Some researchers speculate that this hatred perhaps ties to some new shadar-kai revelation of the future or the dark ones' own inscrutable connection to the Plane of Shadow. Others, however, hold that the



GAL-RALAN

dark ones' mysterious history might lie with the ancient mortal heroes who thwarted the shadar-kai adepts' dark ritual so long ago and that a potent racial enmity remains.

ADVANCED SHADAR-KAI

Desperate to make the most of their dwindling numbers, shadar-kai frequently train as assassins, rogues, and deadly shadow dancers. The most cunning of shadar-kai society take up the mantle of the shadow mage, wizards skilled in the arts of illusion and darkness. Some even adopt the shadow adept (see *Player's Guide to Faerûn*), daggerspell mage, or shadowmind prestige classes (both from the *Complete Adventurer*), giving them far greater control over darkness and their enemies' perceptions.

SHADOW MAGE AGAZTRE CR 8

Male shadar-kai wizard 7

NE Medium fey (extraplanar)

Init +3; **Senses** superior low-light vision;

Listen +11, **Spot** +11

Languages Common, Draconic, Elven, Infernal, Sylvan, Undercommon

AC 14, **touch** 13, **flat-footed** 11

hp 28 (10 HD)

Fort +6, **Ref** +11, **Will** +12; +2 bonus on all saves against death effects, energy drains, and the shadow curse

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee +1 kukri +8 (1d4/18–20 + large scorpion venom)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +3

Special Attack sneak attack +1d6

Combat Gear 2 doses large scorpion venom (2 doses), wand of magic missiles (3rd, 22 charges)

Spells Prepared (CL 7th, ranged touch +8)

4th—shadow conjuration (DC 18)

3rd—haste, keen edge, shadowslip

2nd—darkness, mirror image, silent magic missile, Tasha's hideous laughter (DC 15)

1st—disguise self, mage armor, shield, ray of enfeeblement (DC 14), ventriloquism

0—daze (DC 13), ghost sound, mage hand,

prestidigitation

Abilities Str 8, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 12

SQ hide in plain sight, shadow curse

Feats Alertness, Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (kukri), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (spiked chain), Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (illusion), Weapon Finesse

Skills Craft (alchemy) +11, Hide +13 (+23 in dark or shadowy conditions), Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +9, Knowledge (history) +9, Knowledge (the planes) +13, Listen +14, Move Silently +13, Search +11, Spellcraft +13, Spot +11, Survival +5 (+7 following tracks), Tumble +9

Possessions +1 kukri, amulet of natural armor +1, +2 gal-ralan, hooded lantern, 2 pints of shadowlight oil, spellbook, spell components

Spellbook all prepared spells and a selection of illusion and darkness themed spells.

"Kobolds are the ultimate underdog, and this is why I love them. In particular, I love them because of two ways they appeared in 2nd Edition: Tony DiTerlizzi's awesome illustration in the *Monstrous Manual*, and Colin McComb's treatment of them in *Dragon Mountain*, one of the great adventures of the 2E era and a watershed in kobold history. Prior to *Dragon Mountain*, kobolds had laughable stats, they were minions to something bigger than themselves, and adventurers treated them as a great opportunity to use their Cleave skills. After *Dragon Mountain*, they were still small, weak, and cleaveworthy -- but the little guys stood up and put up a great fight. Instant respect, and kobold street cred was born.

"For me, a single kobold is often a great whiny sniveling NPC, or even a great buffed-up NPC (such as Meepo on the WotC web site). Over time in my own campaign they have grown into a PC race with a rich history. In their standard form, they may have little chance against even a 1st-level party, but they don't give up, and that's their charm."

—Wolfgang Baur, Former *DRAGON* Editor-in-Chief



THE ECOLOGY OF THE

SPAWN OF KYUSS

"For it is of old rumour that the soul of the devil-bought hastes not from his charnel clay, but fests and instructs the very worm that gnaws; till out of corruption horrid life springs, and the dull scavengers of earth wax crafty to vex it and swell monstrous to plague it. Great holes secretly are digged where earth's pores ought to suffice, and things have learnt to walk that ought to crawl."

—H. P. Lovecraft, "The Festival"

The journals of Anadan the Reader make for singularly depressing yet morbidly intriguing study. An enthusiastic member of the crusading knights known as the Scions of the Hale, Anadan's surprisingly literate account of his group's encounters with the unliving contain valuable information on the behavior, combat tactics,

and weaknesses of no fewer than seven undead breeds. Unfortunately for Anadan, it was this seventh undead, the spawn of Kyuss, that would prove to be not only his end, but the end of the Scions of the Hale. The last several pages of his worm-eaten journal tell of how his company was ambushed by a group of these horrific monsters, and how their very appearance drove fear into the hearts of many of his companions. Those who fled the combat were the lucky ones—they were able to live the rest of their humbled lives as broken men. The three who stayed to fight, including poor Anadan, managed to destroy the spawn, only to succumb, one by one, to the worms that infested their bodies during the battle—worms that leapt and lunged from the undead flesh of their enemies to burrow hungrily into living meat.



Anadan tells of how one soldier cut off his own arm at the shoulder to try to stave off the gnawing approach of a worm, only to bleed to death as a result. The other man, Anadan's captain, fled into the mist-cloaked bog and for the next several pages, Anadan writes of how the man's screams grew more and more frantic and incoherent until they suddenly ceased. Throughout the entire account, Anadan writes of how he can feel the worms inside him burrowing through his body. Anadan was not lucky enough to have an arm to lop off. His worms swam through his torso, upward, into his neck. The reader can see in his text when the worms reached his brain, for his writing slowly grows sloppy, his ability to spell degrades, and his very vocabulary becomes stunted and almost illegible as the teeming intruders did their hungry work. His last words (for by this point he had apparently lost the skill to scribe complete sentences) are particularly chilling: "...captain... back... he see me... drool... not drool... worm... chew... no... me live... not want die... hurt... hrrrrtttt... hhungrrrieee..."

KNOWLEDGE OF THE SPAWN OF KYUSS

The following table shows the results of a bardic knowledge or Knowledge (religion) check related to the spawn of Kyuss. Any cleric, graveyard keeper, or scholar of necromantic arts might know some or all of this information, although those who don't know the true nature behind these undead sometimes (unintentionally) spread inaccurate information about them (as evidenced by information provided for a DC of 15). The spawn of Kyuss appear on page 186 of the *Monster Manual II*.

Knowledge (religion)

DC Result

- | | |
|----|---|
| 15 | Some zombies are just plain harder to kill than others. You can tell the really tough ones by the worms that infest them. Their wounds close up as fast as you can hack them apart. |
| 20 | Worm-infested zombies are dangerous, for there's a good chance such a monster is in fact a spawn of Kyuss, a disease-festering menace whose writhing green worms can transform those they infest into undead horrors. |
| 25 | A spawn of Kyuss exudes a supernaturally potent aura of fear. Worse, their touch not only infects victims with a terrible disease, but it can also infest others with the worms that gnaw on their bodies. The touch of silver and deft hands might pluck these worms away before they burrow into a victim's brain. |
| 30 | Magic that removes curses or diseases can save someone infested with the worms of Kyuss even if they have reached the victim's brain. Such a magic effect directed at the spawn itself can transform all but the most powerful into normal zombies. |
| 35 | Some of Kyuss' spawn are much more powerful than the typical spawn and possess strange powers like the ability to exhale clouds of noxious grave wind or the ability to spray the surrounding area with infectious worms. Not all spawn of Kyuss are humanoid in shape and might infest a variety of natural and monstrous forms. |

Scholars and priests often refer eager adventurers who inquire about the undead to the journals of Anadan the Reader, for if they aren't warned off by Anadan's doom, they might learn a thing or two about perhaps the most terrifying and relentless enemy they'll ever face.

HISTORY OF THE SPAWN

The spawn began with Kyuss, an ancient priest of a forgotten deity who ruled an empire before the advent of modern civilization. Little remains in writing of the details concerning Kyuss and his rule, but it seems clear his skill at creating undead was unsurpassed. Eventually, the necromancer-priest vanished into parts unknown, leaving in his wake an empire of the dead. Yet while relatively little information survives to inform the modern scholar about the man himself, of his spawn much has been documented.

The first reports of free-willed spawn of Kyuss came from adventurers who dared explore a forgotten and shadowed spur of the great Rift Canyon. Known now as the Wormcrawl Fissure, this region is reputed to have once been the seat of Kyuss' power. Certainly, the area was infested with his spawn. Strangely enough, explorers in the Amedio Jungle to the south began to report encounters with identical creatures in the western reach of the jungles.

As time wore on, the spawn began to appear in other regions, usually in large urban areas. These spawn were spread deliberately by cultists who proclaimed that Kyuss himself had not vanished from the world. Indeed, they believed that he had become a god, and it was their duty to herald his imminent return.

NECROLOGY OF THE WORM

Like most undead, the spawn of Kyuss have a host of potent supernatural abilities. They radiate fear, they cause disease with a touch, and they heal damage to their undead flesh with shocking speed. Yet their most notorious and fearful aspect isn't properly a feature of their undead bodies at all, but is in fact the source of their scourge.

The green worms that infest each spawn of Kyuss are not themselves

undead. Rather, they are a strange symbiotic form of vermin that subsists upon the decaying flesh of the spawn. The worms are voracious, but as fast as they consume the flesh of their host it regrows and replenishes. Theoretically, if a spawn of Kyuss could be separated from its infesting host, its fast healing would increase dramatically. Fortunately, the spawn themselves are inexorably tied to their wormy symbiots and without one the other quickly dies. The spawn's flesh provides sustenance for the worms, while the worms provide—in some unknown way—the animating energies the spawn requires to exist.

Scholars and necromancers have long been fascinated with these worms. None have managed to keep a spawn animate after harvesting its worms but the reverse is a simple task. A Kyuss worm plucked from the body of its host can survive for several minutes before it melts into a reeking green stain. At one end, the worm is a gaping toothy hole of razor-sharp teeth set in concentric rings around the inside of the throat. A Kyuss worm on the ground is nearly helpless; it cannot slither, instead moving impotently by violently flopping its body. A Kyuss worm goes dormant indefinitely if stored in a *potion of gentle repose*, yet rumors hold that the cult of Kyuss has perfected methods of hiding worms in other liquids as well.

When a Kyuss worm contacts living flesh, it enters a state of violent excitement. The worm's mouth unfolds around itself, turning inside-out and prolapsing so that the teeth along its throat become concentric rings of outward-pointing teeth that take up half its length. These rings of teeth then twist back and forth with such ferocity that the worm can drill through flesh and even bone with

nauseating swiftness, slithering through tissue like a metal screw through soft wood. Although itself mindless, the worm's lower reaches are sensitive to nervous tissue and can feel the transmission of pain created from its fleshly burrowing as it is transmitted through the nervous system to the victim's brain. The worm follows these transmissions like a roadmap, unerringly arriving in the creature's brain only a few moments later.

Once the worm reaches the brain, its mouth reverts to its normal state and it begins to consume, slithering its way at random through the victim's mind as it consumes his memories, personality, and horror-filled final thoughts. The victim soon dies and the worm immediately begins to multiply inside the body's now empty skull via an unnaturally swift asexual process. As the number of worms exceeds the skull's capacity, they burst from the victim's mouth, eyes, nose, and ears. It is at this moment that the supernatural vermin transform the body into a new spawn of Kyuss. Additional worms immediately begin feasting on the victim's flesh and organs, while the original clot of writhing symbionts remain lodged in the undead creature's skull. While individually unintelligent, the worms retain corrupted fragments of the original creature's intelligence and memories. This nest of worms serves the creature as an unholy replacement for the devoured brain. Although this hivemind usually possesses only a fraction of the original creature's intellect, it is more than enough to give the spawn of Kyuss a sinister cunning and drive it to spread its taint among new victims.

CREATING A SPAWN OF KYUSS

Any evil cleric can create a spawn of Kyuss by casting *create undead* as long



KYUSS

Demigod (Neutral Evil)

Once an obscure deity associated with creating and mastering the undead, Kyuss and his cult are rising in prominence with the coming of the apocalyptic Age of Worms. Classically, his appearance has been likened to a gaunt man with hands of bone and eye sockets filled with writhing worms, but many religious scholars believe that Kyuss has shed all remnants of his once mortal body, and is now composed entirely of a humanoid-shaped mass of writhing green worms.

Symbol: A human skull with green worms writhing from the eye sockets and jaw.

Portfolio: Creation and control of the undead, decay, unholy transformation of the flesh, worms.

Domains: Corruption*, Death, Destruction, Evil.

Favored Weapon: Club.

Clerical Training: New cultists must drink a *potion of inflict light wounds* that contains a preserved Kyuss worm in a deadly ritual known as First Ingestion.

Quests: Kyuss encourages his cultists to not only lure powerful individuals to his fold but to trick members of other cults and religions into furthering his unknowable goals.

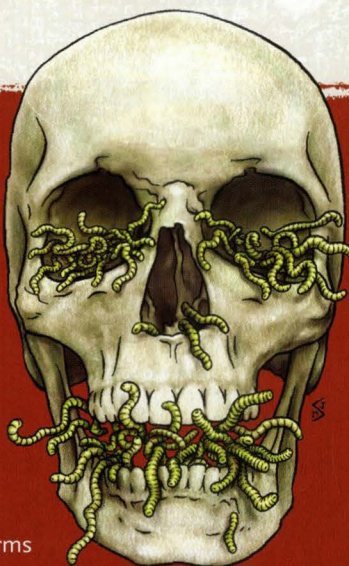
Prayers: Servants of Kyuss offer their prayers on a personal level once a month in a rite involving the ingestion of living worms.

Temples: Huge subterranean cathedrals and tabernacles dedicated to Kyuss exist in remote locations far from civilized lands.

Rites: Kyuss' cult anticipates the return of their god, a time they call the Age of Worms. In preparation, cultists undertake a variety of vile missions ranging from the creation of spawn of Kyuss to world-spanning manipulations.

Herald and Allies: Kyuss' herald is a undead terror known as Dragotha, once a red dragon and consort to Tiamat. Kyuss most commonly sends demons that bear the favored spawn of Kyuss template in response to *planar ally* spells.

* Consult the *Book of Vile Darkness* (mature audiences only).



as he is at least 15th level. The material component for creating a spawn of Kyuss, however, is slightly different than normal. This version of the spell must be cast over the grave of a killer who was buried without a coffin in unhallowed ground (a DC 25 Knowledge [local] check can usually determine if such a body lies near a specific settlement). If the caster has a preserved or live Kyuss worm he may substitute that for the 250 gp black onyx gem that is otherwise required to animate the body. As the spell is cast, the grave blooms with worms and maggots as the newly created spawn of Kyuss rises from within. Favored spawn of Kyuss cannot be created with this spell or with *create greater undead*; the secrets

of their creation reside only with Kyuss and his most trusted minions.

FAVORED SPAWN OF KYUSS

While the spawn of Kyuss are bearers and victims of their master's corruption, those who garner the demigod's favor are blessed by worms. Former fanatics, crazed visionaries, and purposefully sacrificed beasts, these favored spawn of Kyuss wreak his terrible will with an array of corruptive abilities. Found either alone or enslaved to the service of mad prophets, favored spawn take a vast array of forms and imply the demigod of worm's direct interest. In recent years appearances of the favored spawn have risen, evidencing the impending Age of Worms.

SAMPLE FAVORED SPAWN OF KYUSS

An unnaturally mangy mastiff skulks forward, much of its fur and flesh having fallen away leaving gaping, diseased holes. A sickly green light streams from its empty eye sockets and strands of writhing green worms replace drool in equally copious ribbons.

MASTIFF OF KYUSS CR 3

Favored spawn of Kyuss fiendish riding dog
CE Medium undead

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; **Listen** +6, **Spot** +6

Aura fear (DC 13, 40-ft. radius)

Language Abyssal

AC 19, **touch** 12, **flat-footed** 17

hp 13 (2 HD); **fast healing** 5; **DR** 5/silver

Immune undead traits

Resist cold 5, **fire** 5; **SR** 7

Fort +3, **Ref** +5, **Will** +2

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee bite +5 (1d6+6 plus worm plus Kyuss' gift) or

worm +5 touch (special)

Ranged worm +3 touch (special)

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +3

Atk Options smite good 1/day (+2 damage against good foes)

Special Atk create spawn

Abilities Str 19, Dex 15, Con —, Int 5, Wis 14, Cha 8

SQ infested skin, turn resistance +3

Feats Alertness, Improved Unarmed Strike, Track

Skills Jump +10, **Listen** +6, **Spot** +6, **Swim** +5, **Survival** +2 (+6 when tracking by scent)

Possessions masterwork spiked studded leather barding

Create Spawn (Su) Once per round as a free action, a hound of Kyuss can transfer a worm from its own body to that of an opponent. See the following template for a complete description of these effects.

Fear Aura (Su) A mastiff of Kyuss continuously radiates a fear effect. All creatures within a 40-foot radius must make a DC 13 Will save or be affected as if by the spell *fear*. Any creature that makes a successful saving throw against the effect cannot be affected again by the fear aura of the mastiff of Kyuss for 24 hours.

Smite Good (Su) Once per day a mastiff of Kyuss can make a normal melee attack to deal 2 extra points of damage against a good foe.

Infested Skin (Su) A mastiff of Kyuss is so infested with worms that any creature that strikes it with an unarmed strike, natural weapon, or light weapon must make a Reflex save or a Kyuss worm is transferred to the attacker's body. Any creature that shares the same square of the mastiff (such as might occur during a grapple, bull rush, or Tumble check) must make a Reflex save to avoid the same fate.

Plague-spreading hunters and harbingers of the demigod of worms, mastiffs of Kyuss stalk the enemies of their master's favored servants. Tireless and riddled with deadly Kyuss worms, a single mastiff might range over hundreds of miles, inevitably striking a single target with precision or seeding its god's ruinous corruption throughout an entire offending town.

CREATING A FAVORED SPAWN OF KYUSS

"Favored Spawn of Kyuss" (known simply as the "favored" to cultists of Kyuss) is an inherited template that can be added to any living, corporeal creature. A favored spawn uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size and Type: The creature's type changes to undead. Do not recalculate Hit Dice, base attack bonus, or saves. Size is unchanged.

Special Attacks: A favored spawn retains all the special attacks of the base creature and also gains the following special attacks.

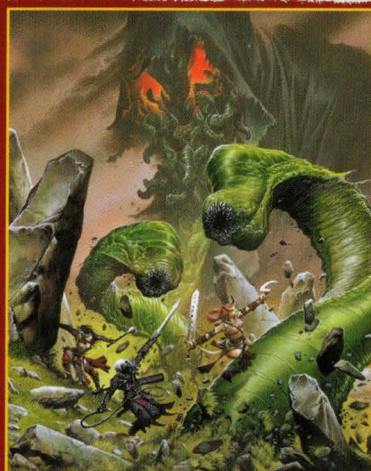
Create Spawn (Su): Once per round as a free action, a favored spawn of Kyuss can transfer a worm from its own body to that of an opponent. It can do this whenever it hits with a natural attack or an unarmed attack, but it can also make the transfer by means of a successful melee touch attack or a ranged touch attack, hurling a worm at a foe from a distance of up to 10 feet.

Each worm is a Fine vermin with AC 10 and 1 hit point. It can be killed with

AGES OF WORMS

Kyuss and his spawn first appeared in official D&D terms in 1981's *Fiend Folio*. Designed by Michael MacDonald, the nigh-indestructible sons of Kyuss were created by the then priest Kyuss for his own dark purposes. The minions of Kyuss have taken numerous forms since the *Fiend Folio*'s original sons of Kyuss, appearing most recently in the *Monster Manual II* as the spawn of Kyuss, in *DRAGON* #307 and as the scion of Kyuss template. Further information about Kyuss, his various spawn and servitors, and their dark plots can be found in *DUNGEON*'s Age of Worms Adventure Path (#124 to #135).

"The Ecology of the Spawn of Kyuss" was first printed in *DRAGON* #336.



normal damage or by the touch of silver. On the spawn's next action, the worm burrows into its host's flesh. A creature with a natural armor bonus of +5 or better is immune to this burrowing effect. The worm makes its way toward the host's brain, dealing 1 point of damage per round for 1d4+1 rounds. At the end of that period, it reaches the brain. While the worm is inside a victim, a *remove curse* or *remove disease* effect destroys it, and a *dispel evil* or *neutralize poison* effect

delays its progress for 10d6 minutes. A successful DC 20 Heal check extracts the worm and kills it.

Once the worm reaches the brain, it deals 1d2 points of Intelligence damage per round until it either is killed (by *remove curse* or *remove disease*) or slays its host (death occurs at 0 Intelligence). A Small, Medium, or Large creature slain by a worm rises as a new spawn of Kyuss (not a favored spawn) 1d6+4 rounds later; a Tiny or smaller creature quickly putrefies, and a Huge or larger creature becomes a normal zombie of the appropriate size. Newly created spawn are not under the control of their creator, but they usually follow whatever favored spawn of Kyuss created them.





If a creature is infested with multiple worms, a single *remove curse* or *remove disease* destroys all the worms infesting the creature at once.

A favored spawn attacking a helpless opponent may use its foul embrace ability instead of this ability.

Fear Aura (Su): A spawn of Kyuss continuously radiates a fear effect. This ability functions like a *fear* spell (caster level 7th, Will save DC 14 + the favored spawn's Charisma modifier), except that it affects all creatures within a 40-foot radius. Any creature that makes a successful saving throw against the effect cannot be affected again by the fear aura of that favored spawn of Kyuss for 24 hours.

Foul Embrace (Su): By pressing its face against a helpless victim, the favored spawn of Kyuss can infest the victim with a rain of 2d6 worms. This

ability is treated the same as the create spawn ability, but a victim slain by the resulting infestation rises as a favored spawn of Kyuss rather than a normal zombie.

Kyuss' Gift (Su): Any creature hit by a favored spawn of Kyuss' natural attack or unarmed attack must succeed at a DC 12 Fortitude save or contract this supernatural disease. The incubation period is 1 day, and the disease deals 1d6 points of Constitution damage and 1d4 points of Wisdom damage. These effects manifest as rotting flesh and dementia. An affected creature gets only half the benefits of natural and magical healing, though a *remove disease* effect removes the affliction.

In addition to the previously described abilities, a favored spawn with 10 HD or more gains one of the

following additional special attacks as a gift from Kyuss himself. Saving throws against these effects are against a DC of 10 + half the favored spawn's Hit Dice + the favored spawn's Charisma modifier.

Infested Skin (Su): The favored spawn of Kyuss is so infested with worms that any creature that strikes it with an unarmed strike, natural weapon, or light weapon must make a Reflex save or a Kyuss worm is transferred to the attacker's body. Any creature that shares the same square as the favored spawn (such as might occur during a grapple, bull rush, or Tumble check) must make a Reflex save to avoid the same fate.

Noxious Breath (Su): Once every 1d4 rounds, as a standard action, the favored spawn of Kyuss can exhale nauseating vapor from its mouth in a 15-foot cone. All creatures in this area must make a Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1d4 rounds.

Wormburst (Su): Once per day as a standard action, the favored spawn of Kyuss can expel a 10-foot-radius burst of worms from its body. All creatures in this area of effect must make a Reflex save or become infested by 1d6 Kyuss worms.

Special Qualities: A favored spawn retains all the special qualities of the base creature and gains the following.

Damage Reduction (Ex): A favored spawn of Kyuss gains damage reduction 5/silver. If the favored spawn has 10 or more Hit Dice, this increases to damage reduction 10/silver.

Fast Healing (Ex): A favored spawn of Kyuss has fast healing 5.

Turn Resistance (Ex): A favored spawn of Kyuss has turn resistance +3.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +4, Int +2, Wis +2, Cha +2. Favored spawn are undead, and as such do not have a Constitution score.

Feats: A favored spawn of Kyuss gains Improved Unarmed Strike as a bonus feat.

Challenge Rating: +2 (for creatures with 9 HD or less) or +3 (for creatures with 10 HD or more).

Alignment: Always chaotic evil. 



THE ECOLOGY OF THE SPELLWEAVER

"Now I am my death and my decay, and soon I shall be nothing... but the scheme of my causes will repeat itself, and generate me again. I lived six times to breed six new lives, and I shall be the same, identical life. I shall be born again as six recurrences of myself."

—From the Breeding Tablet

Magic is the birthright of many creatures; powers in excess of most mortals' abilities that seem to grant them dominion over lesser races. Dragons, beholders, titans: these beings all manipulate the world through magical might, but none hold mastery over and refine their powers to the degree of the enigmatic and elusive spellweavers. Natural sorcerers, as potent as they are alien, spell

weavers are the orphans of an ancient empire, ruined seemingly by happenstance. Collectors, traders, and instigators, spellweavers ever seek a way to reshape the present, which has perhaps gone terribly wrong.

HISTORY OF THE SPELLWEAVER

Only seen on rare occasions, and always because of their involvement in some scheme to obtain magic items by trade, persuasion, or force, spellweavers are a mysterious race of powerful sorcerers. These elusive beings evidence the last descendants of an ancient, magically advanced empire that, millennia ago, spanned numerous worlds and planes.

In this forgotten time, the spellweaver empire consisted of a vast league of colonies, called nodes, which spanned the multiverse.



Huge pyramids of stone and steel powered by gigantic magical furnaces, these nodes were widely separated, often with only one existing on any single world or plane of existence. All of them, however, connected to one another through a complex matrix of magical portals. Thus, each node served as a huge planar travel installation, capable even of instantly moving with all of its inhabitants to other locations or planes.

The so-called spell weaver empire was largely a noninvasive one—an advanced community of intellectual watchers who only occasionally subjugated more primitive creatures to carry out menial chores and hard labor. What few races they encountered that posed threats the spell weavers gifted with powerful magic items and artifacts, allowing these cultures to destroy themselves from within (an act some spell weavers still practice in modern times). Yet, above all, the spell weavers were interested in semantics, a subject they had researched for thousands of

years, traveling through the multiverse to meet and observe nearly every culture imaginable. Through the tireless study and practice of innumerable symbol and language codes, the spell weavers learned to avail themselves of their physical attributes and natural talents like no other race, developing an uncanny telepathy and the ability to cast multiple spells at once.

Few know if the spell weaver plan to acquire total knowledge of all existing communication was their ultimate goal or if they had some other purpose. What is known is that, at the height of their prosperity, the spell weavers conducted a grandiose and dangerous experiment, possibly an attempt to alter reality across the entire multiverse. This experiment, however, met with tragic failure and caused a catastrophe of colossal proportions. For unexplained reasons, the furnaces within every spell weaver node exploded one after the other in a terrible chain reaction, obliterating

the pyramidal colonies and all their inhabitants within seconds, effectively purging the multiverse of the spell weaver empire in a single moment. Only the few members of the race who were away from the nodes survived, becoming the ancestors of all modern spell weavers.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE SPELL WEAVER

Averaging 5 feet in height and 100 pounds, spell weavers are six-armed alien-looking creatures. Their genderless bodies are smooth and hairless, varying between numerous shades of gray and occasionally splotched or speckled with light colors such as beige, pink, or yellow. Their necks are long and exceptionally nimble, allowing spell weavers to turn their heads completely around with no effort. Further adding to their alien nature, spell weaver blood is metallic blue in color, similar to quicksilver.

All spell weavers carry chromatic disks, thin, 6-inch-diameter circular

KNOWLEDGE OF THE SPELL WEAVER

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (nature) check related to spell weavers. Those most likely to know such information are the few people who have researched the ancient spell weaver empire or have knowingly done business with them. Other sources of information might also exist near the site of a node's destruction, wastelands usually marked by a crater or rift of some sort. Considering their ancientness and magical aptitude, DMs might wish to change the skill check required to learn about spell weavers from the standard for monstrous humanoids—Knowledge (nature)—to Knowledge (arcana) or Knowledge (history). The spell weaver appears on page 187 of the *Monster Manual II*.

Knowledge (nature)

DC Result

20	Spell weavers are a race of exotic, six-armed sorcerers constantly in search of magic items.
25	Spell weavers are silent and aloof creatures. They sometimes enslave physically powerful monsters to serve them. Spell weavers excel in magical combat and can sling many spells simultaneously.
30	Spell weavers are powerful telepaths, although they seem to shun contact with all but their own kind. Part of spell weaver communication relies on the shifting colors of their strange chromatic disks.
35	Spell weavers can rejuvenate themselves multiple times, each potentially living multiple lives. New spell weavers are spawned through a complex ritual in which an elder spell weaver dies.
40	The telepathic powers of spell weavers includes the ability to read the "memories" of certain magical objects. Their race-wide search for such items is likely tied to some greater, mysterious purpose.

objects made of a silvery substance that is stronger than steel. At a spell weaver's will, the disk can change color and show a variety of patterns and designs on its dark surface. These objects are intimate creations of spell weavers, actual living extensions of their beings. In the rare case that a chromatic disk is lost or destroyed, a spell weaver can quickly replace it through meditation, exuding blood and fluids from the palm of its hands in the form of a metallic resin. The resin is manipulated to form the disk shape and solidifies quickly. This process takes only an hour but leaves the spell weaver exhausted.

Spell weavers are extremely long-lived creatures, with a lifespan near six centuries. Age does not seem to significantly affect their physical abilities, and only lighter skin tones distinguish older individuals from younger ones. Aging, however, is directly tied to reproduction for spell weavers in a complex and mysterious pair of rituals.

Upon reaching the end of its life—a time spell weavers seem to instinctually know—an elder spell weaver can rejuvenate its body through a special hibernation trance requiring the draining of a near-priceless amount of magic items. In preparation, the spell weaver sacrifices the energies within its accumulated magic treasures, destroying them to create a cylindrical "coffin." It then finds a secure location, as the rite leaves it effectively helpless for the trance's entire duration. Upon sealing itself within the coffin, the spell weaver enters a state of suspended animation from which it cannot be awakened. This process usually takes only a month, but sometimes lasts far longer, with evidence of spell weavers languishing within their coffins for centuries at a time. At the end of this ritual, the spell weaver is physically restored, its skin darkened and its life renewed for another six centuries. This restorative process only seems to function for spell weavers, yet even so they keep its

specifics a mystery from all other races. This trance only functions six times, providing no benefit beyond that. Despite their lengthy lifespans and these renewing trances, however, spell weavers are far from immortal.

To reproduce—an act that is for spell weavers little more than a final act of self-regeneration—an elder specimen who has gone through all six rejuvenation processes may perform a complex, ritual self-sacrifice that results in the "birth" of six new adult spell weavers. The rite requires a special array of breeding vessels found only in a few rare spell weaver sites. To perform the ceremony, the parent creates six new chromatic disks and places them into the vessels where the new individuals form and grow in a few hours. During that time, the parent dies and decays, eventually disappearing into nothingness. The newborn spell weavers rise from the vessels with the full memories and mental abilities of the parent.

Spell weavers do not speak, for their law forbade speech millennia ago as part of the training to develop their telepathic faculties. They seldom emit noises, and only as a consequence. When they suffer pain, for example, they might squeal or grunt in a high-pitched tone, but nothing more. Spell weavers have their own incredibly complex language of clicks and whistles, which they know only from distant memories. In modern times, the spell weaver language is experienced only in its written form, as node hieroglyphs.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE SPELL WEAVER

Although they still comply with the dogmatic prohibition not to speak, modern spell weavers are free from the rigid social structure of their ancient empire. Sometimes a few individuals band together to pursue the common goal of acquiring magic items, but most members of the race are essentially loners.

Spell weavers have two complementary ways to communicate exclusively among themselves—a sign language that makes use of their flexible neck and six hands and a visual language based



on the colors of their chromatic disks. Both of these communication methods can convey very complex and articulate meanings, and are totally incomprehensible to other races. They are not redundant, though, for through the combination of sign language, chromatic disks, and telepathy, spell weavers can deliver hours of explanation and dialogue in a few minutes.

Spell weavers have no religion and actively shun the worship of deities, refuting these beings' divinity and mysteriously hinting at some undermining secret of their powers. Despite this disbelief, spell weavers do revere their ancestors and often meditate to better understand the will of past generations. As all spell weavers share the

memories of their forbearers, this spirituality is less like actual devotion and more a kind of pious reminiscence.

During these recollections, spell weavers often recall the Time of Nodes, the golden age of their race when their pyramidal cities still existed. They refer to the catastrophe that wiped out their empire as the Disjunction, and the following age, up to the present day, as the Scrabbling. In the hopes of restoring this Time of Nodes, spell weavers seek out particular magic items or, more specifically, ancient gems imbued with "memories" that spell weavers can telepathically read. By inspecting these rare and specific gems, many spell weavers try to collect pieces of what they call the Code of Reversion, a magical formula devised before the final

experiment that destroyed the spell weaver empire. The pieces of the formula were psychometrically inscribed on a series of precious stones for security reasons, and distributed in multiple copies to different keepers throughout the empire. Any spell weaver could activate the formula, but it had to read and memorize all the pieces first. The Code of Reversion essentially formed an incredibly powerful multipart spell, designed to revert time in the entire multiverse to the point when the formula was inscribed. Aware of the risks involved in their final experiment, the spell weavers devised the Code of Reversion as a chance to restore their empire if something went wrong. The catastrophe, however, exceeded their worst expectations, and the inscribed gems were scattered and lost. As such, no spell weaver has yet been able to locate and perform the Code of Reversion. Even the spell weavers are not sure if a complete copy of the formula has survived, and most gems suffer gaps in their memory that cannot be filled. Needless to say, the successful activation of the Code of Reversion would inevitably mean the erasure of thousands of years of history and the effective annihilation of all present things.

Not all spell weavers obsess over the past, however. While some accept the ruin of their civilization and attempt to live peacefully, others strive to rebuild the spell weaver empire. To them, the greatest impediment to renewed spell weaver mastery is the world's infestation by innumerable humanoid races, which dominate it through their verminous fecundity alone. Harkening back to offensive strategies utilized during the Time of Nodes, these spell weavers are all too glad to supply such races with the instruments of their annihilation.

THE DISJUNCTION

No spell weaver or researcher from any other race knows what accident caused the ruin of the spell weaver empire and brought about the end of the Time of Nodes. While spell weavers acknowledge



The tablet illustrates the spell weaver breeding process.
 Top Left - a spell weaver goes through his six life cycles (numbered with the canonic senary numerals).

Top Right - the elder spell weaver produces six chromatic disks and places them into as many breeding vessels; the disks shine in the middle of the vessels, as spell weaver embryos develop overhead; the frontal position of the elder spell weaver signifies "death".

Bottom Left - the newborn spell weaver (their life cycle marked "zero") are grown to full adults.

NODE NUMBERS

SPELL WEAVER NUMERALS

0 (SENARY)	1 (SENARY)	2 (SENARY)	3 (SENARY)	4 (SENARY)	5 (SENARY)	6 (SENARY)

SAMPLE NUMBERS

CRADICINAL SPELL WEAVER	SPELL WEAVER/TERRA	COMMON
• 0 •		37
0 1 2 3 4 5 6		1243
• 1 2 3 4 •		378

SAMPLE CYRHER CRANDSCRIPT

This phonetic transcript is part of the results of a comprehend languages spell cast on a spell weaver tablet.

The results change from tablet to tablet, however, and interpreting the text is always a matter of intuition and luck.

The language of the tablets seems to imply a system of encoding patterns stored in the brain, which are perfectly natural to spell weavers, but totally alien to other creatures.



that their leaders were attempting some far-reaching magical feat, they remain universally secretive of its specifics. Two commonly held possibilities follow:

Ascension: Through their study of language, spell weavers discovered the prime form of communication, words of reality capable of manipulating all existence. Revealing that deities were little more than bickering entities with knowledge of this language, the spell weavers attempted to take their place among the powers en masse. Their intentions discovered by the existing deities, these covetous beings warped the spell weavers' attempt to elevate the population of an entire node, creating a magical backlash that rippled through and destroyed the spell weaver empire, along with all knowledge of the prime language.

Unification: Spell weavers came to believe that, at the beginning of creation, all of the planes and countless worlds were in fact one single, balanced reality. This equilibrium, however, was shattered by the mercurial whims of the deities. Traveling to all of these fragmented existences and creating their nodes as anchors, the spell weavers hoped to cast a multiverse-spanning spell capable of drawing the shattered planes back together. The power of infinite infinities proved too great for even the bold spell weavers, though, and their first trial wiped their empire from the reality they hoped to save.

SPELL WEAVER RUINS

Ravaged by the Disjunction, the ruins of spell weaver nodes are thousands of years old—relics of an empire lost to time. Extraordinarily scarce, multiple nodes rarely exist on a single world and never on the same continent.

Every node has a similar structure, with a main pyramid that towers more than 500 feet tall. At the top perches a great crystal lamp once capable of illuminating the surrounding landscape with a pulsing azure light. With all probability, these lamps acted as a magical homing beacon for other spell weaver planar travel facilities.

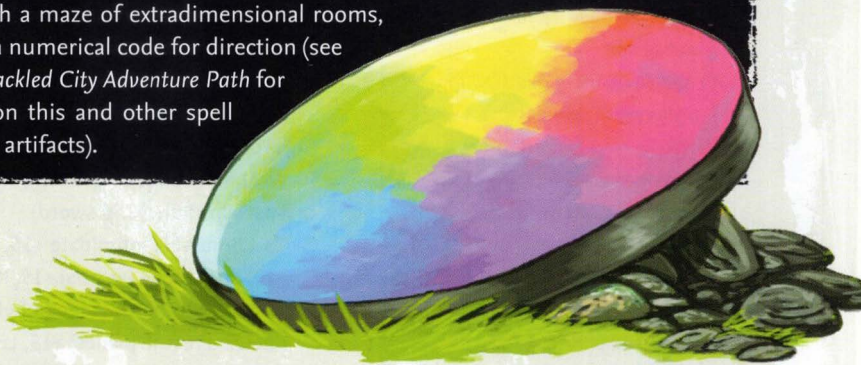
NODE HIEROGLYPHS

The node-dwelling spell weavers of ancient times used special hieroglyphs to record the specifics of their lives, their travels, and their research. Since most spell weaver tablets date to this Time of Nodes, they are often blackened and badly damaged. The spell weavers of modern times rarely use node hieroglyphs, but can still understand them perfectly. The hieroglyphs can be read aloud with spells like *comprehend languages*, but the text is encoded in a way that its literal translation inevitably reveals nonsense to non-spell weavers. To successfully make sense of the text, a reader must succeed at a DC 25 Decipher Script check in conjunction with *comprehend languages*.

Spell weavers sometimes illustrated their tablets with simple line block drawings. The tablet presented here is the Breeding Tablet, one of the most famous spell weaver documents ever discovered. It shows the sequence of a spell weaver's six-life cycle and its final self-sacrifice.

NODE NUMBERS

Numbers—especially the number six—are sacred to spell weavers, and they have a senary numerical system. Spell weavers also have a decimal system, developed to cooperate with the nerra (the enigmatic rulers of the Plane of Mirrors; see page 127 of the *Fiend Folio*) at some point of their history. The purpose of this cooperation was the construction of a mirror-based, short-range teleportation device. This device consisted of several pentagonal gates that connected spell weaver nodes with selected locations in the surrounding areas. Successful transit through the gates was achieved by navigating through a maze of extradimensional rooms, using a numerical code for direction (see the *Shackled City Adventure Path* for more on this and other spell weaver artifacts).



Inside, the most important room of any node was the breeding chamber, the home of the magic cylinders necessary for spell weavers to reproduce. Only a few of these rooms survived the Disjunction intact, and they are desperately sought out and jealously guarded by modern spell weavers. Secondary to the breeding chamber was the mortuary, a many-floored hall that protected spell weavers undergoing their rejuvenating stasis. Deeper than these rooms slept the heart of the node, a gigantic magical furnace. While those in every node ever discovered have been destroyed, an active spell weaver furnace is capable of producing effects on par with the

powers of the deities. As such, spell weavers throughout the planes dream of finding a near-mythic live node furnace.

In the FORGOTTEN REALMS, the Tortured Lands and the Fallen Lands both make likely spots for spell weaver ruins. In EBERRON, a spell weaver node might appear somewhere in the Demon Wastes or deep within mysterious Xen'drik. The *Shackled City Adventure Path* also suggests further spell weaver plots and designs.

ADVANCED SPELL WEAVER

Seeking to master greater magic, most spell weavers advance as sorcerers or wizards, making the archmage or nearly any prestige class from *Complete Arcane*

natural paths for many. Adhering to a strict atheism, spell weavers never advance as clerics. More martially minded spell weavers benefit greatly from the eldritch knight and spellsword (see *Complete Warrior*) prestige classes.

SCHAVRA

CR 12

Spellweaver fighter 4

N Medium monstrous humanoid

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., *see invisibility*, telepathy; Listen +11, Spot +11

AC 27, touch 12, flat-footed 25

hp 85 (14 HD)

SR 21

Immune mind-affecting effects

Fort +8, **Ref** +9, **Will** +14

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee +2 *spell storing* longsword
+15/+10/+5 (2d6+6/18–20) and
3 +1 longswords +14 (2d6+5/18–20)

Base Atk +14; **Grp** +16

Special Attack spell-like abilities, spells

Combat Gear *potion of bull's strength*

Spells Known (CL 16th, ranged touch +16)

6th (5/day)—*chain lightning* (DC 20),
wall of iron

5th (6/day)—*cone of cold* (DC 19),
prying eyes, *telekinesis*

4th (6/day)—*confusion* (DC 17),
dimension door, *fire shield*, *stone skin*

3rd (6/day)—*dispel magic*, *fly*,
haste, *rage*

2nd (6/day)—*alter self*, *blur*, *web* (DC 15),
resist energy, *scorching ray* (DC 16)

1st (6/day)—*burning*
hands (DC 15),

identify, *jump*, *magic missile*, *shield*

0 (6/day)—*dancing lights*, *detect*
magic, *flare*, *light*, *mage and*,
message, *ray of frost*, *touch of fatigue* (DC
13), *resistance*

Spell-like Abilities (CL 16th):

Always active—*see invisibility*

At will—*detect magic*,
invisibility

1/day—*plane shift*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 14,

Con 13, Int 20, Wis 19,

Cha 16

SQ chromatic disk, immunity to mind
effects, shielded mind, spell weaving

Feats Battle Weaver, Empower Spell,
Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Heighten
Spell, Multiweapon Fighting, Spell
Focus (abjuration), Spell Focus
(evocation), Spell Penetration,
Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon
Specialization (long sword)

Skills Climb +12, Intimidate +15, Jump
+10, Knowledge (arcana) +19, Knowledge
(history) +15, Knowledge (religion) +10,
Knowledge (the planes) +15, Listen +13,
Search +9, Spellcraft +19, Spot +14, Use
Magic Device +14

Possessions +4 mithral shirt, +2 *spell storing*
longsword, 3 +1 longswords, *amulet of*
natural armor +2, chromatic disk, backpack

Chromatic Disk: Schavra's chromatic



disk holds ten additional spell levels of energy. By holding the disk in one hand the spell weaver can cast a spell that it knows and expend spell levels from the disk rather than from its number of spell slots

Shielded Mind (Ex): Schavra's mind cannot be read by any means. Those that try must make a DC 17 Will save or be *confused* for 1d6 days.

Spell Weaving (Ex): Schavra can cast multiple spells at a time as long as the sum of their spell levels are equal to or less than the number of hands it has free.

Telepathy (Su): In addition to the basic effects of telepathy, Schavra can communicate by thought with any other spell weaver within 1,000 miles. ☐

BATTLE WEAVER

Some spell weavers train themselves to make use of an extra pair of hands in combat.

Prerequisites: Spell weaver, Str 15.

Benefit: Spell weavers with this feat gain two additional slam attacks. These additional attacks are primary attacks and have the same attack bonus as the spell weaver's other slam attacks.

Normal: Spell weavers can normally only make two slam attacks.

Special: A spell weaver can take this feat twice, allowing it to make use of all six arms in combat. This feat makes spell weavers eligible for the Multiweapon Fighting feat (see page 304 of the *Monster Manual*).

MONSTROUS EVOLUTION: DISPLACER BEAST

I always thought displacer beasts were cool—they just looked really weird and badass. Panthers are cool, tentacles are creepy, tentacles with sharp bone-blades are even creepier. Plus, Dave Trampier's illustration in the first edition *Monster Manual* was perfect. I liked them so much I chose them as the sacred animal for my first (and only) character to reach godhood (how that character managed to get into the Norse pantheon or what displacer beasts had to do with Vikings, I still can't explain)."

—Sean K Reynolds, Game Designer

The displacer beast finds its creative origins in Coeurl, a black, tentacled, catlike creature who first appeared in A. E. van Vogt's 1939 short story "Black Destroyer," and later in the compilation *Voyage of the Space Beagle*. In the story, human space travellers visit the planet Coeurl makes his home upon, a world his hunger has stripped of all life. Mistaking him for an unintelligent creature, the spacefarers allow the alien upon their ship, intending to study him. When a crew member is found murdered, the mystery quickly turns into a hunt to kill the deceptively cunning beast.

AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF THE DISPLACER BEAST



"Black Destroyer,"
1939

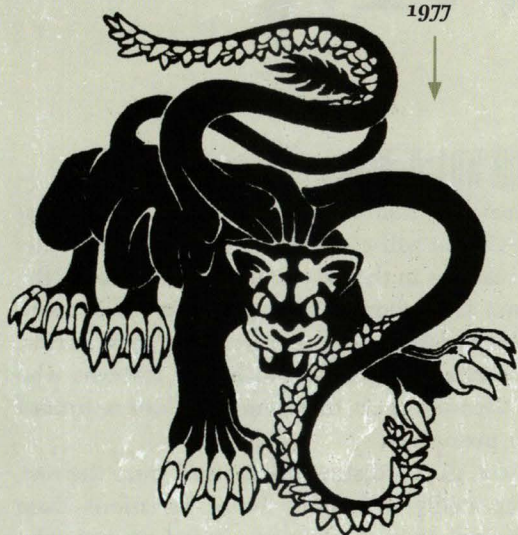


Monstrous Manual,
1993



D&D Minis,
Harbinger, 2003

Monster Manual,
1977



Monster Manual,
2000





THE ECOLOGY OF THE Will-o'-Wisp

"A great flame follows a little spark."

—Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*

Most monsters prove frightening because of the things they have—fangs, spikes, and ichor-dripping claws—but will-o'-wisps are terrifying because of the things they lack: empathy, pity, and mercy. Beings without a hint of conscience, will-o'-wisps possess voices but choose not to speak. Alien beings without body language or expressions to hint at their unknowable agendas, all that one can truly know of will-o'-wisps is their insatiable hunger for grief, terror, and death.

HISTORY OF THE WILL-O'-WISP

Terrified peasants huddled in dark huts first whispered stories about will-o'-wisps. Struggling to place the unnatural creatures in the natural order of the world, the peasants spun tales about cursed men's spirits doomed to wander the marshes and lure travelers to their deaths. Others say they are evil fairies with tiny lanterns who chuckle to themselves as they tempt followers toward sinkholes or precipices.

One of these stories distinguishes itself from the rest, surfacing repeatedly with only minor variations from region to region. It is the tale of a good woman who



married a wicked man—a drunkard and a womanizer with a cruel streak in him. He found no greater pleasure in life than tormenting his young wife, breaking her heart at every opportunity.

His wife, a sweet-tempered and gentle woman, had an infinite capacity for forgiveness and often prayed that her husband would change his wicked ways. When her husband fatally burned down their house one night in a drunken stupor, his wife's piety and devotion granted him a second chance. The gods allowed his spirit to return to earth in the form of a glowing ball of light. If the wicked husband truly repented his evil ways and strove to live a good life, he would then join his wife in the afterlife. So far the creatures supposedly related to that spirit show no intention of living such lives.

Pious scholars sometimes whisper darker tales, suggesting that will-o'-wisps are the corruptions of the purest souls in existence. These investigators postulate that will-o'-wisps

KNOWLEDGE OF THE WILL-O'-WISP

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (dungeoneering) check as it relates to will-o'-wisps. Storytellers, and those who live near swamps or graveyards most commonly possess this information. The will-o'-wisp appears on page 255 of the *Monster Manual*.

DC	Result
16	Will-o'-wisps are glowing balls of light that seek to lure victims into peril.
21	Will-o'-wisps feed off of negative emotions and use electricity attacks.
26	Tracking will-o'-wisps is difficult due to their ability to fly and turn invisible.
31	Will-o'-wisps are immune to all magic except <i>magic missile</i> and <i>maze</i> spells. They can speak Auran and Common but rarely do so.
30	A will-o'-wisp's invisibility is natural and cannot be dispelled. Also, wisps living in the same area often share the same memories, experiences, and goals.

are descended from fallen lantern archons, tempted angels who succumbed to evil. Cast out of the celestial realms for their crimes, these fallen angels have flourished and now wander the Material Plane, indulging in their wicked desires.

Whatever their origins, the most dedicated researchers know will-o'-wisps to be a unique race of living aberrations strongly tied to the

most primal forces of wind, lightning, and air. Peasants have many nicknames for these creatures, such as corpse-candles, bobalongs, and spooks. Will-o'-wisps are also often nicknamed after notorious criminals or evildoers of their region; for example, a small village terrorized years ago by a bloodthirsty green hag might call will-o'-wisps "hag lanterns."



PHYSIOLOGY OF THE WILL-O'-WISP

The alien forms of will-o'-wisps prove particularly confusing to those who seek to destroy them. Their small size—the body of a will-o'-wisp measures only 8 to 12 inches across—combined with the flickering, yellow, blue, green, or white glow that surround them give them an insubstantial, ethereal look as their flames hide their bodies.

A will-o'-wisp's body is not a single solid mass, but rather a cluster of twelve to fifteen gas-filled nodes stuck together in a spherical shape by a transparent, spongy substance. These clear nodes are covered with porous membranes that pulse as the wisp breathes.

Will-o'-wisps gain sustenance from two sources: natural gas and emotional energy. A wisp inhales the gas formed by decomposing plant and animal matter and processes it in several ways. It expels some of the gas to propel itself through the air with great precision and speed while absorbing the rest of the gas to fuel its biological functions.

Digesting gas in this way produces a by-product that ignites in a heatless light when it comes into contact with air. When a will-o'-wisp exhales, this by-product flares up on the surface of its skin, creating its flickering flames and the faintest smell of sulphur. The wisp's alien digestion process also results in an internal buildup of electricity, which the will-o'-wisp uses as an attack form.

Superstition holds that will-o'-wisps feed off emotional energy, particularly negative emotions, in an almost vampiric manner. Some researchers claim it is not a supernatural process but a biological one; that the wisp actually feeds off the chemicals released through a victim's skin when frightened. These theories are vague and unsupported, but all sages agree that will-o'-wisps gain sustenance from negative emotions in some fashion.

Nodal membranes contain tiny, multipurpose sensory organs, which wisps use to see and hear. A healthy

will-o'-wisp grows new nodes at the rate of one a month. These nodes form at the creature's core and push the other nodes outward. Exposed nodal membranes age and tear quickly, and deflated nodes slough off the creature at a rate of about one a month.

A will-o'-wisp that feeds daily for at least six months grows three extra nodes on the outside of its body. It takes a week for these extraneous nodes to mature before they break off and become a new, wholly independent creature. The new wisp develops more nodes over the next two weeks until it matures into an adult-sized wisp. There is no limit to the number of times a will-o'-wisp can reproduce, and it cannot control this process. It only occurs when there is enough sustenance to support reproduction, and thus will-o'-wisp populations naturally control themselves.

Each of a wisp's nodes can think for itself, although they die if separated from the rest of the wisp (except in the case of reproduction). A wisp can think with all its minds at once, which gives it an incredibly advanced intelligence even when it is very young. Also, being that the nodes of a newborn wisp stem from its parent, a young wisp has the same thoughts, memories, and much of the same personality as its progenitor. Thus, will-o'-wisps in the same region are often interrelated and, sharing the same memories, think of themselves as a single creature.

Will-o'-wisps do not seem to have a natural lifespan, but their unique dietary requirements make it easy for them to starve. They must feed on gases once a day and on emotions at least once a week. A solitary will-o'-wisp with constant access to gases but not to emotions breaks down and dies in about three months. A wisp that cannot feed on gases dies in a week, regardless of whether it has access to emotional trauma.

The decomposing materials in a 1-mile-square section of swamp or an average small town graveyard can produce enough gases to sustain a single wisp.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE WILL-O'-WISP

A will-o'-wisp sees little difference between a solitary existence and one with related wisps, as they share the same memories, objectives, and similar personalities. In areas capable of supporting a large number of will-o'-wisps strings of 3-4 wisps commonly form, working as insidious, incredibly mobile hunting parties. If a string forms naturally by reproduction, there is no need for the wisps to compete for resources, as reproduction only occurs when there is enough sustenance to support multiple wisps. Naturally forming strings work together to concoct brilliantly evil plans.

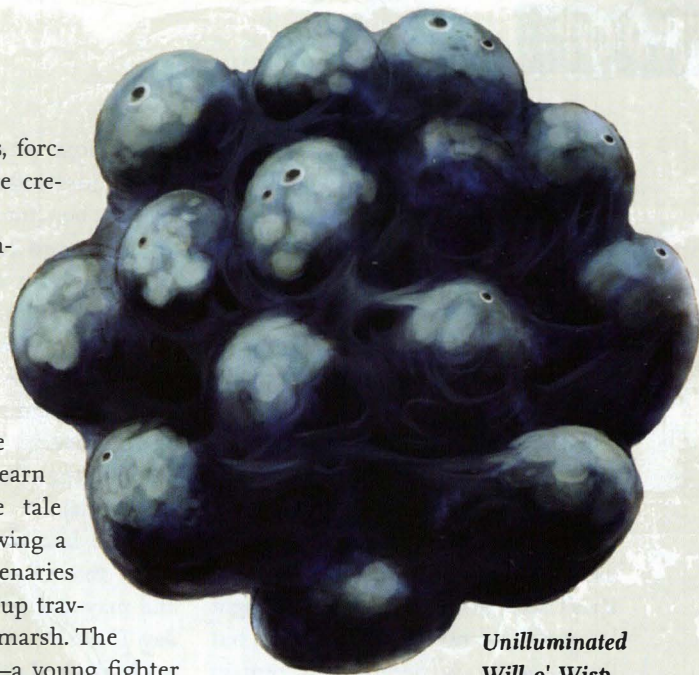
If a wisp enters another wisp's territory, neither has any compunctions about killing its rival if necessary. Wisps have no sense of community or racial solidarity and often perceive foreign will-o'-wisps with dissimilar thoughts and memories as a threat. Should its motives prove compatible, an outsider wisp might be welcomed into a local string. Adventurers set upon by a string of wisps consisting of wisps of different minds can try to trick or persuade the wisps to attack one another. Wisps are wise enough to see through amateur attempts to fool them but a talented adventurer might play them against each other. Will-o'-wisps delight in betrayal and backstabbing and could be receptive to such negotiations if they can be suitably convinced. However, it might prove exceptionally difficult for non-will-o'-wisps to tell apart wisps of different parentages, although the color of the light they shed might provide a clue.

Above all else, wisps love causing pain. Years of practice and their immense intelligence hone particularly insidious and creative tactics. The standard will-o'-wisp tactic is to lure a traveler into a dangerous area by pretending to be a guiding light. Adventurers traveling in graveyards or boggy areas must beware and never follow such lights. Tales of these deadly marsh-lights have spread

far through the years, forcing wisps to be more creative with their plans.

Wisps pride themselves on their intelligence and cunning. A wisp might follow a party invisibly for a day or more to evaluate the group's skills and learn its weaknesses. One tale tells of a wisp following a large group of mercenaries for a week as the group traveled through a huge marsh. The wisp chose a victim—a young fighter on his first mission. Every night the wisp flitted into camp invisibly during the young man's watch and killed one of the other mercenaries in his sleep. When the group had lost half its members in this fashion the survivors turned on the watchman and accused him of being the murderer. In vain he tried to defend himself; his companions beating him mercilessly and then hanging him. The wisp, lurking nearby, sucked up the condemned innocent's terror with glee. When the company moved on, the wisp followed and killed one last victim in his sleep. The invisible wisp remained long enough to absorb the horrified emanations from the survivors as they realized they had executed an innocent man and then flew back to its home, satisfied. Adventurers would be wise to set double watches every night when traveling through areas where wisps might live.

On the rare occasions when will-o'-wisps work together the results are truly terrifying. Three strings of wisps once collaborated on a stormy night, clustering together at the top of a rocky cliff and glowing as brightly as possible. Two ships, mistaking the wisps for a lighthouse, were dashed to pieces against the cliffs. Fortunately such collaborations are rare, but good-hearted adventurers who hear tales of wisps working in tandem often seek them out and destroy them for the good of the land.



**Unilluminated
Will-o'-Wisp**

If necessary, a will-o'-wisp is willing to work with other creatures, but its capricious nature and inherently evil mind make most partnerships short lived. Adventurers who strike deals with wisps should be on guard, as the alien creatures care nothing for keeping promises and enjoy betraying their companions whenever possible.

Since wisps rarely occur in groups larger than four, their society is extremely simple, focusing on survival, reproduction, and causing suffering. Wisp hierarchies, when they exist, make few distinctions between individuals, but give superiority to exceptionally old wisps and those that have executed the most diabolical plans and caused the most terrible deaths—often the same creature.

Will-o'-wisps are unique in that they are one of the few races without religious beliefs. Wisps do not worship any deities and do not have any beliefs about an afterlife. While wisps understand divine magic, they don't believe they have souls. In fact, there have been no recorded instances of wisps returning from the dead by means of divine magic, although whether this is because they have no souls or because the wisps simply do not want to return to life no one can say.

Worshippers of evil gods, particularly chaotic ones who revere slaughter and deception, sometimes see will-o'-wisps as embodiments of their god's

doctrine and seek out alliances with them. Wisps are happy to aid such depraved individuals and are more trustworthy when working with evil priests than when dealing with other beings. Wisps understand the dogma of death and destruction and, while they are not worshipers, they eagerly aid devotees of the powers of lies, trickery, and evil.

Although will-o'-wisps are keenly intelligent, they possess no extremities or telekinetic powers. They cannot use tools, manipulate items, or construct lairs or fortresses. Wisps might learn tactics and hone their skills, but their society is doomed to remain static as long as they stay trapped in their current forms. Their society will never develop further, a reality which frustrates the wisps and drives them to commit ever greater acts of cruelty and depredation. Their reputations as sadistic monsters are all they have.

WILL-O'-WISP LAIRS

Will-o'-wisps live in swamps and graveyards where decomposing plant and animal matter is common. Will-o'-wisps are likely to be less aggressive in graveyards, as there are plenty of corpses around and the emotional anguish of mourners proves quite satisfying. Adventurers seeking to confront a wisp should do so among the resting sites of the dead, particularly if they seek to strike a bargain or converse with one.

Wisps sometimes work with the undead that haunt burial sites, particularly ghouls or wights. The wisp patrols the area invisibly and if it sees a living being it floats above the trespasser's head, glowing brightly. The ghouls and wights learn that following the light leads them to prey, and the wisp feeds off the victim's resulting horror.

Will-o'-wisps must sleep for a few hours each day, and since they must be conscious in order to fly or maintain invisibility, a safe resting place is a necessity. Fortunately, their small size makes it easy for them to hide in

hollow logs or mausoleums, or even to float just under the marshy surface of a bog (the gases permeating the mud around it keep the wisp from suffocating). Adventurers hunting for a will-o'-wisp should look for a faint glow coming from small hiding places or the distinct smell of sulphur (the will-o'-wisp's emissions).

These lairs are nothing more than sleeping holes and may change from day to day. There is nothing of interest in such places; even if a wisp wanted to personalize its lair, it has no way to manipulate objects. For the same reason, the lairs hold no gathered treasure; however, a search of the surrounding area often reveals the decaying corpses of previous victims and their possessions.

ADVANCED WILL-O'-WISP

As will-o'-wisps advance, they typically increase in Hit Dice, though never in size. Widespread throughout the planes, a number of local and planar variants possess an array of templates. The soul of rage is one type of will-o'-wisp found on the Lower Planes.

SOUL OF RAGE

CR 8

Half-fiend will-o'-wisp
CE Small outsider (air)

Init +15; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +17, Spot +17

Languages Abyssal, Auran, Common, Infernal

AC 32, touch 30, flat-footed 21

hp 49 hp (9 HD); **DR** 5/magic

Immune magic, poison

Resist acid, cold, fire, and electricity 10

SR 19

Fort +4, **Ref** +14, **Will** +9

Speed fly 50 ft. (perfect) (10 squares)

Melee 2 claws +18 (1d3–3) and

bite +13 (1d4–3) or

shock +18 melee touch (2d8

electricity)

Base Atk +6; **Grp** –1

Atk Options smite good 1/day (+9 damage)



Spell-like Abilities (CL 9th)

3/day—darkness, poison (DC 16)

1/day—contagion (DC 16), desecrate, unholy blight (DC 16)

Abilities Str 5, Dex 33, Con 12, Int 19, Wis 16, Cha 14

SQ natural invisibility

Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse

Skills Buff +14, Diplomacy +18, Disguise +14 (+16 acting), Intimidate +16, Knowledge (local) +9, Knowledge (the planes) +16, Knowledge (religion) +9, Listen +17, Search +16, Sense Motive +15, Sleight of Hand +25, Spot +17, Survival +15 (+17 on the planes or following tracks)

Immunity to Magic (Ex) A spirit of rage is immune to most spells or spell-like abilities that allow spell resistance, except magic missile and maze.

Smite Good (Su) Once per day a spirit of rage can make a normal melee attack to deal +9 points of extra damage against a good foe.

Natural Invisibility (Ex) A startled or frightened spirit of rage can extinguish its glow, effectively becoming invisible as the spell. ☐

MONSTROUS EVOLUTION: MONSTERS OF SUCK

My favorite D&D monsters are born of the game itself, rather than drawn from mythology. While it's impossible to scoff at dragons and giants, my true heroes are the schlubs like rust monsters, xorn, and umber hulks. Most of my D&D biases and tastes emerged as I discovered first edition AD&D as a child, so monsters that came to be in second and third edition are also-rans (even if I created them).

"For sheer goofy D&D goodness, nothing tops the first edition Fiend Folio, which introduced the notorious

githyanki, slaad, and elemental princes of evil to the game. Some of the best creatures from that tome are the sad-sack losers like the enveloper (who looks sort of like a huggy Michelin Man), the adherer (a sticky mummy), and my favorite, the ruinously ill-conceived C.I.F.A.L. (Colonial Insect-Form Artificial Life), a swarm creature with a "nuclear core."

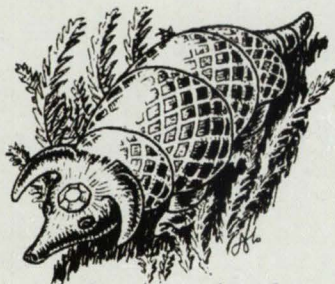
"Basically, I like the oafs and the losers, the random creations that wouldn't exist without D&D but that will live forever in the garbage heap of nostalgia."

—Erik Mona, Editor-in-Chief of *DRAGON* magazine

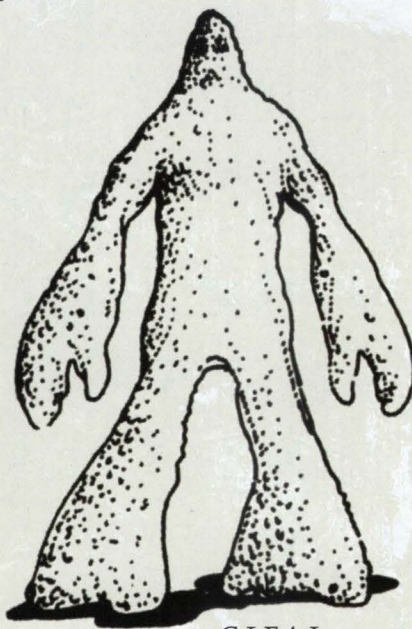
MONSTERS OF SUCK IN PICTURES



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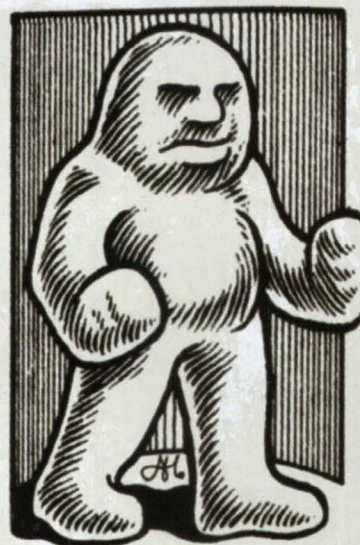


Carbuncle



C.I.F.A.L.

Colonial Insect-Form Artificial Life

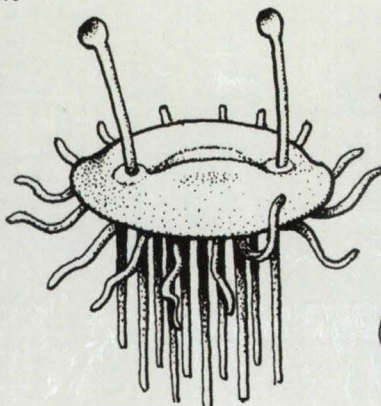


Enveloper



Dire Corby

"please end my pain..."



Flumph

"If I close my eyes forever, will it all remain the same?"



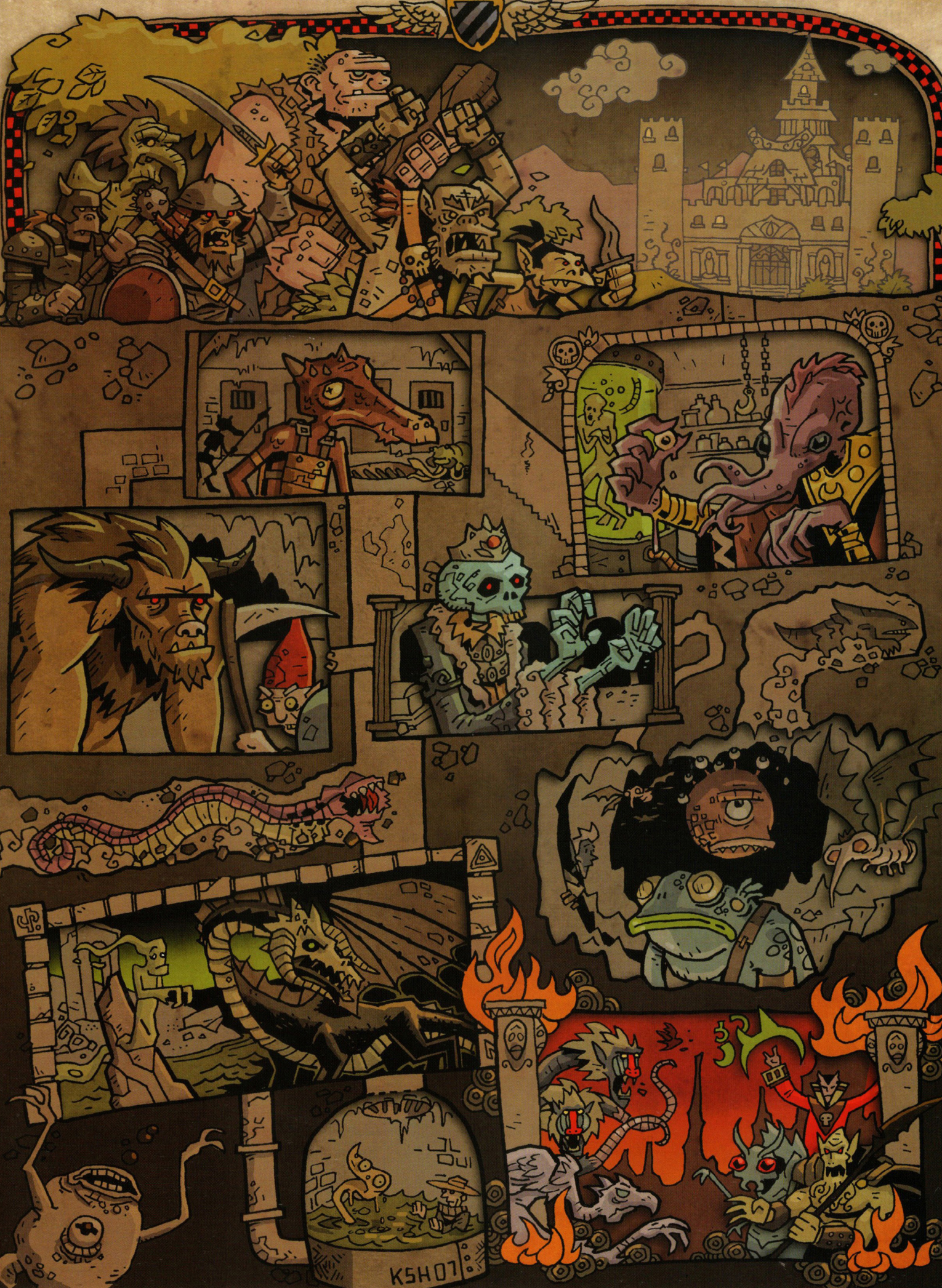
Ogrémoch

"Hey, Kool-Aid!"



Gorb

"Got any schpare change?"



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