



ZOR DRAXTAU

Letter from the Publisher



Welcome to the inaugural issue of **Zor Draxtau** — official newsletter of the **USHERWOOD ADVENTURES**. Each issue of **ZD** will feature recently published Open Gaming Content (OGC), new or revised details regarding the **USHERWOOD ADVENTURES** campaign setting, product announcements, and

other items of interest specifically pertaining to the campaign setting. Additionally, subscribers of the newsletter will receive special periodic product offerings not otherwise available.

I would also invite readers to submit their questions and comments regarding any of the **USHERWOOD ADVENTURES** products and materials by email at; kramer@usherwoodadventures.com. I'll address as many of your queries and comments as possible.

KRAMER

March 22, 2010
Everett, WA

Open Gaming Content:

Feral Zombie (zombus delaurentius)

Source: **THE DOOR OF INFINITE PORTALS**
(http://www.rpgnow.com/product_info.php?products_id=79075&filters=0_0_0_0&manufacturers_id=2411)

Size:	Medium
Move:	60 ft
Armor Class:	8
Hit Die:	1+4 (head)/8+1 (body) — fight as 2 HD monster
Attacks:	3
Damage:	1-3/1-3 (swing/punch); 1d4 (bite)
Special Attacks:	Infection
Special Defenses:	See below
Magic Resistance:	See below
Rarity:	Rare
No. Encountered:	4d6
Lair Probability:	Nil
Intelligence:	Low
Alignment:	Neutral
Level; X.P.:	IV; 175 + 4/hp

Feral zombies are corpses that have been reanimated by a mysterious infectious disease. The origins of this illness are unknown (some say these zombies were created by an angry god, or by strange magics in the air, or by inter-dimensional beings...no one knows for sure). The most widely accepted theory is that a mad alchemist — Professor Qaurtermain Stanford — accidentally poisoned the water supply of a small remote village



Zombus Delaurentius shirts

Available in black and colors single-sided (444385920), or white double-sided (444385921), \$21.99

Front

Back

Interested in being a contributor? Have a short article you think would be beneficial to your fellow First Edition/OSRIC gamers? Feel free to shoot the publisher an email at kramer@usherwoodadventures.com, and we'll look at getting it into our next edition.

while researching a strange substance which had issued from a remote copper mine.

Whatever their origins, feral zombies — also known variously as ‘hunger zombie’, ‘Quartermain’s Folly’, and ‘brain glutton’ — are noted for their predatory intelligence and their overwhelming urge to eat living flesh (they are particularly fond of organs, such as brains, hearts, kidneys, livers, etc.), even stopping to consume a victim in the midst of combat. They generally hunt in packs and are always drawn to living prey. Their numbers are continually expanded through their infectious bite. Those bitten, but not consumed, may succumb to the infection and become themselves a feral zombie.

If both hand attacks of the creature are successful, the zombie may attempt to bite. Upon being bitten by a feral zombie, the victim must make a saving throw vs. poison or else become infected with the feral virus. For each day the victim is infected, they will lose 2 points of CHA, and 1 point each of STR, DEX, and CON. Loss of CON and CHA are permanent, but STR and DEX are regained at a rate of 1 point per month if the infection is successfully countered (see below). Further, the infection diminishes the effectiveness of all *cure wound* spells (divide all results by 50%, rounding down). An infected individual will continue to loose health at the rate of 1 HP every 3 turns due to the of continual wasting of the body due to the virus. The casting of a *cure disease* spell will remove the infection, and halt further HP loss.

Any creature reduced to 0 HP by the feral infection will themselves become a feral zombie within 24 hours, unless a *cure disease* is cast (or unless consumed by the creature). Feral zombies can be returned to their mortal-selves if both a *cure disease* and a *raise dead* spell are cast on the creature within 6 days of initial infection.

Feral zombies are not true undead, and so cannot be turned by clerics. *Sleep*, *charm*, *hold* and *cold*-based spells do not effect feral zombies. Similarly, holy water does not harm them. And the feral zombie is not susceptible to disease of any kind, nor the effects of aging.

The body of a feral zombie is capable of sustaining huge amounts of physical damage (thus, 8+1 HD) before being destroyed. However, the head of the feral zombie is weak, and may sustain only 1d8+4 HP damage before the creature is destroyed.

The feral zombie fights as a 2 HD monster.

They will always fight to the death, and are single minded when it comes to pursuing their prey. Unlike normal zombies, feral zombies react normally during combat initiative (i.e., they get to roll for initiative).

In all other respects, the feral zombie is indistinguishable from normal zombies.

Treasure: Nil

The feral zombie is based on an original creature concept by Tim Martin (<http://www.paratime.ca>).

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ZOR DRAXTAU

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*Send pictures to store@jdkds.com.

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UA Setting Scriptorium:

The Spire of Xao

Source: **THE USHERWOOD ADVENTURES** sourceweb
(<http://www.usherwoodadventures.com/support/html/dol/religion.html>)

The solitary plane of Purgatory is an infinite landscape of a thousand realms. These realms encompass all godly kingdoms not otherwise included upon the other plans. Further, these realms cover the gamut of alignment philosophies. Therefore, these lands are plagued by an endless array of war and battle as Law seeks to overthrow Chaos; Evil seeks to destroy Good; and Balance (neutrality) pits all against each other.

But the most notable characteristic of Purgatory, is the diminishing power of magical spells and items as one travels nearer the center of the plane. Even godly powers weaken with proximity to the plane's core.

At the very center of Purgatory lies the Spire of Xao; reputedly, the absolute center of Everything. Within the Spire, it is reported that all magic — even the magic of the three creators; Tau, Jakkohb, and Yyyd'emsk — are utterly neutralized. Due to this, it is further said that the only means of actually slaying a god, demigod, or other divine being, is to kill

them within the Spire itself. Artifacts placed within the Spire lose all their powers, but if removed, the item's powers will be restored. Other magical items brought into the Spire are drained of all magic, utterly and forever. See the table below for additional effects.

Impeded spell levels will suffer a 50% chance of failure, irrespective of any other benefits the caster may possess.

Power of spell levels indicates, even if cast successfully, that Distance, Duration, and Area of Effect of a given casting will be halved (01-70), normal (71-90), or doubled (91-00). Permanent spells that are halved, fail to have any effect.

Destroyed spell levels render the spells completely powerless, irregardless of the caster's level.

The powers of the three creators — Tau, Jakkohb, and Yyyd'emsk — are negated only if the god actually enters into the Spire itself.

The plane of Purgatory lays within the absolute center of the inner planes, touching upon all of them. As well, Purgatory touches upon all three Paths; Goodliness, Vileness, and Blindness.

Distance from the Spire of Xao	Impeded Spell Levels	Power of Spell Levels	Destroyed Spell Levels	Other Effects
beyond 1,100 miles	—	—	—	—
1,100 – 1,001 miles	1st	—	—	—
1,000 – 901 miles	2nd	1st	—	—
900 – 801 miles	3rd	2nd	1st	All creatures restore HP at a rate 1 point per turn when in a state of full rest
800 – 701 miles	4th	3rd	2nd	All creatures gain immunity to disease
700 – 601 miles	5th	4th	3rd	All creatures gain immunity to poison
600 – 501 miles	6th	5th	4th	Psionic abilities negated
500 – 401 miles	7th	6th	5th	Positive/negative energies negated
400 – 301 miles	8th	7th	6th	Supernatural abilities negated
300 – 201 miles	All	8th	7th	Access to the astral plane not possible
200 – 101 miles	All	All	8th	Powers of demigods (and lesser divine beings) negated
100 miles or closer	All	All	All	God-like powers negated

Open Gaming Content:

Cloak of Utter Darkness

Source: **THE DOOR OF INFINITE PORTALS**
(http://www.rpgnow.com/product_info.php?products_id=79075&filters=0_0_0_0&manufacturers_id=2411)

This cloak of rich black fabric is similar to other garments of similar design, in that it provides the ability of the user to conceal their presence. However, the garment works best in non-lighted, moonless nighttime. Under such conditions, the cloak renders the wearer virtually undetectable. Even body heat is completely concealed from creatures that have the ability of infravision. Although, the cloak does work as well against ultravision. Those creatures with ultravision have a 1–2 on d8 chance of seeing the cloak's wearer in silhouette.

In lighting conditions other than that described above, the cloak functions as follows;

Light conditions	Effectiveness (ability of others to see wearer)
Torch/lantern light	1 on d8
Partial moon	1–2 on d8
Full moon	1–3 on d8
Sunrise/sunset	1–4 on d8
Cloudy day	1–4 on d8
Shadowed daylight	1–5 on d8

The cloak is human-sized creatures. Creatures large than human-sized may not use the cloak.

Editorial:

Old School Renaissance, Creative Plagiarism, or Laziness?

Contributor: **KRAMER**
(kramer@usherwoodadventures.com)

First, let me state, this is article is an *o-p-i-n-i-o-n* article...

It looks just like the old TSR modules!

How many retro-game reviews have you read that count this as a positive point to the product? If your experience is anything like mine, probably allot.

As a hobbyist publisher, I am constantly on the look-out at what other publishers are doing creatively — particularly those in the Old School market, like myself. And it's clear to anyone with even a passing interest, that many (most?) publishers in this retro-gaming market are seeking not just to 'harken', or 'pay homage' to the TSR designs of the late 70's and early to mid-80's, but are actually doing everything they can to replicate it as closely as possible. And for the life of me, I can't understand why.

I understand there's some component of this that wishes to re-instate as much of our collective childhood memories as we can, however, speaking as a graphic designer who specializes in book design, those early TSR products were just not that well designed! The good folks in Lake Geneva were learning by the 1980's, but still, I wish I could have been in that product development team to fix some of the problems I recognized, even then.

Cyan Maps

Those lovely, hand-drawn, cyan colored, one square = 10 ft maps. Hey, they were great in their day...because we had nothing else against which to compare them. Yes, they're simple, they're straight forward, but, they were not always clear. (Did **you** always know what was a wall, and what was just part of the grid? I can't say that I did.) If today's tools (Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, Macromedia Freehand, among others) were available to EGG and friends back then, do you think this is what we would have ended up with? I think not. I think they did the best could with the tools available to them at the time. But that was 30 years ago! We have better and better options. Why shouldn't we use them.

While I am not a fan of many of these mapping applications that produce the detailed objects, ground textures, birds-eye view PC's, drop shadowed pieces of polished artwork, I do enjoy the extra visual interest that a little color, and little detail can help provide. With the options of PDF and POD deliverables available to even the smallest publisher at little or no out-of-pocket expense, what are we doing going out of our way to replicate technology that existed before cell phones, CDs, and the personal computer?

Typography

I am a typo-ophile. I am **not** a type designer. That's an entire field of expertise that I simply haven't had the opportunity

to indulge myself in to any great depth. But, I do appreciate well-designed type faces, and elegantly composed blocks/pages/spreads of type.

Now here, I will admit, I do use Futura for most of the Usherwood Publishing products. Futura was of course the font family in use in the **PLAYERS HANDBOOK**, the **MONSTER MANUAL**, the **DUNGEON MASTERS GUIDE**, and several other TSR products. However, creatively I enjoy the font for its informality and legibility, and have ever since I was young college graduate just starting my career.

But why the love affair with Century Gothic?

I have read a number of bulletin board postings and blogs about the use of Century Gothic in Old School adventure modules, not because it's an elegant font that works for the defined purpose, but because it's the font that Gary and Friends used. That's not an intelligent, well-reasoned, design decision.

There's more that goes into the proper choice of a font than just who used it before you for a similar purpose. I would encourage other publishers out there...use a font that stylistically promotes your company identification.

Here's a few other points to consider when choosing a proper type face;

Kerning values; does the font contain kerning algorithms and kern pairs designed by the font designer? Poorly kerned fonts are nearly impossible to make look good. You'll always end up with some letters that are too close together, and some that are too far apart. This is one reason why type designers make such a good living...those kerning tables take a long darned time to compile.

Style variation within the family; does your font include adequate variations to provide several different formatting options to suit your need? For instance, Futura which I am using here, is available as *Light*, *Book*, *Medium*, **Heavy**, **Bold**, and **Extra Bold**, and each of those having an oblique (italic) variation. Additionally, it also has *Light Condensed*, *Medium Condensed*, **Bold Condensed**, and **Extra Bold Condensed**, with each of these also having an italic variation. Century Gothic (in the True Type version, which is what most people will be using since it comes with their computer system for free) comes with *Regular*, *Italic*, **Bold**, and **Bold Italic**. So, as you can see, Futura provides me with much more flexibility within the same font family than Century Gothic ever could.

Characters per line at a given size and line length; does your font provide you enough space on a line of text in order to meet your page count requirements? If you're not a publisher, it may be a difficult thing to consider, but knowing how many pages your manuscript will end up being **before** it's ever laid out is of paramount importance (assuming you're going to print, and not just creating a PDF). Different fonts at

the same point size are going to yield (sometimes) vast differences in page count.

Company and product identity is a customer going to differentiate your product from Joe Blow Retro-Game Publisher™ if you're both using the Century Gothic? It may seem a small issue, but the choice of your font, even if it has nothing to do with your actual logo, identifies your company apart from other companies. If everyone is using Century Gothic, set into either 2-columns or 3-columns, then once a reader gets between the covers, will they be able to easily distinguish your product from someone else's? Your choice of font identifies your company **and** your product line.

And speaking of product identity...

Covers

In a **WHERE'S WALDO** book, imagine finding the one Waldo without the glasses on page where a hundred of the red-and-white striped heroes are staring back at you.

This is your biggest opportunity at creative solution finding to make your product stand out from the crowd...but how will it stand out when everyone in the crowd is working to achieve the exact same thing?

Go out to any of the product sites that feature Old School adventures (my personal favorite are the RPGNow.com family of eStores), and see how many of them are working very hard at looking just like the late 1970-something through 1980-something TSR modules. Product lines from **OONE GAMES** (Advanced Master Adventures), **EXPEDITIOUS RETREAT PRESS** (Advanced Adventures), **PIED PIPER PUBLISHING** (anything from their line of product), **BRAVE HALFLING PUBLISHING** (Classic Labyrinth Adventures) —all great publishers of great retro-game products though they be — if these are all presented on the same book store shelf, and a reader is looking for a particular publisher, how's it going to stand out? It's not.

I must confess, I have even adopted a few TSR standard design elements in Usherwood Publishing adventure books as well. But, I tried very specifically not to actually **replicate** the TSR model. I use a colored bar across the top, and a strong central image, this is true. But the similarities end there.

I Know, I'm Probably Alone...

Above everything, I'm a pragmatist.

I've read the boards, seen the discussions, gone over the product reviews, and I know where I stand; most of you out there think that replicating the visual identity of the TSR modules is a good thing, a desirable thing, a thing by which to measure your success.

I will never understand, nor agree with that goal. It's counterproductive to making your product, Your Product™. All that's being achieved is blurring the line between something you created today, and something TSR created...30 years ago. Why date your product like?

Yes, yes, yes, we're all about the Old School here. I know that. I appreciate that. I'm all over that. I'm an AD&D/OSRIC player, and I always will be. OD&D goes too far back, and anything beyond Second Edition doesn't interest me in the slightest. But it doesn't mean my games have to look like I got into the Wayback Machine, traveled back in time when the Competitor's Castle was still located at the corner of Vanowen and Reseda Boulevards in Reseda, CA, and pulled them off the 2x4-on-cinder-block store shelves that dominated that particular building.

I hope I haven't turned off too many folks who I've had the good fortune of meeting online, or, have worked with over the past couple years. But, that's my position. So, if Knockspell doesn't look as Old School as you think it should, or if I don't agree with what may seem the overwhelming popular opinion of the community at large, at least now you know why.

The Zor Draxtau Editorial column is an open forum. Contributors are welcome to submit articles of approximately 700 to 1,500 words to; kramer@usherwoodadventures.com. Rebuttals will be printed in subsequent issues as space allows.

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