

# ***RPG REVIEW***

***Issue #13 & #14,  
December 2011***



***Planescape and D20 Double Issue ... A  
Crafty Interview ... Pathfinder  
Planescape ... Assassins ... Fantasy  
Craft ... Cthulhu ... Existentialism ...  
Movie and PC Games Reviews ... Industry  
News ... and more!***

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## ADMINISTRIVIA

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# EDITORIAL

Ain't it dead yet? Apparently not. Whilst nominally marked as a double-issue for December 2011, we have embarked into the new year so *auld lang syne* and all that (no, not forgotten). But if the time is just a little out of line, the content certainly isn't. This is indeed, a very substantial D20 and Planescape double issue of RPG Review; perhaps the most significant game-system (in sales, popularity and influence) which I've attempted to combine in one article along the many and varied permutations, combined with a veritable mountain of material for Planescape written by newcomer to our fold, Felix Aplin. Both are aptly helped with an interview with the two main minds from Crafty Games, responsible for Spycraft and Fantasy Craft, Patrick Kapera and Alex Flagg.

Precursors and tangents from D20 are also included; generator of many characters, Stew Wilson, has provided an AD&D1e sample character thus providing both retrospective content as well as our regular sample NPC. Regular contributor Karl Brown provides his experience with a D20-like fantasy system with Fantasy Craft, where as John Four provides a selection of tactics on assassins from his latest publication. For the most recent incarnation of D&D, Matt Stevens embarks on a valuable attempt to speed up combat by recalculating hit points. Because we believe in balance, a long-lost classic article by an anonymous 7<sup>th</sup> Sea fan who was not the least pleased with the D20 steamroller. For my own scenario contribution, light up a Gauloise, for there is an offering of an Existentialist D&D dungeon, guaranteed to drive the *characters* mad, plus conversion rules for two of the most popular Cthulhu campaigns. Newcomer Matt Lindus provides three short reviews of PC games and hopefully we'll see more of his excellent material in future issues. Long-term hero Andrew Moshos gives us the sword (or laser) of Hollywood with reviews of two recent and very popular films, and last but not least, our dearest Minghsi tells all the news she's received through her banyan vines. .

So what have we learned from the d20 experience? Well, actually the lesson is older than that. The lesson dates back to the generic nature of The Chaosium system, somewhat less so with the Rolemaster/Spacemaster system, and certainly



with GURPS. A general rule that can be applied is that a well designed game system that satisfies a some level of realism and provides detailed flexibility can become a powerful force in the hobby. This has certainly been achieved with games that have had a “simulationist” or “gamist” creative agenda, but less so with the newer, “narrativist” systems which, strongly associated with independent publications, are a little like the punk rock fanzines of the RPG world. Most of them are simply designed for a relatively short (several session) story with simple, if clever, rules are are remarkably lacking in detail. Even games which are explicitly orientated now towards being generic (e.g., the latest edition of HeroQuest) are somewhat lacking in this regard. So perhaps surprisingly, the lesson learned from D20 games is a lesson for narrativist games. Make one that is generic, flexible and detailed and perhaps we'll see another D20-sized seismic shift in the hobby.

Anyway enjoy the issue... and please consider writing, either an article or a letter for the next. It keeps editors enthused.

Lev Lafayette (lev@rpgreview.net)

# A CRAFTY INTERVIEW

*with Patrick Kapera and Alex Flagg*

*Patrick Kapera and Alex Flagg developed Spycraft, the popular d20 and OGL modern action and espionage RPG first introduced in 2002 by Alderac Entertainment Group. They later founded Crafty Games ([www.crafty-games.com](http://www.crafty-games.com)) to take over where AEG left off, and created Fantasy Craft, a modular fantasy toolkit RPG using the same rules.*

*They're currently working Spycraft Third Edition, along with a companion modern street crime game called Ten Thousand Bullets, but their latest release is the Mistborn Adventure Game, based on the best-selling novels by Brandon Sanderson ([www.brandonsanderson.com](http://www.brandonsanderson.com)).*

**RPG REVIEW:** Hello Pat and Alex and welcome to RPG Review. Let me begin which is a typical first question for people we interview here. How did you first get involved in roleplaying games?

**ALEX:** For my part, I got involved with creating roleplaying games in college, where I met Will Hindmarch (line developer for Vampire, and most recently developer for Green Ronin's Dragon Age RPG). He was firing up a small company and we bantered around different ideas. I ended up leaving school not too long after, but the bug was started. After a few years working on video game projects, I found myself yearning for something different — so I turned back to my first love of RPGs.

D20 was in full swing at the time, so I tried my hand at creating a d20 crime game called Ten Thousand Bullets. I was making good progress on what I expected to be a free release on the internet when I ran across a game called Spycraft. It had about 80% of what I was doing in my own game, so I wrote up AEG (in reality, Pat) and offered to make 10kB a Spycraft supplement instead. He was intrigued, and I brought an 80 page design document to show him at Gen Con 2002. I was hired on the spot.

**PAT:** Oh the work I saddled Alex with in those early days... Good times. My start in the industry was very much an accident. I was attending a local show in Southern California and spotted an old friend behind a table at the AEG booth. It turned out he'd been hired as the editor for Shadis Magazine and when I asked whether they were hiring he introduced me to Maureen Yates, AEG's business manager at the time. She brought me on as an editorial intern under D.J. Trindle and I spent a few months tinkering with existing manuscripts. By the end of that time, however, I'd managed to write for two books and in one case produced enough material to get my name on the cover. At that point I think they felt obliged to hire me.

**RPG REVIEW:** You both have a long list of credits associated with AEG. Would you care to reveal a little about working in the industry and with AEG in particular?

**ALEX:** At AEG I was a mechanics freelancer, focusing on the Spycraft line and its subsidiaries, including Stargate: SG-1. Compared to the life of a company owner, it was pretty easy — have some meetings, grind out some copy, make some edits, collect a paycheck. As a guy who wrote web and print copy at the time, it was just like my day job, only with more math and a bit more creative license. ☺

**PAT:** My first few years at AEG remain the most fulfilling I've ever had. It wasn't just the fact that AEG was at the epicenter of a major revolution in the gaming industry, or the fact that I'd lucked into a dream gig at the head of one awesome product line after another... It was the people. In those early days the office was a powerhouse of collective talent, and I made friends I'll take to my grave. It's also wonderful to see all those friendly faces now smiling back from so many high-profile projects on the shelves today... Guild Wars 2, Arkham Horror, Descent, Monsterpocalypse, UFS, Edge of Midnight, Firefall... All touched by former AEG staffers. So to reveal a bit about the industry — not just the hobby gaming industry but the *broader* gaming industry — it's smaller than you might think.

**RPG REVIEW:** But of course, you're now key figures in Crafty Games, supporting the Spycraft and Fantasy Craft lines. Could you tell us more about that transition, and how Crafty Games fares. Is it really possible to make a living in the RPG industry?

**ALEX:** I think you need to define what you mean by "living." Can you eat and afford your own place on an RPG developer's salary? Probably, if you are prolific enough as a freelancer or on staff at a reputable publisher. Could you be the sole breadwinner in a family of four, holding down a mortgage and car payments? Doubtful... but then, how many jobs can you actually do that with nowadays?

Pat's our full-time Crafty employee and I work two jobs — web content manager by day and company owner by night — while I put my wife through school. It's what you've got to do. I've recently started transitioning to more of a Crafty focus as my wife is near graduation with her pharmacy degree, which is nice. The "sugar mama" plan should let me go full-time in 2012, and I couldn't be more excited.

Being successful in today's industry is all about knowing the market and being nimble. Video games and other interactive entertainment has obviously had a significant effect on the market since the halcyon days of the late 90's, but there are plenty of other venues which provide a company with great opportunities to be successful. Crafty, for example, was a big investor in PDF and digital distribution from the get-go, and we built the company from that base into a print operation. Building good, mutually-beneficial partnerships, establishing a strong reputation for both consistency and quality, keeping your ear to the ground for the next thing, and staying flexible in your approach to business can benefit anyone in the RPG industry, no matter their size.

**PAT:** Alex covered most of it but I can attest that it is indeed possible to make a permanent living in the hobby games industry. I'm living proof — I've been doing it for 14 years and counting. Granted, eight of those were with one of the biggest and most influential companies out there (AEG), and I've had my fair share of lucky breaks, but I've also poured a lot of blood, sweat, and tears into it, and I've never forgotten the people who got me here. As with any job this is about who you know and, even more importantly, how you treat them. I've worked very hard to forge lasting friendships — not just relationships but genuine friendships — with everyone I can, and that's paid off not just on the business front but also dramatically improved my quality of life across the board. My life couldn't be more different since I've joined this crazy profession, and I'm thankful every day that I get to be part of it.

Now, you asked about the transition from AEG to Crafty. I'm not gonna lie... it wasn't trivial. Going from a staff position with paid holidays and health insurance to paying for literally everything yourself is just the tip of the iceberg. The logistics of running a company alone are enough to scare off most sane people, and it's really just unbridled tenacity and deep, abiding love for what we do that's gotten us this far. There are new and complex challenges all the

time, from how to prioritize your time to how to sell your products and beyond, but on the up side life is never boring. You're the captain of your own destiny, and that's pretty sweet, especially when you're fortunate enough to score the kinds of projects and attract the kind of talent we have. Crafty's future is looking brighter every day, and for that we're eternally grateful.

**RPG REVIEW:** Spycraft and Fantasy Craft are d20-derived games. Looking back, was the decision to make a d20-derived espionage game one which was carried out with some market research or was it gut-instinct that there was a niche?

**PAT:** A little from column A... I knew there was a niche for espionage, which was what got the original Spycraft project going. I'd been keeping my ear to the ground and knew there was a massive swell of spy-related movies, TV shows, and books coming, and I managed to convince the Powers that Be to let me take a swing at the genre. Originally Spycraft was supposed to be a Roll and Keep game (that's the system used in the award-winning Legend of the Five Rings RPG), and somewhere I have a pretty well developed draft of that stored for posterity. Around the same time, of course, Wizards was working on D&D's Third Edition, and they were gracious enough to show AEG some of their work ahead of release. That was really all it took for us to jump on that band wagon, as it was pretty clear from the outset they were onto something special. The rest, as they say, is history.

**RPG REVIEW:** OK, so what do you see as the main advantages of Spycraft and Fantasy Craft? Why wouldn't one simply play d20 Modern with an espionage story or D&D3.x?

**ALEX:** I think RPGs are like tool boxes — while you can always use a few basic tools to create almost anything, having just the right tools for the job at hand makes it so much easier. Sure, you can build a mansion with a hacksaw and mallet, but wouldn't you rather do it with a backhoe, power drill, scaffolding, and nail gun?

Spycraft is a game built for a specific purpose — its job, first and foremost, is to help you tell spy stories, and it provides the tools you need to do so right in the box. Key pieces for the genre, like rules for chases, seductions, exposure, agencies, cover identities, investigation, and so on are all provided to help you make your perfect spy game. That in my opinion is the biggest value Spycraft brings to the table for the gamer: less time prepping, more time playing.

Fantasy Craft, though it has a similar name, takes a different stance. What we wanted with that game was to provide players with a toolkit to help them build their own perfect fantasy world. Fantasy roleplaying is already chock-full of really compelling, fun, cool settings, so we wanted to give folks the tools and rules they needed to bring those worlds to life at their table, not just as presented but exactly as desired. To this end, Fantasy Craft is the most modular of all our games — things like campaign qualities, Alignments, technological Eras, monsters, and even a number of classes can be turned on, off, or changed with the flip of a proverbial switch. We feel this modular approach really empowers both GMs and players to support the worlds they create with solid rules that enable, rather than restrict, how their settings and stories work.

**RPG REVIEW:** What's Crafty Games planning in the near future and where do you see the hobby going?

**ALEX:** The biggest news from us is that we've just released the Mistborn Adventure Game, based on the novel series by New York Times bestselling author Brandon Sanderson. It's a rules-light, dark epic fantasy game with a really unique flavor and an awesome magic system, where the players become outlaw heroes fighting against the oppressive Final Empire. We've got big plans in the coming months and years for this line, including a supplement based on the brand new novel in the series, *Alloy of Law*.

Beyond that, we're planning a big return for the world's greatest espionage RPG in Spycraft Third Edition, and we'll be coupling that with Ten Thousand Bullets (or "10kB"), the game I mentioned at the beginning of the interview.

As for where I see the hobby going in the next few years, I think we're going to see a continuing trend towards simplicity. One positive effect of video games on tabletop RPGs in my opinion is the expectation — no, the *demand* — for more intuitive and rewarding play. Games that find a way to successfully balance this trend towards simplicity without making the game shallow or board game-like will, I think, reap great rewards in the future.

**PAT:** Of course we're already seeing this in D&D Next, which I personally find really exciting. I love many games including Pathfinder, and I think it's high time we got back to loving D&D as well. What we're seeing out of Wizards' design department is already illustrating a lot of what I think we'll see in the future: innovation married to integration, braving new futures without forgetting the past... It's what we're after with Spycraft Third Edition, and I expect you'll see more and more of it from all corners. No one's interested in abandoning what works for them, but there's a pioneer spirit in a lot of corners right now, and I think designers that capitalize on that will really shine in years to come.



**RPG REVIEW:** Thanks for joining us at RPG Review!

**ALEX & PAT:** Thanks for having us!



# INDUSTRY NEWS

*by Wu Mingshi*

Hosei bo Mr. Lev, Happy dragons to you, long long time no see,

So you come back, la? You think Mingshi don't mind, disappear for eight months like pregnant girlfriend, and no problem when you return? Very cham. Don't act cute buay with me, you been see some other fanzine, la? Mingshi strong girl with +2 Sword of Sharpness to do Bobbit on you if I eyeball you find kway. So you want news? Well Mingshi had news but you go all double on her and her news stale and sala. So now new new news need.

First news Minghi provide on iron plate. In its annual address ICE say it let down fans in past due to business failures and that future "behind the scenes" fixes will make fans happy again. Never see it before, is it? Maybe no go pok kai this time? Second news is Adamant Entertainment makes big promise with multimedia splash. Big new website, new roleplaying game, new comics and all for what? A Wuxia-Western mash-up, with name "Tales of the Far West". Ahh, very garang this one, lah? My first character name "Ann Sergio Leone". Also, a good howl from White Wolf, they bring lots of old classics back with "Now In Print" series. Hunter, Vampire, Exalted, and many others. This give chance to Mingshi and many orang to got good old books from Gothic-Punk (TM) days. That total worth. In my island home Gothic-Punk (TM) not so good, too steamy, makeup run all down face.

Pathfinder have new scenarios, make Mingshi think that this is the new you-know-what. Postmortem Studios sell "Thulu: Six Pack Adventures" and Open Design have "Zobeck Gazeteer". Not outdone Goodman Games have "Dungeon Crawl #66: The Vampire's Vengeance" for D&D fourth edition.

From Indy-Scene special science fiction game HELLAS have major supplement, "Wine Dark Void" with new ships, construction, slipspace (like Mingshi at a new nightclub, lah?), and the goddess Aionisia.

Mingshi through great eye power also hear talking cock about coastal wizards already beginning work on D&D 5<sup>th</sup> edition. So soon?!



OK, that all from me this quartering!

Mingshi! xxxooo



# D20 HISTORY AND REVIEW

*by Lev Lafayette*

## A D20 and OGL Primer

With the release of Dungeons & Dragons, 3rd edition, the "d20 System" was also introduced. This would become the dominant roleplaying system of the decade, and certainly highly influential in this second decade of its existence. Largely released as a System Reference Document (SRD) it was also part of a new business model approach which shifted away from onerous licenses in favour of the Open Game License (OGL), although it must be pointed out that the D20 trademark was quite separate from the OGL, which had significant repercussions.

In terms of mechanical approach comparisons are invariably made with Steve Jackson's GURPS or Chaosium's implementations of the Basic Roleplaying System. Certainly of the two the latter has a greater degree of accuracy, as d20 never sought to become a fully generic system. The comparison with GURPS is usually made on account of the range of material that is available. As an additional elaboration however it must be stated that some subsequent developments from the D20/OGL line are orientated as a generic system (such as True20) and with the addition of various supplements it did become a universal system in its own right.

Another common misconception is that the Open-Gaming License is some sort of gaming equivalent of the GNU General Public License. The differences are actually quite strong. Whereas a GPL product requires that derived works can only be distributed under the same license terms and that aggregate products, (e.g., attached to the same software executable), must come under the same license. In contrast the OGL defined two types of content in its license; that

which was open game content (OGC), which could be used, modified and distributed (with credit), and product identity (PI) which could not. In addition there was the d20 System Trademark License, which required publishers to exclude certain rules and adhere to an acceptable content policy to be able to use the d20 logo. Some games (such as Mongoose's OGL) chose to use the OGL and not D20. The D20 system comes with a System Reference Document (SRD), which includes the set of the core mechanics released under the OGL, designed to lack elaborations, and specific product references (e.g., World of Greyhawk)



*Not up to "community standards of decency".*

The history of the license SRD/d20/OGL has been messy, to say the least. Part of the problem was comes from the attempt to couple "free" and "non-free" licenses in the same product; it was supposed to be a means by which one could expand the market (via the "free" part) whilst still protecting exclusive profits (the "non-free" part). When one publisher, The Valar Project, attempted to produce the d20 Book of Erotic Fantasy, which involved various character-based sexual issues, the d20 license was altered to comply with "community standards of decency", preventing publication of the book (it was subsequently published under the OGL). From other publishers it be popular to maximise the amount of content listed

under "product identity", which certainly rendered the spirit of the OGL quite impotent. Finally as the D20 trademark license was revokable, there was quite a shock to the gaming community when, in 2009, that license was revoked leaving a number of small publishers confused, to say the least.

However this article isn't primarily about the licensing issues, as significant as they may be. It is about the games themselves, their evolution and development. As an overview one can refer to the two main d20 products, that is Dungeons & Dragons third edition (v3.0) and Dungeons & Dragons third edition, revised (v3.5). As direct elaborations to the line, there was also reasonably popular games that were also published by Wizards of the Coast, such as d20 Modern (and the supplements d20 Past, d20 Future, d20 Apocalypse, d20 Cyberscape), d20 Call of Cthulhu, Oriental Adventures (a d20 version of Legend of the Five Rings), and the Star Wars Roleplaying Game. Other publishers included Alderac Entertainment's Swashbuckling Adventures (a d20 version of 7th Sea), Spycraft and Fantasy Craft, Amarillo Design Bureau's Prime Directive d20, QLI/RPGRealm's Traveller 20, and Mongoose's OGL Ancients, OGL CyberNet, OGL Horror, OGL Manga, OGL Steampunk, and OGL Wild West, Green Ronin's Blue Rose, Mutants & Masterminds and True20 Adventure Roleplaying Game and finally Paizo's Pathfinder Roleplaying Game. This is by no means an exhaustive list and certainly doesn't go into the extreme number of d20 system supplements that became available, but it does provide for the opportunity for an working overview.

### **Dungeons & Dragons v3.0 and v3.5**

The most important thing to realise about the D20 version of D&D game system is that, fundamentally, it was very much so still D&D. The changes were significant of course, certainly far more significant than those from AD&D first edition to AD&D second edition which arguably were insignificant given the twelve years that had passed. Rather like MS-DOS and MS-NT, the game also merged two streams together and also like the operating system it used the name of the system which had the least influence in the new product. It wasn't promoted at Advanced Dungeons & Dragons third edition, or Dungeons & Dragons sixth version.

Reference semantics aside, there was a new product and it was D&D in terms of all its major distinguishing features. The core ability scores were still Strength, Constitution, Dexterity, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma, with an average value of 10-11. After said choice came the various fantasy races with their special benefits, the choice of character class with their benefits acquired by level and experience points, and the abstract alignment system for moral and legalistic outlooks. It even came as a three-book set entitled "Players Handbook", "Dungeon Masters Guide" and "Monster Manual".

There were however some notable changes, most of which were significant improvements. The combination of Monte Cook (Rolemaster), Jonathan Tweet (Ars Magica, Over The Edge), and Skip Williams (AD&D 2e) worked well to ensure both imaginative solutions to old problems and that there was a sense of continuity. There was also a sense of making the game more enjoyable; annoying features such as class, level and race combinations were dropped (for example), but game balance was largely kept by giving humans some extra benefits.

Ability scores were no longer capped at 25 and they had a universally linear rate of modifications. Spell abilities were extended to include the Charisma for sorcerers and bards (although oddly, not for 0-level spells). Multiclassing was made to be somewhat simpler and more adaptable; most notably the distinction between multiclassing and dual-classed characters was removed. Most notably, nearly all (excluding some prestige classes) classes were available to all races. Characters could gain a level of any character class of their choosing, rather than splitting experience points or only gaining levels in the second class. A penalty system was introduced for having multiple classes with divergent levels.



Level advancement was also notably faster, a rate of roughly one level per game session from experience. Class groups (fighters, clerics, rogues, wizards) were removed. Specialist wizard and mythos priests were removed, although similarity could be achieved by spell-choices, feats and prestige classes etc. The introduction of the sorcerer, a spell-caster with natural rather than learned abilities, added to the range. Finally, prestige classes, high level classes with prerequisites, were also introduced, although arguably a prestige improvement existed as the “name level” in previous editions of D&D and AD&D. Levels provided, automatically and with specific values varies by class, increases to the base attack bonus, bonuses to saving throws but random increases in hit points.

A bigger change, and perhaps more controversial, was the skill and feat system. AD&D had a skill system in prior editions, of sorts, but in D&D3e it became far more extensive with additional complexity with class-skills and cross-class skills defined down to half-rank levels. Particular advantages, often allocated to class descriptions, became binary 'feats', a sort of catch-all category for special abilities. Extensive and detailed, the skill and feat system became both a source of popularity and of criticism for providing significant detail, but also for some time-consuming minutiae.

The most significant change of all however was the introduction of a universal course mechanic, the d20 system. Whereas previous editions of the game almost had a special resolution method for every group of actions (sometimes

roll high, sometimes roll low, sometimes d20, sometimes percentile, sometimes d6 etc), D&D3e introduced a method of D20, plus bonuses, beat a difficulty target number. These target numbers were consistent and scalable with a large number of examples that seemed well-tested. Saving throws were integrated into the d20 mechanic, reduced from five, on forms of attack, to three defensive mechanisms; fortitude (Con), reflex (Dex), and will (Wis).

The initiative system was also changed to a d20 system, specifically actions in order of d20+Dex bonus. The combat round was changed from 1 minute in AD&D 1st and 2nd edition to six seconds (D&D used ten second rounds). Following from previous editions, the d20 system was implemented in attack rolls as d20+bonuses versus a target number of 10+armour class, rather than the THACO system.

In July 2003 a revised edition was released as “Dungeons & Dragons v3.5”. This approach of revision had been used before in second edition AD&D, to indicate a highly similar but not identical set of core rules. The changes were relatively modest; a slight improvement for barbarians, bards and druids, some tweaks to monks, paladins and rangers. A number of spells were changed, with some notable changes to cleric spells. But overall, it was still d20 Dungeons & Dragons. Whether or not 4th edition Dungeons & Dragons is also a d20 system is a matter of some debate. Wizards of the Coast certainly think so, marketing D&D4th edition in the d20 system home of their website – the issue will be explored latter in the article.

### **D20 Modern, D20 Cthulhu et. al.**

Following the success of Dungeons & Dragons 3e, it became clear that the core system was highly adaptable and could be transposed to different genres. Even from the early days of TSR this potential had been recognised, albeit without a great degrees of success. D20 was different; the introduction of D20 modern proved extremely popular, and was quickly expanded to include extra relevant supplements, such as D20 Past and D20 Future.

Unlike D&D, D20 modern used more generic classes. Instead of fighters, clerics, druids, wizards, etc. it based a broad character class on each of the core ability scores. Thus a Strong Hero was related to strength, a Fast Hero to dexterity, a Smart Hero to intelligence, a Dedicated Hero to wisdom, and a Charismatic hero to charisma. This is not to suggest that the game lacked class specialisation, however this did not occur until later levels as “advanced classes”, which varied between the sensible (e.g. Negotiator, Engineer, Explorer) and the speculative for special effects (e.g., Battle Mind, Shadow Slayer etc). In addition all characters at first level choose an occupation which provides a selection of skills and a modifier to wealth.

As per the standard D20 system, each character class receives a varied number of skill points per level, which can be distributed as ranks in particular skills, with distinction between class and cross-class skills. The resolution method is skill ranks + ability + d20 versus a target number. The selection deals largely with the prosaic, although the specialist skill Knowledge (Arcane Lore) may give a bit of a hint that all is not what it seems. A nice touch is making Wealth a skill, representing of total purchasing power, albeit strangely from a somewhat random base.

This combination of the mundane and the speculative is consistent throughout the game, which is to be expected considering it is an attempt to reach generic appeal. Of course, it is possible to play the game without an enhanced reality, but unless there's a particular fondness for paper and paychecks, there will usually be at least a modicum of the speculative and this is certainly the case here. Feats, for example, include the generic sort (Acrobatic, Endurance, Improved Initiative), the technologically advanced (Laser Weapon Proficiency) and the magical (Advanced Secrets of

Glamour). A sort of specialist feat path exists in each class in the form of Talents; for example a charismatic hero can make advances in Fast Talk or Leadership.

Sometimes the combination results in unusual breaches of expectations. D20 Modern explicitly describes itself as a cinematic game, which is fine in itself. This is undoubtedly part of the thinking behind following the hit-points increase per level design for example. However modern firearms are anything but cinematic. As a design result, D20 Modern has some of the most implausible burst and autofire rules imaginable for any modern-day game system. The sheer incredulity of designing a system where the chance of a normal person hitting a target 3 metres away with a 10 round autofire from an assault rifle is a mere 10% and with only a 50% chance of incapacitating a 1st level character (and a 1 in 8 chance of doing the same to a player-character). This is in addition to “stafe” rules which differ from autofire by affecting a 20 by 5 ft area rather than a 10 by 10.

It must be mentioned however, that this is an unusual error of verisimilitude for what is a cinematic game which skirts on the edge of plausibility. The characters are larger than life, the situations are just supernatural enough and so forth, The feeling is closer to say, the X-files, rather than Shadowrun, although you do find – as the illustrations suggest – bugbear police officers, ithilid preachers and medusa office-workers. They're just not your standard fare, although there is a dedicated chapter to the default world's setting and style along with a chapter on special effects (i.e., magic-using characters and the like).

In a similar manner, D20 Past explicitly argues against historical roleplaying as unsatisfying. The PCs are reduced to either bit-pieces in the broad sweep of history or they are playing to fulfil a pre-determined result. The supplement does allow the possibility of playing without the inclusion of the supernatural or speculative, but the content certainly doesn't encourage it. "The Age of Adventure" is a fantastic interpretation of swashbuckling privateers and musketeers with zombies, ghouls and sea-drakes, the Victorian-era "Shadow-stalkers" has mummies, baskerville hounds and working spiritualists, and "Pulp Heroes" comes with cybernetic Nazis and invisible stalkers.

For another angle consider D20 Future and some associated products (D20 Cyberscape and D20 Apocalypse). There is not much of the supernatural in this setting, but plenty on speculation. Even for D20 Apocalypse, supernatural events make up only two of the several possibilities, and the sum total dedicated to the subject is mere paragraphs. Instead D20 Future we see the introduction of Progress Levels, from PL 1 (Stone Age) to PL 9 (practical control of matter at the





subatomic level, time travel etc); the distinction between technical and social progress is barely a concern and there is little exploration of the latter.

Whilst there is the expected elaborations on classes, feats, skills and equipment, there is at first blush surprisingly little on the s.f. environments. What does exist is presented solely in terms of character consequences; there is nothing to stop a GM, for example, creating a small planet with minimal heavy metals with a high air pressure and gravity, even if such a planet is fairly impossible. Instead, what is explained is the effects of heavy atmosphere and high gravity. This is repeated in D20 Cyberscape, where the VR environment makes no serious explanatory attempt, but concentrates instead almost entirely on the environment from a character perspective.

Great staples of the genre are included with this perspective; starships are described in terms of combat capacity and condition, the thoroughly unrealistic mecha receive a chapter (power armour really does have a minimal functional range), robotic and androids, cybernetics (which gets great elaboration in Cyberscape), and finally mutations. Notably for the last chapter the mutations in question are fairly modest with a good mix of minor powers and drawbacks; this is not Gamma World, where one randomly ends up with a mutant flying cactus with telepathy. The most extreme creature of this ilk make their appearance in D20 Apocalypse with cannibalistic zombies (of course) and giant (3ft) cockroaches.

Finally, D20 Call of Cthulhu is considered in this block. One would expect, as part of a long-held genre convention (and the co-authorship by John Tynes) that this supplement would dispense with the more cinematic elements of D20 in favour of a gritty world of horror. To an extent this is retained; hit points only go up by 1d6 per level, most of the cinematic feats are removed and encounters with eldritch horrors and spell casting will still earn you a trip to the sanatorium. On the other hand the autofire rules for guns still manage to disappoint; although each bullet is rolled for and the limit is three per round, with a combined modifier of -10 (non-proficiency -4 plus autofire -6) Joe Public will be Deep One food in no time. This aside, D20 Call of Cthulhu does largely - if not as well as well as the original - capture the genre themes and conventions.

### **OGL, True20. C&C etc.**

Strictly speaking due to license restrictions and mechanical differences, OGL games (Mongoose, AEG), True20 or Mutants & Masterminds (Green Ronin), or even Pathfinder (Paizo) and Castles & Crusades (Troll Lord) are not D20 games. That sentence should be sufficiently clear to any reasonable person or even a lawyer. From the OGL license two fairly diverse games are examined here, specifically OGL Ancients which covers the Greek and Egyptian ancient world, OGL Cybernet, cyberpunk roleplaying, both from Mongoose and Spycraft from AEG. From the latter group the two titles will serve, and of course Pathfinder and Castles & Crusades.

It is unsurprising to discover that OGL Ancients includes setting specific information within a D20-style game. There are the well-known ability scores, there are classes, there are skills, feats and so forth. What is interesting is the inclusion system modifications for social class backgrounds (e.g., hardy slaves receive +2 Con), regional backgrounds (wily Cretans receive +2 to Bluff and Sense Motive), and potential divine patronage. Further character classes are likewise orientated towards the realistic; aristocrats, artificers, bards (musicians), courtesans etc. are staple. The religion and magic system is likewise highly orientated towards the setting and uses entirely different mechanics (skill-based, sustained by hit points) to the D20 line.

In addition, a notable change from the D20 line is the inclusion of an active defense (e.g., shield blocks) as in combat as



a contested roll as the rule. If a hit is scored a coverage check is made, then damage is applied, with a reduction (like BRP-based games) in damage based on the type of attack. Greivous wounds (greater than the average of Str+Con) do temporary Strength damage. Equipment is purchased in the coin of the realm, rather than the generic, and is specified to region and culture with a rather good reference to herbs. Artificiers will be delighted to discover there is an entire chapter dedicated to the construction of technological marvels.

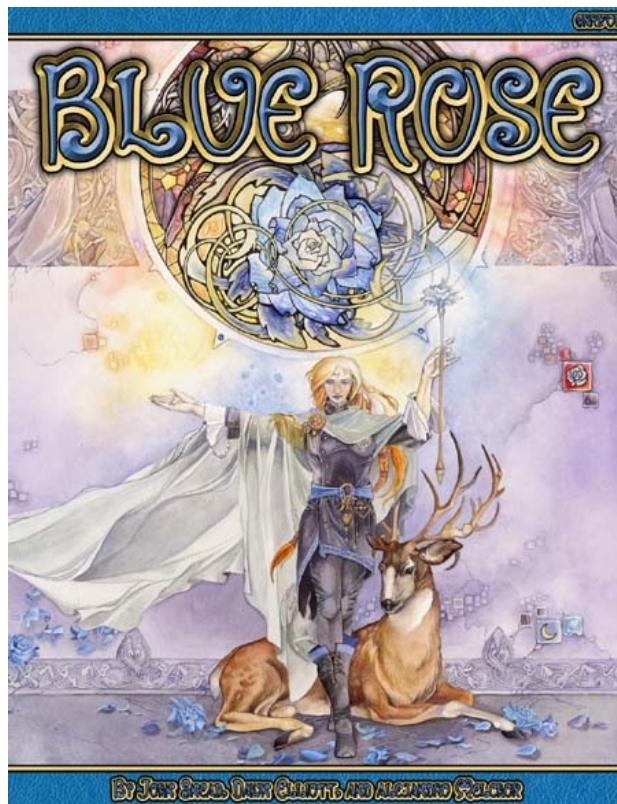
Likewise OGL Cybernet also uses some setting-specific rules variations. For example, in a nod to the genre, cybernetics eat away the character's charisma-derived Self score. Pre-adventuring occupations provide minor benefits before the character moves on to their classes with their specific features and talent trees. Again, it's a fairly normal course here; familiar abilities, hit dice, skills and feats. There is setting-based equipment such as drugs and poisons with some appropriate addiction and overdosing rules for the former.

The equipment list gives a range of appropriate goods for the world; guns, armour and vehicles are the norm, but with a handy collection of gadgets. Combat follows the D20 Modern norm, and it was unsurprising, yet disappointing, to see the broken burst and autofire rules transposed thoughtlessly. There is a cybernetics chapter with various limbic, sensory and mental enhancers. Finally, there is a web designed as per many other games as a giant cinematic virtual reality.

Spycraft, AEG's venture into the OGL world, is a game of modern agents with a cinematic bent. "Departments" fulfill the same game benefits as "race" in D&D, with classes appropriate to the genre. Interesting innovations to the standard benefits include Budget Points, a sort of wealth level and Gadget Points, doled out by the Agency for the secret missions. In addition, levels increase Defense and Initiative bonus; armor adds damage resistance rather than add to defense. There are also "backgrounds" for the character which normally provide a negative to the character (a nemesis, a debt etc), but literally build character by providing a bonus to experience. Level increases also give "Action Dice" for each play session that add to die rolls.

With genre specific skills, feats and gear (quite an extraordinary array), the combat system also contains a few divergent ideas. Whilst largely the same as d20 games, it is notable that the autofire and burst rules actually work. Further there is an excellent distinction between wound points (based on the constitution ability) and vitality points which develop like hit points. The first represent how much damage a character can take, the second how long they can stay in a combat situation before being wounded. Appropriately for the genre an entire chapter is dedicated to vehicle chases.

Originating from Blue Rose, a romantic-fantasy game, True20 contains a number of mechanical innovations whilst still being an obvious descendent of the D20 species. It uses the standard abilities, but rather than having a score it only cares about the modifier. Instead of a range of classes, it uses only three roles (Adept, Expert, Warrior) with a core ability. Heroes also gain benefits of



a conviction a modest fate point and Reputation. Saving throws bonuses can vary according to role. There are skills and feats which operate as expected, with a small selection which are specific to each role. Powers (spells etc) are treated like a skill test with a fatigue check following in some cases; some can be maintained with a concentration test.

In True20, everything is resolved with the d20 - even hit points. Attack rolls are made against Defense that does not include armour. Armour adds to the character's toughness saving throw to avoid damage, which has a target number increasing to the damage. For every five points that the throw is saved by, the character loses a level of condition. Thankfully, the autofire rules in T20 are not broken either - an attack is resolved normally with additional damage caused by the degree of success. One overly heroic oddity is that no matter how hard the saving throw is, a natural 20 always avoids damage. It stretches the imagination to think of this in some cases.

Mutants & Masterminds explicitly states itself as a d20-based superhero game using the OGL. The default "power level", a superhero equivalent to character level, is 10. Power level determines power points which in turn is used to purchase (like the Hero system of old), abilities, combat and saving throw bonuses, skills, feats and powers. The maximum ranks in the aforementioned are limited by power level. Drawbacks add to the reserve of power points. The system is, effectively, classless although not quite levelless. Character improvements are achieved through "Award Points", analogous to experience points and game-play modifications are achieved through "Hero Points", given when the character suffers a setback.

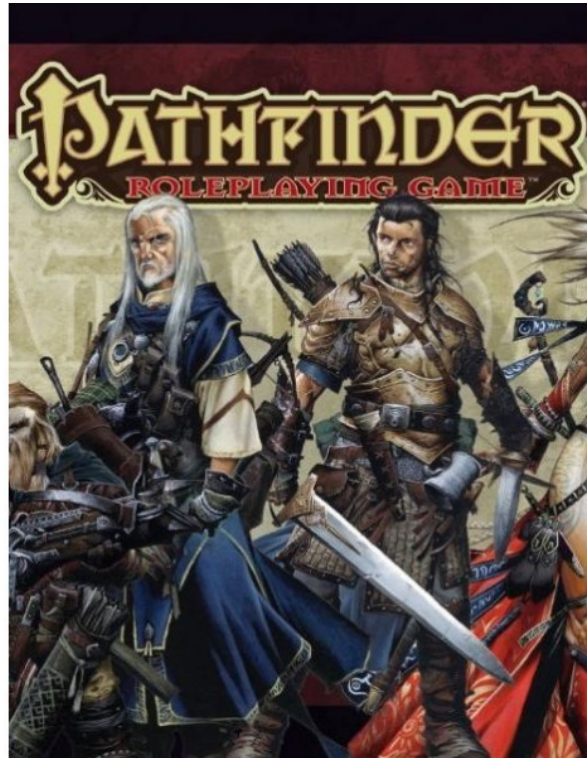
Also taking a leaf out of the Hero System's book, M&M's power structure follows the same general principles of having a costing system derived base power plus extras minus flaws - but in this case it uses addition and subtraction rather than the somewhat more complex multiplication and division system. The damage system is similar to that used in True20 - there are no hit points as such, but rather saving throws against damage with status conditions.

Returning to fantasy variants of D20, Castles & Crusades (Troll Lord Games), using the OGL license, is a particularly radical variant. Whilst roughly based on the d20 mechanics (its own system is called the SIEGE Engine), it removes most of the skills and feats found in D20 in favour of extra classes. Deliberately aimed for quick resolution rather than detailed rules, C&C uses a simplified mechanic where some of a character's attributes are allocated as Primes. Primes have a base target number of 12, whereas other non-Prime attributes have a base of 18 - hence they are easier to succeed at. Many of the class abilities harken back to early editions of Dungeons & Dragons, for example, the range of abilities given to Rogues, or the extra attacks for Fighters. Whereas D20 moved many class abilities to Feats, largely available to all and the matter of selection, C&C has put them back into classes and made their acquisition automatic. This "old school" approach however includes some of the less enjoyable aspects of early edition D&D; such as variable experience points per class and extremely low hit points at first level.

### **Pathfinder and D&D 4th Edition**

On the other end of the scale is Pathfinder (Paizo), certainly the most well-known and most explicit derivation of Dungeons & Dragons 3.5, even to the extent that it is referred to by many fans as D&D 3.75, although for obvious reasons the publishers would officially object to such a designation. In Pathfinder the D20 System Reference Document has been thoroughly reviewed with numerous minor modifications, the total of which does indeed make a thorough revision, and not a new game as such. So much is similar to be expected; abilities, races, classes, skills, feats and the basic resolution.

But the changes are notable and have largely met with approval. The skill system is streamlined with a standard +3 bonus to class skills, a bonus is given to preferred class, there's Wizard specialisations and Sorcerer bloodlines, changes to Barbarian rage, Clerical abilities to turn undead has been expanded, Druidic 'wild shape' now equates with other polymorph spells, Monks have a ki pool, magic item creation no longer costs XP, level 0 spells are unlimited, there's many more feats, and the much plagued grappling rules have been simplified as part of "combat maneuvers". There are optional XP charts for slow, medium or fast progression, animal companions and familiars were given equivalent rules,



A question can be raised on whether Dungeons & Dragons, 4th edition, is really a D20 game. Certainly the core mechanic is identical; roll d20, add modifiers, beat target number ("Difficulty Class"). The game explicitly states that it is based around simple rules with many exceptions, and the specific rule trumps the general rule. Abilities, classes, levels, and races are virtually identical, although there is some additions in the latter with the Dragonborn, Elderan and Tieflings. Alignments have been cut down from the law-chaos/good-evil complex to just five.

Much of D&D4e is about powers; defined as "at will", "per encounter" or "daily". This includes spells from previous editions and various combat maneuvers. The number of skills has been pared down to a mere 17 with the fine-grained 5% distinction removed for "trained" and "untrained" categories. In contrast there are some 150 feats with some 90% being orientated to combat; likewise with the wide quantity of powers nearly all are orientated towards combat situations with only a handful serving different purposes.

What is interesting about these two lines is how deeply they have divided the D20 and D&D playing community from significant differences in design. Whilst D&D and D20 were synonymous for the better part of a decade the differences between D20 and D&D4e are sufficiently great that perhaps over half the 3.x D&D community have moved to Pathfinder, whereas others have made the transition to D&D4e. Obviously there is some crossover between the two, but it must be stated from a considered opinion that it is Pathfinder that more accurately represents the D20 lineage than D&D4e.

### **Supplements: Best and Worst**

There is a veritable mountain of D20 supplements and as a result of the OGL there is also an enormous variety of quality. One purpose of reviews is to ensure that the consumers come to purchase a product with some knowledge, least the engage in the heinous crime of sharing documents whether in person or by a digital media. This does not pretend to

be a comprehensive justification on why some supplements come into the "best" category and whilst others fall into the "worst", although at least some minimal explanation is given.

In the best category, Green Ronin's "Testament" must surely receive mention, the first thorough undertaking of the Biblical period with great attention to stylistic issues. Malhavoc's "Hyperconscious", an expansion for psionics consistently receives good reviews for an area that has always been somewhat difficult in D&D. Also from the same company, Monte Cook's "Ptolus" receives recognition and one of the most detailed settings ever produced, although for pure inspiration "Nyambe", based in sub-Saharan Africa, receives recognition as a quality product.

The D20 version of "Oriental Adventures", making ample use of the setting of Legend of the Five Rings, justifiably received the 2002 Ennie Award. For a completely independent gamesystem which has not been reviewed above (insufficiently familiar with it), "Star Wars d20" consistently receives good reviews - and keeping in mind this was during the releases of the dreadful pre-Trilogy films. Finally, "Book of the Righteous" is consistently recognised as being a very well executed supplement.

Picking the worst is often more fun, because of the sheer incredulity of some of the design decisions. "The Book of Vile Darkness" is universally mocked for trying to describe 'evil' in terms that is merely slightly kinky. "Dragon Lords of Melniboné", from Chaosium of all people, is often cited as a poor example of cut-and-paste, and search-and-replace from Stormbringer and Elric. The first d20 supers game, "The Foundation" receives note for poor production qualities and numerous textual errors, with a rather sparse attention to actual rules.

"Gary Gygax's World Builder" (Troll Lord) is often criticised for being essentially a book of lists with an AD&D1e feel and with about as much attention to facts. Contrary to the title it doesn't really help build worlds. It receives some fame for having a verbose description of a brick. Certainly however for a tedious book of lists, the appropriately subtitled "Nuisances: Random Piles of Crap for Fantasy Roleplaying Games" (Skirmisher Publishing) is certainly most deserving in the "worst" category, including such classy items as a table for Random Monster Pornography.

*'A block of clay hardened by drying in the sun or burning in a kiln. Bricks come in numerous shapes and sizes. Bricks come in numerous densities and hardness depending on the baking process, parent material and the material mixed with it for hardening (pebbles, hay, grass, twigs ect[sic]).'*

### **The Future After D20 and OGL**

With the old d20/D&D community irrevocably split into two strongly competing game lines and various spin-off games certainly lacking the combined market push to even revive an equivalent flurry of activity it would seem that whilst the D20 line will continue to be played and the supplements used, the sheer volume of production of line-items is in a state of torpor which, given the quality of much of the material is pretty much quite a good thing.

By the same token many of the design considerations of D20 have led to a general improvement in RPG design as a whole. The popularisation of consistent mechanics with at least a degree of realism has meant that the enormous quantity of fantasy heartbreakers of the 1980s and 1990s is hopefully at a (near) end. Future developments will build on the successes of D20 design and hopefully so will licensing. Next time, perhaps even a genuine free license will be considered.

# NATASCHA

## “TASH” KESHELL: AN AD&D CHARACTER

*by Stew “Danger” Wilson*

*Stew Wilson runs a 'blog primarily dedicated to generating characters in different game systems. In this instance, he tries his hand at AD&D first edition, a game which he was quite unfamiliar with. The process both illustrates some of the gnomic reasoning used in said game as the precursor of the d20 system as well as providing a useful and interesting character at the end of it.*

The Game: Advanced Dungeons and Dragons 1e

The Publisher: TSR Games

Degree of Familiarity: None whatsoever

Books Required: As is a running theme with **D&D**, both the **Player's Handbook** and **Dungeon Master's Guide**

Something quite strange happened on the way to the circus. By which I mean the pub. It was a couple of weeks ago, on our way home from a wander up to Homebase to get some picture frames. As stereotypical a Sunday afternoon as one could want: I had just finished a pint of Hurricane Jack, we were waiting on a stack of onion rings or something similar that we intended to rebrand as “Lunch”, and I got the Urge to check out the local charity shop.

It's a good charity shop. I've found all manner of gaming books in there: Ars Magica 4th edition (which I had, sold, had again, sold again, got in PDF, then forgot about for roughly ten years), the Heavy Gear corebook—hell, I have to remind myself that I don't like high-crunch fantasy heartbreakers or I'd be down another fiver. But this time, I found something I knew I had to pick up. With a copyright date of 1978, no less. The first edition Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Player's Handbook and Dungeon Master's Guide, along with the first Fiend Folio.

I have no particular love for D&D. I'd not played any edition before 3.0, and that was far better at being the engine for a video game than it was as the basis of a roleplaying game. Worse, it spawned the D20 system, a horrible mess that few publishers bothered to properly divest of board-game trappings and even then it wasn't good unless it was so stripped-down as to be unrecognisable: True20 and various Microlite games almost get there. But this is the first edition of AD&D. It's a piece of gaming archaeology, and on that note alone I had to pick it up, if only to see how far we've come.

For those keeping score? We've come a long way, baby.

### **Creating the Player Character**

After the preface, the PHB moves straight into the section on Character Abilities: Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, Dexterity, Constitution, and Charisma. Only then do I realise that 4e is the first game that includes the means of generating Abilities in the PHB. Here, I'm told that the DM will let me know what method we're using.

Since I'm my own DM, I open the DMG. Wow. To say that this book is disorganised is like saying that the Pope has



been known to defecate in copses (to met a mixaphor). The contents page breaks everything down with headings and subheadings, but in the book itself the text is all sans-serif, with almost no difference between any level of heading. Keywords don't jump out at you, they're obfuscated. For nothing else, it makes me long for the high-crunch weirdness of AlphaOmega, because those guys know design like nothing else.

Flipping through the pages, I note that yes, there is a discussion on dice probabilities on the first page, including demonstration of linear/bell curves (with handy graphs). Please note that we've not got to the mechanics yet.

### Character Abilities

Right. Five methods for determining ability scores. 4d6 drop lowest, 3d6 twelve times choose the highest six, roll six sets in order and pick the highest of each, and roll up 12 sets of 6 and pick the highest. I choose option 2: generate 12 scores, pick the 6 highest, and assign them as I will.

Normally, I'd turn to [random.org](http://random.org) to generate my scores, but as these books predate the web, I'm using good old-fashioned six-siders. With a flick of the wrist, I've got 14, 9, 13, 10, 8, 9, 11, 15, 12, 11, 11, 15. Putting them in order and dropping the lowest six, that's 15, 15, 14, 13, 12, 11. Right, back to the book. Oh, bugger...

See, both races and classes have limitations on stats. While the racial prerequisites get stated explicitly in a table, class restrictions are not. And, oh fuck, this includes different strength maxima for male and female characters. Definitely a product of its time. Paying attention to the wording in the book means I can whip up a table of requisites, so I can work out what classes I can go for. No wonder AD&D character creation has a reputation for taking fucking ages. More fun: what's the minimum Dex for a Ranger? Normally, when not stated, it's a 6, but 6 is only listed as the minimum for Magic-Users; other classes don't get a look-in. Though that's the only table where this is the case... it's hard work, and I need to check my numbers twice. Why the hell couldn't classes get the same summary as races?



*course. What flavour, sir?*

*Ranger? Of*

**EDIT:** Okay, now I'm reading the class descriptions, the stats are spelled out. But it's still not tabulated anywhere. Back to the plot. What there was of it.

### Race and Class



For reference, the four core classes are Cleric, Fighter, Magic-User, and Thief. They have a pattern of needing one 9 (Wis, Str, Int, Dex in order), one 3 (Dex, Int, Str, Wis in order), and 6s elsewhere. Oddly, the book states that characters without a couple of 15+ stats are likely hosed—I'm paraphrasing, due to Gygaxian description. Each class also has subclasses: Druid, Paladin, Ranger, Illusionist, and Assassin. The Monk is also available, and the Bard's kicking around in an appendix. Subclasses don't get the benefit of having one stat at 3, and often require multiple high stats.

Anyway. With that stat spread, I can get any of the four core classes. Paladin is out (as I don't have a 17), as is Illusionist (no 16), and Monk (only 2 15s). I can scrape my way into Ranger, Assassin, or Druid. Assassins are level-capped for everyone but humans and half-orcs, Druids likewise for half-elf and half-orc, and Rangers are level-capped half-elf and human only. Also notable that only dwarf, elf, half-orc, and halfling give racial trait modifications.

In order to explore where some of my common choices come from, I'm going to make a human Ranger, who in this edition is a bit more like a commando. I assign scores as follows: STR 15 INT 13 WIS 14 DEX 11 CON 15 CHA 12. This gives me derived features; I note only those that are above or below normal.

### **Class Features**

On to class features. A Ranger starts with 2d8 hit points, but gets an extra d8 every level. This is in contrast to Fighters and Paladins, who have 1d10 each level. I roll 7, 5, and add 1 to each for Constitution (starting with two hit-dice is one of the major advantages of choosing a Ranger). 14 hit points isn't bad at all. The character adds her level to damage rolls against "giant-class" enemies, surprises on a 1-3, suffers surprise on a 1, and can track overground with 90% chance to follow, with modifiers (and further rules for underground tracking). There's lots of other bonuses at higher levels: at 8th level you get Druid spells; 9th brings Magic-User spells; 10th allows magic items pertaining to clairaudiance, clairvoyance, ESP, or telepathy and attracts 2-24 followers.

As for restrictions, Alignment needs to be Good, and we can't hire anyone until 8th level. Also, no group can have more than three Rangers, and each Ranger can only own what he can carry or fix to her mount—at least until 10th level, when she can build a stronghold.

Interestingly, all Fighter classes can attack multiple times per round depending on level: for Rangers, that's 1/round at 1-8, 3/2 rounds at 8-14, and 2/round 15+. That's not the interesting part: against anything with less than one d8 hit die, all fighters can attack once per level per round. I think this is the genesis of minions, which other games call "extras" or "mooks". Another idea that's a lot older than I first thought.

### **Alignment**

I know I need to make this character Good. For a change, I go with Lawful Good: I think they've become a Ranger in order to bring the laws of civilisation to the wild lands where monsters still roam.

### **Character Hit Points**

Now, we have a discussion of Hit Points. Which is good because it points out that Hit Points are nothing more than luck, combat skill, and magical or divine protection. It also mentions that the DM may want to track HP, telling the characters only how they feel. Which is cool.

### **Establishing the Character**

For some reason, I'm seeing this character as female. Natasha "Tash" Keshell. Yes, her father's Lord Keshell. Yes, the one with the thing for spikes. Her mother smuggled her out of Arnheim when she was six years old. All she remembers of her life before then is high stone walls, spikes, and blood. So much blood. She grew up the apprentice to a stonemason in Blackheath, and acted as his proxy to the dwarves who owned the nearby mines. She grew up strong and smart, and was all set to inherit the stonemason's business. One night, the warning horn didn't blow to warn the town of a raiding party of monsters. Tash only just escaped with her life. The monsters took over both the town and the nearby dwarven mine. She fled into the night, dedicating her life to killing the monsters who took away her adopted home. She's come to Netherwell to rest and recover.

### **Character Languages**

I have three bonus languages from Intelligence. I pick up Dwarvish (from her backstory), Orcish, and Kobold (from tracking her foes). Tash can also speak Lawful Good. Alignment Language is a stupid concept, but it's a feature that is there and can come in handy when interacting with NPCs of similar alignment.

### **Money**

We start with 5d4x10 gp: 130gp A suit of scale-mail and a small shield does for protection and costs 55gp. At this point, I should probably choose Weapon Proficiencies—they're not picked when choosing a class or anything like that. Rangers get 3. I quickly get lost in the tremendous amount of names for polearms. How am I supposed to know what a Lucerne Hammer or a Spetum look like, anyway? Anyway. Shortbow, hand-axe, and long-sword. Done. Purchasing one of each costs 31gp. Two dozen arrows is another 2gp. A riding-horse is 25gp. Saddle and saddlebags are 14. I'm assuming the bit, bridle, harness, and saddle-blanket are all-in. With 3gp left, I go for a week of rations.

From here, the book swiftly turns into a massive list of spells. Since we're not creating a high-level Ranger, we don't need to care. All of these rules have been in the first 40 pages. Spells take up the next sixty. That takes effort, man.

### **Miscellanea**

Though I've made a character, I still think something is missing. Playing old D&D-based games introduced me to the bizarre idea of THAC0, and I wonder if it's in this edition. I flick through the DMG, and come across the attack matrices. These are what would eventually become THAC0, which would then be discarded in favour of rolling high vs. AC. Fortunately, the Fighter/Paladin/Ranger table's easy to cook down: d20 vs (20-AC), with +2 to the die on every odd-numbered level, or +1 per level if the DM's feeling gracious. Since I'm a bit of a git, I'm not feeling gracious at all. And I was lenient with prices for tack for the horse. I've got my eye on me.

Also, saves. These are by class and level, so I note the starting ones now. All of these are d20 roll-over. I think that's everything.

## **Tash Keshell, Level 1 Human Ranger**

**STR 15 INT 13 WIS 14 DEX 11 CON 15 CHA 12**

**HP 14**

**Armor Class 5**

**To-Hit** 1d20 vs (20 - defender's AC), +2/odd-numbered level

**Saves** Paralyse, poison, death magic 14; petrification, polymorph 15; rod, staff, wand 16; breath weapon 17; spell 17

**Weight Allowance** Normal 400gp; Heavy 700gp; V. heavy 1150gp

**Open Doors** on 1-2

**Bend Bars/Lift Gates** 4%

**Languages** Common, Orcish, Kobold, Dwarvish

**System Shock/Resurrection** 91%/94%

**Max. Henchmen** 5 (0 before Level 8)

**Surprise** 3-in-6/1-in-6

**Damage Bonus:** Add level to damage roll vs. giant-class creatures

**Tracking:** Overground 90% +2 per extra creature, -10 per day since creatures came, -25 per hour of rain. Underground (only if observed less than 30 mins ago), 65% -10 using a door or stairs, -20 using trapdoor, -30 uses chimney or concealed door, -40 through secret door.

**Equipment:** Scale mail, Small shield, Shortbow (2, 1-6), Long-sword (1-8/1-12) and scabbard, Hand-axe (1-6/1-4), 24 arrows. Light horse with large saddlebags. 1 week's rations. (623 gp weight all carried)

# EFFECTIVE COMBAT TACTICS FOR ASSASSINS

*By Johnn Four*

To give you a taste of Assassin's Amulet, here is a very brief excerpt from the GM Advice chapter.

Many GMs struggle with running killer NPCs. One big goal of the book is to arm you with enough actionable advice that you'll scare the crap out of your players if they ever catch wind of an NPC assassin ever again.

Part of this GM training involves learning some general principles of engagement when running assassins.

I hope you find this advice useful.

\* \* \*

Chief caveat for assassins in combat situations: avoid combat if possible.

The most favorable combat situations involve fighting with allies. However, assassins tend to work alone, which causes tactical problems.

In all the tactics below, hit-and-run is the only reliable method to combine with any combat tactic. Using an assassin's amulet in combination as a means of escape makes this even more reliable.

## **1. Maximize Sneak Attack Opportunities**

Sneak attack is the best option for assassins in combat. Do anything you can to give NPC assassins this opportunity so they can cause damage while trying to get away.

It is difficult, though not impossible, to flank an opponent without an ally - anything that removes an opponent's Dexterity bonus or causes him to become flat-footed will grant such an opportunity.

Feint/Improved Feint: using the feint option of the Bluff skill, the assassin spends his first round trying to cause the opponent to be off-balance or otherwise unready.

This denies the opponent his Dexterity bonus to his Armor Class on the assassin's next attack, giving the killer a sneak attack.

This tactic provokes an attack of opportunity, so use it carefully. Give the assassin the Improved Feint feat when it becomes available.

Foes defeat this tactic using Sense Motive, if they have that skill, or a raw check aided by their Wisdom modifier.

Therefore, an assassin should scout out foes to determine their ability to sense others' motives or see through such tricks as feinting.

The killer must know in advance if a foe can defeat feint. This saves the assassin a full round of futility plus exposure to a potential attack of opportunity.

Invisibility: except for class dipping with caster levels, which is not recommended, becoming invisible means using a magic item and the Use Magic Device skill.

An invisible assassin initiating combat denies their opponent a Dexterity bonus to that attack, and so the foe must suffer

a sneak attack.

Blindness: like invisibility, if the opponent is blind, the assassin is effectively invisible (see above).

Possessing the feat chain Critical Focus and Blinding Critical is helpful, though unreliable, as the NPC must engage in at least one round of combat with no advantages, and he must succeed on a critical hit, which can never be counted on.

Eggshell grenades-pepper (from Oriental Adventures) are a mundane device that require use as a thrown weapon. With a successful hit affecting a five-foot area, the opponent is blind, though he gets a save to avoid the circumstance. Any magic item that causes blindness will also do this.

## 2. Single Striking

A one-shot kill relies on high Strength combined with Power Attack and using a two-handed weapon, granting half-again Strength bonus on attacks. Unfortunately, Strength is generally a tertiary stat for assassins, following Dexterity and Intelligence.

Focus on causing as much damage as possible with a single attack using magic, magic items and equipment to eke out all the extra damage you can.

Enhance this tactic with Dodge, Mobility and Spring Attack, as well as the vital strike feat chain. While this is feat intensive and takes away valuable feat slots to make an effective assassin combatant, the three feats mentioned allow him to strike without attacks of opportunity, so offer better survivability.

Having the Quick Draw feat also gets the weapon in hand quickly. Combine this with sneak attack and this could be a one-shot kill.

## 3. Two Weapon Fighting

Using two weapons in combat means more opportunities for sneak attack. The assassin should possess the Weapon Finesse feat to rely on the character's Dexterity instead of Strength. While effective, this combat tactic does not cause as much damage as the single strike tactic, though it uses far fewer feat slots for combat.

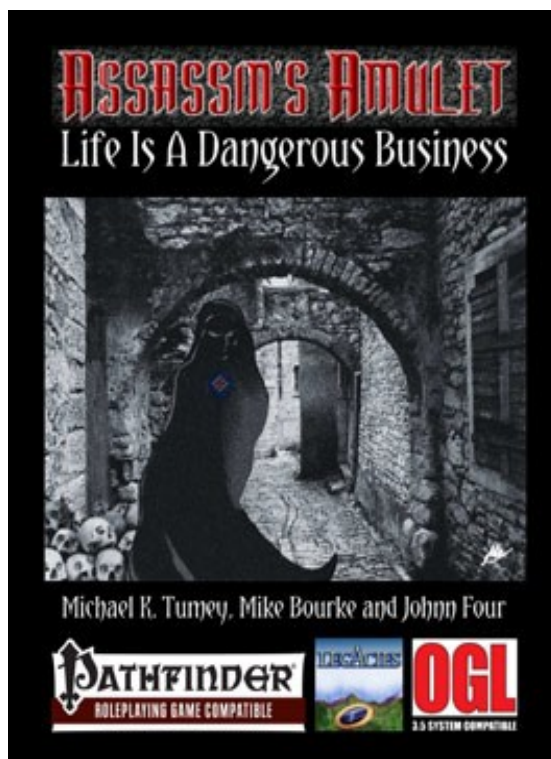
## 4. Sniping Using Ranged Weapons

If the assassin can prepare to choose a hidden spot to attack from this can be an effective combat tactic. However, it requires time unseen to prepare such an opportunity.

The assassin must hide, shoot at their target, and then move to another location to repeat the process. The assassin must be skilled with ranged weapons and will spend his combat feat slots doing so.

This tactic does not accommodate being caught unawares and forced into melee, so the two previous combat tactics are more reliable.

Take the Arcane Trickster prestige class instead of Assassin so ranged sneak attack is possible to make this a more



viable combat tactic.



*I've gained a few levels since 1978!*

## 5. Using Traps

Indirect combat offers a usable strategy, but also requires some time in preparation prior to engaging in combat. Simple is sometimes most effective.

For example, tossing caltrops in areas of expected movement for oncoming combatants or use of tanglefoot bags.

Consider allowing assassins to use portable traps either mundane or arcane, where the assassin can arm, disarm, move and rearm such a device in a move-and-wait or move-and-run-away tactic.

Always consider poisoning any blade, ranged weapon or traps to improve damage and escape chances, as well.

\* \* \*

If you liked these tips, you should check out two more previews of Assassin's Amulet:

### 50 Assassin Hooks

Assassins make awesome NPCs. Thing is, they often have paper-thin character development. Well, you can fix this right now. Start by giving your next assassin one of these tasty hooks.

<http://www.campaignmastery.com/blog/50-assassin-hooks/>

### How to Roleplay Assassins

Assassins should be compelling in every encounter in which they appear. This excerpt describes how to run assassins as compelling characters to roleplay and deadly adversaries to fight.

<http://www.campaignmastery.com/blog/roleplaying-assassins/>

See also: <http://LegaciesCampaignSetting.com>



# STOP THE MADNESS!

*By Poison Shadow*

*The following "anti-d20" rant was originally published in 2007 at the Poison Shadow website, dedicated to the 7th Sea RPG and the roll-and-keep system, but has been unavailable for some time. Attempts to contact the webmasters to confirm republication were not successful. The site, from what can be ascertained has not been updated in any way since 2009 and in the interest in keeping an on-topic mighty fine rant in circulation (no endorsement one way or another suggested) the "Stop The Madness!" rant is reprinted here...*

As someone wiser than I once said, "I don't want to get off on a rant, here..."

Oh, wait. Yes, I do.

You may have gotten the impression that the creator(s) of this website do not particularly care for the d20 system. That's not exactly true.



The creator(s) of this website despise the d20 system. We don't dislike it, we don't think it's overpowered. We hate it. It makes us want to stop playing RPG's. We hate it that much.

Don't get us wrong. The system is good for what it's intended to be used for. Granted, we have yet to figure out what that use is, beyond satisfying some puerile need to compensate for genital shortcomings by playing some overpowered, indestructible tank of a character with epic levels and more hit points than a small army in most other systems.

What are the strengths of d20 supposed to be? They say it's simple to learn. Right. Sure, a couple of things are simpler. Three saving throws are simpler than five saving throws because  $3 < 5$ . But then how do you figure out what you rolled? "I got a 7. But I have a +2 Luck Bonus from my class ability and a +1 Skill bonus for my Wisdom and a +3 enchantment bonus from my cloak and a +1 Vile bonus from that feat I took, so...did I make it?"

"Well, let's see. The DC is 10, +4 for the 4th level caster, +2 for the spell focus feat, +2 for the specialty, but -3 for the...wait, did I roll for his armor spell failure?"

Whatever.

What's another strength? Oh, I know...it's modular! Oh, thank God! Everything can plug into everything else, and you have unlimited options for your character. Hey, guess what: I don't need unlimited options for my character. Did I think it sucked that Elves couldn't be Paladins? No, I didn't, because they could be fighter/clerics, and that was good enough. Being able to play an Elven Paladin (or an Elven Fighter/Cleric...or just a Cleric with feats spent to enable longsword use...or whatever) is not worth the train wreck that the games become.

Well, think about it. Under what other rule set can you run to your nearest gaming store, drop a couple hundred dollars on rulebooks for Swashbuckling Adventures, Stargate SG-1, Unholy Avatars, and Liber Mortis and, that very same day, explore the Temple of Elemental Evil or the Death Star with your mixed party of fiendish fate witches, celestial Jaffa, and undead half-dragon artificers with celestial dire badger familiars? And then, when the day is done, the battle won, you can kick back with your newly-found +4 keen ghost touch bastard sword of wounding, bane vs. orcs (of dancing)—well, assuming you have a proficiency feat to spare—and plan your next mission: an assault on Mount Olympus where, thanks to the d20 system, the gods are conveniently statted for your butchering convenience.

Of course, you need a +4 keen lawful booger smasher...whatever...because you are going up against fiendish dire crocodile half-dragon monstrosities with character levels in the rogue class. Yes, that's right. Somewhere, there was a demon sitting around the abyss, bored, and he said, "Yanno, I think I want to go possess me a crocodile. Not just any crocodile, though. I want to possess a prehistoric crocodile, and luckily, there seems to be one bobbing around in yonder swamp." And he did. And two caves down, there was some dragon, who saw this flame-spewing crocodile and said, "Mmm, I gotta get me some of that!" And then, their twenty-foot long offspring that hiss and smell like sulfur somehow learned how to sneak around without being seen, and then backstab you for extra damage.

They don't have hands!

Don't even get me started on the phase spiders with levels in the barbarian class, or umber hulks...umber hulks for God's sake...with levels as a monk! No one liked monks in the original game because they weren't appropriate to the setting. Now they're back, and training giant beetle-men in unarmed combat?

How can something be both celestial and dire, anyway? And when exactly did dragons become the mac daddies of the game? "Holla holla, playa. I got me a cave full of gold and I just knocked up a giant spider. Word."

It's not uncommon for things to have 400 hit points. Not gods. Not great wyrm dragons. Just very large displacer beasts. Umm. Yeah.

Now, feats? An absolute abortion. "They allow you to specialize your character." Like hell. You can pick like two of them. "I want to play an elven knight who is trained in the katana and an expert at trick shots with the bow." Oh, sorry! Those each require a feat, and you only get one. Maybe at 3rd level. Of course, then you can't get extra hit points. Or better saving throws. Or more attacks. Or...

Whatever! We could improve our saving throws in 2nd edition, too. It was called a Ring of Protection. Put it on, get the bonus. The end. Now, Rings of Protection don't even give you a bonus to your saving throws. Only to your AC. Or was that to your natural armor? No, those are amulets. Oh, thank God d20 is so much simpler, right?

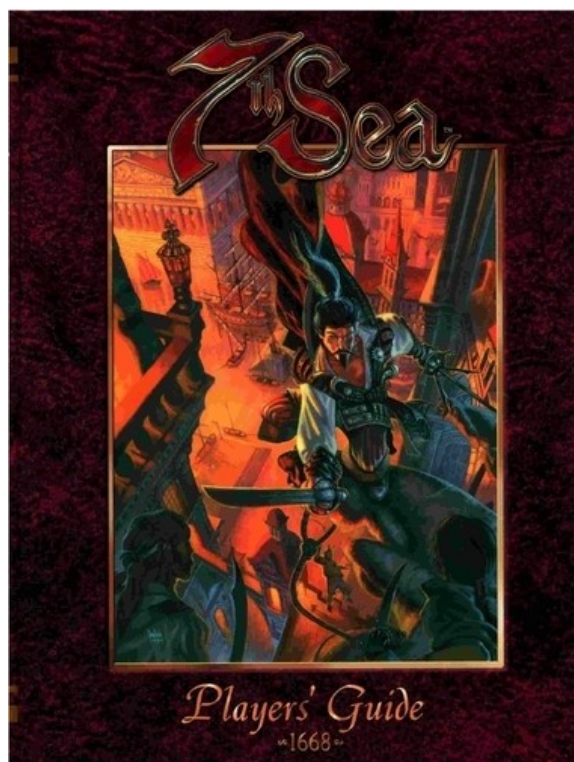
Do we need Plug & Play in our Role Playing Games? "With d20 rules, you can take a Fate Witch from Théah and drop her right into your Farscape game." Guess what. I don't want Fate Witches in my Farscape game! There aren't any Fate Witches in Farscape! Farscape doesn't need Fate Witches. If I'm a player and I want to play a Fate Witch in Farscape, should the GM say, "Oh, well, because it's d20, I can do that, no problem?" No! If I'm that player., I should

be shot and killed! You know why? Because I'm too stupid to live!

This isn't meant solely as a critique of the d20 system, though I could go on at length about its shortcomings and, more importantly, its base hypocrisies. I do think it's worth noting that the d20 system and the OGL are praised by some (mostly those who came up with the idea) as "saving" the role playing game industry. How magnanimous of Wizards of the Coast to offer to let other publishers use their mechanics...so long as they don't try to get too creative and so long as they pimp the Player's Handbook in a prominent place on the cover.

And then there's the unmitigated joy that is Swashbuckling Adventures.

Hell, AEG themselves say that it's all messed up. Look in the Knights & Musketeers book (which is utter crap, thank you, but that's another rant entirely)—it says right in there that 1st level characters don't have the abilities that a starting 7th Sea character does, so you have to advance them to 3rd or 5th level and lower the requirements for Prestige Class Swordsman Schools (and, what a mistake those were) to keep up. d20 spread its poison into 7th Sea, and what was the result? AEG kept putting out more crap books in the Swashbuckling Adventures line, and because it was modular, those in charge got the terrific idea that they could farm projects out to eleven different people and get one good product. Well, Knights & Musketeers showed us that was a myth, didn't it?



*Where did my game go?*

This, however, was only one among a number of actions ranging from poor business decisions to gross mismanagement (depending on who you believe). AEG scrapped the familiar 7th Sea name (which had been embraced by their previously loyal fans). They lost (or surrendered) their familiar [www.7thsea.com](http://www.7thsea.com) (go ahead and click on it if you want; there's nothing there) web address for the unintuitive [www.swashbucklingadv.com](http://www.swashbucklingadv.com). They put new products on the back burner to crank out a series of three d20-only supplements which were of absolutely no use to established fans of the game (and, according to many people, of little use to new d20 players, either). All of this was such a good idea that the company no longer publishes products under either name, and the line is continued only through the volunteer work of a handful of freelance writers and a website that is updated with a frequency that rivals the appearance of Hailey's Comet.

I certainly understand the appeal of attracting new players, and of expanding one's market. But AEG already had a rabid pool of supporters of the Roll and Keep system playing the Legend of the Five Rings game. We're talking about a group of people who were already committed to AEG, playing in a setting that had a definite, but completely

undetailed, swashbuckling-era region of the world already in place. The intelligent decision would have been to put out one book, not three, detailing conversion rules from 7th Sea to L5R, and vice-versa. Just like that, L5R players have new options for gaijin characters, 7th Sea players have new lands to explore with their characters, and sales of books

for both lines increase as everyone catches up with what they missed in the other game world. Instead, as we know, the brain trust at AEG set up a “real fire wall” between Théah and Rokugan, allowing for no official crossovers between systems. See above, in re: poor decisions and gross mismanagement. Thank God one of the most prevalent voices of that little nightmare appears to have been let go, “editorial fiats” and all. (Because the world is uniformly unjust, he will probably immediately be hired by Sword & Sorcery or Green Ronin or Chessex or some other company I actually respect, but that’s neither here nor there.)

Be that as it may, what’s done is done (and other phrases, as well). Now, we look to the future, such as it is, and any reasonable approach to the future demands that the line abandon d20 in all future publications (such as they are).

Don’t agree with me? Consider the facts.

The d20 market is bottoming out. Like the junk bond industry, a large number of people with very little ability jumped aboard the band wagon and glutted the market with inferior products in such volume that it finally cracked. While this gave a lot of untalented writers the opportunity to make a meager living (for a while) and pad their résumés, it did very little for the gaming community as a whole. Many of the small d20 publishers that popped up in the afterglow of the OGL have withered and died, and even established companies are putting out fewer and fewer products, relying on bargain-basement pdf sales to stay afloat.

(Thank God for the saving graces of d20 and its single-handed revivification of the market, huh?)

The d20 books for the line are savaged, even by fans of the system, for being poorly written, grossly unbalanced, and completely out of touch with the original game. The most active proponents of the d20 line have butchered the rules, replacing the cumbersome class system with d20 Modern, and supplementing the spotty coverage of the world (since older sourcebooks were not reprinted in their entirety for d20 only, thank God) by tacking on Ravenloft or other high-fantasy, non-Théan content. Since d20 fans are rewriting the rules anyway, let them do it on their own, without giving them new rules to rewrite in future products.

It takes resources to put out gaming materials, and AEG is not paying anyone anything to keep the world afloat. Dropping d20 from future products would reduce by half the time and energy needed to develop game statistics, and allow freelance writers to spend their time fine-tuning the traditional Roll and Keep elements.

AEG is grossly scaling back on d20 products, anyway. The new edition of L5R has abandoned its flirtation with d20 Rokugan entirely. Product lines like Farscape and Stargate SG-1 are lapsing left and right. No “single word” d20 books have been put out in ages, and the hundred-dollar World’s Largest Dungeon is a one-trick pony (though one can’t help noticing that breaking the three-digit barrier for cost has emboldened game manufacturers everywhere to increase their prices—well done, AEG). Last I heard, plans for the follow-up World’s Largest City have been tabled, if not scrapped outright.

Online participation in popular game-dedicated forums (e.g., Revenant’s message board, or Jack Harding’s compendium) suggest that Roll and Keep players grossly outnumber d20 players. While this is, admittedly, a self-selected and unscientific sample, it strongly suggests that the most avid fans of the game are also the least interested in seeing d20 support continue.

Will this be a popular stance? Maybe, maybe not. The beauty is, I genuinely don't care. I am not an employee of AEG or Wizards of the Coast. I am not a professional in the role playing game industry. I am a fan, nothing more, though I daresay I'm a reasonably intelligent one. I have nothing but love for the 7th Sea game, and I want to see it sail on with as much glory as its circumstances allow.

It's time to cut the ropes tying the line to the d20 system, before it drags the game under completely.

Oh, and one more thing.

Some of you may find the ideas presented at this website objectionable. You may choose to oppose them so long as you have breath in your body. Why, you may even feel that they are the worst idea in the entire history of bad ideas.

You— all of you — can feel free to fuck off and die. No one here will miss you, and if you look around, I suspect you'll find that not too many people will miss you anywhere else, either.

Meanwhile, I'll just stay here and fix all of your mistakes. Don't worry. It'll keep me plenty busy.



*Looks like an ideal place for ... land adventures*

# A YEAR WITH FANTASY CRAFT

**Karl David Brown**

*When D&D 3.5 was scrapped for 4th edition, a number of companies scrambled to provide a game for those who preferred 3.5. While it looks like Pathfinder (aka 3.75) has seized the initiative, the latecomer, Fantasy Craft, deserves a very close look.*

There are many reviews of this game online and most are glowing, however, those who had only read through the book or had run a single play-test game wrote these reviews when the game was new. Here I provide an in-depth look at Fantasy Craft drawing on a year playing the game. While my review is positive, there is not one game for everyone. This review recounts my experiences with Fantasy Craft and why it suits my needs. If you are wondering, “Is Fantasy Craft the game for me?” then this review will help. I’ll take time to point out some of the game’s FEATURES. If you do decide to play Fantasy Craft, then to help you get started and get the most out of this game I offer TIPS for understanding the rules and TRICKS for extending what you can do with them.

## **A personal historical context**

In the early 80’s I discovered roleplaying games and soon after AD&D. As teenagers we had many good weekends exploring dungeons and creating our own fantasy worlds. Over the two decades that followed we came to understand the deep structure of the rules and created new races and classes, including dragons and giants well before the official versions. Second edition AD&D cleaned-up the layout, improved the clarity, and tweaked the rules just a little. We ate it up. You could use your old 1st edition stuff with the new edition but that was what was expected from a new edition in those days.

The 3rd edition of D&D felt like a betrayal. The ethos was lost, no longer was the game presented as a toolkit to build your own worlds; the gods of Greyhawk were in the core book as defaults! It seemed much of the ‘poetry’ was lost and replaced by mechanics and a battlemat. You couldn’t use your 1st and 2nd edition stuff with the new game because it was a totally new game. This was not a new edition, it was called D&D but that was about the only similarity. In time I played a few sessions of 3rd edition and had to admit it wasn’t a bad game; however, it just wouldn’t do what I wanted. The production quality of the new volumes fell. They were riddled with typos, poor writing, and ‘clunky’ rules. As the years went by numbers of AD&D players diminished. I wanted to find a game that captured the spirit of those first twenty years and encouraged creativity but used a modern set of rules.

My criteria were:

1. Mechanics that would allow for representatives of the iconic species of western mythology and fantasy literature
2. Wasn’t tightly linked to a specific world and ideally would not be presented with a setting.
3. Provides a toolkit for creating your own settings and encourages you to do so.
4. Rules detailed enough to delineate what is possible in unfamiliar settings.
5. Rules deep enough for the experienced gamer but not so complex that play slows to a crawl.



Your criteria might be different. Please note that I wasn't looking for something that would perfectly recreate AD&D.

### **Your Dungeon, Your Dragon, Your way**

Over the years I looked at numerous fantasy games trying to find a game that would replace 2<sup>nd</sup> edition AD&D by meeting my criteria. GURPS, Tunnels and Trolls 5.5, FATE 2e, and Legends of Anglere all deserve honourable mentions.

Increasingly new games came tailored for their own highly specific worlds and my hope of finding a good fantasy toolkit faded. Then I encountered the Fantasy Craft tag line "Your Dungeon, Your Dragon, Your way". This seemed to indicate that here was a game that put creative freedom back in my hands (criteria 2 & 3). I got my hands on the free preview. Fantasy Craft was a d20 game and therefore easier to find players for. The classes and species (races) allowed for all the classic fantasy genre archetypes even giants and dragons! (criterion 1). The game was well received by reviewers, so I took the plunge.

TRICK: Drakes are a PC species that looks like a classic dragon. They are probably only not called dragons so dragons can be D&D style monsters festooned with all manner of non-traditional magic. Call drakes dragons; make your players happy.

FEATURE: In Fantasy Craft what most fantasy games call races and sub-races are called species and sub-species; this is not just sensitive, it is also accurate. Oddly, the authors still use male pronouns throughout.

### **What you get for your money**

The cover of this big heavy tome is colour; the interior is black and white. Interior illustrations are good quality and frequent enough; moreover, they never feel like padding. Fantasy Craft is a stitch hardcover with pages of good quality paper able to withstand years of gaming table abuse. When asked on the forum the Crafty guys confirmed that this was a deliberate choice.

As a pdf image resolution is good, the document is searchable, and there are three layers of bookmarks. On the first page is a place to click to hide the page frames to save ink if you print pages. At 52.1MB it's on the big side but not overly so.

There is a lot of font 9 writing; reading cover to cover there are almost no typos and the writing is concise. There is very minimal fluff, a deliberate choice to keep the game a generic toolkit and deliver value. Other larger companies would have taken these rules padded them with fluff and spread them over four books. This single volume is very good value.

Interestingly, Fantasy Craft's development process predated both 4th ed D&D and Pathfinder. Fantasy Craft would have been released at the same time as these other games except Crafty felt compelled to delay release while they revised the rules top to bottom. When this occurs there was grumbling but the result is a faster, more elegant game than their SpyCraft system.

TIP: Character sheets are available as pdf's free from the Crafty or Fantasy Craft Database sites. A form fill-able pdf version enables you to store your character on your computer and email a copy to your referee.

TRICK: You can copy and paste text from the pdf into a word processor. This enables inexperienced players to make cheat sheets with their character's class abilities, spells etc.

### **General comments on the rules**

The core of Fantasy Craft is a simple mechanic familiar to most gamers: d20+modifiers, try to roll high. Many of the other rules are *altered* and *simplified* versions of the D20 or D&D rules. For example, combat in Fantasy Craft is very streamlined compared to 3.5 but also includes good game rules for actions like taunt and anticipate that ensure everyone, not just combat wombats, can contribute effectively. As you work with the rules you can feel the parts fitting together and you know the rules have been carefully thought through and tested.

The core book is a thick imposing tome but the bulk of the core book is actually made up of 'systems' and examples of the output of the systems. The thing with systems is you don't need to learn the all the options, only have an understanding of the steps involved. There is a system for creating PC's, a system for NPCs, a system for inventing modified equipment, a system for magic items, even a system for building worlds. With this book you could create enough new characters, monsters, inventions, magic items, and worlds to fill a lifetime of gaming and never buy another damn book if you wanted to.

Fantasy Craft is designed to be somewhat modular. For example, you don't have to use all the classes; you can build a world without spell-casters and your player character parties will still be functional in the game without having to carefully adjust all your encounters and adventures. Similarly, you can have a world without any magic items. You can build a world without any magic at all.

Narrative systems like FATE are also very flexible, narrative systems require everyone at the table to have a really good idea of what is possible in the setting. This is fine if you are playing Middle Earth, EarthSea, Narnia, or some other well-known setting but for original settings of your own devising you need some way of delineating what is possible. What can magic do? Can a dragon fly off with a knight? Can a giant outrun a horse? A good flexible but sufficiently detailed set of rules acts as an in game 'laws of physics' and thus set out what is possible within the game world. Fantasy Craft has sufficient detail for this function.

Fantasy Craft does have a system that puts some narrative control in the hands of players, action dice. Basically, these are like fate points used in some other games except they are a pool of dice rather than a pool of points. Players can spend and roll dice to confirm critical hits, improve skill rolls and with an optional rule introduce small narrative details.

TIP: Whether designing a PC, a monster or a world the first step described in Fantasy Craft is always to create a concept. This is important because without a previously thought out concept to guide your choices you could be overwhelmed by options.

TIP: Fantasy Craft is a D20 game with changes. Do not assume rules from other D20 games apply. The following differ from the D20 standard: lifestyle, reputation, size and strength, scaled weapons, non-magical healing, gear bonuses, class abilities and roles, magic, narrative control, and combat. These changes streamline play and increase flexibility. Changes to combat are discussed on page 203 of the book.

## An alternative to Dungeon and Dragons?

When learning a game I use an active read through approach; I read the book cover to cover building a character, a world, and an adventure as I go. Since I was looking for an 'update' for AD&D I decided to rebuild a diverse old home brew world built with AD&D. As far as being able to represent my vision including the diversity of that world, its cultures, species and people Fantasy Craft actually did a better job than AD&D.

It was pretty easy to find equivalents to most of the 'races' and 'sub-races' of AD&D, probably because the designers had built the game as a possible alternative for D&D3.5.

I was also able to generate PCs that were 'look alikes' for many iconic AD&D/D&D races including many that required optional or house rules in AD&D. In D&D 3.5 characters such as giants and golems required level adjustment and/or levels in a race-class. In D&D 3.5 you could begin as a small juvenile dragon or giant; however, these are often not the concepts most players actually want to play. They want to play adults. To my way of thinking, the D&D methods of dealing with large or odd species are unsatisfying and clunky. In Fantasy Craft these characters are balanced at first level as full grown, though inexperienced, adults. This is because the Crafty guys shed a lot of D&D baggage and reworked the rules to provide a game environment where odd species are balanced (criterion 1). Examples of these changes include: the Construct type does not get a big bonus to hit points, dragons (drakes in Fantasy Craft) are not festooned with spells, strength is assumed to be proportional to size (e.g. an average giant has 10 strength), and giant *weapons* are balanced against human ones. My first character for Fantasy Craft was a storm giant, my second was a dragon; both were first level characters and both were used in play and seemed completely balanced against elf and dwarf companions.

With D&D 3.5 being dropped for the utterly different 4<sup>th</sup> edition, some readers will have substantial D&D 3.5 or d20 collections and may be wondering if they can just use their old books 'plug and play' without doing conversions. If you're a 3.5 veteran you are not going to be able to use your old 3.5 materials 'out of the box'. This is because Fantasy Craft has overhauled d20 completely so there are substantial changes away from d20 D&D. Fantasy craft does have a Monster Converter for 3.5 and many D&D mainstays are found in the Fantasy Craft book, forum or database. Overall, D&D 3.5 and d20 material is not going to be of any more use than material for other fantasy games. You can use the fluff and descriptions but the rules in the books have to be pretty much tossed out wholesale. Having lived through the change AD&D to the incompatible 3<sup>rd</sup> edition D&D I can sympathise if this is enough to discourage some from switching to Fantasy Craft.

FEATURE: Fantasy Craft includes many monsters and PC species familiar to players of D&D.

FEATURE: Species that are optional and poorly represented in D&D by optional rules are balanced core species and sub-species in Fantasy craft.

FEATURE: Fantasy Craft does not provide you with a campaign setting but the core book alone gives you the tools to recreate most published or homemade fantasy settings.

TIP: The Adventure Companion supplement has a big list of what species and feats emulate which classic 'races' drawn from numerous sources including D&D, Tolkien's novels, and World of Warcraft.

TRICK: If you want a play in a popular published setting it's worth checking the Licence to Improvise section of the Crafty Games Forum and the Fantasy Craft Database. At these locations you'll find other fans have probably done a lot of the work for you.

TRICK: Fans of Planescape should check out the Planescape playtest edition online. Also read the discussion on the

forum; the Planecraft team have yet to update their work based on the forum's feedback.

TRICK: For fans of any AD&D setting Planecraft contains a guide to converting AD&D monsters to Fantasy Craft and Fantasy Craft statistics for many AD&D monsters.

## Characters

Fantasy Craft characters are competent and every character can bring something to every situation. Your soldier can blanch a king with a glare and has the resolve to weather a political storm. Your Courtier can snatch victory in battle by inspiring teammates or knifing enemies. You get the idea. The other upshot of this is - unlike AD&D and 3.5 - you don't have to fill specific party roles or risk weakening the entire party. In AD&D you need a warrior, a rogue, a wizard and a priest; if your party is missing one of these types adventures become very challenging or have to be carefully designed for your weakened party. The advantage of the D&D approach is that it encourages teamwork. Slowly, I realised that Fantasy Craft encourages teamwork through a more subtle method: most Fantasy Craft characters have abilities that give other PC's a boost.

Characters are built around a core of three choices: Species, Speciality, and Class. Species and Class should be recognised by most gamers. Specialities remind me of 2nd edition AD&D kits. They are parcels of minor abilities that represent your profession or background. As with AD&D, a massive number of combinations of species, class, and speciality are possible. The core rulebook alone can support thousands of character concepts. In Fantasy Craft your Speciality is what you do for a living, while your class represents the abilities you use to do that work. It is quite possible to think outside the box and, for example, create Mage Gladiators because unlike the kits of old, Specialities are not linked to class. Some Specialities are based on D&D classes. e.g. Bard, Sorcerer, Fighter, Cleric, and Thief are all Specialities in Fantasy Craft.

The core Fantasy Craft book has the following species: drake, dwarf, elf, giant, goblin, human, ogre, orc, pech (gnomes and halflings), rootwalker (ent/treant), saurian, and unborn (golem). In addition humans select one of 25 talents like educated or ruthless.

The following classes are offered: assassin, burglar, captain, courtier, explorer, keeper, lancer, mage, priest, sage, scout, and soldier. Starting at 5th level you can take an expert class such as: alchemist, beastmaster, edgemaster, paladin, rune knight, and swashbuckler.

Specialities included: acrobat, adept, adventurer, archer, aristocrat, artisan, barbarian, bard, cavalier, cleric, corsair, criminal, dragoon, druid, fencer, fighter, fist, gladiator, guardian, lord, merchant, miner, musketeer, mystic, nomad, physician, ranger, rogue, shaman, shield bearer, sorcerer, swindler, tribesman, vanguard, warden, and wizard.

TRICK: To create characters that have greater social standing, fame, or homes rather than starting at a higher level consider a +90 bonus to Reputation at first level. Do not allow this Reputation to be spent on magic items.

TRICK: Fantasy Craft provides very little fluff allowing players to describe sub-species, classes, etc to suit their concept. Alternative explanations for the same game rules are often called 'skins'. For example a Mage could be a studious wizard, someone harnessing nature's fury, or a demi-god growing in power etc.

TIP: Though Fantasy Craft has a lot of species and classes in one book it neglects to warn players that not all of these might be available in your referee's world. The chapter on Worlds discusses at length how, as a referee, you probably won't want to use all the species and classes.

TIP: When creating a character don't forget you have two free choice Origin Skills. Use these to pick two skills you want but are not on your class skills list.

TIP: For a Jack-of-a-trades (master of none) with many different skills you need to Well Rounded feat. You cannot take cross-class skills unless your GM turns on the Versatile Heroes campaign quality.

TIP: The Forge chapter lists an enormous variety of equipment however your referee may have chosen an Era that limits your choices. Your referee can alter the equipment available in other ways too always check for setting limitations on equipment.

TIP: The Fantasy Craft Assassin is geared more towards the James Bond or Lady Borgia approach than a 1st edition AD&D or Assassin's Creed one. You could build a sneak and stab assassin with this class using careful feat, attribute, and proficiency choices. Alternatively, use the Burglar class to be very sneaky and then use other options to make her deadly.

FEATURE: the wide selection of Talents for humans makes Fantasy Craft an excellent game for human only fantasy settings, such as the Hyborian Age or Pirates of the Caribbean.



**Building a world**

Looking over my converted world I saw I had tapped only a fraction of the game's capability. I went back to the drawing board and built a world to take advantage of the game's features. There was a project I had wanted to do for a long while and Fantasy Craft provided the tools. My setting is the epic First Age, a scant few generations from Creation. Elder species dominate the world, gods meddle in mortal affairs, and legends are being forged with bronze and oratory.

How well did Fantasy Craft handle this?

Following the instructions in the World chapter you begin by sketching out a concept for your new setting. What is your world's 'feel' and genre? What are your inspirations? After that the book guides you through a series of choices. For the most part this is a version of the kind of world building advice rpg veterans have seen numerous times. Fantasy Craft then takes things a step further and lets you alter the game rules to support your vision.

You can choose Campaign Qualities to tweak the game rules. Essentially these are 'official house rules'. Using these you can make combat more or less deadly, have characters advance faster, reduce or increase the availability of magic items and more. Some of these are cross-referenced throughout the book as prerequisites for equipment, character options etc. This is a really handy way for a referee to communicate her vision to the players and flag what options are available in her world. This is where the modular nature of the rules really shines. For example if you don't have Miracles or Sorcery this neatly removes all the magic from your world and communicates to players that options that have Sorcery or Miracles listed as a requirement are out of bounds. For my world I chose: Miracles, Rare Magic items, Sorcery, Difficult Magic, Non-scaling NPCs, and Dominant Heroes.

You also choose an Era describing technological and social development. Every item of equipment and some character options have an Era requirement. This is something like a GURPS technology level. Fantasy Craft supports four Eras: Primitive, Ancient, Feudal and Reason. An Industrial Era ('Victorian') is discussed but not supported elsewhere in the core book. I wanted to create a world something like the ancient past of a typical D&D world so I chose Ancient Era to represent a time of heroes, spears, gods and legions.

Fantasy Craft does not use the axiomatic alignments familiar to D&D players. Instead alignments are whatever the referee decides is important to the people of her world; these could be philosophies, religions, star signs, patriotic nations or whatever else is important. Fantasy Craft enabled me to outline the competing beliefs so important to my world and back them with game mechanics using the Miracles campaign quality.

Overall Fantasy Craft did a good job of supporting my particular vision. The choices available can describe a great variety of worlds. The rules can be tweaked to support a variety of fantasy genres, though remaining somewhat cinematic. I have seen settings as diverse as Conan and Planescape represented well by these rules.

TRICK: The Eras are very coarse grained. Primitive covers everything from Chimpanzee tools to the Neolithic. Ancient includes both Troy and Rome. Every item also has a complexity, by adding a limit to complexity you can add a finer grain to Era. For example the Bronze Age is Ancient Complexity 10. Players can add 'upgrades' like Crude Materials to reduce the complexity of items to represent emerging or imperfect technologies.

TRICK: For a campaign where ideology is important insist every PC takes an alignment but be sure to include 'no



faith' as an option. You can list other alignments as opposed to the faithless representing the wrath of the gods (Clash of the Titans) or lack of respect (Planescape's Clueless).

**FEATURE:** At its core Fantasy Craft is what many would call a cinematic rules set. While cinematic brings to mind Hollywood films I found this approach a good match for the hyperbole of European legends, folklore, and old epics like Beowulf. However if you want a 'realistic' game even after applying campaign qualities you might be better off with something like GURPS.

### **1st and 2nd printings. Alas Truly Massive...**

Soon after I got my first pdf, Crafty produced the Second Printing of the game. At a glance the two versions are hard to tell apart; however, scattered throughout the second printing are dozens of small corrections and alterations incorporating both errata and player feedback. Rules that had not sat well with fans including banned actions and the drawbacks associated with iconic classes and specialities were cut. Also, some balance issues were addressed. The bottom line? Hidden away in the second printing are numerous changes that make a good game better.

### **Alas for missing things...**

The Truly Massive feat was one of my favourite features of the game. It enabled players to take on the role of Huge giants, dragons, and rootwalkers (in d20 games Huge is a size category covering creatures up to about 30' tall). Without Truly Massive a giant is limited to about 15' tall. Truly Massive was a great fit for my world: mythic PCs for a mythic setting. More generally Truly Massive enabled Fantasy Craft to recreate old AD&D favourites like Bronze Dragons or Cloud Giants in a satisfying manner. Beyond D&D, many fantasy settings in literature, film, and myth feature Huge characters. Unfortunately, this feat was cut from the Second Printing. Without Truly Massive a portion of the game's ability to realise fantasy archetypes as PCs was lost. Speculation on the Crafty forum regarding the cut suggested a number of reasons including: a) that if the game is to play smoothly 'out of the box' then giving players the option to play characters that aren't going to fit in those common dungeon adventures isn't a good idea; b) that trying to cater for several species with one feat produced a generic bland result; and c) that the feat was mechanically unbalanced.

The authors of fantasy Craft are to be congratulated for changes to rules such as strength/size, types, weapon scaling, etc. that have broadened PC horizons beyond what d20 could traditionally handle well. With Huge characters, maybe we have found something the system cannot do, given that most other games also cannot handle Huge PCs this not much of a criticism.

**TIP:** The paper second and first printing look almost identical. To quickly check: the first printing has a small coat of arms for Mongoose Games on the back cover.

**TIP:** If you do get a first printing copy of the rules there is a 41 page booklet free on the Crafty site to get you up-to-date at <http://www.crafty-games.com/downloads>.

**TIP:** Even if you do have the second printing the above document's introduction explains the approach taken by the design team and how they imagine you might best use their toolbox game.

TIP: If your local store has copies of the first printing get the manager to contact Crafty, in the past they have done a replacement deal.

TIP: If you are going to run lots of dungeon adventures consider cutting Ogre, Giant, Drake, and Rootwalker from the available PC species in your world.

### **Online support**

I had a great new game, but my group was deep into two long campaigns and I was working too many hours to take on a weekday afternoon campaign. Furthermore, it's hard to talk about a game much less your ideas for that game with people who have never played it. I needed an outlet. So, I checked out the company forums. This was a new experience for me; I had never seen a forum before. No, really. I found the community was large, welcoming and well behaved (I have since discovered this is far from the norm). I was able to get thoughtful criticism for my ideas and help developing new PC species and the like. The forums have Q&A threads for the company's games and if other forum members can't answer your question then the game designers will.

As well as the forum, the Crafty site hosts a regularly updated news feed that keeps customers notified of the latest releases and what conventions the Crafty designers will be attending. There are occasional links to video of 'town hall' meetings where gamers ask the company's two designers questions and get direct answers. These can be illuminating but for specific questions the Q&A threads on the Forums are a better choice. The company website also features a largely neglected wiki.

The Crafty Wiki contains an unofficial guide to creating species and specialities. That they allow this kind of fan reverse engineering on the official site speaks volumes about the culture of this little company. I personally would have liked an official version of the Origin design rules in the book. For a toolbox game designed to create almost any fantasy setting this is an obvious set of tools to toss in. That said the Origin design rules are not fail-safe and including them could have reduced the perceived quality of a watertight set of rules.

If you do want to post material for Fantasy Craft, the best place is not the company site. A more recent addition to the Fantasy Craft online community is the Fantasy Craft Database (FCDB). The moderator of this site - "Veector" - is to be commended for how quickly he checks material and posts it to the site. The moderator does not act as editor: any and all Fantasy Craft material seems to be accepted. The site does have a voting system to help users distinguish good material from poor; however, either too few people are using the site or too few of them are voting. Most items have few votes and even the top rated items generally have less than ten votes. With so few votes cast, they are a poor guide to item quality. Unfortunately, there is no space for users to comment on the work of others.

Overall, online support for the game is good. Both the company site and the FCDB are regularly updated and the online community surrounding these sites is large, welcoming, and active.

TIP: Before posting to the FCDB put your creation on the forums for critique. The input of other gamers *always* refines and improves an idea.

TRICK: Many fan-rules never make it past the forum. If you can't find something in the database, try using the search

function in the forum before doing the hard work of creating the thing yourself.

TRICK: The Crafty Wiki contains an unofficial guide to creating species and specialities. It does not guarantee balance but it will get you close enough to start play-testing your idea.

### **Online play**

Another facet of the forum community is a very active play-by-post section. Play-by-post (pbp) takes some getting used to but is worth it as you have the world in your neighbourhood. There are ALWAYS people ready to play. This alone is a good reason to recommend Fantasy Craft to those who can't find a regular gaming group or are too busy to join one.

Generally, a new game opens every month or so; however, about a third of these never get very far. Games always have a limited number of places and you might not be selected; therefore, a little patience is required. A typical game requires one or two in-character posts per week. Compared to a table top game the pbp pace is very slow and takes some getting used to.

While many consider pbp the poor cousin of table-top gaming the media does have its own advantages. Play-by-post gives you the time to look up the rules and consider your options before describing your action. For this reason pbp is a great way for those new to the game to learn the rules. Another advantage of pbp is that you can play characters with odd mannerisms or motivations. For example one of my characters had an unusual code of behaviour and always spoke in a formal archaic manner, this would be very difficult to keep up around the table.

TIP: Most pbp games only accept a small number of players and increasingly they are not first come first serve. When you have spare time pre-write a few character concepts ready; then when a game is advertised you can respond quickly picking a concept from your stable that might appeal to the referee.

TIP: Only about one in three pbp games gets very far. Don't be too disappointed if a game dies, just sign up for another.

TIP: For online games in text environments don't arrange your character as on the character sheets, instead keep all the class abilities together, all the feats together, etc. This allows harried pbp gamers to check each other's working. Your GM may have a favoured format for this. Check with her.

TRICK: I found keeping PC's for pbp games on the wiki made a lot of sense.

### **One-off table test (worked examples)**

A referee's business trip left a hole in my group's gaming calendar and I was ready with a one-off adventure and pre-generated characters. This gave me an opportunity to 'push the system' more than I could as a player in a pbp game.

Also, in pbp you cannot judge how smoothly a game will play at the table. Some games look great on paper but stall and stutter the flow of the story in play. I wanted to know: Did fantasy craft have 'poetry'?

I designed an outdoor adventure to fill a single session. Fantasy Craft uses a mix of tactical time periods (rounds, months, days, etc.) and narrative ones (scenes, adventures etc.). The frequency with which character's can use their abilities is linked to the narrative time periods. For me this was a big adjustment in my thinking. During the planning stage it took a couple of revisions to figure out where the scene changes were. Nevertheless, I was able to run a tactical style adventure within these constraints. Here was my set up: the PCs had to catch an ogre who had a head start before he reached the river ford marking a local border. I used the travel rules to track everyone's progress and decided to make scene changes occur whenever characters caught up with foes. That way I could run a highly tactical adventure of the kind I favoured in AD&D as a series of scenes.

Another kind of game familiar to AD&D veterans is the adventure of attrition. In this kind of adventure the PC's face a series of challenges and the players must be careful to only use their spells, ammunition and other consumables when really necessary or have insufficient resources come the adventure's end. Fantasy Craft does not seem to be well suited to this kind of adventure. A referee could decide a whole dungeon is one scene to create this kind of situation.

What about characters? I wanted to showcase my world and the diversity of character concepts Fantasy Craft was capable of, therefore the PC party was pretty wild. It does not have to be this way; you can easily run an all human world if you want it to. The PCs were a Drake Warden Captain, Dwarf Shield-Bearer Soldier, Elf Ranger Mage, and an Unborn (golem) Mystic Explorer. It is worth discussing each.

I wanted to see if there were any imbalance issues for larger characters. I used Truly Massive unaltered for the drake character and observed no 'mechanical advantage' problems, within that single adventure. Players seemed to be pleasantly surprised when they realised the 44' long dragon among them was an inexperienced first level adult. The dragon had an NPC minion, a dwarf agent.

When designing the dwarf I tried to create a character as focused/specialised as an AD&D or D&D character. To create a 'fighter' who was really good at combat and nothing else was very difficult. As already noted Fantasy Craft characters usually have broad competence and it is difficult to avoid this even if you are deliberately doing it. Fantasy Craft, unlike D&D, does not foster teamwork by specialised/complementary roles. Instead most characters have abilities that can boost other members of the team. For example our dwarf could raise the defence of allies adjacent to him.

The elf was an example of how to alter common concepts with Fantasy Craft. She had abilities well suited to the traditional wilderness role of the Ranger but her class abilities and skill selection leaned toward magic and social manipulation rather than the more traditional sword and bow woodland warrior ranger. Although her class was Mage this character's selection of spells included minor healing and protection more like a D&D cleric. Note that in Fantasy Craft healing magic is not restricted to priests.

The unborn was chosen to demonstrate the range of characters the game can handle. The bronze idol was the party skill monkey but was not a sneaky rogue. He was a passable warrior and his skills and gear made him descent healer too.

The main source of healing is often skills and mundane supplies like bandages, not spells or magic items. A party without healing magic is not at a fatal disadvantage. This is one of the changes from the D&D 3.5 SRD that enables fantasy craft to handle parties of any mix of classes and worlds without healing magic.

As experienced gamers my players soon figured out that the only way to succeed was to cooperate. For example the only way to get the two dwarves to the ford ahead of the ogre was for the dragon to carry them. In combat the combination of the PC dwarf's defence sharing kept the ogre out of harm's way while it hacked away at the ogre. In the end the fight was a smidge too easy. The ogre managed to really hurt the poor NPC dwarf minion but the players cut down my villain a couple of rounds after closing to melee range. We did not use a grid for combat, just a rough 'mud map' on a whiteboard and narrative description. Though they made little use of action die one player especially like the idea of a bonus players can use for what they perceive as important rolls or for limited narrative control and that this bonus was an 'explosive' die. The players enjoyed the adventure and were open to playing Fantasy Craft again some time.

On the forums others have described other one-off games. Experienced gamers seemed to like the way Crafty had retooled the skill and feat systems. In at least one game players made greater use of the narrative control rules and the referee felt it added to the game. Other referees have also experienced the feeling that the PC's tore through their chief villains too readily. I think that devising effective NPC tactics and design of challenging major NPC's are skills that require a little learning time. Though, I suppose, my taste runs towards more deadly opponents compared to the tastes of those the designers' table.

Overall, we found the system was not intrusive on the action and story being portrayed. The speed of play was to my personal taste. At a live table Fantasy Craft had the 'poetry' of a fast running AD&D session with experienced players even though my group had never seen Fantasy Craft before.

FEATURE: Combat in Fantasy Craft can be run with or without a grid.

TIP: If you start with first level characters you are going to need a lot of d4, prepare yourself for a strange look at your local game store.

TIP: While learning the art of good villain design and tactics I might use menace level IV adventures to get the amount of PC maiming I'm happy with. I caution though that this is a matter of taste.

TIP: Alternatively, use campaign qualities to make your NPCs more of a threat.

TIP: If you do decide to run a dungeon as one scene to create a challenge of attrition you had better warn your players first.

### **Summary: Is Fantasy Craft for you?**

Fantasy Craft met all five of my criteria. Your criteria will be different. I found that:

1. Fantasy Craft could handle a greater variety of PC types than most games on the market. Dragons, giants, devil tainted bloodlines, gladiators, wizards, phalanx soldiers, nobles and more are all in the core book. For gamers that do not want a diverse high fantasy world Fantasy Craft can be used with humans alone and the huge number of Talents available to humans should keep human only worlds interesting for players.
2. The game is not linked to a specific world and is not presented with a setting. I know other gamers want

setting material; if so, you might take a look at the Adventure Companion supplement for three very well thought out settings in short form. Alternatively, you could pick just about any fantasy setting and use Fantasy Craft's wide selection of options and toolkits to make conversions.

3. Fantasy Craft provides a toolkit for creating your own settings and encourages you to do so. I found it easy to create the worlds I wanted with the core book alone. Almost all the tools you could want are here including NPC design, gear customisation, combinatorial character generation, and low fluff 'skinnable' character abilities.
4. The rules are detailed enough to delineate what is possible in unfamiliar settings. Better yet, campaign qualities allow you to quickly communicate alterations to the rules that bring them in line with your vision. While able to deal with a good variety of sub-genres and styles of play the Fantasy Craft physics is, at its core, cinematic/mythic. Those seeking a closer match to real-world physics, perhaps for a non-magical or historical setting, will find Fantasy Craft unsuitable.
5. The rules are deep enough for experienced gamers but not so complex that play slows to a crawl. Fantasy Craft is made up of systems. The various systems of the game are consistent; a general rule applies in all specific cases making the game easy to learn. The systems are also massively combinatorial, you will never exhaust the combinations the systems can create. In play the game flows nicely not impeding the narrative the group is creating. It has 'poetry'.

After a long wait I could finally retire my AD&D collection and enjoy the advantages of a flexible, easy to teach, modern rpg for my fantasy adventures.

Beyond my personal criteria there are other considerations that may be important to the reader.

If you have a favourite setting in another game system, including D&D 3.5, the toolbox of options and design systems in Fantasy Craft makes conversions easy. Many popular settings have already been converted to Fantasy Craft by fans.

You cannot 'plug and play' rules from other D20 games with Fantasy Craft.

If you are too busy to have a regular session but are itching to get some gaming done then Fantasy Craft might be for you. With an active and welcoming online community the play-by-post sub-forum on the Crafty web site is a great way for busy people to play.

In conclusion I strongly recommend Fantasy Craft for any fantasy or historical setting from Stone Age to Renaissance provided a cinematic or mythic style of play is desired.

*Acknowledgments: Proof reading of the first draft by Michael James with input from the Crafty Forum community. Any errors remaining are my own. Thanks also to referees and players of the various pbp games and COG Melbourne; our Fantasy Craft adventures together provided the basis for this review.*

*Planescraft is a free version of planescape setting for the Fantasy Craft game. As we went to press an updated version of this pdf went onto the net. The Address for the new release is:*

*<http://www.planescraft.com/web/news.php?n=6&Second+playtest+of+Planescraft+core+rulebook+released!>*



# The Shifted Soul: A Pathfinder Planescape Campaign

*Felix Aplin*

## The Shifted Soul - Campaign Notes

### Background summary:

The players are part of a society known as the Tainted: mortals who have inherited a strange curse (and boon) known as the *Shifted Soul*. Whilst normally the soul is a reflection of the body and mind, for the Tainted it is the physical which is less 'real'. Tainted literally carry their souls with them through life in the form of crystal fragments called Heartgems. As long as the soul remains intact, the body is merely a projection that may be harmed or even destroyed without permanent consequence. However, the physical destruction of this soul brings an immediate and final end in annihilation.

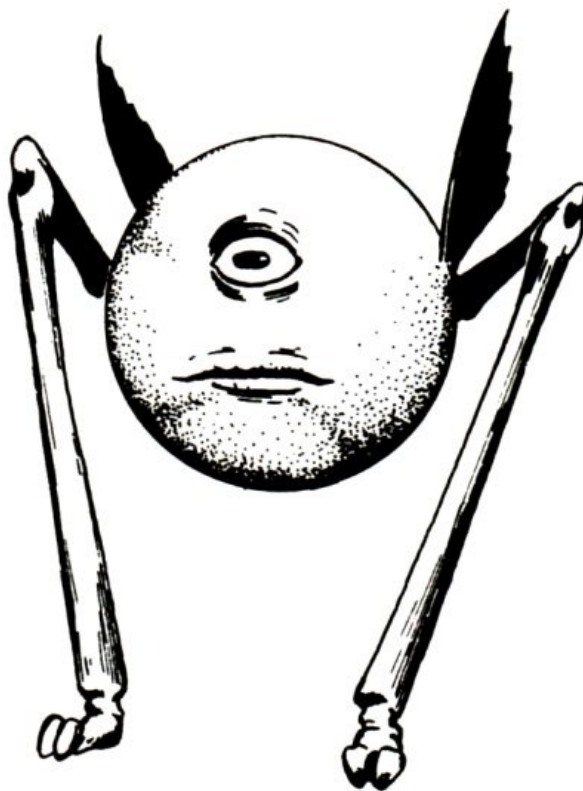
Your characters are outcasts, members of Tainted society who have grown up and lived their own lives freely on the planes. As the campaign begins, they are strangers drawn together by an odd phenomenon: their Heartgems have begun to glow, pulsating with a dim blue light that grows stronger as their gems are brought closer together. From this start they are free to explore the reasons behind this strange occurrence, or simply seize the opportunity to band together and seek fortune on the Planes.

I plan to make the game a traditional Planescape mix of gritty and outlandish with a dash of fate and mortality, but we can get as serious and philosophical or lighthearted and gamey as we wish.

### Rules Outline:

I have attached a first draft of the Shifted Soul rules to this email. This section is especially open to your feedback as it changes the feel of the game significantly.

Mechanically, the players (and any other Tainted they encounter) have a kind of quasi-immortality. They can be killed time and time again only to reform at their Heartgem, but if the gem (their true body) is destroyed the character is permanently lost. Traditionally in DnD, death is something to fear right up until you got raise dead, at which point it became a mere annoyance. For a Tainted, 'ordinary' death is almost trivialised, but with this boon comes the possibility of irrevocable character loss. In a way they have become both stronger and more



fragile than a typical DnD character.

As it stands the rules allow for the players to use 'death' creatively as another problem solving tool, almost in a planescape torment-esque fashion. You might want to consider whether reincarnation should have some kind of cost, such as an XP reduction. This will stop any potential for system abuse, but makes your characters weaker than normal DnD characters, who can be raised at no permanent cost in Pathfinder.

Currently the rules allow players and villains to leave their Heartgems safe in their lairs if they know they will face danger, which makes combat less lethal and encourages divination/stealth/deception as a means of defeating an enemy. An alternative is that Heartgems must be kept within a certain radius of the body, which will make combat much more threatening to players but weaken the utility of the curse/Heartgem.

### **Character Creation:**

I have tried to design the background to be as open-ended as possible in terms of character creation. The 'curse' can be passed on to any intelligent mortal race, so you have no restrictions. Immortal races such as Demons, Modrons etc are a bit harder to justify but are still feasible. If you have a really wacky idea (you want to play an intelligent spell or something) we can definitely discuss how to make it work in-game. I encourage humanoids just so we don't run into too many balance headaches. The only choices I don't encourage are 'standard' races other than humans, such as halflings, elves etc. Save that for traditional fantasy!

As your character is born an outsider you are free to come up with your own elaborate backstory. If you are unfamiliar with the setting, I suggest playing a 'prime' (a character who has grown up on a traditional fantasy world or DnD setting) as it gives you an excellent excuse to ask many questions and generally act like a tourist. Think not only about who/what your character is, but also what kind of life philosophies your character may have. This will become more important during the game itself. I think the only players we have who don't know the setting are Liz and Janet, so Carl/Myself can help our respective halves come up with a character idea so no one is left feeling lost.

If you are already familiar with Pathfinder, feel free to start creating a character using the online SRD. If you have played 3.5, take care not to assume classes/races work the same as before: some have changed considerably. I have a hardcopy core rulebook and advanced player's guide. If you want to use any Pathfinder content not from these books, or any 3.5 content, please run it past me first. We are starting at level 1 with 1000 gold to purchase initial equipment. If you want to play a monster race with a level adjustment, let me know and I will convert it into a standard pathfinder (+0 LA) race for you – I have attached some examples in this email. My only restriction is that if you wish to play a divine class such as a cleric, please pick an ideal rather than a god to draw your power from. This is purely a 'fluff' consideration.

### **Pathfinder converted races:**

#### **Pureborn:**

**+2 Constitution, +2 Charisma, -2 Dexterity:** Pureborn Tainted are tough and have strong personalities, but their thick scales make them less nimble than other races.

**Medium:** Pureborn are Medium creatures and have no bonuses or penalties due to size.

**Normal Speed:** Pureborn have a base speed of 30 feet.

**Low-Light Vision:** Pureborn can see twice as far as humans in conditions of dim light.

**Scaly Hide:** Pureborn have a thick, scaly hide which gives them a +1 natural armour bonus.

**Arcane learning:** Pureborn have an innate understanding of the arcane. They receive a +2 racial bonus to Knowledge (arcane) skill checks.

**Dragon Blood:** Pureborn are humanoids with the dragonblood and reptilian subtypes. For all effects related to race, a Pureborn is considered a dragon.

**Languages:** Pureborn begin play speaking planar common and draconic. Pureborn with high intelligence scores can choose bonus languages from any non-secret language.

**Feytouched:**

**+2 Dexterity, -2 Constitution, +2 Charisma:** Feytouched are quick and charismatic, but as fragile as porcelain.

**Medium:** Feytouched are Medium size.

**Normal Speed:** Feytouched base land speed is 30 feet.

**Fey Blood:** Feytouched are humanoids with the Fey subtype. For all effects related to race, a Pureborn is considered a Fey.

**Low-Light Vision (Ex):** A feytouched can see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, and similar conditions of poor illumination.

**Light foot:** Feytouched have a +2 racial bonus to stealth checks.

**Wild Mind:** A feytouched has a +4 racial bonus on saving throws against mind-affecting effects.

**Languages:** Common, Sylvan. *Bonus Languages:* Elven, Gnome, Halfling.

**Khaasta:**

**+2 Strength, +2 Constitution, -2 Charisma:** Khaasta are strong and tough, but notorious for their difficult disposition.

**Medium:** Khaasta are Medium creatures and have no bonuses or penalties due to their size.

**Normal Speed:** Khaasta have a base speed of 30 feet.

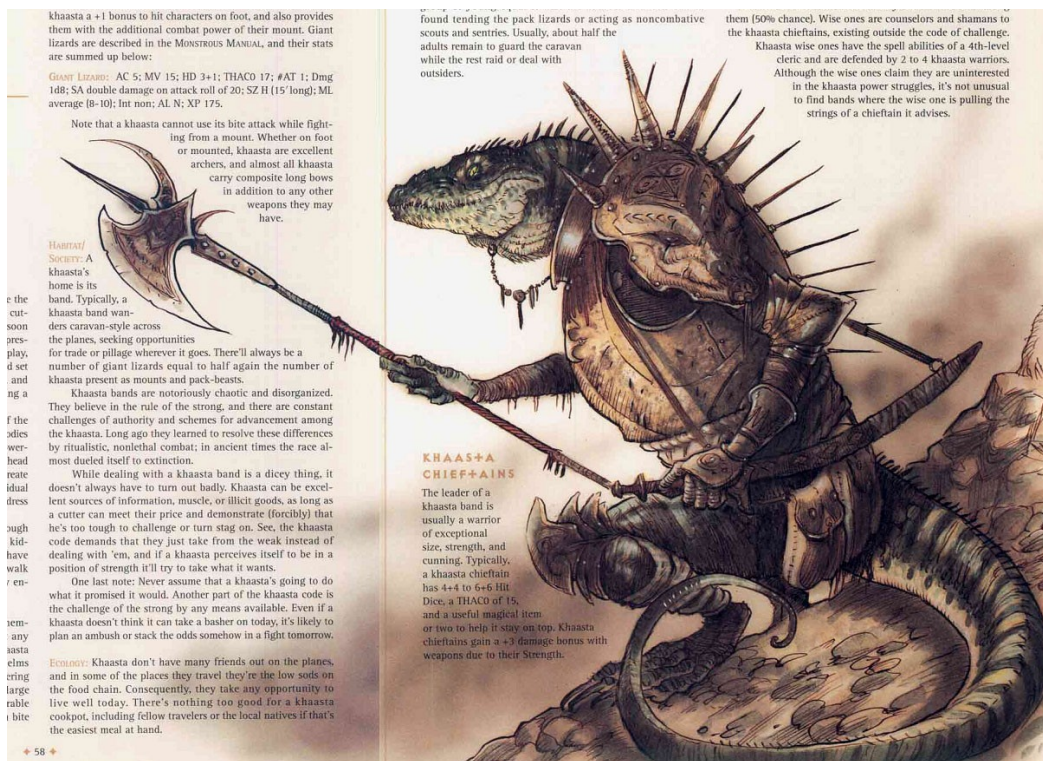
**Darkvision:** Khaasta can see in the dark up to 60ft.

**Humanoid (extraplanar, reptilian):** Khaasta are humanoids with the reptilian and extraplanar subtypes.

**Scaly Hide:** Kobolds have a thick, scaly hide which gives them a +1 natural armour bonus.

**Natural Attack (Bite):** Khaasta have viciously huge jaws and can bite as a primary natural attack (1d6 damage).

**Languages:** Khaasta begin play speaking planar common and Khaasta. Khaasta with high intelligence scores can choose bonus languages from any non-secret language



## Bariaur:

**+2 Strength, +2 Wisdom, -2 Dexterity:** Bariaur are Strong and Wise, but their larger bodies makes them less dextrous than two-legged creatures.

**Medium:** Bariaur are Medium creatures and have no bonuses or penalties due to their size.

**Fast Speed:** Bariaur have a base speed of 40 feet.

**Low-Light Vision:** Bariaur can see twice as far as humans in conditions of dim light.

**Outsider (extraplanar):** Bariaur are Outsiders with the extraplanar subtype.

**Quadruped:** As quadrupeds, Bariaurs gain a +4 bonus on checks to resist bull rush and trip attacks. They have a carrying capacity 1 ½ times greater than normal for their Strength. They must wear barding instead of normal armor and cannot wear boots designed for humanoid.

**Powerful Charge:** A Bariaur often begins a battle by charging at an opponent, lowering its head to smash its rams' horns against a foe. In addition to the normal benefits and hazards of a charge, this allows the Bariaur to make a single bludgeoning attack that deals 2d6 + 1 ½ times the bariaur's Strength modifier.

**Sure Footed:** As a half-goat, Bariaur can find sure footholds where two-legged creatures struggle to find even handholds. Bariaur gain a +2 racial bonus to climb checks.

**Languages:** Bariaur begin play speaking planar common and Bariaur. Bariaur with high intelligence scores can choose bonus languages from any non-secret language

## How Knowledge skills apply to planar characters

**Knowledge (Arcana):** As per normal. An example of a planar specific Arcana check would be to recall any specific magical inhibitions on a particular plane.

**Knowledge (Dungeoneering):** As per normal. 'Dungeon' in this instance is taken to mean any artificially constructed feature likely to include hostile environs, such as a castle, maze, pocket dimension or abyssal lair.

**Knowledge (Engineering):** 'Engineering' in this case refers to specific knowledge of planar physics, in relation to the construction (or destruction) of buildings and mechanical items in the planes. A knowledge (engineering) check would need to be passed in order to create a (semi) permanent structure in pandemonium, identify an automaton or repair the hull of a submarine in the plane of water.

**Knowledge (Geography):** 'Geography' in this case refers to the specific layout of planes and their layers. An example of a knowledge (geography) check would be pinpointing the location of Tiamat's lair on the first layer of Baator, or knowing what the 284<sup>th</sup> layer of the abyss is called.

**Knowledge (History):** As per normal, where 'history' refers to the history of the planes themselves. A knowledge (history) check would be required in order to recall the history of the pact primaeval, or the origins of the fiends.

**Knowledge (Local):** Local in this case means a single planar location, chosen when the skill is first taken. This would typically be a planar metropolis (such as Sigil) but could also be generalised out to a planar layer or prime. Knowing the best place to acquire a lich's skull in Sigil would be a Knowledge (Local) – Sigil check.

**Knowledge (Nature):** 'Nature' in this case refers to any native non-civilised creatures/plants/living things on the planes, as well as a general understanding of planar climate. For example, in Mechanus 'nature' would cover the clockwork animals or flocks of mathematical proofs which naturally inhabit the plane, but not the specifics of Modron society.

**Knowledge (Nobility):** Nobility checks apply to any situation where knowledge of specific social etiquette is required. A knowledge (nobility) check would be needed to gain audience with a high-ranking efreet, but would also be necessary to navigate almost every aspect of life in Mount Celestia.

**Knowledge (Planes):** Specifically refers to the general structure and workings of the planes and belief as a whole. This skill gives no specific information on planar locations, but a knowledge (planes) check would be necessary to describe the migration of souls on the planes, or the process by which new planes are formed.

**Knowledge (Religion):** As per normal, except this extends to all powers, including powerful outsiders such as demon princes. The planar location of specific powers is more commonly known on the planes (a lower DC than would normally be required). Knowledge (Religion) also covers knowledge of Proxies, the layout of a deity's realm and the nature of godhood itself.



## The City of Omelas

**Population:** ~ 200,000. 70% Tainted, (30% human/planetouched, 30% Pureborn, 10% Duergar, 10% Rhooide, 10% Kobold, 10% other), 5% Khaasta, 3-4% Rilmani, ~20% other. ~200 dragons young adult or above; 65% Red, 25% planar, 10% other.

**Primary Languages:** Planar Common, Draconic.

**Location:** The Concordant Domain of the Outlands



### Overview:

- Omelas is the home of the Tainted, an ancient city by prime standards but young from a planar perspective. It lies in a state of crumbling magnificence, grandiose and content in its own stagnation.
- Located in the Outlands, the plane of neutrality and balance, the city is ringed by mountains and cloaked in an endless fog through which distant buildings are only barely visible. Through unknown means this fog hides the city from those who would do it harm.



- The city's population is comprised mainly of Tainted, humanoid or otherwise, who live generally stable lives pursuing their own goals and interests. A smaller but not insignificant subset of the population are non-Tainted, who do their best to survive in a city that treats them as second-class citizens.
- Omelas acts as a regional trade hub and gateway for several important Outlands civilisations, as well as a discreet location for illegal operations. More widely the city is considered of only minor planar significance due to the insular nature of its inhabitants and remote location.
- The main export of Omelas comes from unique ventures known as 'gate diving'. These businesses revolve around the creation of unstable planar rifts which connect to random locations on the planes. Because of their unique quasi-immortality, Tainted can dive through these portals with little to no risk of permanent injury or death. Most gate-diving businesses are simply a glorified method of looting, but some gates instead generate revenue through more pure (or sinister) methods.
- A race of draconic humanoids called 'Pureborn' traditionally holds the positions of power in Omelas' government, which is a mix between democratic representation and oligarchy. Law in the city revolves around controlling wealth and enforcing trade agreements, ignoring all but the most extreme crimes.
- The most powerful organisation in Omelas is the *Sepathos* (soul guardians). This extremely secretive enclave of Pureborn sorcerers and seers guard the secret to the creation of Heartgems, which all Tainted require. Many Tainted resent the Sepathos, but few challenge them openly.

#### Geography:

- Omelas is located deep in a great chain of mountains called The Barrier, which run most of their length between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> rings chaosward from the Spire in the Outlands.
- The city rests upon a small plateau barely large enough to contain the city. High impassable peaks surround the plateau to the south, east and west. To the north lies a sharp cliff, which plummets through dense fog to unknown depths. Crumbling pieces of land known as earthburgs float out over this drop to form the northernmost edge of Omelas itself. Those who leave the city this way find themselves emerging from the fog situated high above the mountain chain, with the city nowhere in sight.
- A fast mountain river pours from cracks in the rocks to the south of Omelas, flowing through the city before splitting into many small canals, rivers and twisting sewers. The river's ultimate fate is to plunge from the northern cliff at a hundred separate spots, cascading over low-floating earthburgs. By this point the water has become polluted, dirty, and laced with alchemical ingredients from failed experiments.
- To the south and west of the city lies a relatively small area of farmland, where the city's food is grown. Further to

the south, a small gap in the jagged peaks marks the Path of Shades: the only way in and out of Omelas by foot. This windy, misty and treacherous path leads from the southern gate of the city out onto trails in the Barrier Mountains. Parts of the trail cut through the rock and have openings which lead down to a network of caverns deep beneath the surface known as the Underlands.

- The fog which permanently engulfs Omelas is damp and cold, which only worsens the slow deterioration omnipresent within the city. Even the thick, driving rain that occasionally washes the streets does not banish the fog. While there is a cycle of day and night, the city is devoid of seasons and weather remains reliably (if unpleasantly) constant.

#### **People:**

- The majority of residents within Omelas belong to the Tainted, but often that is where similarities between individuals end. There are multiple racial and cultural divides within the city, and each group strives to keep its identity distinct. The most prominent Tainted communities within the city are: The Pureborn, Humans, Grey Dwarves, Kobolds and Rhooode.
- Due to the time restraints associated with the construction of new Heartgems, population growth within Omelas is extremely slow. Tainted children are vanishingly rare and zealously protected.
- Pureborn represent the majority of Tainted, although only by a slight margin. These draconic humanoids fill many of the positions of power within the city and are the most common arcane magic users. Pureborn are infamously arrogant: even while utterly destitute, a Pureborn can act insufferably superior.
- Humans represent the second largest racial group in Omelas, but are also the most culturally diverse, often forming their own distinct 'cliques'. Easily influenced by planar blood, most humans within the city have some level of heritage stemming from the outer or elemental planes. Tieflings and Elemental Genasi are especially common sights, outnumbering 'ordinary' humans by a fair margin. Humans form the backbone of craft and trade in the city, and are the most gregarious Tainted.
- Grey Dwarves, also known as Duergar, are the most insular and conservative of all Tainted communities. They prefer the company of their own kind and reside almost entirely within their own district, Eastgate. The Duergar still venerate their ancestor spirits and legends, and were the original Tainted race to rediscover the means to tap divine energy without an Astral connection. Many Grey Dwarves become blacksmiths, stonemasons and clerics.
- Omelas Kobolds are everything that the Grey Dwarves are not: creative, wild and liberal. No longer shackled by violent, short lives, Tainted Kobolds have changed substantially from their craven brethren. Revelling in danger and ingenuity, Omelas Kobolds are famous for their mechanical aptitude, short attention spans and disregard for physical safety. Many Kobold Machinists and Alchemists reside in the High Slums, where they pollute the waterways and sewers of Omelas with oil and residue from failed experiments.

- Finally, the Rhoode are a race of aquatic amphibians found normally in the Elemental Plane of Water. Rhoode have a mentality many find alien: they are naturally subservient, and are often content to act as common labourers and servants for the other Tainted communities. Of course, the Rhoode do not see this as servitude; rather, they believe true power lies in the hands of those who influence events with subtlety. It is true that many important Omelas officials could not function without their Rhoode assistants.
- A substantial minority of the population are non-tainted humanoids, most of which live in slums outside of the city proper. Non-tainted humanoids fall into several distinct groups: relatives of Tainted who have remained in the city; the destitute and desperate; and communities of trading partners such as Rilmani, Khaasta, Drow or Hobgoblins who have settled in the city over the years.
- Generally, non-Tainted are treated as second-class citizens and have fewer rights. Many Tainted fear that, if given the opportunity, their normal counterparts would rapidly grow to outnumber the Tainted in Omelas, upsetting the current balance of power.
- A community of dragons lives in earthburys out past the northern cliff. These are mostly red dragons, drawn by prospect of arcane power and the generally friendly reception they receive in the city. The community keeps to itself and does not attempt to interfere with the day-to-day workings of the city.

#### **Politics and Law:**

- Omelas is ruled (in name at least) by a governing council consisting of 9 members, who sit weekly to decide upon policy via majority vote. The council nominates its own head, known as the High Proctor. The High Proctor loses his right to propose or vote on policy matters except as a tie breaker, but gains a measure of power over everyday administration of the city.
- 5 council members each represent one of the following powerful factions within Omelas: The *Sepathos*; The Diver's Guild; The Arcane University; The City Watch and The Craftsman's Guild. The remaining 4 members are selected by popular vote every 20 years, and are almost always members of Omelas' nobility. Only Tainted are eligible to vote in these elections, and the process is far from transparent.
- A sizeable proportion of wealth and power within the city is held by a small number of self-styled 'nobility': mostly ancient Pureborn many centuries old with multiple descendants. Members of the nobility breathe politics as easily as air and play games of madness and intrigue spread over a thousand years.
- The great factions of the planes hold some sway over Omelas' residents, but have no official jurisdiction within the city. The three most powerful factions in the city are the Athar, the Sign of One and the Doomguard. The Doomguard have allied themselves with the Fated in Omelas to create a single front known as the Order of Flame. The only factions with no representation in the city are the Harmonium, Guvners and Mercykillers, who have unanimously declared the Tainted an abomination and corruption of natural law.

- Crime is a significant problem within Omelas, as the *Zaun Sepa* reduces the danger inherent in many crimes, encouraging would-be thieves to take greater risks. Heartgem thieves especially are a major issue, and draw the primary attention of law enforcement. Violence is more acceptable within the city, with death or injury meaning little to a Tainted: bars and the city's nightlife can be considerably more dangerous to ordinary travellers.
- Most laws within the city focus around regulation of fair trade and gate diving. The gravest punishment (for gem theft or the murder of a Tainted) is eternal solitary confinement within one's Heartgem if a Tainted, or execution if not. The City Watch is small, but well trained and armed. They have so far escaped the rampant corruption found in some other areas of society, mainly due to the inspiring influence of their current Watch Captain, Haraam Lasnan. While unfit to deal with the volume of petty crime present on Omelas' streets, the Watch still takes its job very seriously and will come to the aid of citizens if notified.
- Omelas maintains cautious political ties to several key planar trading hubs. The city has an unreliable portal to the Lower Ward in Sigil, which sees some trade and traffic. However, Omelas is just too small and insular to register in Sigilian politics. The City of Brass maintains cautious ties to the Tainted, who are allowed to walk freely within the city's foreign quarter using their Heartgem as identification. The Efreeti are interested in Omelas trade, but so far have expressed no desire to consider any permanent agreement or alliance. The only civilisation that holds a formal alliance with Omelas is the nearby Rilmani Protectorate, and Rilmani traders are quite a common sight on its streets.
- Other important trading partners for the city include the ever-present Khaasta caravans, who bring goods to trade from all gate towns and major civilisations in the Outlands, and traders from the many Underlands civilisations - most commonly Drow, Deep Gnome or Hobgoblin, but also Illithid, Beholder and even Undead merchants. Occasionally Lizardmen from Semuanya's Bog come for weaponry and other metal goods, although Khaasta bandits limit the number of traders willing to make the trek. Surprisingly few Merkants can be found plying their trade in Omelas: for some reason, those who do deal with the city typically base any negotiations within Sigil, and only enter Omelas if absolutely necessary.

### **The Shifted Soul:**

#### **History:**

A race bound not by form, thought or belief, but rather by a curse: *Zaun Sepa*, the shifted soul.

Eons ago, the great red wyrm Arzosah was driven into madness when her love, a human priest named Jedian, died of old age after refusing her offer to prolong his life via necromancy. Consumed by grief and desperate to reclaim the only thing she held dear, Arzosah travelled to the outer planes and petitioned the powers of the upper planes to return Jedian's soul to her. They refused her request, just as they refuse all requests to return mortal souls that have passed in peace; Jedian's soul had already been absorbed into the planes themselves, and was forever lost.

Arzosah, furious and desperate to the point of insanity, accused the planar powers of deliberately shortening mortal lives to allow for a steady stream of souls to empower their own realms and forces. Determined to break the planar hold

on the soul but mindful of Jedian's request that no necromancy be used, the great wyrm set about permanently separating the soul from both the body and astral plane. Her millennia-long efforts led to the creation of *Zaun Sepa* (literally 'shifted soul'), a blood curse that separates the soul from the body at birth. However, the process was not perfect: unless the soul was quickly bound into another vessel, it would drift back into the Astral and be torn apart. The only available material strong enough to contain a soul in its Astrally-severed entirety was a crystallised piece of the great heart of Arzosah herself. Thus, Arzosah sacrificed herself in order to bring about her own vision of freedom for the mortal races.

### **The Cursed Soul:**

Originally created by the Arzosah as a means of denying gods the souls of mortals, *Zaun Sepa* is an inherited ('blood') curse that cannot be given by any other means: the only being who knew the secret of its creation was mad Arzosah herself, who is now long dead. The curse forces the soul out of the astral at birth and into the physical realm, where it is literally born alongside the body. However, without some method of containment the soul is quickly torn apart and lost forever. In order prevent this, the soul is immediately forced into a receptacle known as a 'Heartgem' – originally crystallised pieces of Arzosah's gigantic heart – which is capable of containing the immense energies necessary to bind a soul. Those who have undergone this process are known as the Tainted, and they have been permanently and irrevocably removed from the natural cycle of life.

While normally the Soul is a reflection of the body and mind, for bearers of *Zaun Sepa* it is the physical which is less 'real'. Similar to a lich's phylactery, the Heartgem is capable of recreating the body of a Tainted, even if the original body has been utterly destroyed. The only way to permanently destroy a bearer of *Zaun Sepa* is to destroy the Heartgem itself. Tainted can expect only annihilation from this act: no force on the planes can return him or her to life.

Thankfully, whatever material the gems are created from is incredibly strong, and great force must be applied to even so much as chip one. Barring the destruction of the Heartgem, a Tainted can expect to live indefinitely, although such a lifespan creates its own set of issues for (once) mortal minds.

The Shifted Soul defines the Tainted as a society. It opens them up to opportunities beyond ordinary mortal experience, but at the same time brands them as outcasts and abominations, permanently dissociated from the machinations of planar powers both good and ill. For the most part, *Zaun Sepa* is considered a gift by the Tainted, who use it to great advantage.

### **Physical Description:**

The original recipients of *Zaun Sepa* were the half-dragon children of Arzosah and Jedian, and since that time many other races have inherited the curse. Some of Arzosah's children sought to keep their line pure in order to create a stable race who could be trusted with the arcane secrets of the curse. This led to the creation of the Pureborn; a race of humanoids who still resemble their draconic ancestors. Pureborn retain the draconic ability to interbreed with nearly any intelligent race, although the child almost entirely resembles the non-Pureborn parent. Tainted spread *Zaun Sepa* to new races in this way.

Other than Pureborn, the most common races within the Tainted are Planetouched Humans, Kobolds, Duergar and the amphibious Rhooode. Other mortal races are reasonably commonplace (such as Drow or Gith), but very rare are the immortal races of the planes.

**Society:**

The majority of Tainted live in a planar city within the Outlands known as Omelas. This is because the secret of creating new Heartgems is known only by an order of high-ranking Pureborn known as the *Sepathos* ('Soul Guardians'). Tainted must either live in the city or travel to it in order to acquire a Heartgem for their newborn: a gift that many hopeful parents wait decades to receive. Furthermore, Omelas holds a special power, the source unknown, that hides it from the vision of the gods and planar powers: any such power seeking to do harm finds the city impossible to locate. As such Omelas is a hotbed for dissenters and deserters who are hiding from one power or another. Small communities of Tainted live in several other planar metropolises including Sigil and the City of Brass. Small groups of Tainted also exist scattered throughout the multiverse and on the primes.

**Religion:**

The *Zaun Sepa* is a direct attack against the traditional flow of souls in the outer planes, and is an affront to virtually all gods and outer planar powers. Because a Tainted's soul does not touch the astral, there is no way for the energies of a deity to directly empower them. This acts as both a hindrance and a boon: deities cannot directly track or effect the Tainted as they leave no mark upon the astral, but this also means the Tainted may never receive or use divine power. Tainted clerics can never gain their powers from a god: if a Tainted wishes to become a cleric, they must focus inwardly on the strength of their own beliefs. Some Tainted even go on to become Athar or Ur-Priests, directly acting against the gods, although most are simply apathetic.

**Adventurers:**

Tainted make excellent and daring adventurers due to the quasi-immortality their curse provides. Many Tainted begin their lives as adventurers by working as gate-divers within Omelas: the brief visits to other planes pique their curiosity, causing them to seek lives outside of the city. Tainted will often hide their true identity out of necessity when adventuring outside of Omelas, as their race is not generally well received on the planes.

**Names:**

Non-Pureborn Tainted take names according to their own racial traditions. Pureborn Tainted have draconic names.

**The Shifted Soul Rules:**

*Zaun Sepa* is a unique curse that can be inherited by any living, sentient organism capable of reproduction, and is automatically passed on to the child as long as at least one parent has the curse. It cannot be removed in any way currently known: once the soul has been pulled from the Astral it cannot be returned, and any attempt to lift the curse leads only to the death of the Tainted.

Tainted have a drastically reduced rate of aging: no Tainted has ever died of old age, and some are nearly one thousand years old.

When a Tainted is 'killed' via hitpoint damage or any other effect, its body disintegrates and is instantaneously transported to its Heartgem. Any items worn are left behind. While inside the Heartgem, Tainted regenerate lost HP at a rate of 1 hp/minute, ability damage at a rate of 1/hour and ability drain/negative levels at a rate of 1/day. This allows



them to recuperate from any wound, representing the time necessary to recover from the trauma of death or injury and re-establish their physical identity.

Alternatively, the Tainted can decide to enter his or her Heartgem at will without first 'dying'. In order to accomplish this, the Tainted must be physically touching the Heartgem. This action takes 1 full round to complete. A character is immune to death while inside this Sanctuary: any effect that would kill him instead reduces his hitpoints to 0. Returning a body to the physical world from a Heartgem takes a single round and provokes an attack of opportunity.

Any effect that would prevent a Lich from reforming at its phylactery will also prevent a Tainted from reforming at his or her Heartgem. Examples of this include antimagic fields, or a dimensional anchor spell when the body is on a different plane to the Heartgem.

Heartgems can be enchanted and effected by spells both as living entities and as items. If damaged, the Gem slowly heals at a rate of 1 HP per 24 hours: it cannot be healed by any other means. If a Heartgem is reduced to 0 HP, it is destroyed and forever lost, along with any persons inside it. What remains of the owner's soul is torn apart and the individual ceases to exist. Not even a wish spell or divine intervention can return a Tainted to life.

Because Tainted bodies lack an astral connection, any spell or ability that explicitly effects the soul or spirit of a Tainted automatically fails (such as the *create spawn* ability of a wraith, or the spells *soul bind* and *astral projection*).

- Spells that detect living entities (such as detect living, deathwatch and scry) fail to detect a Tainted: however, they will work normally on the Tainted's heartgem. For example, a successful scry spell would locate a Tainted's heartgem instead of his body.

Heartgems have the following statistics:

AC: 10

HP:  $(10 + \text{the HD of the owner}) \times 2$ .

Hardiness, Spell resistance and Resistance to Cold, Fire, Electricity and Acid:  $10 + \text{the HD of the owner}$ .

The owner's saves.

# PLANESCAPE SPELL COMPENDIUM

## Spells of the First Circle

*Avoid Planar Effects* (Abjuration) Level: Sor/Wiz 1, Cleric 1

Components: V

Casting time: 1 immediate action

Target: One creature Range: Close (25ft + 5ft/level)

Duration: 1 round/level Save: Fort negates (Harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell grants a very brief respite from the horrible effects that a plane can wreak upon an individual. For the duration, a single subject is rendered immune to all of a plane's natural harmful or disruptive effects. It provides no protection from creatures on the plane, native or otherwise. Likewise, intentionally created traps, magical spells, or spell alteration due to planar location are unaffected by this spell. While this spell is active, the subject creature doesn't need to worry about a lack of air, nonmagical temperature extremes, nonmagical poisonous fumes, or any other harmful planar conditions. It is generally used to allow a character time to cast longerlasting protective spells.

*Minor Embalming* (Necromancy) Level: Sor/Wiz 1, Cleric 1

Components: V, S

Time: 1 standard action

Target: One undead creature touched

Range: Touch

Duration: 5 minutes / level

Save: Fortitude negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes

Embalming preserves the flesh of the dead, and this spell acts to preserve the form of any undead creature it is cast on. Tears are mended, decay is halted and bones are made more resilient to damage. The target gains 1 temporary hit point per level, up to a maximum of +10 at level 10, and a + 1 deflection bonus to AC for the duration of the spell.

## Spells of the Second Circle

*Black Barbed Curse* Conjunction (Summoning) [Evil] Level: Druid 2

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Target: 1 creature

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 feet / 2 levels)

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: None

Spell Resistance: No

Those who have walked the twisted paths of a Night hag can summon forth black barbs from the depths of their own souls to assault a target's flesh. When cast, the spell summons a swirling mass of black barbs that grow and burrow into the target for 4d4 hit points of piercing damage, with no save allowed. This damage counts as both magical and evil for the purposes of bypassing damage reduction.

*Blood Bridge* Necromancy Level: Sor/Wiz 2

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Target: Living creature touched

Range: Touch

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes

This necromantic spell allows the caster to give some of her own life essence to another...at a cost to herself. When the target is touched, blood flows out of the mage's body, spiralling through the air to flow into the recipient, where it seals wounds and halts bleeding. The target is healed for 2 hit points + up to 2 hit points per level of the caster (she may choose to bestow less if she wishes). However, at the same time the caster loses an equal amount of hit points to those she transfers.

*Greater Embalming* Necromancy Level: Sor/Wiz 2, Cleric 2

Components: V, S

Time: 1 standard action

Target: Undead creature touched

Range: Touch

Duration: 10 minutes / level

Save: Fort negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell is a more potent version of Minor Embalming, and the mending and damage resistance it bestows lasts longer. The target gains 2 temporary hit points per level of the caster, up to a total of +20 at level 10, and a +2 deflection bonus to AC.

*Infernal Orb* Evocation [Fire] Level: Sor/Wiz 2

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Target: 1 creature

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 feet / 2 levels)

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: None

Spell Resistance: Yes

The caster summons a large, magical Orb of Fire, which weakens and slows the enemy. The caster must make a range touch attack, and if she hits the orb does 2d6 points of fire damage. If this attack successfully causes damage, it also inflicts a -2 penalty to the enemy's Strength and Dexterity for 2 rounds.

### Spells of the Third Circle

*Black Barbed Shield* Abjuration [Evil] Level: Druid 3

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Target: Self

Range: Personal

Duration: 1 round / level

Save: Fortitude negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: No



Those who have walked the twisted paths of a Night hag can summon forth barbed branches from their own souls to help shield them from damage. This spell calls forth a series of black barbs that protect and shield the caster from harm. The caster gains a +2 natural armour bonus to AC for the duration of the spell, and any creature that successfully hits the player with a melee attack suffers 1d6 hit points of piercing damage + 1 per two levels of the caster, to a max of +5 at level 10.

*Axe of Torment* Conjuration (Summoning) Level: Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Target: One living creature

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 feet / 2 levels)

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Will negates (see text)

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell summons a large glowing battleaxe, imbued with energy, pain, and torment. The axe inflicts 1d8 points of Force damage. In addition, if the target fails their save, roll a 1d4 and consult the table below, applying the result to the target. If the mage is of level 9 or over, roll a 1d8 instead. 1: Suffer an additional 1d8 points of Force damage.2: Suffer an additional 2d8 points of Force damage.3: Stunned for 1 round 4: Suffer an additional 5d8 points of fire damage.5: Suffer an additional 6d8 points of cold damage.6: Teleported in a random direction 1d10x5 feet 7: Paralysed for 1d4 rounds 8: Suffer an additional 8d8 points of Force damage.

*Armour of Acheron* Abjuration, , [Law] Level: Clr 3

Components: V, S, M ( piece of scrap metal)

Casting time: 1 standard action

Target: Self

Range: Personal

Duration: 1 minute / level

Save: Fortitude negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell creates a suit of magical armour to encase the caster, protecting him from harm. The armour appears as bulky, spiky black and red metal armour, but does not interfere with any armour the caster is wearing already. This has two effects: The caster gains an armour bonus of +9 (the same as full plate).This bonus does not stack with any armour the wearer is already using.Secondly, the armour provides damage resistance 5/magic; after 5 points/level of damage have been absorbed the armour is destroyed and dissipates. Note that the spell does not confer any other properties of full plate to the caster, such as an armour check penalty or slower speed. This spell draws upon the plane of Acheron to power it, creating the armour from a scrap of Thuldadin; for this reason no two suits look exactly the same, and are often slightly rusted and pitted.

*Baatorian Barb Blast* Transmutation [Evil, Lawful]

Level: Sor/Wiz 3 , Clr 4

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Range: Personal

Area: Cone(25 ft + 5 ft / 2 levels)

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Reflex ½; See Text

Spell Resistance: Yes



This spell was created by the fiendish inhabitants of Baator, and reflects their evil and torturous ways. The spell causes the casters hands to sudden sprout vicious, barbed spikes, which are then launched out in a cone of barbs that cause great pain to anyone hit and stick into the flesh to further agonise and torture. Anyone caught in the blast of barbs takes d6 damage for every 2 levels of the caster, to a maximum of 8d6. Further, they suffer d6 temporary Dexterity damage from the barbs lodging in their flesh and impeding their movements. A successful Reflex save results in only half damage and no Dexterity damage.

*Elysium's Tears* Evocation [Good] Level: Sor/Wiz 3, Cleric 4

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Target: 1 creature

Range: Medium ( 100 feet + 10 feet / level)

Area: See text;

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Reflex ½

Spell Resistance: Yes

The skies of the Upper Planes shed tears when evil is done, and these tears can burn even the most armoured of foes. The caster chooses a single target within range. Then a stream of small meteors of glowing white energy rain down and strike the target, one meteor per caster level up to a maximum of ten. Each meteor deals d8 holy damage to the target, and 1 damage to anyone within 5 feet of the target. A successful Reflex save reduces the damage by half. Good creatures are unaffected by this spell and suffer no damage from its effects.

*Ice Armour* Abjuration [Cold]

Level: Sor/Wiz 3, Druid 4, Cleric 3

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Target: Self

Range: Personal

Duration: 1 minute / level

Save: Fortitude negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell creates armour made of sparkling, translucent ice around the wearer, that can absorb damage and fend off fire. The Ice Armour weighs nothing, and does not encumber or restrict the wearer in any way. It provides damage resistance 5/magic and absorbs the first 5 points of fire damage each round. After the armour has absorbed a combined total of 25 damage from these sources, the ice armour shatters and melts away.

*Infernal Shield* Abjuration [Fire] Level:  
Sor/Wiz 3, Cleric 3

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

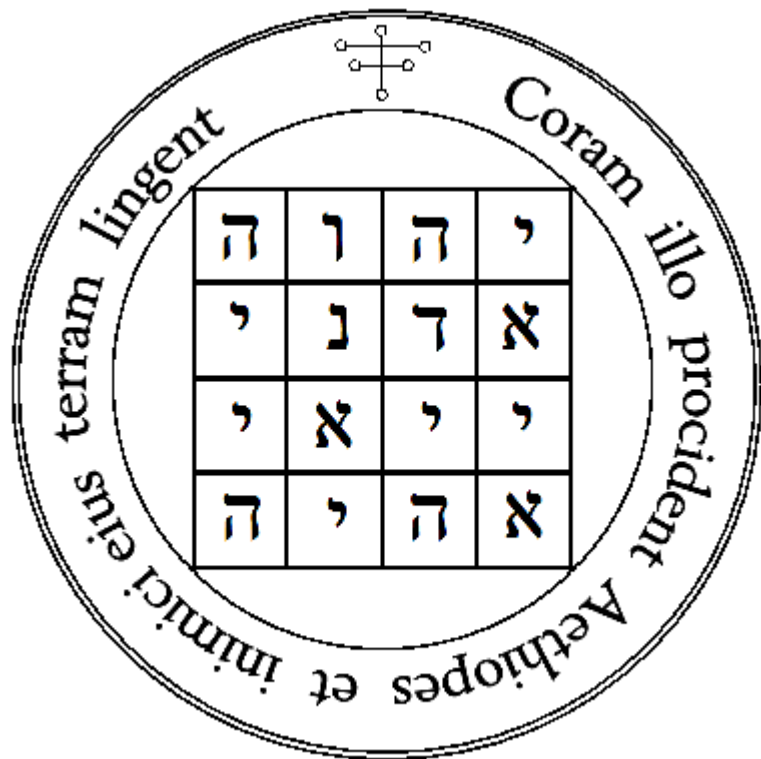
Range: Self

Duration: 1 minute / level

Save: Fortitude negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes

This mystical barrier converts flame from a destructive energy to a regenerative force. When cast, all fire damage is absorbed and altered into healing energies. The Infernal Shield bestows fire resistance 30. In addition, every 5 points of fire damage absorbed heals the caster for a single point of HP.



*Minor Embalming, Mass Necromancy*  
Level: Sor/Wiz 3, Cleric 3

Components: V, S

Time: 1 standard action

Target: One undead creature/level

Range: Close (25ft + 5ft/level)

Duration: 5 minutes / level

Save: Fortitude negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell is identical to Minor Embalming, except it affects multiple creatures. The targets gain 1 temporary hit



point/level up to a maximum of +10 and a + 1 deflection bonus to AC for the duration of the spell.

*Ocanthan Shardstorm* Conjunction (summoning) Level: Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S, M (a shard of metal from Ocanthus)

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Target: Any number of creatures, no two further than 30 feet apart

Range: Medium (100 ft + 10 ft / level)

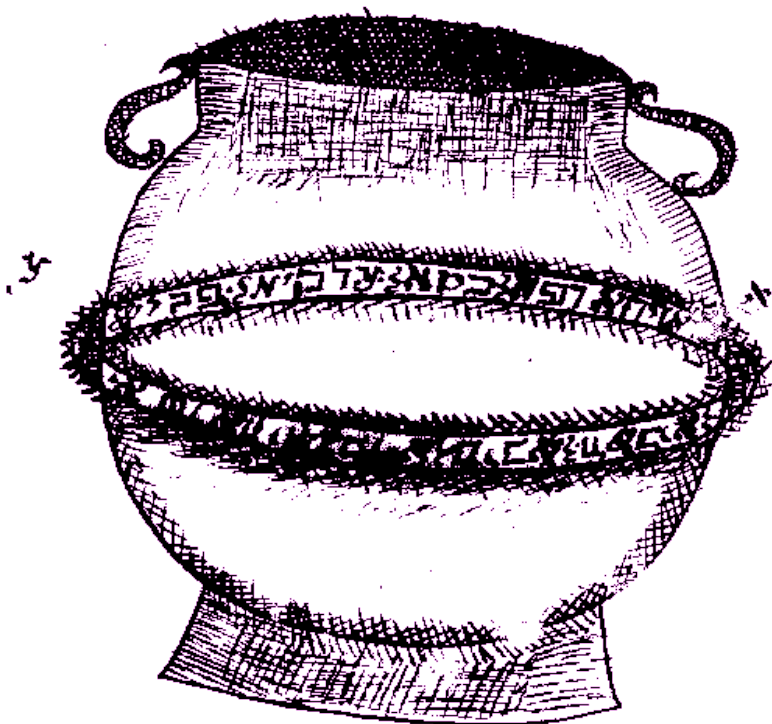
Duration: Instantaneous

Save: None

Spell Resistance: No

Upon casting this spell, the caster summons jagged shards of metal from Ocanthus, the third layer of Acheron, to fly forth in a spray of deadly blades. The caster conjures one shard for each caster level, to a maximum of 10 shards. The caster may split the shards between any number of targets with 30 feet, but must make separate ranged touch attacks for every creature so designated. On a successful hit, each shard deals 1d4 slashing damage to the target.

### Spells of the Fourth Circle



*Blacksphere* Evocation, [Force] Level: Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 feet / 2 levels)

Area: 25 feet radius

Duration: Instantaneous/1 round

Save: Reflex negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

A wave of concussive force explodes out from the target point. Any creature within the area must then make a Reflex save or suffer 1d4 points of Force damage + 1 point per caster level and be imprisoned within a sphere of impenetrable force until the start of the caster's next round, as if trapped in a windowless force cage. Unlike ordinary force effects, spheres of force

created with this spell are completely opaque.

*Chaos Blast* Evocation [Force, Chaotic] Level: Sor/Wiz 4, Cleric 5

Components: V, S, M (flesh from a lawful creature)

Casting time: 1 standard action

Range: Personal

Area: 30 ft radius

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

The chaos blast spell was developed by a marilith named Theiras - a tanar'ri not known for her subtlety. When cast, chaos blast projects waves of concussive force 30ft in all directions from the caster. The waves harm any creature in the area of effect with a lawful or neutral alignment. Victims suffer 5d8 points of damage and are knocked prone. A successful reflex save halves the damage and negates the knockdown effect.

*Dissolve* Transmutation Level: Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S, M

Casting time: 1 standard action

Target: 1 creature or object touched

Range: Touch

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Fort partial (see text)

Spell Resistance: Yes

The weaker version of disintegrate, this spell is known by most Doomguard wizards that regularly peruse the libraries of the four faction citadels. As disintegrate, except as follows: damage dealt by dissolve is 1d8 per caster level (maximum 10d8). A target that makes a successful Fortitude save is partially affected, taking only 3d8 points of damage. If this damage reduces the creature or object to 0 or fewer hit points, it is entirely disintegrated.

*Prismatic Lance* Evocation Level: Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Target: 1 creature

Range: Medium (100 ft + 10 ft / level)

Effect: Ray

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: None

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell creates a lance of shimmering prismatic energy that flies from the tip of the casters finger. The caster must make a ranged touch attack against the target, and if she hits then it takes 1d6 damage per level (maximum 10d6), of an energy type chosen from: Fire, Cold, Acid, Electricity or Sonic. When this spell deals damage of an energy type, it is also a spell of that type.

*Greater Embalming, Mass Necromancy* Level: Sor/Wiz 4, Cleric 4

Components: V, S

Time: 1 standard action

Target: one undead creature/level

Range: Close (25ft + 5ft/level)

Duration: 10 minutes / level

Save: Fort negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell is identical to the spell *Greater Embalming*, except it effects multiple creatures. The targets gain 2 temporary hit points per level of the caster, up to a total of +20 at level 10, and a +2 deflection bonus to AC.

### **Spells of the Fifth Circle**

*Ash Blast* Evocation [Cold] Level: Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25ft + 5ft / 2 levels)

Area: Cone

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Reflex ½; see text

Spell Resistance: Yes

The *Ash Blast* spell allows the caster to blast forth a cone of chilling ash from her fingertips, choking those effected. The cone of ash originates at the caster and extends outwards. Those in the area of effect suffer 1d10 points of cold damage per 2 caster levels (maximum 10d10) and are nauseated for one round. A successful Reflex save halves the damage taken and negates the nauseating effect. Creatures from the plane of ash or who do not need to breathe are unaffected by the nauseating component of this spell.

*Fire and Ice* Evocation [Fire, Cold] Level: Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 feet / level)

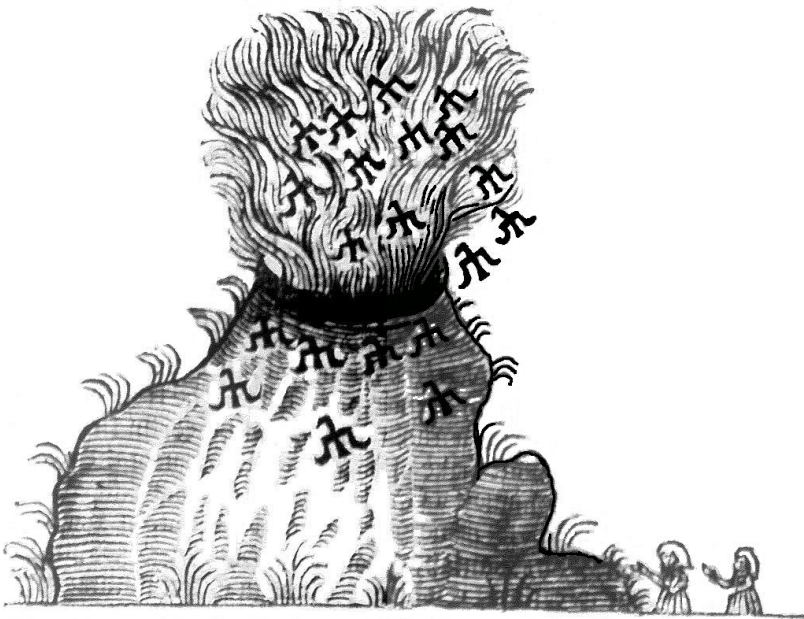
Area: 30 foot radius burst

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Reflex ½

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell creates a red sphere of Fire and a blue sphere of Ice that streak out to explode at the target point, incinerating and then freezing the surrounding area. The red sphere deals 1d6 fire damage for every two levels of the caster, while the blue sphere deals 1d6 cold damage for every two levels of the caster, up to a maximum of 7d6 fire and 7d6 cold. A successful Reflex save halves the total damage.



*Volcanic Rain* Evocation [Fire, Evil]

Level: Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S, M (A vial of oil)

Casting time: 1 standard action

Target: 1 creature

Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 feet / level)

Area: See text;

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Reflex ½

Spell Resistance: Yes

Streams of fiery rain from the heart of volcanic Gehenna streak down upon the target, burning and crushing it into submission. The caster chooses any single target within range. A stream of fiery

meteors rain down and strike the target and surrounding area - one 'meteor' for every second caster level up to a maximum of 10. Each missile inflicts 1d6 fire and 1d6 bludgeoning damage to the target, as well as d6 fire damage to anyone within 5 feet. The damage is halved on a successful Reflex save. The Bludgeoning damage counts as evil for the purposes of bypassing damage reduction.

**Spells of the Sixth Circle**

*Aqueous Air* Transmutation [Air, Water] Level: Sor/Wiz 6, Cleric 6

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft/level)

Area: 25 cubic feet/level

Duration: 2 hours/level

Save: None (harmless)

Spell Resistance: No

This spell transforms an area of normal air into a supernatural element with qualities of both air and water. Creatures who can normally only breathe water breathe normally whilst in the area of this spell. Creatures can swim through affected air as if it were water, or walk/fly normally. Large areas of Aqueous Air have been known to occur naturally, on occasion, and produce rather interesting hybrid ecosystems of aquatic and land-based life. This spell can be made permanent with the permanency spell.

*Black Barbed Transformation* Transmutation [Evil]

Level: Druid 5

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Target: 1 creature touched

Range: Touch

Duration: 2 rounds/level

Save: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes

Those who have walked the twisted paths of a Night hag can summon forth black roots from the depths of their own souls to twist the flesh of the willing into that of a black-barbed horror. This functions as Polymorph, except the form taken is always a large plant as per plant shape II and the creature gains fire and cold resistance 20, 2 slam attacks and DR 10/cold iron and magic.

*Desert Hell* Evocation [Fire] Level: Sor/Wiz 6

Components: V, S, M (A pinch of desert sand.)

Casting time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 feet / 2 levels)

Area: 50 ft by 50 ft square

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Fortitude ½

Spell Resistance: Yes

The spell summons scorching heat of the desert planes to burn all enemies in the area. They suffer 8d10 points of fire damage; those who make a successful Fortitude save suffer only half damage.

*Howl of Pandemonium* Conjuration, summoning[Sonic, Mind-affecting, Chaotic] Level: Wiz/Sor 6, Cleric 6, Bard 6

Components: V

Casting time: 1 standard action

Range: Personal

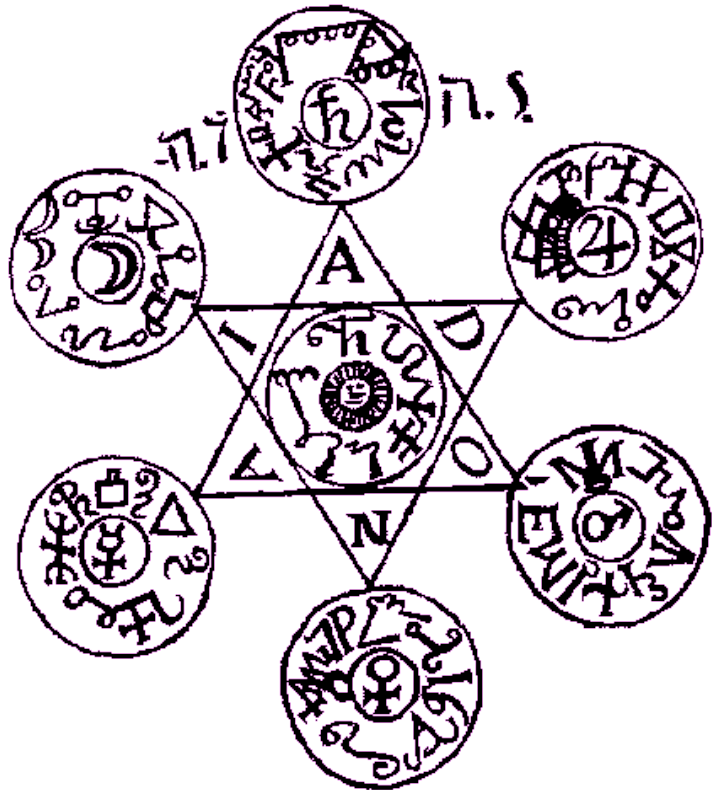
Area: 30-ft. radius circle

Duration: Concentration (up to 1 round a level); See Text;

Save: None, or Will negates; See Text;

Spell Resistance: Yes

The howl of Pandemonium spell derives power from the twisted Plane of Pandemonium, channelling the screaming winds of the plane into a numbing wail that incapacitates all nearby. The howl only begins to effect creatures at the beginning of his next turn, but it lasts as long as the caster concentrates, to a maximum of one round per caster level. The effects linger even after the spell ends, lasting as long as the spell was maintained. All creatures in the area of effect other than the caster are effected; communication of any kind is impossible, including the casting of spells with verbal components, and each creature suffers a –2 penalty to attack rolls and saving throws. Non magical missiles are deflected by the force of the wind, and all sonic based effects are negated, drowned out by the howl. In addition to the above effects, creatures with total HD equal to or lower than the caster must successfully make a Will save or become confused for the duration of the spell.



### Spells of the Seventh Circle

*Stygian Ice Storm* Conjuration (Summoning), [Evil] Level: Sor/Wiz 7, Cleric 8

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 feet / 2 levels)

Area: 25 foot radius burst

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: See text

Spell Resistance: Yes

This devastating spell summons the harshest cold and bitter ice of the Fifth Layer of Baator, Stygia, to smite those caught in the storm. As the River Styx flows through the Stygian Ice, so it does in this spell as well. Ice from Stygia is summoned to crush all creatures within the area of effect for 8d8 points of cold damage, with no saving throw. In addition, all creatures in the area of effect must make a Will save or suffer confusion as the spell for 1d6 rounds due to the immediate contact with the frozen, forgetful waters of the River Styx

*Enoll Eva's Duplication* Divination [Law] Level: Sor/Wiz 7, Cleric 7

Components: V, S, M (A sheet of complex equations)

Casting time: 1 full round action

Target: 1 creature touched

Range: Touch

Duration: 1/round or until discharged; see text;

Save: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes

This 'spell' is actually a complex mathematical equation accidentally discovered by the Guvner Enoll Eva while calculating the multiplication factor on various linear algebraic formulas. The results are devastating: This equation allows a subsequent action to be doubled or duplicated. This spell affects a single target. When cast, the recipients next attack action or spell will be duplicated once: For example, after making a full attack with a weapon, the full attack will be immediately duplicated - same for spells (cast a Magic Missile, and immediately afterwards, another Magic Missile spell will launch). The second action must have the same target as the original action; if this is not possible (because the target has been killed, for example) the spell fails. This effect lasts until the first such action is undertaken by the recipient, or the spell duration ends. All die rolls involved in the attack are rolled again in the duplication: as such, it is possible for the first attack to miss or fail to penetrate spell resistance, whilst the duplicated version manages to succeed.

### **Spells of the Eighth Circle**

*Mechanus Cannon* Transmutation [Teleportation, Law]



Level: Sor/Wiz 8, Cleric 9

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Target: 1 creature

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 feet / 2 levels)

Effect: -

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: None

Spell Resistance: No

The true, logical justice of Primus shall be delivered unto the illogical, in the form of pure energy descending from Mechanus. This spell does not actually create the blast of Force which smites the target, but rather acts as a targeting spell for a group of Modrons. When this spell is cast, it sends a message to the Mechanus Cannon crew in the heart of Mechanus, and they use the co-ordinates thus delivered to fire the cannon through a portal to the requested target. Logical Justice is delivered in the form of 15d6 points of Force damage with no saving throw allowed.



*Ignus's Fury* Evocation [Fire] Level: Sor/Wiz 8

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 feet / level)

Area: One 10 foot square / level

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Reflex ½

Spell Resistance: Yes

Named after an insane fire mage bent on planar destruction, this spell draws flames from the Elemental Plane of Fire to erupt, scorch and burn. This takes form as a horrific storm of fire that inflicts 12d10 points of fire damage + 1 point per caster level of fire damage on all creatures within the area of effect. A successful Reflex save halves the damage taken.

*Spells of the Ninth Circle* Abyssal Fury Conjunction (summoning) [Evil, Chaotic]

Level: Sor/Wiz 9, Cleric 9

Components: V, S, M; Material Component: A demon's finger bone

Casting time: 1 standard action

Target: 1 creature

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 feet / 2 levels)

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Reflex Negates, then fortitude negates; see text;

Spell Resistance: No

When compared with the Tanar'ri, at least the Baatezu are more civilised. There is, perhaps, nothing more horrific than the unbounded fury of the Abyss. By use of this spell, the ground splits open and the victim is dragged into the Tanar'ric madness.

The spell opens a planar portal beneath the target and drags them down into the Abyss unless they make a Reflex save. The portal remains open even once the victim is swallowed in. The only sound bystanders hear is the incessant screaming of the victim as they are torn apart by the ruthless Tanar'ri.

After what seems like only a few seconds (which is more than an eternity for the victim in the Abyss) the victim (or what's left of him) gets spat back out of the portal. On a failed Fortitude save, the target simply dies from the horrendous mauling he has received; if he succeeds, then he instead suffers 10d10 damage.

*Elysium's Fires* Evocation [Good] Level: Sor/Wiz 9, Cleric 9

Components: V, S

Casting time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 feet / level)

Area: 50 foot radius spread

Duration: Instantaneous

Save: Reflex ½

Spell Resistance: Yes

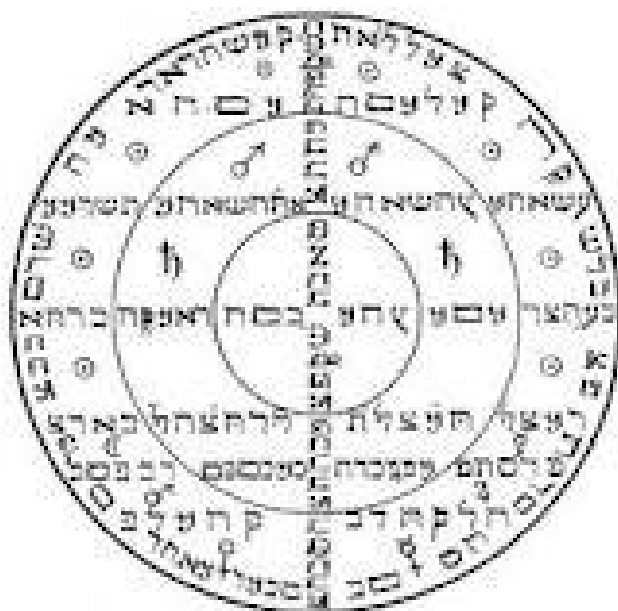
Elysium's Fires split the sky, raining streams of bright white fire down upon the earth. Each blast explodes when it strikes the ground, causing a tremendous flash and sending waves of holy fire rippling out from the point of impact. This rain of blazing meteors deals 20d8 Holy damage to all creatures within the area, with a Reflex save for half damage. Good creatures are unaffected by this spell and suffer no damage from its effects.

# PLANESCAPE CHARMS

*by Felix Aplin*

## Charm rules:

Charms are single-use wondrous items unique to the Planescape setting. Like a potion, using a charm takes a standard action, but this action does not provoke an attack of opportunity. Unless otherwise noted, any class and race may use a charm and benefit from its effects. As wondrous items, charms may be created by characters with the craft wondrous item feat. Charms are categorised according to their effective spell level in a similar way to potions, except their spell level can range from 0 to 5.



## Orison level Charms

### *Lesser Eye Charm*

This appears to be a small opaque crystal, about the size and shape of a human eye except tinged with blue. It has a smooth surface, and is in fact hollow – when the charm is crushed in the palm of the hand, a spell is released and invoked on the user, allowing him to see as if he had cast Detect Magic upon himself. This effect lasts for 1 minute before dissipating. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 30 gold pieces

Craft Level: 1st

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Detect Magic; 15 gp

Weight :Negligible

## First Level Charms

### *Feather Charm*

This is a rather tatty looking feather, the end of which has been sharpened and stuck through a small cluster of brightly coloured beads. The feather is that of a vrook – when the feather is snapped on two, the charm releases the evil energy held within, which repulses goodly creatures. Such charms are regularly used by lower planar inhabitants to protect themselves from good-aligned war parties, as well as being commonly used by anyone having dealings with upper-planar beings as a safeguard. Making use of one of these does not necessarily mean that the user himself is evil. When used, it invokes a Protection from Good spell on the user, which lasts for 1 minute. Like most charms, using this item is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

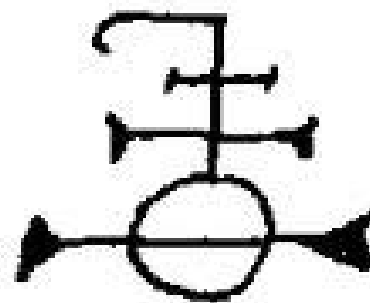
Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 150 gold pieces

Craft Level: 1st

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Protection from Good;  
75 gp

Weight :Negligible



### *Rune of Lesser Warding*

This small emblem, usually worn around the neck on a string or chain as if a necklace, is activated when its rune is fingered and traced over by the wearer. It grants the effects of a Mage Armour spell on the wearer for 1 hour. Once the rune has been activated, it becomes dull and inactive, and is merely shaped scrap metal. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 150 gold pieces

Craft Level: 1st

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Mage Armour; 75 gp

Weight: Negligible

### *Rune of Greater Warding*

This item comprises a rune carved onto a piece of metal, usually worn around the neck on a string or chain. Activating the rune requires it to be traced with a finger, whilst the wearer concentrates upon the shape of the rune. Once activated,

the wearer is protected by the effects of a Shield spell for 1 minute. Once the rune has been activated, it becomes dull and inactive, and is merely shaped scrap metal. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 150 gold pieces

Craft Level: 1st

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Shield; 75 gp

Weight: Negligible

#### *Tar Charm*

This appears to be a glistening drop of pitch-black tar, solidified into a hard, smooth form. When placed on the tongue, it dissolves and suffuses into the skin, giving the user a +5 circumstance bonus to Stealth checks. The effect lasts for 10 minutes, after which it wears off. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 150 gold pieces

Craft Level: 1st

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Disguise self; 175 gp

Weight: Negligible

### **Second Level Charms**

#### *Adder's Tear*

This charm is made of a green, tear-shaped substance. It is hard until placed into the mouth, where it dissolves quite naturally, giving a slightly acidic taste. It grants the ability to spit an Acid Arrow at one target, as if cast by a 3rd level caster. Consuming the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 350 gold pieces

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Acid Arrow; 175 gp

Weight: Negligible

### *Black-Barbed Charm*

This is a string of black barbed seeds linked together by one of the hairs of a Night Hag. When the string of seeds is sliced in the right spot, the necklace unravels around the wearer, invoking the Black Barbed Shield spell as if cast by a 3rd level caster, that will help protect them from attacks. Using this item is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 350 gold pieces

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Black Barbed Shield; 175 gp

Weight :Negligible

### *Black-Barbed Seed*

These malevolent seeds contain a portion of a Night Hag within themselves. Their power is activated when the seed is hurled up to 30 feet at the ground in front of an opponent - when the seed strikes the ground, it sprouts into black-barbed black branches that tear hungrily into the victim's body, invoking the spell Black Barbed Curse as if cast by a 3rd level caster. Each seed contains only one such curse. Using these seeds requires a ranged touch attack, and is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

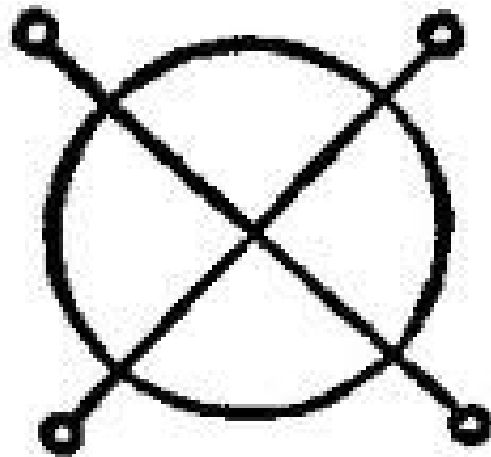
Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 350 gold pieces

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Black Barbed Curse; 175 gp

Weight :Negligible



### *Bone Charm*

This old finger bone charm has been hollowed out and tiny symbols have been scratched on its surface. A user must snap it in two to activate it. When snapped, the bone charm temporarily strengthens the user's skeleton and acts as a ward against breaks and fractures. The charm gives the user a +2 enhancement to natural armour, plus an additional +2 natural AC against bludgeoning weapons, for 10 minutes. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 350 gold pieces

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Barkskin; 175 gp

Weight:Negligible

#### *Clot Charm*

This glistening blood drop is as hard and smooth as a pearl. When placed on the tongue, it dissolves instantly and spreads through the character's bloodstream. The charm stimulates the user's blood into clotting and scabbing over existing wounds, healing any minor damage the user may have suffered before consuming the charm. Furthermore, as long as the charm is in effect, the character's blood becomes more "aware" of new wounds that occur, especially any attacks that draw blood. The charmed individual becomes more resistant to attacks, as their blood clots and scabs over the wound as soon as the flesh is torn. In this way, a clot charm heals 9 hit points, and also gives a +1 natural armour bonus for the next ten rounds. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 350 gold pieces

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Cure Moderate Wounds; 175 gp

Weight :Negligible

#### *Cranium Rat Charm*

This charm consists of the specially prepared body of a cranium rat, hollowed out and stuffed with herbs and parchments with mystic runes on. The charm has to be consumed to activate it (at least partially, anyway), and causes the recipient to gain a +5 competence bonus to perception checks, and a +2 enhancement bonus to Intelligence. The recipient will also feel as if they are seeing through several different pairs of eyes simultaneously, but this effect, though dizzying, causes no adverse effects. Consuming the charm is a standard action, but does not cause an attack of opportunity. The effects last for 10 minutes.

Type Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 350 gold pieces

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Fox's Cunning; 175 gp

Weight :Negligible



#### *Fiend's Eye Charm*



Like the Lesser Eye Charm, this appears to be a small crystal about the size of a human eye. Greater Eye Charms are heavily tinged with red and obviously inhuman, slitted pupils. When crushed in the palm of the hand, it invokes a See Invisibility spell on the user for a period of 10 minutes. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 350 gold pieces

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; See invisibility; 175 gp

Weight :Negligible

### *Ignan Dust*

This metallic dust is made from the remnants of powdered fire mephits specially created for the purpose. Usually held in a small pouch or non-metal blowpipe, when it comes into contact with metals it starts to generate considerable heat. The dust may be thrown onto an object or creature as a ranged touch attack. If hit, the object or creature is affected as if by a Heat Metal spell, but with no save allowed. The dust may be thrown with a range increment of 5 feet. Throwing the dust is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

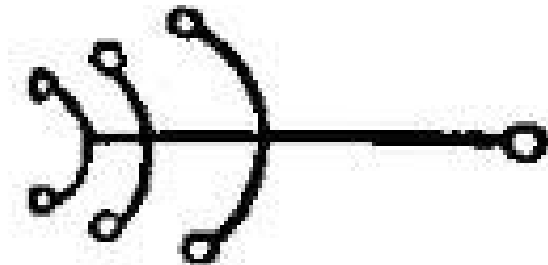
Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 350 gold pieces per use

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Heat metal; 175 gp

Weight:Negligible



### *Knot Charm*

This charm looks like a small piece of hemp, with the ends knotted together into a loop. No matter how closely the item is studied, the knot will defy explanation; it appears to pass over, under and even through itself in so many ways that it is impossible to see how it was tied. Ironically, when the two ends are pulled apart the knot comes undone with ease, giving the person dismantling the charm a sudden rush of strength. This invokes a Bull's Strength spell on the recipient for 1 minute. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack or opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 350 gold pieces

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Bull's Strength; 175 gp

Weight:Negligible

#### *Rat Tail Charm*

This charm is particularly filthy and smells faintly of vomit. The tail is stiff, like a wire, and it can be bent into different shapes- it would almost make a great lockpick, except it is too thick. When this charm is consumed, the user gains +5 competence bonuses to sleight of hand and stealth checks, but suffers a penalty of -2 to charisma. The charm lasts for 10 minutes. Consuming the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 350 gold pieces

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Alter Self; 175 gp

Weight :Negligible

#### *Thrice-Blind Charm*

This charm is made from the tails of three cranium rats, woven together. The effects of the charm are triggered when the tails are untied, and allowed to fall apart. When this occurs, the caster selects a target within their line of sight, to a maximum range of 100ft. The charm subjects the target to a Blindness spell (Fort DC 12 negates). Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 350 gold pieces

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item;Blindness-Deafness; 175gp

Weight:Negligible

#### *Tongue Charm*

This charm is a small, shrivelled tongue, obviously obtained from some humanoid creature. Across the dried surface of the tongue, barely visible runes can be distinguished, having been either painted or stitched into the charm. When consumed, the charm functions as a silence spell centred on the user, eradicating all sound within a 20-foot radius for 1 minute. The main exception is that the user of the charm is unaffected and may still speak, cast spells with verbal components and perform any other vocally orientated function. Creatures may attempt a DC 12 will save when they are first exposed to the silenced area: if successful, they are unaffected by the spell for its entire duration. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 350 gold pieces

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Silence; 175 gp

Weight: Negligible

### *Whispering Flask*

This container holds a peculiar substance called "Whispering Motes", a form of healing powder commonly used by the githzerai on the Plane of Limbo. When the stopper is pulled and the spice touched on the skin of a wounded person, the spice travels through the injured person's body, generating raw matter to fill up the "holes" in his physical and spiritual form. When used in this way, the motes acts as an Aid spell as if cast by a 3rd level caster. In addition, the motes grant a +2 enhancement bonus to constitution for the duration of the Aid spell. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 800 gold pieces

Craft Level: 3rd

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Aid; Bear's Endurance; 400 gp

Weight: Negligible

## **Third Level Charms**

### *Blood Charm*

This glistening drop of blood is as hard and smooth as a pearl. When placed on the tongue, it dissolves instantly and spreads through the character's veins and heart. Like its younger cousin, the clot charm, the blood charm stimulates the user's blood into clotting and scabbing over existing wounds, healing damage the user may have suffered before consuming the charm. However, while the blood charm's initial healing effect is more powerful than the clot charm, it has no other lasting effects. When used, it heals 18 points of damage. Using a charm is a standard action which does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 800 gold pieces

Craft Level: 5th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Cure Serious Wounds; 400 gp

Weight :Negligible

### *Blood Fly Charm*

Despite their vicious appetite and temperament, blood flies are used by healers to draw forth diseased blood from an individual or even drain blood from a dead body. On occasion, blood flies are used to siphon off rare types of blood and are then paralysed with powders or spells and kept in storage for future use. When this paralysed fly is consumed, the user heals a small amount of damage immediately and also gains the ability to recover from wounds for a certain period of time. The charm heals 3 hit points, and gives the user fast healing 1 for an additional 10 rounds. Using the charm is a standard action which does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 800 gold pieces

Craft Level: 5th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Vampiric Touch; 400 gp

Weight :Negligible

### *Bottled Shadow*

This charm appears as a bottle of black ink with a black stopper. When the stopper is removed, a shadow substance pours from the bottle to fill an area with deep darkness. The has the effect of casting a Blacklight spell centred on the user, which fills an area of 20 radius and lasts for 5 rounds before dissipating. The darkness is impenetrable even to darkvision, but the charm's user can see normally within it. Creatures outside the spell's area, including the charm's user, cannot see through it. Using a charm is a standard action which does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 800 gold pieces

Craft Level: 5th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Blacklight; 400 gp

Weight:Negligible

### *Charcoal Charm*

This piece of charcoal is a charred bone fragment of some creature, perhaps a finger bone or a talon. Various symbols have been scratched onto its surface... the scratchings are so faint that they are easy to miss. This charcoal charm temporarily protects the user against flames and extreme heat. To use the charm, the charred bone is snapped and the broken ends rubbed over the heart of the user. This acts as a protection from energy(fire) spell cast on the user, lasting for 50 minutes or until it has absorbed 60 points of fire damage. Charms require a standard action to activate and do not provoke attacks of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 800 gold pieces

Craft Level: 5th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Protection from Energy; 400 gp

Weight :Negligible

#### *Cockroach Charm*

Cockroaches are as common on the Planes as other scavengers. The shell of this particular dead cockroach has been dotted with paints and faint arcane symbols. The magic contained within the charm is activated when the roach is consumed. When swallowed, the recipient temporarily gains the protection of the cockroach. Their skin hardens, taking on the strength of a suit of chain mail armour, and the charmed individual becomes difficult to squash, giving them added protection vs. crushing attacks. This has the effect of giving them a +4 natural armour bonus, which is increased to +6 against bludgeoning attacks, for 10 minutes. As a charm, it does not provoke an attack of opportunity when used.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 800 gold pieces

Craft Level: 5th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Vermin Shape I; 400 gp

Weight :Negligible

#### *Tears of Sorrow*

Contained in this bottle are the tears of sorrow that are shed by Elysium itself when a holy hero perishes before his time. All the rage and anguish at a person's senseless death is contained in this tiny bottle. By throwing this bottle at an enemy (a ranged touch attack with a range increment of 10ft), their wrath can be unleashed, in the form of the spell Elysium's Tears, as if cast by a 5th level caster. If struck, the target cannot attempt a reflex save to halve the effects of this spell. Using a charm is a standard action which does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 800 gold pieces

Craft Level: 5th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Elysium's Tears; 400 gp

Weight :Negligible

#### **Fourth level charms**

### *Abyssal Pipe*

This is a small pipe, wooden pipe, carved to resemble the head of a demon. When used, it billows forth great gouts of deadly fumes from the planes of the Abyss, creating the effect of a Cloudkill spell centred on the caster. The fog lasts for 10 minutes before dissipating. Using a charm is a standard action which does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 1,200 gold pieces

Craft Level: 7th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Cloudkill; 600 gp

Weight :Negligible

### *Corpse Fly Charm*

This charm is a corpse fly, a common insect around much of the Great Ring, especially on the lower side. The fly appears to be dead or frozen; certainly it is extremely stiff and rigid. The charm is activated by placing the fly into the mouth. The person who does so will become suddenly nauseous, and after a few seconds will be able to expel from their nose and mouth a stream of insects which count as a wasp swarm as per the spell Insect Plague, but without a poisonous special attack. The insect swarm can be placed in any square adjacent to the invoker. The insects last for one minute before dissipating. Using the charm is a standard action which does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 1,200 gold pieces

Craft Level: 7th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Insect Plague; 600 gp

Weight :Negligible

### *Heart Charm*

This glistening drop of blood is as hard and smooth as a pearl. When placed on the tongue, it dissolves instantly and spreads through the character's veins and heart. The heart charm is more powerful than the blood and clot charms, and it heals a number of wounds instantly, even serious or critical injuries, preventing the user from being injured. Furthermore, the user will also gain a rush of energy, removing any fatigue they may be otherwise feeling. The charm cures 27 points of damage, and gives a +2 natural armour bonus to AC for the next 10 rounds. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 1,200 gold pieces

Craft Level: 7th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Cure Critical Wounds; 600 gp.

Weight:Negligible

### *Scent of Illsensitive*

This appears to be a perfume bottle, filled with some watery liquid. A small atomiser is attached to the bottle that produces a fine mist when used. A faintly briny smell can be smelt emanating from it; In fact, the liquid inside is brine taken from the pool of an illithid (TM) Elder Brain. Spraying the liquid into the air invokes a Mind Fog spell centred on the user, after which it is used up. The fog lasts 30 minutes before dissipating. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 1,200 gold pieces

Craft Level: 7th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; Mind fog; 600 gp

Weight:Negligible

### *Sphere Murk*

This is a small spherical bottle contains an unidentifiable dark liquid. If broken open, it invokes a blacksphere spell as if cast by a 7th level caster. The bottle can be thrown as a ranged touch attack, with a range increment of 10 ft. Once used, the liquid dissipates and may not be used again. Using a charm is a standard action which does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 1,200 gold pieces

Craft Level: 7th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous item;  
Blacksphere; 600 gp

Weight :Negligible





### *Spider Charm*

This appears to be a tiny, solidified drop of amber, highly polished and perfectly smooth. Upon closer inspection, the form of a small spider, caught in the amber and entombed, can be made out inside. The charm has been bound with powerful magics so that if consumed, it bestows upon the user some of the qualities of a spider, allowing them to move unimpeded amongst webs and other obstacles without trouble. This has the effects of a Freedom of Movement spell, cast on the consumer as if by a 7th level caster. Consuming the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 1,200 gold pieces

Craft Level: 7th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous item; freedom of movement; 600 gp

Weight :Negligible

### **Fifth Level charms**

#### *Scent of the Storm*

This is a perfume bottle. A small atomiser is attached to the bottle that produces a fine mist when used. There seems to be a small amount of liquid left in the bottle. Spraying this into the air will call invoke an Acid Fog spell centred on the user, after which it is used up. The fog lasts 10 rounds before dissipating. Using the charm is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Type: Wondrous Item, Magical

Market Value: 1,800 gold pieces

Craft Level: 9th

Craft Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item; acid fog; 900 gp

Weight :Negligible

# NO EXIT: AN EXISTENTIALIST-PLANESCAPE ADVENTURE FOR D&D

*by Lev Lafayette*

Recently Zack Sabbath wrote an article with the lengthy title “Put On Your Beret, Light A Gauloise, And Here We Go...

”. Using a comparison between classic D&D and new games it noted that one commonly cited feature is considered a problem by some and an excellent feature by others, namely, “it’s not focused around any one way of playing”.

A comparison was thus made between existentialism and post-structuralism. The former argues about deriving meaning through action in the world; “it was basically a philosophy that caught on in an environment where everybody was asking:

Hey, there are Nazis, what do we do?

”

In comparison, “post-structuralism was a philosophy developed while people were all asking the question:

Well, ok, those Nazis were bad, right, but can we be all smug and say we’re not like them? No, they were products of an environment. How do we make the environment not produce Nazis?”

So classic D&D is essentially an existentialist game, you are what you choose to do, you are condemned to be free; whereas new games, where the characters are very much part of their environment are post-structuralist games.

(This is a very pop version of the philosophy; strictly speaking the conflict should be between existentialism and structuralism; post-structuralism was a synthesis of the philosophical libertarianism of the existentialists and the determinism of the structuralists)

Now you can read the rest of Zack’s essay at: <http://dndwithpornstars.blogspot.com/2011/11/put-on-your-beret-light-gauloise-and.html>

The point is, the Eternal Dungeon is an existentialist adventure of a different nature.

The Eternal Dungeon is a one-shot D&D3.x adventure. Whilst it can be easily modified to other d20 games or similar, it works particularly well with D&D due to the common motifs, specifically (a) it must be in a dungeon, (b) it uses the four classic D&D character classes (Fighter, Rogue, Wizard, Cleric), (c) it requires that each PC belongs to one of the extreme moral and legal alignments (Lawful Good, Lawful Evil, Chaotic Evil, Chaotic Good).

Further the scenario also has some features which are strongly contrary to the D&D theme which actually adds to the plot, specifically (d) there are no monsters in the dungeon (well, there's one), other what the characters create themselves (e) character background and personality is more important than class and equipment (f) the theme of 'group loyalty' must be constantly challenged and even defeated.

Finally, there are three very important plot developments that the PCs must eventually discover; (g) the characters cannot actually die (h) they are actually already dead, trapped in the Concordant Domain of the Outlands.

Sample characters are as follows, mostly taken from the superb NPC generator ([http://www.myth-weavers.com/generate\\_npc.php](http://www.myth-weavers.com/generate_npc.php)). Let the players determine equipment. Note that the characters will not start with anything other than personal equipment, although the characters will not know that.

**Thorhalla**, female human Rog10: CR 10; Size M (5 ft., 10 in. tall); HD 10d6; hp 34; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12; Attack +8/+3 melee, or +9/+4 ranged; SV Fort +3, Ref +9, Will +3; AL CE; Str 13, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 9, Wis 11, Cha 6.

Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills and feats: Appraise +10, Bluff +7, Craft (Leatherworking) +12, Decipher Script +11, Disable Device +6, Disguise +11, Escape Artist +10, Hide +13, Knowledge (Local) +7, Knowledge (The Planes) +0, Listen +0, Move Silently +10, Search +11, Spot +0; Combat Reflexes, Diligent, Dodge, [Evasion], Negotiator, Stealthy.

Possessions: 10,000 gp in gear.

Primary motivation: Thrill seeking. The character has passion for adventuring and risk.

Secondary motivation: Divine. The character is compelled to act according to their Fate-based religious beliefs.

Recent Past: The character had a recent encounter with one or more vampires.

Social Class: Middle class. The character doesn't care for social classes and really dislikes both stuffy aristocrats and the upwardly aspirational.

**Roondar**, male gnome Clr10: CR 10; Size S (3 ft., 5 in. tall); HD 10d8+30; hp 76; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 12; Attack +9/+4 melee, or +9/+4 ranged; SV Fort +10, Ref +4, Will +11; AL LG; Str 13, Dex 12, Con 17, Int 10, Wis 18, Cha 16.

Languages Spoken: Common, Gnome.

Skills and feats: Craft (Alchemy) +2, Craft (Pottery) +12, Hide +5, Knowledge (Arcana) +4, Knowledge (Architecture and Engineering) +2, Knowledge (Religion) +6, Listen +6, Move Silently +1, Spot +4; Eschew Materials, Improved Counterspell, Negotiator, Silent Spell.

Possessions: 10,000 gp in gear.

Cleric Domains: Knowledge, Fire.

Cleric Spells Per Day: 6/5+1/5+1/4+1/4+1/2+1.

Primary motivation: A desire for money/treasure.

Secondary motivation: A desire for power and/or immortality.

Recent Past: The character had a recent encounter with one or more ogres.

Social Class: Lower class but with very strong desires to better their station in full accordance to law and order.

**Joey**, male halfling Wiz10: CR 10; Size S (3 ft., 1 in. tall); HD 10d4; hp 32; Init +5; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16; Attack +4 melee, or +11 ranged; SV Fort +4, Ref +9, Will +6; AL LE; Str 7, Dex 20, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 6, Cha 12.

Languages Spoken: Common, Elven, Gnome, Halfling.

Skills and feats: Climb +0, Concentration +13, Craft (Bowmaking) +9, Craft (Weaponsmithing) +6, Hide +9, Jump +0, Knowledge (Local) +10, Knowledge (Religion) +11, Listen +0, Move Silently +7, Spellcraft +13, Spot -2; Combat Reflexes,

Craft Rod, Extend Spell, Heighten Spell, Improved Counterspell, Maximize Spell, [Scribe Scroll].

Possessions: 10,000 gp in gear.

Wizard Spells Known (4/5/5/3/3/2): 0th -- Acid Splash, Arcane Mark, Dancing Lights, Daze, Detect Magic, Detect Poison, Disrupt Undead, Flare, Ghost Sound, Light, Mage Hand, Mending, Message, Open/Close, Prestidigitation, Ray of Frost, Read Magic, Resistance, Touch of Fatigue. 1st -- Charm Person, Color Spray, Disguise Self, Enlarge Person, Expeditious Retreat, Hold Portal, Magic Aura, Magic Missile, Ray of Enfeeblement, Reduce Person, Sleep, True Strike. 2nd -- Acid Arrow, Blur, Darkvision, Fox's Cunning, Obscure Object, Resist Energy, Web. 3rd -- Blink, Dispel Magic, Gentle Repose, Hold Person, Magic Circle against Law, Sleet Storm, Stinking Cloud, Vampiric Touch. 4th -- Animate Dead, Black Tentacles, Ice Storm, Summon Monster IV. 5th -- Baleful Polymorph, Hold Monster, Permanency, Transmute Rock to Mud.

Primary motivation: A strong sense of loyalty to the strong. The character feels that they owe them much, and will act to help them.

Secondary motivation: A need for knowledge about drow. The character feels that an understanding will solve their problems.

Recent Past: The character had a recent run in with ghosts.

Social class: Upper class with a very strong sense that everyone should know their place or be put in it.

**Halfdan**, male human Ftr10: CR 10; Size M (5 ft., 5 in. tall); HD 10d10+30; hp 96; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11; Attack +13/+8 melee, or +11/+6 ranged; SV Fort +10, Ref +4, Will +3; AL CG; Str 17, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 11.

Languages Spoken: Celestial, Common.

Skills and feats: Climb +9, Hide +1, Intimidate +5, Jump +15, Knowledge (Geography) +3.5, Knowledge (Local) +2, Listen +2, Move Silently +1, Perform (Keyboard Instruments) +3, Sense Motive +2, Spot +2, Swim +16; Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Endurance, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (urgosh, dwarven), Improved Critical (crossbow, light), Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Weapon Focus (crossbow, light).

Possessions: 10,000 gp in gear.

Primary motivation: Love for members of The Knights of the Watch. The character puts the object of their love's welfare before their own.

Secondary motivation: A deep fear of the religious and pious. The character is terrified, and will act out of fear.

Recent Past: The character has been visiting a friend in Welkwood.

Social class: Slave. The character's life started in the absolute bottom of society and has dedicated their life to the great ideals of goodness and freedom ever since.

## **The Dungeon Crawl**

The actual dungeon itself will vary every time all characters find themselves back on the slabs for whatever reason ("death", sleep etc). Use a random dungeon generator (e.g., <http://donjon.bin.sh/d20/dungeon/>) to create the new layout when necessary.

Each door is a Locked Strong Wooden Door (Open Lock DC 20, break DC 25; hard 5, 20 hp), each secret door is Secret (Search DC 30) Unlocked Strong Wooden Door (hard 5, 20 hp).

Each dead end has engraved in the stone, in glowing gold for Celestial and glowing red for Infernal (or Abyssal if you use that distinction) the words "No Exit". Touching any one of these walls immediately teleports the character to a random dead end in the dungeon (a "Jump Cut").

There is no escape from this dungeon; wishes etc, notwithstanding. Contact Other Plane etc will give insightful but gnomonic answers that strongly hint at the situation, without giving it away.

Continue the dungeon until the PCs resign themselves that they have to live with each other in this "hell", or they take the "leap of faith" (Room 2).

### **Room 1: Being-in-the-world**

"The human being is not the lord of beings, but the shepherd of Being." Martin Heidegger, Letter on Humanism (1947)

The characters start in a stone slab in a sparse room. They characters awaken, with their personal equipment, simultaneously. Although it is possible that they will not realise it they are actually laid out according to their alignments, with their heads pointing towards the appropriate alignments; top left for the Seven Mounting Heavens of Celestia (Lawful Good, Roondar), bottom left for the Nine Hells of Baator (Lawful Evil, Joey), top right for Olympian Glades of Arborea (Chaotic Good, Halfdan) and bottom right for the Infinite Layers of the Abyss (Chaotic Evil, Thorhalla).

The sparseness and indeed incredible dullness of the room is worthy of emphasising. The temperature is cool, but not cold. The air is slightly stuffy, but not overwhelmingly slow. The ambient light is dim, from an unknown and unknowable source. The stone walls of the room are a rough bluestone.

### **Room 2: A Leap of Faith**

"But this act of letting go is surely also something; it is indeed a contribution of mine. Must not this also be taken into account, this little moment, brief as it may be, it need not be long, for it is a leap." Søren Kierkegaard, "Philosophical Fragments" (1844)

This is essentially a room of traps. The secret door itself is several mechanical traps (DC 30 to find, DC 25 to disable) which releases (in order of being opened). All traps are CR 10.

a) a heavy guillotine that hits the first character, Reflex Save DC 20 to avoid, 8d8 damage.

b) a poison gas that seeps through the frame affecting all the vicinity, Fortitude Save DC 25 for half damage, 8d8 damage.

c) an explosion of Yellow Mold; All within 10 feet of the mold must make a DC 20 Fortitude save or take 2d6 points of Constitution damage. Another DC 25 Fortitude save is required 1 minute later - even by those who succeeded on the first save to avoid taking 4d6 points of Constitution damage.

The middle section of this room - some 30 ft by 30 ft - contains the only way out, in a manner of speaking. It is simply a bottomless pit, a void. A character who jumps in here will remain falling for the rest of eternity. As per tradition, the punishment for suicide is eternity in limbo.

To make matters worse, the door on the other side also has an energy drain trap:

CR 10; magic device; visual trigger (true seeing); automatic reset; Atk +8 ranged touch; spell effect (energy drain, 17th-level wizard, 2d4 negative levels for 24 hours, DC 23 Fortitude save negates); Search DC 34; Disable Device DC 34. Cost: 124,000 gp, 7,920 XP.

### Room 3: Thirty Plus Years of Stupid Monsters

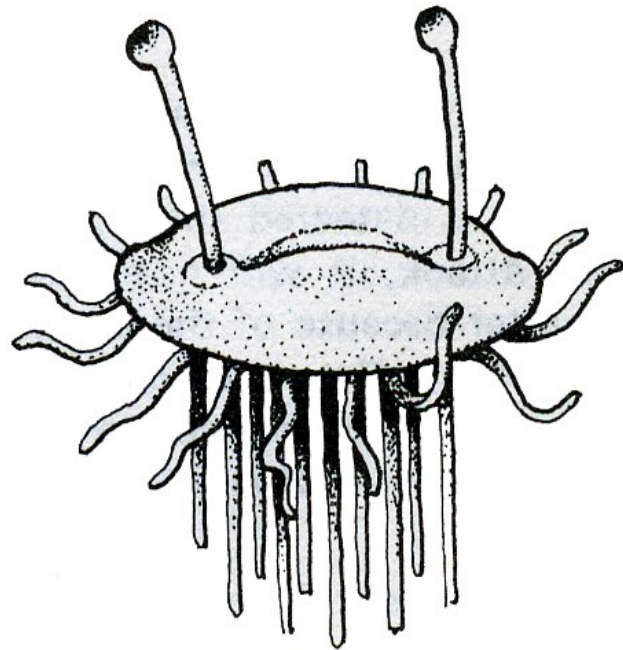
"Just the place for a Snark! I have said it twice:

That alone should encourage the crew.

Just the place for a Snark! I have said it thrice:

What I tell you three times is true."

Lewis Carroll, in *The Hunting of the Snark* (1874)



This room has a collection of the stuffed bodies of the most ridiculous monsters to grace the pages of D&D manuals. Expertly stuffed and mounted, some of the creatures that can be found here include:

A beholder, a gas spore (still operational), several flumphs, an owlbear, a sea lion, a wolf spider, a duck-bunny, a squark, an armadilliphant, an owlephant, a giant beaver, a mimic. Plus there are containers with various oozes, slimes etc. Nailed to the ceiling is a gelatinous cube.

You get the idea. There's even a flumph.

## Room 4: Found Objects

"Beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table." Comte de Lautréamont, Les Chants de Maldoror, 1874

This room is cluttered with a range of mundane goods arranged "artistically". Kitchen implements have been turned into metallic birds, a line of mops and brooms have been arranged to look like soldiers standing to attention, a bundle of swords have been beaten into a ploughshare.

A search of the room will discover a significant number of magic objects, although these will be invariably difficult to obtain. They'll be in locked boxes, hidden among the artworks etc. Furthermore the choice of magic items will be the annoying and inane, including the following:

Ten foot pole +1., a Ring of Clumsiness., Amulet of the Planes. It doesn't actually work here; the swirls appear, plus an tentalising vision, but without the plane shift. A Bag of Tricks. A Glaive-Guisarme +3. Boots of Dancing. A Folding Boat. A Ring of Contrariness. An Elixir of Love. A Girdle of Masculinity/Femininity. A Helm of Opposite Alignment

A Figurines of Wondrous Power: Ebony Fly. A Plate Armour of Rage. A Helm of Underwater Action. A Vacuous Grimoire. Horseshoes of a Zephyr. A Rod of Wonder. A Bag of Devouring. Ioun stones. And finally... a Deck Of Many Things.

## Room 5: A Monster of the Abyss

"He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you." Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil", Aphorism 146 (1886)

In this room there is a trapped demon of the abyss, Sek, who comes from the Egyptian pantheon. Sek is about 9 feet tall and measures about 20 feet from head to tip of tail, weighing about 4,000 pounds. Not that this Marilith is not evil, but rather "neutral balanced". They understand that their purpose in life is to slay "monster-killers" who come into their domain so they can face themselves.

### Sek, A Marilith

Size/Type: Large Outsider (Chaotic, Extraplanar, Evil)

Hit Dice: 16d8+144 (216 hp)

Initiative: +4

Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares)

Armor Class: 29 (-1 size, +4 Dex, +16 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 25

Base Attack/Grapple: +16/+29

Attack: Longsword +25 melee (2d6+9/19-20) or slam +24 melee (1d8+9) or tail slap +24 melee (4d6+9)

**Full Attack:** Primary longsword +25/+20/+15/+10 melee (2d6+9/19-20) and 5 longswords +25 melee (2d6+4/19-20) and tail slap +22 melee (4d6+4); or 6 slams +24 melee (1d8+9) and tail slap +22 melee (4d6+4)

**Space/Reach:** 10 ft./10 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Constrict 4d6+13, improved grab, spell-like abilities, summon demon

**Special Qualities:** Damage reduction 10/good and cold iron, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid 10, cold 10, and fire 10, spell resistance 25, telepathy 100 ft.

**Saves:** Fort +19, Ref +14, Will +14

**Abilities:** Str 29, Dex 19, Con 29, Int 18, Wis 18, Cha 24

**Skills:** Bluff +26, Concentration +28, Diplomacy +30, Disguise +7 (+9 acting), Hide +19, Intimidate +28, Listen +31, Move Silently +23, Search +23, Sense Motive +23, Spellcraft +23 (+25 scrolls), Spot +31, Survival +4 (+6 following tracks), Use Magic Device +26 (+28 scrolls)

**Feats:** Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Multiattack, Multiweapon Fighting, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword)

**Challenge Rating:** 17

**Alignment:** Neutral (!)

Each of a Sek's six arms wields a weapon, and the creature gets an additional three weapon attacks with its primary arm. Sek's natural weapons, as well as any weapons it wields, are treated as chaotic-aligned and evil-aligned for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.

**Constrict (Ex)** A marilith deals 4d6+13 points of damage with a successful grapple check. The constricted creature must succeed on a DC 27 Fortitude save or lose consciousness for as long as it remains in the coils and for 2d4 rounds thereafter. The save DC is Strength-based.

**Improved Grab (Ex)** To use this ability, a marilith must hit with its tail slap attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it succeeds on the grapple check, it can constrict.

**Spell-Like Abilities** At will - align weapon, blade barrier (DC 23), magic weapon, project image (DC 23), see invisibility, telekinesis (DC 22), greater teleport (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), unholy aura (DC 25). Caster level 16th. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

**Summon Demon (Sp)** Once per "life" a Sek can attempt to summon 4d10 dretches, 1d4 hezrou, or one nalfeshnee with a 50% chance of success, or one glabrezu or another marilith with a 20% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 5th-level spell.

**True Seeing (Su)** Mariliths continuously use this ability, as the spell (caster level 16th).

**Skills.** Mariliths have a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks.

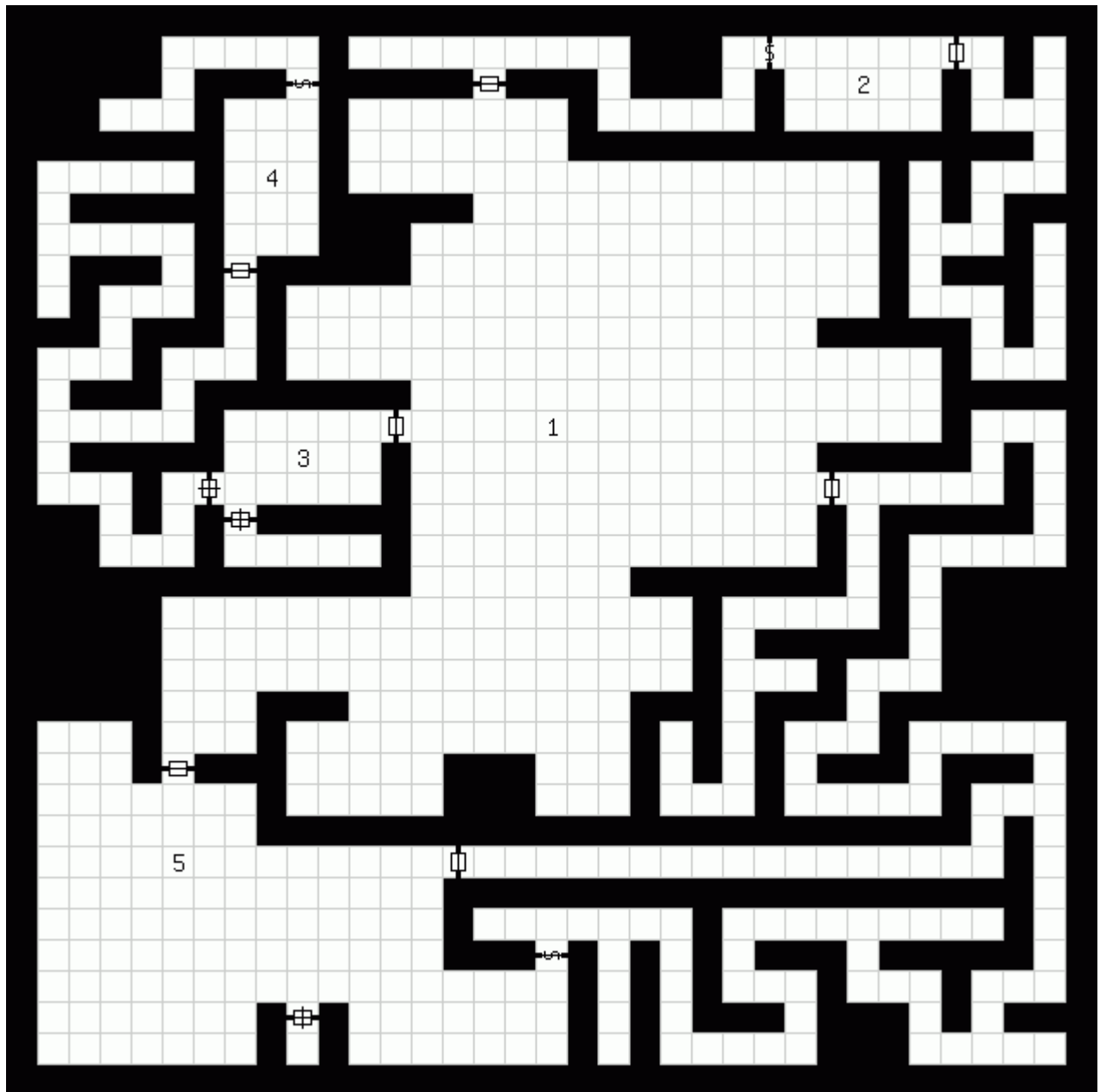
**Feats.** In combination with its natural abilities, a marilith's Multiweapon Fighting feat allows it to attack with all its arms at no penalty.

Sek is defeated, the character landing the "killing blow" (spell etc) will find themselves transported to a pocket-dimension where they have to combat a carbon-copy of themselves. Sek will reform an hour after being killed, and await the next person who seeks to "fight monsters".



Eventually the PCs will question Sek, who will explain that if they fight a monster of the abyss, they will fight themselves, such is the curse that has been bestowed upon this immortal being.

The Eternal Dungeon is conceptually based on Jean-Paul Sartre's acclaimed play "No Exit" (<http://vtheatre.net/script/doc/sartre.html>), l'enfer, c'est les autres.



# THE ILLOGICS OF D&D

*by many people!*

A classic post from over ten years ago; was originally put together by numerous posters at a WoTC forum, no long since gone.

*"This always works in the movies"*

The MM says that staking a vampire kills them, but there are no called shot rules and undead aren't subject to coup-de-grace. So you can't actually stake them.

*"We don't need thumbs here in the Abyss"*

By the MM errata, all outsiders with an Int of 6 or higher are proficient with all martial weapons. This includes Hellhounds, Howlers, and Nightmares, among other quadrupeds.

*"You backwoods Dwarves still dig, what ever for?"*

Wall of Iron produces real iron as an instant spell (so it can't be dispelled and is non-magical) and by the price guidelines on PHB 96 & 114 and the Availability guidelines on DMG 137, you can hire a wizard to cast a spell that produces roughly 1800 gp worth of iron for only 500 gp in any small town or larger settlement. And yet iron mining supposedly exists in the game world.

*"Like, you know, like that.. an stuff... anat, right?"*

Simulacrum produces a creature that has among other traits 51-60% of the "speech" of the original. Does that mean that it leaves random words out of ... or do it just use small words when talk?

*"All the commoners round here always die off at the same time every year"*

The extreme heat/extreme cold rules render much of the real world uninhabitable as everyone in Fairbanks in winter or Phoenix in summer takes enough subdual damage to render them unconscious in just a few hours.

*"But I'm as strong as Heracles, made my save, and was carrying a Spade of Digging.."*

Regardless of size, strength, tools on hand or reflex save result, anyone caught in the bury zone of an avalanche is pinned and must wait to be rescued rather than being able to dig there own way out.

*"So that's what those pointy bits do..."*

The 20th level Expert Trapmaker with Search, Profession: Trapmaker, Craft: Trapmaking, Knowledge: Famous Traps and Knowledge: Magical Traps all at 23, cannot attempt to find a trap if the Search DC is over 20, but the 1st level rogue with none of those skills can.

*"I know he fled into the woods, but first, we'll check at the inn"*

A Successful Wilderness lore role to Track lets you track somebody for up to 1 mile indoors, and in fact you get to retry more frequently indoors than outdoors.

*".....ouch."*

Since according to PHB 121, free actions can only be performed while taking another action, and since you can only take an action on your initiative, and since by Table 8-4 on PHB 128, "Speak" is a free action: By a strict reading of the rules, you must wait until your next action to cry out in pain after being hit in combat.

*"Wall of Orca"*

Running away from someone? Need to block a passage? Well, have we got a solution for you! Summon monster V allows you to summon a celestial orca. The critter has (on average) 85 hit points and it can thrash around and attack anyone trying to get through. Much better than a wall of stone. And, since it just goes back to its home plane when it "dies," you don't really have to feel all that bad.

*"I'm not exactly feeling myself today, and neither am I"*

A small spellcaster with a tiny familiar can use Polymorph Self to turn back into himself. And he can use Share Spells to have his familiar also turn back into "himself" at the same time. There aren't many spells that specifically allow you to break the normal constraints English grammar has on reflexive pronouns.

*"Wow, I didn't realize dragons beer-goggled that heavily"*

The various "half-" templates can be applied to any corporeal creature (Alignment permitting). This includes oozes, plants and even constructs.

*"I never Meta-magic I didn't like."*

Silent Power Word, Kill. Still Burning Hands. How?

*"Transmute Rock to Stone"*

Type elemental provides immunity only to poisons, sleep, paralysis, stunning and critical hits. So it is still possible for a Gorgon, Medusa, Cockatrice or Basilisk to petrify an Earth Elemental.

*"Trees; you can chop 'em down, but you can't change 'em with magic"*

As per MM 6, plants are immune to polymorphing. Presumably this includes Polymorph any Object, even though the spell description uses "vegetable" as a classifier.

*"So much dropping a GP off the Empire State building"*

An arrow fired from a bow or flung via Telekinesis deals 1d6 or more damage, yet the same arrow dropped from a great height can never deal any damage, since it weighs less than one pound (DMG 89, column 2)

*"Azathoth's Gibbering Explained??"*

Deities are capable of casting Contact Other Plane to converse with themselves - but they "resent such intrusion" and even have a flat percentage chance of lying to themselves.

*"All things are not equal..."*

50ft of chain = 10lbs. 50ft of hemp rope = 10 lbs.

*"Mad cat!"*

A house cat, according to the MM, can deal 3 damage with two claws and a bite. (Minimum damage is 1 HP for an attack.) And a peasant has 1d4 HP. So don't tick off kitty!

*"It's Big, It's Heavy, It's Wood!"*

Since a club costs 0 gp, a Limited Wish spell can create an infinite number of clubs, causing the plane to collapse into a black hole.

*"Why yes, I did bring weapons for the entire army"*

Since the sling has both cost 0 and weight 0, and you can generally find ordinary stones for free, there is no mechanical reason not to carry a few million around in case you need to arm a peasant uprising.

*"Dagger, Greatclub it's about the same"*

The MM errata failed to amend the Tarrasque's Swallow Whole ability to mention the usual stipulation that you can only cut your way out with a "light slashing or piercing weapon"

*"If the horses ever catch on, we're in trouble"*

A whip cannot even deal subdual damage to any creature with a +3 or better natural armor bonus. This includes all horses, which makes you wonder about coachmen and the use of riding crops.

*"It's all in the trunk"*

Dire Elephants, as described in MotW, have a +23 skill bonus to Climb, and are listed as having speed 40 ft., Climb 10.

*"It's Not So Good Up Close When They're Standing Still"*

Although it ignores armor (as it normally requires only a ranged touch attack to hit), and is specifically noted as creating a "magical arrow", Melf's Acid Arrow cannot be used to perform a Coup de Grace against an adjacent foe in the manner a normal bow can (PHB 133). For that matter, neither can a sling, although a hand crossbow works just fine.

*"Never trust a used weapon salesman"*

Despite the really cool part about the ability not allowing a saving throw, that's just clever advertising intended to distract you from the fact that the complete destruction effect of a Mace of Smiting only functions when you deal a critical hit to a construct - which are not subject to the effects of critical hits. And watch out for those vorpal weapons too, they have to be fabricated using a spell that doesn't exist in 3rd edition.

*"Butter-fingered Balors"*

Balor's vorpal sword is only a +1 weapon... This means that it's almost entirely useless vs most other demons and devils. Why don't they simply get a +5 keen or defending weapon? Is that so that they don't accidentally cut themselves?



*"He's just faking it..."*

Despite being blind, Grimlocks have a Spot check of +3.

*"Class-ical Blunders"*

Apprentice-level paladins have lay on hands as a class ability, but have an effective level of 0.

Wizards, druids, and monks do not have Unarmed Strike as a weapon proficiency and the druid loses all abilities for 24 hours if she tries to punch someone, or if she Wild Shapes into an animal and bites them.

A Cleric with the Water Domain can turn Fire Creatures like a normal cleric turns Undead. So Clerics with the Water Domain can turn Red Dragons. In fact, the only dragons that cannot be turned are white, the weakest of all colors.

*"In the eye of the beholder"*

Hill Giants are described as "oddly simian", who "seldom wash" and carry "filthy, and stinky" possessions. Cloud Giants are "handsome" and "well-defined" who wear "the finest clothing available." Hill Giants have a charisma of 17; Cloud Giants have a 13.

*"Forget stone, build my castle out of dwarves!"*

The disintegrate spell cast on an object will destroy 10 cubic feet of matter, no saving throw allowed. The same spell will only affect one dwarf, who the caster must hit first with a touch attack roll, and still gets a saving throw.

*One Way Fire*

"The spell "Flame Shield" creates a fire around you that burns anyone that attacks you, even if they are using a weapon (although not if they are using a reach weapon)... however, you can touch them without damaging, even grapple them. However, they'd take damage if they tried to grapple back "

*Sic Him, Rex!*

Apparently the average dog is as strong as a bugbear.

*I Bleed... Slower.*

A dying character can delay his own death in order to be healed. A character takes bleeding damage at the end of a round (ie just before his initiative). A dying character may take no actions. Delaying your go in a turn (up to -(10+dex bonus) is not an action.

*Level Down!*

Standard gnomes, elves, dwarves and halflings presented in the MM can use any martial weapon, and have a d8 for hitpoints. If they choose to work hard and farm the land (gaining a level in commoner) they will lose half their hitpoints, forget how to hack at people with axes, and lose many of their skills as they suddenly become cross-class.

*Archery Contests*

An inanimate, untargeted arrow or spear launching device (traps from the DMG - +10 to hit and +12 to hit within 200ft respectively) has a vastly greater chance of hitting someone, and at a far greater range than the average man aiming a crossbow at them (+0 to hit up to 80ft).

*The Peasants Are ...*

Since a club costs 0 gp, a Limited Wish spell can create an infinite number of clubs, causing the plane to collapse into a black hole.

Since the sling has both cost 0 and weight 0, and you can generally find ordinary stones for free, there is no mechanical reason not to carry a few million around in case you need to arm a peasant uprising." (or just a Limited Wish instead, I suppose).

# HORROR ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS AND MASKS OF NYARLATHOTEP CONVERSIONS FOR D20 CALL OF CTHULHU

*by Lev Lafayette*

Converting from *Call of Cthulhu* to *D20 Call of Cthulhu* should not be an onerous task. As the guide in the D20 book suggests (p314) there is a direct correlation between a number of statistics and skills and ratings simply have to be changed from a D100 to a D20. Some minor tweaks however are recommended. Firstly, D20 INT is expressed here as the average of CoC INT, with modifications for extreme EDU, rather than dropping EDU. Secondly, D20 STR is expressed here as the average of CoC SIZ and STR, rather than dropping SIZ and just using STR. The conversion of CoC POW to D20 CoC WIS caused some concern, as the latter has far greater scope and variation than the former.

The “attack method” for determining character level is used for combat-orientated characters, rather than the more calculative intensive “skill method” which is reserved for the more professorial types. Where it was obvious that a character came from a more academic background the BAB conversion was made as if a defensive option was taken. In some cases however this did not work as a character in CoC is quite capable of having an enormous quantity of skills, but no combat ability. This is, of course, not possible in D20 Call of Cthulhu. The translation of skills also required some license; many skills were combined, for example CoC Debate and Oratory have been merged into Diplomacy, with half the smaller bonus adding to the first, There has been a strong tendency to round up in skill ratings.

Whilst it is almost certain that any attempt to reverse engineer the values will result in divergence, for actual play this is sufficient. It's a dirty hack and it must be acknowledged that the two game systems do not merge as easily as the authors of D20 Call of Cthulhu would like to claim.

As for the actual adventure packs, Horror on the Orient Express and Masks of Nyarlathotep are recognised as two of the most extraordinary campaigns ever produced for Call of Cthulhu, or even in the history of roleplaying as whole. Although both are quite rare, there is no attempt here to recreate the stories in total and this article assumes that one has both adventures. Some attempt has been made to avoid spoilers, as much as one can whilst giving Keeper's a quick and ordered reference guide.

The only characteristics used here are those that the PCs are likely to come into conflict with. Indeed, in some cases extra numbers have been combined; I did not see the point of replicating gangs of cultists on minor statistical variation alone. For others simply pick the appropriate skill percentage and divide by 10 for conversion to D20 bonus if the situation requires. Likewise not that skills and saving throws listed below do not include attribute bonuses; however hit points do.

## **Horror on the Orient Express Book II (London, Paris, Lausanne, Milano)**

Mehmet Makyrat STR 16, CON 16, INT 17, WIS 18, DEX 14, CHA 14(2), Sanity 0

Skills: Bluff +5, Climb +5, Craft (Flaying) +9, Cthulhu Mythos +3, Disguise +4, Drive +4. Hide +8, History +3, Move Silently +8, Other Language: English +6, French +5, Research +4, Sense Motive +5, Sleight +3, Spot +9, Search +9, Tumble +6, Wilderness Lore +4,

Level 10, Offensive Option. +8/+3, +7 Fort, +3 Will. +3 Ref, 60 hp

Weapons: Knife 1D4, Handgun 1d10, Quot 1d8

#### Special Passengers

STR 12, CON 12, INT 0, WIS 1, DEX 9, CHA 0, BAB +1, Grapple, Doom Kiss, Level 1 Offensive 4 hp

STR 13, CON 16, INT 0, WIS 1, DEX 9, CHA 0, BAB +1, Grapple, Doom Kiss, Level 1 Offensive 6 hp

STR 13, CON 18, INT 0, WIS 1, DEX 9, CHA 0, BAB +1, Grapple, Doom Kiss, Level 1 Offensive 7 hp

STR 14, CON 15, INT 0, WIS 1, DEX 9, CHA 0, BAB +1, Grapple, Doom Kiss, Level 1 Offensive 5 hp

STR 12, CON 14, INT 0, WIS 1, DEX 9, CHA 0, BAB +1, Grapple, Doom Kiss, Level 1 Offensive 5 hp

STR 12, CON 15, INT 0, WIS 1, DEX 9, CHA 0, BAB +1, Grapple, Doom Kiss, Level 1 Offensive 5 hp

STR 13, CON 13, INT 0, WIS 1, DEX 9, CHA 0, BAB +1, Grapple, Doom Kiss, Level 1 Offensive 4 hp

STR 13, CON 13, INT 0, WIS 1, DEX 9, CHA 0, BAB +1, Grapple, Doom Kiss, Level 1 Offensive 4 hp

STR 13, CON 13, INT 0, WIS 1, DEX 9, CHA 0, BAB +1, Grapple, Doom Kiss, Level 1 Offensive 4 hp

STR 15, CON 12, INT 0, WIS 1, DEX 9, CHA 0, BAB +1, Grapple, Doom Kiss, Level 1 Offensive 4 hp

Duc Jean Floressas des Esseintes, STR 13, CON 14, INT 19, WIS 19, DEX 13, CHA 15(2), Sanity 0

Skills: Bluff +8, Cthulhu Mythos +3, Diplomacy +6, Hide +5, Occult +7, Tumble +4, Other Language: English +7, German +7, Stealth +5

Level 5, Offensive Option, +5 BAB, +5 Fort, +2 Ref, +2 Will, 25 hp

Weapons: Knife 1D4, Swordcane 1d6

#### Mob Members

STR 14, CON 12, INT 13, WIS 11, DEX 15, CHA 10, BAB +3, Knife 1d4, Club 1d4, Level 3 Offensive, 12 hp

STR 12, CON 12, INT 11, WIS 11, DEX 14, CHA 10, BAB +3, Knife 1d4, Club 1d4, Level 3 Offensive, 12 hp

STR 13, CON 13, INT 10, WIS 12, DEX 13, CHA 10, BAB +3, Knife 1d4, Club 1d4, Level 3 Offensive, 12 hp

STR 13, CON 11, INT 10, WIS 11, DEX 12, CHA 10, BAB +3, Knife 1d4, Club 1d4, Level 3 Offensive, 9 hp

STR 13, CON 13, INT 9, WIS 12, DEX 10, CHA 10, BAB +3, Knife 1d4, Club 1d4, Level 3 Offensive, 12 hp

STR 13, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 11, DEX 9, CHA 10, BAB +3, Knife 1d4, Club 1d4, Level 3 Offensive, 9 hp

Arturo Faccia, STR 12, CON 9, INT 14, WIS 14, DEX 11, CHA 9, Sanity 0

Skills: Accounting +9, Diplomacy +5, Law +2, Other Language: English +2, Turkish +5, Research +2, Stealth +3, Search +7, Sense Motive +7, Spot +7



Level 3, Offensive Option, +3 BAB, +4 Fort, +1 Ref, +1 Will, Weapons: Knife 1D4, Swordcane 1d6, 6 hp

#### Bulky Brothers

STR 14, CON 15, INT 11, WIS 11, DEX 13, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4, Club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 10 hp

STR 14, CON 13, INT 12, WIS 10, DEX 12, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4, Club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 8 hp

STR 14, CON 14, INT 11, WIS 11, DEX 12, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4, Club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 10 hp

STR 12, CON 13, INT 13, WIS 13, DEX 12, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4, Club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 8 hp

STR 13, CON 12, INT 14, WIS 14, DEX 11, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4, Club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 8 hp

STR 13, CON 13, INT 12, WIS 11, DEX 11, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4, Club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 8 hp

#### Caterina Cavollaro

STR 12, CON 14, INT 13, WIS 12, DEX 8, CHA 11, BAB +1, Grapple, Level 2 Defensive, 8 hp

### **Horror on the Orient Express Book III (Venezia, Triest, Zagreb, Beograd)**

#### Blackshirt Elite

STR 12, CON 12, INT 11, WIS 16, DEX 12, CHA 11, BAB +3, natural weapons, Level 3 Offensive, 12 hp

STR 9, CON 10, INT 11, WIS 13, DEX 15, CHA 11, BAB +3, natural weapons, Level 3 Offensive, 9 hp

#### Blackshirt Thugs, for Vienna and Trieste (also used for Sebastiano's friends)

STR 13, CON 15, INT 11, WIS 8, DEX 10, CHA 11, BAB +2, natural weapons, (knife 1d4), Level 2 Offensive, 10 hp

STR 14, CON 13, INT 11, WIS 6, DEX 15, CHA 11, BAB +2, natural weapons, (knife 1d4), Level 2 Offensive, 8 hp

STR 14, CON 9, INT 11, WIS 9, DEX 8, CHA 11, BAB +2, natural weapons, (knife 1d4), Level 2 Offensive, 4 hp

STR 13, CON 11, INT 11, WIS 10, DEX 11, CHA 11, BAB +2, natural weapons, (knife 1d4), Level 2 Offensive, 6 hp

STR 13, CON 11, INT 11, WIS 7, DEX 17, CHA 11, BAB +2, natural weapons, (knife 1d4), Level 2 Offensive, 6 hp

STR 13, CON 8, INT 11, WIS 9, DEX 9, CHA 11, BAB +2, natural weapons, (knife 1d4), Level 2 Offensive, 4 hp

#### Vigilli

STR 14, CON 9, INT 11, WIS 14, DEX 13, CHA 11, BAB +2, club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 4 hp

STR 13, CON 13, INT 11, WIS 11, DEX 11, CHA 11, BAB +2, club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 8 hp

STR 13, CON 14, INT 11, WIS 11, DEX 11, CHA 11, BAB +2, club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 10 hp

STR 14, CON 12, INT 11, WIS 11, DEX 10, CHA 11, BAB +2, club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 8 hp

STR 14, CON 14, INT 11, WIS 11, DEX 10, CHA 11, BAB +2, club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 10 hp

STR 13, CON 17, INT 11, WIS 10, DEX 8, CHA 11, BAB +2, club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 12 hp

Carlo Casciano, Mob Ringleader

STR 13, CON 13, INT 10, WIS 12, DEX 11, CHA 14, BAB +2, club 1d4, Level 2 Offensive, 8 hp

Mob Members

STR 12, CON 11, INT 10, WIS 12, DEX 11, CHA 11, BAB +1, club 1d4, Level 1 Offensive, 3 hp

Antoni Termona

STR 11, CON 14, INT 11, WIS 14, DEX 8, CHA 13, BAB +1, handgun 1d10, tentacle 1d4, Level 1 Offensive, 5 hp

Bluff +6, Other Language: English +6, Latin +3, Search +4, Spot +4

Marco Montanella

STR 9, CON 12, INT 17, WIS 16, DEX 8, CHA 11, Sanity 0

Archeology +3, Diplomacy +7, Other Language: Classical Greek +7, English +6, German +5, Latin +7

BAB +1, handgun 1d10, Tentacle 1d4, Level 1 Offensive, 4 hp

John Winckleman INT 14, WIS 29

Skin Brothers

STR 14, CON 12, INT 11, WIS 9, DEX 16, CHA 11, BAB +2, knife 1d4, Stealth +3, Hide +3, 8 hp

STR 16, CON 13, INT 11, WIS 14, DEX 15, CHA 11, BAB +2, knife 1d4, Stealth +3, Hide +3, 8 hp

STR 14, CON 14, INT 11, WIS 10, DEX 11, CHA 11, BAB +2, knife 1d4, Stealth +3, Hide +3, 10 hp

STR 14, CON 13, INT 11, WIS 11, DEX 13, CHA 11, BAB +2, knife 1d4, Stealth +3, Hide +3, 8 hp

STR 15, CON 15, INT 11, WIS 10, DEX 13, CHA 11, BAB +2, knife 1d4, Stealth +3, Hide +3, 10 hp

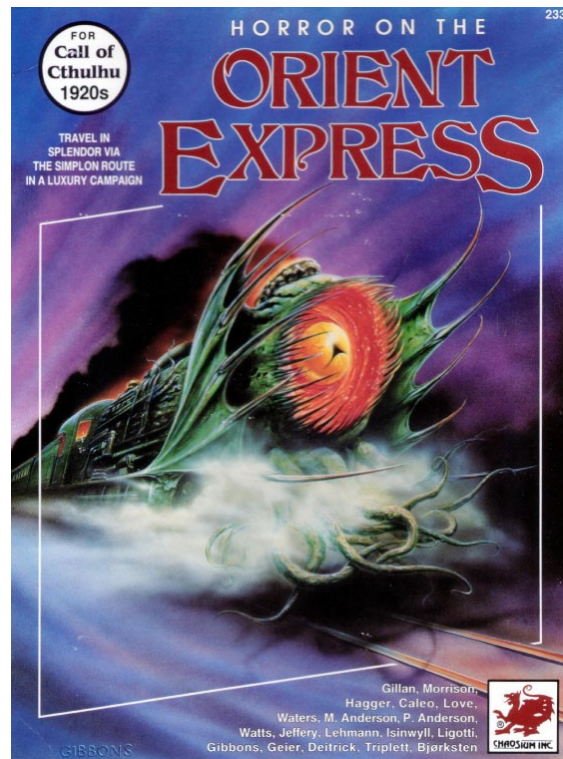
STR 13, CON 13, INT 11, WIS 16, DEX 13, CHA 11, BAB +2, knife 1d4, Stealth +3, Hide +3, 8 hp

Level 2 Offensive

Lloigor Cultists

STR 14, CON 16, INT 11, WIS 11, DEX 14, CHA 11, BAB +2, knife 1d4, Stealth +3, Hide +3, 12 hp

STR 14, CON 17, INT 11, WIS 11, DEX 13, CHA 11, BAB +2, knife 1d4, Stealth +3, Hide +3, 12 hp



STR 15, CON 14, INT 11, WIS 10, DEX 13, CHA 11, BAB +2, knife 1d4, Stealth +3, Hide +3, 10 hp  
STR 16, CON 16, INT 11, WIS 12, DEX 12, CHA 11, BAB +2, knife 1d4, Stealth +3, Hide +3, 12 hp  
STR 15, CON 16, INT 11, WIS 10, DEX 12, CHA 11, BAB +2, knife 1d4, Stealth +3, Hide +3, 12 hp  
STR 15, CON 13, INT 11, WIS 9, DEX 12, CHA 11, BAB +2, knife 1d4, Stealth +3, Hide +3, 8 hp

#### Level 2 Offensive

Lliogor (see D20 Call of Cthulhu, p175)

STR 24, CON 21, INT 17, WIS 16, DEX 13, CHA 16, BAB +11, +7 Fort, +7 Ref, +5 Will, AC +8, 76 hp

#### Statue Thieves

STR 16, CON 16, INT 11, WIS 13, DEX 11, CHA 11, BAB +4, club 1d4, Level 5 Defensive, 30 hp  
STR 15, CON 17, INT 11, WIS 12, DEX 10, CHA 11, BAB +4, club 1d4, Level 5 Defensive, 30 hp

#### Serbian and Turkish Brawlers

STR 12, CON 14, INT 10, WIS 10, DEX 14, CHA 10, BAB +1, Knife 1d4, Rock 1d4, Level 1 Offensive, 5 hp  
STR 12, CON 12, INT 10, WIS 15, DEX 11, CHA 10, BAB +1, Knife 1d4, Rock 1d4, Level 1 Offensive, 4 hp  
STR 13, CON 13, INT 10, WIS 11, DEX 11, CHA 10, BAB +1, Knife 1d4, Rock 1d4, Level 1 Offensive, 4 hp  
STR 10, CON 9, INT 10, WIS 12, DEX 17, CHA 10, BAB +1, Knife 1d4, Rock 1d4, Level 1 Offensive, 2 hp  
STR 11, CON 11, INT 10, WIS 11, DEX 14, CHA 10, BAB +1, Knife 1d4, Rock 1d4, Level 1 Offensive, 3 hp  
STR 13, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 12, DEX 9, CHA 10, BAB +1, Knife 1d4, Rock 1d4, Level 1 Offensive, 3 hp

#### Marja Nedic

STR 11, CON 12, INT 12, WIS 16, DEX 10, CHA 15,  
Skills: Botany +9, Heal +8, (Folk) History +10, Listen +9, Spot +10, Search +10  
Offensive Level 10 BAB +9/+4, knife 1d4, +7 Will, +3 Ref, +3 Fort, 40 hp

#### Baba Yaga (Maiden, Mother, Crone)

STR 30, CON 100, INT 16, WIS 17/25/35, DEX 17, CHA 19/12/7,  
Skills: Move Silently +18, Craft (Mortar) +30, Craft (Tapestry) +30  
Offensive Level 9, +7/+2 BAB, Knife 1d4, Shovel, Pestle 1D6, +6 Will, +3 Ref, +3 Fort, 405 hp

#### Dark Young (see p162 D20 Call of Cthulhu)

Baba's Flock (use stats for a rat p201-201 D20 Call of Cthulgu)

## Horror on the Orient Express Book IV (Sophia, Constantinople and return)

Nikolai

STR 16, CON 16, INT 12, WIS 11, DEX 14, CHA 10

Skills: Climb +5, Jump +5, Listen +5, Sneak +4, Spot +5, Search +5

Offensive Level 12 BAB +9/+4, +8 Ref, +4 Will, +4 Fort, Hooked dagger 1d4+1, Machine Pistol 1d10, burst, 72 hp

Fenalik

STR 21, CON 14, INT 17, WIS 14, DEX 16, CHA 3, Sanity 0

Skills: Bluff +10, Climb +10, Diplomacy +8, History +4, Jump +7, Listen +9, Occult +4, Other Language: English +8, Italian +6, Russian +7, Turkish +8, Sense Motive +9, Spot +8, Search (by smell) +9, Tumble +7, Wilderness Lore +6

Offensive Level 15 BAB +12/+7/+2, +10 Will, +5 Ref, +5 Fort, Bite 1d4, Claw 1d4. See p157, Horror on the Orient Express., 75 hp

The Beylab Thing, The Stranger Thing, See p167-169 HotOE.

STR 18, CON 40, INT 5, WIS 1, DEX 8. Touch +7/+2 (1d4). Armour: 7pt, 162 hp

Feyar

STR 12, CON 14, INT 18, WIS 15, DEX 15, CHA 13, Sanity 0

Skills: Bluff +7, Craft (Cartography) +3, Cthulhu Mythos +1, Diplomacy +4, Other Language: Arabic +4, Bulgarian +4, English +5, Greek +7, Russian +3, Turkish +8, Occult +2, Research +6, Spot +6, Search +6, Stealth +5, Tumble +6, Hide +6,

Offensive Level 5 BAB +4, +4 Will, +1 Ref, +1 Fort, Knife 1d4, 25 hp

Brothers of the Skin, See HotOE for p176-177

STR 18, CON 15, INT 10, WIS 8, DEX 16, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4. Dead arm, 10 hp

STR 14, CON 8, INT 10, WIS 16, DEX 14, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4. Dead ears. Listen +5, 4 hp

STR 14, CON 13, INT 10, WIS 16, DEX 15, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4, Dead eyes. Spot, Search +5, 8 hp

STR 13, CON 13, INT 10, WIS 11, DEX 15, CHA 3, BAB +2, Knife 1d4. Dead face, 8 hp

STR 14, CON 9, INT 10, WIS 9, DEX 16, CHA 10, BAB +2. Knife 1d4. Dead fingers, 4 hp

STR 18, CON 14, INT 10, WIS 11, DEX 14, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4. Dead legs (STR bonus), 10 hp

STR 13, CON 11, INT 10, WIS 10, DEX 13, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4. Dead arm, 6 hp

STR 14, CON 8, INT 10, WIS 16, DEX 14, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4. Dead ears. Listen +5, 4 hp

STR 14, CON 12, INT 10, WIS 11, DEX 13, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4, Dead eyes. Spot, Search +5, 8 hp

STR 13, CON 13, INT 10, WIS 11, DEX 15, CHA 18, BAB +2, Knife 1d4. Dead face, 8 hp

STR 14, CON 14, INT 10, WIS 9, DEX 12, CHA 11, BAB +2. Knife 1d4. Dead fingers, 10 hp

STR 17, CON 17, INT 10, WIS 11, DEX 11, CHA 10, BAB +2, Knife 1d4. Dead legs (STR bonus), 12 hp

Level 2 Offensive

Hakim and Crew

STR 14, CON 14, INT 9, WIS 9, DEX 13, CHA 8. BAB +3 (knife 1d4), Level 3 Offensive, 15 hp

Appraise +8. Pilot +4, Sense Motive +4,

STR 10, CON 15, INT 10, WIS 14, DEX 13, CHA 10. BAB +2 (knife 1d4), Level 2 Offensive 10 hp

STR 12, CON 12, INT 10, WIS 11, DEX 13, CHA 10. BAB +2 (knife 1d4), Level 2 Offensive, 8 hp

STR 12, CON 14, INT 10, WIS 9, DEX 13, CHA 10. BAB +2 (knife 1d4), Level 2 Offensive 10 hp

The Skin Beast. See p177 HotOE

STR 40, CON 100, INT 10, WIS 12, DEX 10. Armour 5 pts, Search (smell) +9, BAB +5(tongue 1d2), 240 hp

Selim Makryat, See p177 HotOE for spells.

STR 9, CON 8, INT 14, WIS 21, DEX 8, CHA 10, Sanity 0

Skills: Diplomacy +7, Craft (Playing) +9, Cthulhu Mythos +2, Other Language: English +3, Spot +9, Search +9

Offensive Level 15 BAB +12/+7/+2, +9 Will, +5 Ref, +5 Fort, Knife 1d4, 30 hp

Flesh Creeper

STR 2, CON 3, INT 5, WIS 1, DEX 15, BAB +5, Causes drowning, 6 hp

Mehmet Makryat Reincarnated. See HotOE for special powers, p208

STR 16, CON 16, INT 17, WIS 23, DEX 14, CHA 0, Sanity 0

Skills: Bluff +5, Climb +5, Craft (Playing) +9, Cthulhu Mythos +3, Disguise +4, Drive +4. Hide +8, History +3, Move Silently +8, Other Language: English +6, French +5, Research +4, Sense Motive +5, Sleight +3, Spot +9, Search +9, Tumble +6, Wilderness Lore +4,

Level 10, Offensive Option. +8/+3, claw 1D4, +7 Fort, +3 Will. +3 Ref, 60 hp

The Skinless One. See HotOE for special powers, p208

STR 20, CON 20, INT 86, WIS 100, DEX 20, CHA 0, Sanity 0

Skinning Gaze (cannot miss), 4d6, 120 hp

**Masks Of Nyarlathotep Chapter One (New York)**

Standard Cult Member (also use instead of stats on Ch1 p15)

STR 12, CON 15, INT 4, WIS 10, DEX 13, CHA 4.

Skills: Climb +6, Cthulhu Mythos +2, Other Language: English +4, Swahili +6, Jump +6, Listen +5, Occult +1, Stealth +6, Spot +4, Search +4, Wilderness Lore +5

Level 3 Offensive, BAB +3 (pranga 1d6, razor 1d4), 15 hp

#### Elite Cultists

STR 15, CON 15, INT 5, WIS 10, DEX 10, CHA 6, 30 hp

STR 12, CON 12, INT 10, WIS 8, DEX 13, CHA 7, 24 hp

STR 13, CON 13, INT 4, WIS 8, DEX 16, CHA 4, 24 hp

Skills: Disguise +6, Cthulhu Mythos +1, Other Language: English +1/+6/+1, Hide +8/+6/+8, Jump +9/+6/+6, Listen +7/+8/+6, Swim +6/+3/+3, Wilderness Lore +1/+2/+9

Level 6 Offensive, BAB +5 (pranga 1d6, razor 1d4), +5 Ref, +2 Will, +2 Fort

#### Mukunga

STR 16, CON 20, INT 8, WIS 36, DEX 13, CHA 17. See Ch1, p15 for spells.

Skills: Disguise +6, Climb +7, Cthulhu Mythos +7, Heal +8, Hide +7, Jump +8, Other Language: English +4, Swahili +7, Listen +7, Perform (Sing) +6, Stealth +8, Spot +6, Search +6, Tumbling +9

Level 7 Defensive, BAB +3 (pranga 1d6, razor 1d4), +5 Fort, +5 Will, +2 Ref, 48 hp

#### Zombies

STR 15, CON 19, WIS 1, DEX 12, BAB +6, (pranga 1d6), Level 6 Offensive, 42 hp

STR 16, CON 7, WIS 1, DEX 11, BAB +6, (pranga 1d6). Level 6 Offensive, 6 hp

STR 15, CON 15, WIS 1, DEX 10, BAB +5, (pranga 1d6), Level 6 Offensive, 30 hp

STR 11, CON 15, WIS 1, DEX 8, BAB +4, (pranga 1d6), Level 6 Offensive, 30 hp.

STR 9, CON 15, WIS 1, DEX 6, BAB +3, (pranga 1d6), Level 6 Offensive, 30 hp

STR 16, CON 15, WIS 1, DEX 4, BAB +2, (pranga 1d6), Level 6 Offensive, 30 hp

#### Masks Of Nyarlathotep Chapter Two (London)

##### Standard Cult Member

STR 9, CON 12, INT 4, WIS 7, DEX 9, CHA 5.

Skills: Climb +5, Cthulhu Mythos +3, Drive +4, Hide +7, Other Language: Arabic +6, English +2, Move Silently +4, Sense Motive +2, Sleight +2, Spot +5, Search +5, Wilderness Lore +3

Level 3 Offensive, BAB +3 (cult club 1d6, knife 1d4), +3 Ref, +1 Fort, +1 Will, 12 hp

#### Ssathasaa

STR 10 (4), CON 11 (8), INT 25 (8), WIS 35 (9), DEX 17 (5), CHA (9).

Skills: Disguise +5, Cthulhu Mythos +8, Hide +8, Jump +7, Occult +10, Other Language: Arabic +5, English +10, Stealth +9, Swim +7. Wilderness Lore +6

Level 11 Offensive BAB +9/+4 (knitting needle 1d4, bite 1d8, poison), 1 pt armour (scales), 33 (22) hp

#### Miles Shipley

STR 13, CON 14, INT 25 (8), WIS 35 (9), DEX 15, CHA 6.

Skills: Disguise +5, Cthulhu Mythos +8, Hide +8, Jump +7, Occult +10, Other Language: Arabic +5, English +10, Stealth +9, Swim +7. Wilderness Lore +6

Level 11 Offensive BAB +9/+4 (knitting needle 1d4, bite 1d8, poison), 1 pt armour (scales), 44 hp

#### Lawrence Vane

STR 12, CON 16, INT 16, WIS 10, DEX 15, CHA 10. Sanity 55

Skills: Accounting +5, Archeology +3, Bluff +2, Diplomacy +7, Drive +7, History +4, Law +5, Listen +6, Other Language: French +8, Greek +4, Psychology +2, Ride +6, Research +4, Sense Motive +2, Search +4, Spot +4, Wilderness Lore +3

Level 7 Offensive BAB +6/+1 (shotgun 3d6, fencing foil 1d6), 42 hp

#### Eloise Vane

STR 6, CON 6, INT 12, WIS 10, DEX 9, CHA 13. Skills: Botany +4, Other Languages French +5, Research +4

#### Werewolf

STR 18, CON 14, INT 5, WIS 12, DEX 16, CHA 1. Level 4 Offensive, BAB +3 (bite 1d8), armour 1 point, 20 hp

#### Bouncers

STR 14, CON 15, INT 10, WIS 15, DEX 13, CHA 6. BAB +5 (club 1d4, knife 1d4). Level 6 Offensive, 30 hp

STR 15, CON 14, INT 10, WIS 5, DEX 12, CHA 3. BAB +5 (club 1d4, knife 1d4). Level 6 Offensive, 30 hp

STR 14, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 10, DEX 14, CHA 7. BAB +5 (club 1d4, knife 1d4). Level 6 Offensive, 18 hp

STR 13, CON 12, INT 10, WIS 9, DEX 13, CHA 9. BAB +5 (club 1d4, knife 1d4). Level 6 Offensive, 24 hp

STR 13, CON 11, INT 10, WIS 9, DEX 12, CHA 9. BAB +5 (club 1d4, knife 1d4). Level 6 Offensive, 18 hp

STR 13, CON 15, INT 10, WIS 7, DEX 11, CHA 7. BAB +5 (club 1d4, knife 1d4). Level 6 Offensive, 30 hp

### The Thing in the Fog

STR 30, CON 30, INT 1, WIS 25, DEX 18, BAB +5 (choke), 65 hp

### Punji Chabout

STR 9, CON 16, INT 14, WIS 8, DEX 13, CHA 12.

Skills: Accounting +8, Cthulhu Mythos +1, Diplomacy +4, Hide +7, Law +4, Listen +7, Sense Motive +8, Sleight +5, Stealth +5, Search +5, Spot +5

Level 10 Offensive Option, BAB +8/+3 (garrote, knife 1d4), +7 Will, +4 Fort, +4 Ref, 60 hp

### Lacasars

STR 9, CON 12, INT 10, WIS 12, DEX 16, CHA 6. BAB +5 (knife 1d4), Level 6 Offensive, 24 hp

STR 11, CON 13, INT 10, WIS 10, DEX 14, CHA 4. BAB +5 (knife 1d4), Level 6 Offensive, 24 hp

STR 10, CON 11, INT 10, WIS 8, DEX 13, CHA 3. BAB +5 (knife 1d4), Level 6 Offensive, 18 hp

STR 11, CON 12, INT 10, WIS 10, DEX 13, CHA 7. BAB +5 (knife 1d4), Level 6 Offensive, 24 hp

STR 11, CON 11, INT 10, WIS 6, DEX 11, CHA 8. BAB +5 (knife 1d4), Level 6 Offensive, 18 hp

STR 11, CON 16, INT 10, WIS 13, DEX 11, CHA 3. BAB +5 (knife 1d4), Level 6 Offensive, 36 hp

STR 11, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 7, DEX 10, CHA 6. BAB +5 (knife 1d4), Level 6 Offensive, 18 hp

STR 9, CON 15, INT 10, WIS 8, DEX 9, CHA 5. BAB +5 (knife 1d4), Level 6 Offensive, 30 hp

Edward Gavigan. See p27 Ch2 Masks for spells etc.

STR 13, CON 17, INT 18, WIS 45, DEX 16, CHA 14. Sanity 0.

Skills: Accounting +3, Archeology +6, Anthropology +6, Astronomy +5, Climb +6, Cthulhu Mythos +9, Diplomacy +8, Drive +5, Hide +2, Jump +5, Other Language: Arabic +10, Ancient Egyptian +10, Greek +7, French +9, Latin +8, Swahili +3, Law +5, Listen +6, Occult +8, Psychology +5, Ride +5, Stealth +3, Search +4, Spot +4, Sense Motive +7, Swim +5

Level 6 Offensive Option, BAB +5 (shotgun), +5 Will, +2 Fort, +2 Ref, 36 hp

### Better Cultists

STR 14, CON 12, INT 17, WIS 8, DEX 13, CHA 6, BAB +4 (club 1d4), Level 5 Offensive, 20 hp

STR 13, CON 12, INT 14, WIS 9, DEX 13, CHA 7, BAB +4 (club 1d4), Level 5 Offensive, 20 hp

STR 13, CON 11, INT 14, WIS 10, DEX 13, CHA 4, BAB +4 (club 1d4), Level 5 Offensive, 15 hp

STR 11, CON 13, INT 11, WIS 10, DEX 14, CHA 5, BAB +4 (club 1d4), Level 5 Offensive, 20 hp

STR 13, CON 9, INT 10, WIS 9, DEX 12, CHA 9, BAB +4 (club 1d4), Level 5 Offensive, 10 hp

STR 13, CON 8, INT 11, WIS 6, DEX 12, CHA 10, BAB +4 (club 1d4), Level 5 Offensive, 10 hp

STR 13, CON 9, INT 9, WIS 7, DEX 12, CHA 3. BAB +4 (club 1d4), Level 5 Offensive, 10 hp



STR 13, CON 10, INT 12, WIS 3, DEX 11, CHA 4. BAB +4 (club 1d4), Level 5 Offensive, 15 hp

#### Shantaks

STR 40, CON 16, INT 6, WIS 8, DEX 12, BAB +7/+2 (bite 1d6), 9pt armour, 45 hp

STR 41, CON 10, INT 6, WIS 9, DEX 11, BAB +4 (bite 1d6), 9pt armour, 15 hp

STR 44, CON 14, INT 3, WIS 10, DEX 7, BAB +4 (bite 1d6), 9pt armour, 30 hp

STR 43, CON 17, INT 4, WIS 10, DEX 7, BAB +4 (bite 1d6), 9pt armour, 35 hp

STR 35, CON 15, INT 4, WIS 9, DEX 7, BAB +4 (bite 1d6), 9pt armour, 30 hp

STR 41, CON 12, INT 2, WIS 6, DEX 7, BAB +4 (bite 1d6), 9pt armour, 25 hp

Lesser Gods See Ch2 Masks, p28 for special abilities

STR 59, CON 21, INT 0, WIS 96, DEX 15, Damage 6d6, BAB +12/+7/+2. 144hp

STR 55, CON 88, INT 0, WIS 100, DEX 14, Damage 6d6, BAB +12/+7/+2. 672hp

STR 58, CON 47, INT 0, WIS 70, DEX 12, Damage 2d6, BAB +12/+7/+2. 352hp

STR 88, CON 45, INT 0, WIS 36, DEX 11, Damage 10d6, BAB +12/+7/+2. 336hp

STR 51, CON 71, INT 0, WIS 58, DEX 10, Damage 5d6, BAB +12/+7/+2. 544hp

STR 57, CON 88, INT 0, WIS 80, DEX 10, Damage 6d6, BAB +12/+7/+2. 672hp

STR 60, CON 52, INT 0, WIS 62, DEX 9, Damage 5d6 (3 attacks), BAB +12/+7/+2. 392hp

STR 76, CON 64, INT 0, WIS 28, DEX 8, Damage 8d6, BAB +12/+7/+2. 488hp

STR 41, CON 87, INT 0, WIS 43, DEX 7, Damage 7d6, BAB +12/+7/+2. 656p

#### Masks Of Nyarlathotep Chapter Three (Cairo)

##### Brotherhood Members

STR 12, CON 14, INT 11, WIS 10, DEX 10, CHA 10

Skills: Archeology +1, Astronomy +1, Disguise +2, Cthulhu Mythos +4, Hide +8, Other Language: English +2, Law +2, Listen +6, Occult +2, Sleight +5, Stealth +6, Search +5, Spot +5

Level 7 Offensive, BAB +6/+1, (cult club 1d6, dagger 1d4, garrote), +5 Ref, +2 Will, +2 Fort, 35 hp

##### Hakkim and His Brothers

STR 13, CON 10, INT 8, WIS 9, DEX 11, CHA 14, 15 hp



*Cairo, 1922*

STR 12, CON 11, INT 7, WIS 8, DEX 11, CHA 8, 15 hp

STR 11, CON 9, INT 6, WIS 11, DEX 10, CHA 9, 10 hp

STR 12, CON 7, INT 7, WIS 10, DEX 10, CHA 11, 5 hp

Skills: Bluff +4, Climb +5, Hide +4, Jump +4, Sense Motive +5, Sleight +4, Stealth +4, Spot +4, Search +4

BAB +4, (Knife 1d4, garrote).

Omar Shakti

STR 12, CON 25, INT 18, WIS 50, DEX 17, CHA 16, Sanity 0

Skills: Accounting +7, Archeology +8, Craft (Cartography) +8, Cthulhu Mythos +10, Diplomacy +15, Hide +4, History +9, Other Language: Arabic +10, Chinese (Mandarin) +10, Demotic Egyptian +8, English +9, French +10, Classic Greek +10, Hebrew +10, Hieroglyphs +10, Latin +10, Swahili + 10, Law +7, Listen +7, Occult +10, Pharmacy +10, Psychology +6, Stealth +10, Search +9, Spot +9, Sense Motive +10

Level 18 Defensive, BAB +9/+4, (cult club 1d6, dagger 1d4, garrote), +11 Will, +11 Fort, +5 Ref, 180 hp

Hetep

STR 2/16, CON 4/20, INT 15, WIS 25, DEX 16/18, CHA 13/0

Skills: Climb +9/+3, Hide +10/+8, Jump +10/+8, Other Language: Arabic +3, English +3 Demotic Egyptian +3 (all understanding only). Stealth +10/+8, Wilderness Lore +8/+8

Level 9 Offensive, BAB +7/+2, (tongue, claws 2d6, bite 2d6), +6 Ref, +3 Fort, +3 Will, 9 hp/72 hp

More Despicable Cultists (p9), Cultist Guards (p11) and Random Cultists (p23)

STR 11, CON 9, INT 8, WIS 10, DEX 12, CHA 7, 12 hp

STR 13, CON 7, INT 10, WIS 10, DEX 10, CHA 8, 6 hp

STR 11, CON 9, INT 8, WIS 10, DEX 10, CHA 9, 12 hp

STR 13, CON 10, INT 8, WIS 10, DEX 13, CHA 8, 18 hp

STR 11, CON 11, INT 9, WIS 10, DEX 13, CHA 6, 18 hp

STR 11, CON 10, INT 8, WIS 10, DEX 12, CHA 9, 18 hp

STR 18, CON 18, INT 8, WIS 10, DEX 11, CHA 6, 42 hp

STR 8, CON 7, INT 8, WIS 10, DEX 16, CHA 15, 6 hp

Skills: Cthulhu Mythos +3, Hide +4, Listen +5, Sleight +2, Stealth +4, Search +5, Spot +5

Level 6 Offensive, BAB +5, (cult club 1d6), +5 Ref, +2 Will, +2 Fort

Dr. Henry Clive

STR 10, CON 15, INT 17, WIS 30, DEX 12, CHA 13, Sanity 0

Skills: Anthropology +7, Archeology +11, Astronomy +6, Bluff +3, Cthulhu Mythos +5, Oratory +7, Heal +7, History +4, Other Language: Arabic +10, French +5, Hieroglyphs +9, Law +5, Oratory +4, Psychology +2, Research +7, Sense

Motive +4, Search +8, Spot +8 Zoology +2

Level 7 Defensive, BAB +3, (cult club 1d6), +5 Will, +5 Fort, +2 Ref, 42 hp

Martin Winfield

STR 13, CON 12, INT 16, WIS 12, DEX 15, CHA 14, Sanity 0

Skills: Archeology +8, Bluff +7, Cthulhu Mythos +4, Diplomacy +8, Drive +8, Occult +1, Other Language: Arabic +7, French +7, Hieroglyphs +3, Sense Motive +3, Ride +5

Level 9 Offensive, BAB +7/+2, (riding crop 1d2, handgun 1d10), +6 Fort, +3 Will, +3 Ref, 36 hp

Agatha Broadmoor

STR 6, CON 8, INT 13, WIS 16, DEX 9, CHA 9, Sanity 35

Skills: Archeology +5, Astronomy +4, Occult +11, Other Language: Arabic +3, French +2, Hieroglyphs +1,

Level 3 Defensive, BAB +1, +3 Will, +3 Fort, +1 Ref, 6 hp

James Gardner

STR 12, CON 12, INT 16, WIS 7, DEX 10, CHA 11, Sanity 40

Skills: Anthropology +7, Archeology +6, Cthulhu Mythos +1, Diplomacy +7, History +4, Occult +1, Other Language: Arabic +5, Aramaic +5, Assyrian +5, Hieroglyphs +2, Psychology +2, Research +6, Sense Motive +3

Level 5 Defensive, BAB +2, (handgun 1d10), +4 Fort, +4 Will, +1 Ref, 20 hp

Johannes Sprech

STR 13, CON 16, INT 15, WIS 17, DEX 16, CHA 10, Sanity 50

Skills: Archeology +6, Astronomy +2, Cryptography +5, Cthulhu Mythos +1, Diplomacy +8, Drive +4, Hide +6, History +2, Jump +4, Listen +3, Occult +7, Other Language: Arabic +7, English +6, French +4, Sense Motive +3, Sleight +2, Stealth +5, Search +5, Spot +5, Swim +5, Wilderness Lore +1

Level 7 Offensive, BAB +6/+1 (handgun 1d10, knife 1d4, club 1d4), +5 Ref, +2 Will, +2 Fort, 42 hp

The Black Sphinx (additional powers p23)

STR 135, CON 100, INT 26, WIS 50, DEX 10, BAB +9/+4 Forepaw 8D6, +9 Fort, +3 Ref, +3 Will, 480 hp

Children of the Sphinx

Bull STR 13, CON 15, INT 1, WIS 11, DEX 8, BAB +4 Horns 1D8, 5 level offensive +4 Fort, +1 Ref, +1 Will, 25 hp

Ibis STR 11, CON 12, INT 6, WIS 11, DEX 5, BAB +2 Beak 1D3, 5 level defensive, , +4 Will, +4 Ref, +1 Fort, 25 hp

Hipp STR 15, CON 15, INT 1, WIS 12, DEX 6, BAB +4 Bite 2D6, 5 level offensive,+4 Fort, +1 Ref, +1 Will, 25 hp

Chee STR 11, CON 15, INT 6, WIS 11, DEX 10, BAB +4 Bite 1D6, 5 level offensive, +4 Fort, +1 Ref, +1 Will, 25 hp

Hipp STR 13, CON 12, INT 3, WIS 13, DEX 10, BAB +4 Bite 2D6, 5 level offensive, +4 Fort, +1 Ref, +1 Will, 25 hp  
 Falc STR 14, CON 18, INT 4, WIS 11, DEX 10, BAB +4 Beak 1D4, 5 level offensive, +4 Fort, +1 Ref, +1 Will, 25 hp  
 Bull STR 13, CON 15, INT 3, WIS 11, DEX 12, BAB +4 Horns 1D6, 5 level offensive, +4 Fort, +1 Ref, +1 Will, 25 hp  
 Chee STR 13, CON 17, INT 3, WIS 8, DEX 3, BAB +4 Bite 1D6, 5 level offensive, +4 Fort, +1 Ref, +1 Will, 25 hp  
 Ibis STR 12, CON 11, INT 3, WIS 9, DEX 9, BAB +2 Beak 1D3, 5 level defensive, +4 Will, +4 Ref, +1 Fort, 25 hp  
 Hipp STR 22, CON 16, INT 3, WIS 3, DEX 2, BAB +4 Bite 2D6, 5 level offensive, +4 Fort, +1 Ref, +1 Will, 25 hp

#### Shefire Roash

STR 12, CON 15, INT 16, WIS 16, DEX 13, CHA 18, Sanity 0

Skills: Archeology +8, Cthulhu Mythos +10, Diplomacy +19, Hide +5, History +3, Occult +6, Other Language: Arabic +6, English +3, French +1, 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Egyptian +10, Pharmacy +10, Psychology +5, Sense Motive +5, Stealth +8

Level 11 Defensive, BAB +5 (touch 1, dagger 1d4), +7 Ref, +7 Will, +3 Fort, 55hp

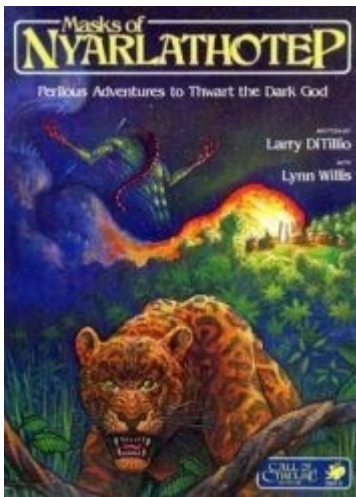
#### Masks Of Nyarlathotep Chapter Four (Kenya)

Cult of the Bloody Tongue, average member

STR 14, CON 16, INT 6, WIS 12, DEX 16, CHA 2, Sanity 0,

Skills: Cthulhu Mythos +4, Hide +8, Jump +7, Listen +6, Perform (Sing) +3, Perform (Dance) +6, Search +6, Stealth +5, Spot +6, Wilderness Lore +9

Level 3 Offensive, BAB +3 (pranga 1d6, spear 1d6, war club 1d8), +3 Ref, +1 Fort, +1 Will, 18hp



#### Four Thugs

STR 14, CON 13, INT 8, WIS 12, DEX 14, CHA 9 BAB +5 (blackjack 1d4, knife 1d4), hp 24

STR 11, CON 12, INT 9, WIS 11, DEX 13, CHA 12 BAB +5 (blackjack 1d4, knife 1d4), hp 24

STR 15, CON 14, INT 9, WIS 11, DEX 12, CHA 10 BAB +5 (blackjack 1d4, knife 1d4), hp 30

STR 11, CON 18, INT 12, WIS 10, DEX 11, CHA 13 BAB +5 (blackjack 1d4, knife 1d4), hp 42

Skills: Listen +5, Search +6, Sense Motive +3, Sleight +4, Stealth +5, Spot +6

Level 6 Offensive, +5 Fort, +2 Will, +2 Ref

Fire Vampires (see also D20 Call of Cthulhu, p166)

Red STR 1, CON 6, INT 12, WIS 15, DEX 12, CHA 17, BAB +0 (fire 1d6 + 1d4 CON), 9hp  
Blue STR 1, CON 8, INT 15, WIS 10, DEX 16, CHA 17, BAB +0 (fire 1d6 + 1d4 CON), 9 hp

Nails Nelson

STR 15, CON 13, INT 11, WIS 6, DEX 13, CHA 7, Sanity 30

Skills: Climb +6, Demolitions +3, Disable Device +5, Disguise +4, Hide +8, Jump +4, Listen +3, Other Language: Swahili +1, Sense Motive +2, Swim +4, Tumble +7

Level 7 Offensive BAB +6/+1 (shotgun 3d6, knife 1d4), +5 Ref, +2 Will, +2 Fort

Who

STR 67, CON 85, INT 3, WIS 14, DEX 12, Spot +8, BAB +7 (tongue 1d6, grapple), 104 hp, +12 Fort, +7 Ref, +4 Will, 104 hp

Tandor Singh

STR 9, CON 10, INT 14, WIS 21, DEX 15, CHA 12, Sanity 0

Skills: Accounting +4, Bluff +4, Cthulhu Mythos +6, Diplomacy +3, Hide +7, Other Language: English +6, Swahili +4, Pharmacy +4, Psychology +2, Search +4, Sense Motive +8, Stealth +4, Spot +4

Level 7 Defensive, BAB +3 (meat cleaver 1d6, dagger 1d4), +5 Fort, +5 Ref, +2 Will, 24 hp

M'weru

STR 10, CON 20, INT 17, WIS 35, DEX 16, CHA 18, Sanity 0

Skills: Cthulhu Mythos +9, Diplomacy +9, Occult +5, Other Language: Bantu +8, English +6, Search +5, Spot +5, Stealth +10

Level 9 Defensive, BAB +4 (dagger 1d4, pranga 1d6), 74hp

M'weru's Bodyguards (10, identical)

STR 17, CON 18, INT 6, WIS 13, DEX 17, CHA 10, Sanity 0

Skills: Climb +9, Hide +7, Jump +6, Listen +5, Stealth +6, Search +6, Spot +6, Swim +5, Wilderness Lore +8

Level 10 Offensive BAB +8/+3 (pranga 1d6, war club 1d8, thrown spear 1d8), +7 Fort, +3 Will, +3 Ref, 77 hp

Spawn of Nyarlathotep, Monstrous (see p20 for multiple attacks, etc)

STR 42, CON 25, INT 43, WIS 50, DEX 10,

Level 9 Offensive BAB +7/+2 (tentacle 1d10, grapple, claws 2d6 each, bite 2d8, eye ray 1d0), 90hp

Spawn of Nyarlathotep, Hypatia

STR 10, CON 19, INT 43, WIS 50, DEX 15, CHA 20

Skills: Diplomacy +4, Drive +7, History +3, Law +4, Other Language: French +6, Swahili +3, Sense Motive +4, Research +5, Ride +6, Swim +7

Level 9 Defensive BAB +5 (foil 1d6), +7 Ref, +7 Will, +3 Fort, 66 hp

### **Masks Of Nyarlathotep Chapter Five (Shanghai)**

Order of the Bloated Woman, Sample

STR 10, CON 9, INT 8, WIS 13, DEX 13, CHA 4, Sanity 0

Skills: Cthulhu Mythos +3, Occult +3, Other Language: English +2, Performance (Sing) +3, Sense Motive +2, Shiphandling +3, Sleight +2, Stealth +4, Swim +7

Level 6 Offensive, BAB +5, (sickle 1d6, knife 1d4), +5 Ref, +2 Will, +2 Fort

Ho Fong (see p11 for spells etc)

STR 9, CON 13, INT 16, WIS 35, DEX 12, CHA 14, Sanity 0

Skills: Accounting +8, Archeology +3, Botany +9, Cthulhu Mythos +10, Diplomacy +4, Listen +7, Other Language: Classical Chinese +8, Dutch +3, English +6, French +3, Japanese +5, Pharmacy +9, Psychology +5, Search +7, Spot +7, Sense Motive +8, Swim +4

Level 14 Defensive, BAB +7/+2, (sickle 1d6, knife 1d4), +9 Will, +9 Fort, +4 Ref, 66 hp

Ho Tzu-Hsi

STR 5, CON 7, INT 9, WIS 4, DEX 10, CHA 11, Sanity 0, hit points 1

Carl Stanford (see p12 for spells and further abilities)

STR 13, CON 16, INT 22, WIS 40, DEX 12, CHA 18, Sanity 0

Skills: Archeology +8, Astronomy +5, Bluff +9, Cthulhu Mythos +10, Diplomacy +9, History +6, Other Language: Arabic +8, Chinese (Mandarin) +8, Classic Greek +10, Research +10, Stealth +8, Zoology +10

Level 16 Defensive, BAB +8/+3, (sword cane 1d6), +10 Will, +10 Ref, +5 Fort, 110 hp

Order of the Bloated Woman Assorted Cultists

STR 14, CON 13, INT 10, WIS 9, DEX 17, CHA 3, Level 7 Offensive, BAB +6/+1 (jo stick 1d4, sickle 1d6), 32 hp

STR 16, CON 10, INT 9, WIS 6, DEX 16, CHA 3, Level 7 Offensive, BAB +6/+1 (jo stick 1d4, sickle 1d6), 25 hp

STR 11, CON 12, INT 8, WIS 13, DEX 15, CHA 4, Level 7 Offensive, BAB +6/+1 (jo stick 1d4, sickle 1d6), 32 hp

STR 13, CON 14, INT 10, WIS 4, DEX 13, CHA 6, Level 7 Offensive, BAB +6/+1 (jo stick 1d4, sickle 1d6), 39 hp

STR 11, CON 16, INT 8, WIS 15, DEX 13, CHA 5, Level 7 Offensive, BAB +6/+1 (jo stick 1d4, sickle 1d6), 46 hp

STR 8, CON 9, INT 13, WIS 9, DEX 13, CHA 7, Level 7 Offensive, BAB +6/+1 (jo stick 1d4, sickle 1d6), 18 hp

STR 10, CON 10, INT 12, WIS 10, DEX 11, CHA 4, Level 7 Offensive, BAB +6/+1 (jo stick 1d4, sickle 1d6), 25 hp  
STR 8, CON 8, INT 14, WIS 14, DEX 10, CHA 7, Level 7 Offensive, BAB +6/+1 (jo stick 1d4, sickle 1d6), 18 hp

Isoge Taro

STR 13, CON 16, INT 17, WIS 12, DEX 18, CHA 15, Sanity 60

Skills: Bluff +3, Climb +6, Craft (Cartographer) +4, Diplomacy +9, Demolitions +5, Disable Device +7, Hide +5, History +3, Other Language: Chinese (Mandarin) +6, English +5, Korean +2, Tagalog +2. Psychology +5, Sense Motive +3, Stealth +6, Swim +4

Level 9 Offensive, BAB +7/+2, (handgun 1d10), +6 Will, +3 Ref, +3 Fort, 60 hp

Lin Tang-Yu

STR 9, CON 15, INT 17, WIS 12, DEX 9, CHA 8, Sanity 0

Skills: Anthropology +5, Archeology +6, Botany +6, Cthulhu Mythos +3, Diplomacy +9, Heal +5, History +4, Occult +6, Other Language: Arabic +4, Chinese (Cantonese) +9, Chinese (Hakka) +4, Classic Greek +3, English +5, Japanese +5, Russian +2, Sanskrit +4, Tibetan +4, Psychology +5, Research +4, Search +6, Sense Motive +8, Spot +6, Stealth +6

Level 10 Defensive, +5 BAB, Will +7, Fort +7, Ref +3, 66 hp

Tun-Tun and Ping, White Guardian Gorillas

STR 25, CON 15, INT 7, WIS 8, DEX 18, BAB +6/+1 (Bite 1d6, Punch 1d4), +6 Fort, +6 Ref, +2 Will, 34 hp

STR 22, CON 17, INT 3, WIS 5, DEX 16, BAB +6/+1 (Bite 1d6, Punch 1d4), +6 Fort, +6 Ref, +2 Will, 34hp

Nefarious Henchmen (see page 15 for other abilities)

STR 13, CON 14, INT 6, WIS 10, DEX 15, CHA 6, Level 9 Offensive BAB +7/+2 (hatchet 1d4, club 1d4 ), 44 hp

STR 12, CON 15, INT 3, WIS 11, DEX 14, CHA 3, Level 9 Offensive BAB +7/+2 (hatchet 1d4, club 1d4), 44hp

STR 12, CON 12, INT 10, WIS 12, DEX 12, CHA 10, Level 9 Offensive BAB +7/+2 (hatchet 1d4, club 1d4) , 40 hp

STR 12, CON 10, INT 9, WIS 9, DEX 13, CHA 9, Level 9 Offensive BAB +7/+2 (hatchet 1d4, club 1d4 ), 34 hp

STR 16, CON 16, INT 3, WIS 8, DEX 16, CHA 3, Level 9 Offensive BAB +7/+2 (hatchet 1d4, club 1d4), 49 hp

STR 12, CON 14, INT 7, WIS 9, DEX 10, CHA 7, Level 9 Offensive BAB +7/+2 (hatchet 1d4, club 1d4), 44 hp

STR 14, CON 12, INT 8, WIS 3, DEX 9, CHA 8, Level 9 Offensive BAB +7/+2 (hatchet 1d4, club 1d4), 40 hp

STR 12, CON 10, INT 5, WIS 7, DEX 12, CHA 5, Level 9 Offensive BAB +7/+2 (hatchet 1d4, club 1d4), 34 hp

Skills: Bluff +5, Disguise +8, Hide +8, Jump +7, Listen +7, Other Language: Chinese (different dialects) +5, English +2, Sleight +5, Search +7, Spot +7, Stealth +8, Wilderness Lore +5

Shoggoth (see p181 D20 Call of Cthulhu)

STR 45, CON 30, INT 7, WIS 8, DEX 3, BAB +35 (slam), Fort +25, Ref +6, Will +9, 465 hp

Deep Ones (see p163 D20 Call of Cthulhu. Also use these for “Ominious Deep Ones”)

STR 18, CON 8, INT 12, WIS 8, DEX 15, BAB +5 (claws 1d4, trident 1d6), Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3, 11 hp

STR 18, CON 14, INT 15, WIS 8, DEX 14, BAB +5 (claws 1d4, trident 1d6), Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3, 15 hp

STR 18, CON 9, INT 15, WIS 13, DEX 13, BAB +5 (claws 1d4, trident 1d6), Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3, 11 hp

STR 18, CON 11, INT 13, WIS 8, DEX 10, BAB +5 (claws 1d4, trident 1d6), Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3, 13 hp

STR 20, CON 11, INT 13, WIS 8, DEX 10, BAB +5 (claws 1d4, trident 1d6), Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3, 13 hp

STR 18, CON 8, INT 12, WIS 8, DEX 15, BAB +5 (claws 1d4, trident 1d6), Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3, 11 hp

STR 18, CON 14, INT 15, WIS 8, DEX 14, BAB +5 (claws 1d4, trident 1d6), Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3, 15 hp

STR 18, CON 9, INT 15, WIS 13, DEX 13, BAB +5 (claws 1d4, trident 1d6), Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3, 11 hp

STR 18, CON 11, INT 13, WIS 8, DEX 10, BAB +5 (claws 1d4, trident 1d6), Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3, 11 hp

STR 20, CON 11, INT 13, WIS 8, DEX 10, BAB +5 (claws 1d4, trident 1d6), Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3, 11 hp

Sir Aubrey Penhew (see page 29 for spells and other abilities)

STR 14, CON 18, INT 18, WIS 45, DEX 16, CHA 18, Sanity 0

Skills: Anthropology +6, Archeology +8, Astronomy +3, Cthulhu Mythos +9, Diplomacy +10, Disable Device +6, History +6, Occult +5, Other Languages: Arabic +4, Chinese (Mandarin) +5, Deep One +4, Great Ones +2, Hieroglyphs +9, Physics +2, Psychology +5, Tumble +4, Stealth +4

Level 11 Defensive, BAB +5, (handgun 1d10), +7 Will, +7 Ref, +3 Fort, 110 hp

Jules Savoyard

STR 11, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 36, DEX 9, CHA 3, Sanity 0

Skills: Cthulhu Mythos +7, Law +5, Navigation +5, Other Language: Chinese (Mandarin) +4, English +3, French +8, Shiphandling +6, Stealth +4, Search +5, Spot +5

Level 6 Offensive, BAB +5, (handgun 1d10), +5 Fort, +2 Will, +2 Ref, 41 hp

Half-Breed Crewmembers

STR 11, CON 9, INT 9, WIS 5, DEX 13, CHA 4, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 8hp

STR 12, CON 8, INT 9, WIS 4, DEX 12, CHA 4, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 8hp

STR 10, CON 10, INT 9, WIS 13, DEX 12, CHA 5, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 9hp

STR 8, CON 7, INT 8, WIS 8, DEX 10, CHA 3, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 7hp

STR 12, CON 15, INT 8, WIS 7, DEX 9, CHA 3, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 11hp

STR 11, CON 12, INT 8, WIS 10, DEX 9, CHA 3, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 10hp

Villager Half-Breeds



STR 11, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 36, DEX 9, CHA 3, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 9hp  
STR 11, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 36, DEX 9, CHA 3, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 9hp  
STR 11, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 36, DEX 9, CHA 3, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 9hp  
STR 11, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 36, DEX 9, CHA 3, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 9hp  
STR 11, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 36, DEX 9, CHA 3, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 9hp  
STR 11, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 36, DEX 9, CHA 3, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 9hp  
STR 11, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 36, DEX 9, CHA 3, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 9hp  
STR 11, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 36, DEX 9, CHA 3, BAB +2 (sickle 1d6, club 1d4), +3 Ref, +0 Fort, +0 Will, 9hp

The Bloated Woman (see p295, D20 Call of Cthulhu and p31)

STR 31, CON 44, INT 86, WIS 100, DEX 19,

BAB +42, (tentacle 3d3), +39 Fort, +60 Will, +32 Ref, Hit Points 650



# RECALCULATING HIT POINTS FOR D&D 4E

*by Matt Stevens*

Fights take too long in 4th edition D&D, and while a number of fixes have been suggested over the years, I think the best would be to reduce the number of hit points everyone has, especially if it would make HP calculations simpler. Based on my calculations, the following formulas would reduce HP, for all classes, by approximately 25%:

## **Class Hit Points**

Wizards, Invokers, Psions\*  $\text{Con} + [\text{level} \times 3]$

Clerics, Rangers, Rogues, Warlocks, Warlords, Bards, Druids, Shamans, Sorcerers, Ardents, Monks, Rune priests, Seekers  $\text{Con} + [\text{level} \times 4]$

Fighters, Paladins, Avengers\*\*, Barbarians, Battleminds  $\text{Con} + [\text{level} \times 5]$

\* You can give Psions 2 additional HP at 1st level, if you like, to be compatible with current rules

\*\* You can give Avengers 1 less HP at 1st level, if you like, to be compatible with current rules

For NPCs, give one additional HP per level.

For monsters, use the following table:

<b>Role</b>	<b>Hit Points</b>
Artillery, Lurker	$\text{Con} + [\text{level} \times 5]$
Controller, Skirmisher, Soldier, Solos	$\text{Con} + [\text{level} \times 6]$
Brutes	$\text{Con} + [\text{level} \times 8]$

A wizard with a Con of 10 will have 20 HP at first level and 60 HP at 11th level. Under this system they would have 13 at 1st level and 43 at 11th level. Proportionately they're about the same.

# PC GAMES REVIEW: VIRTUAL VILLAGERS

*by Matt Linus*

The first game in the series from Independent studio "Last day of work" That revolves around a tribe of people that have been abandoned on an island. Your job as a player is to influence the tribe members to solve problems and enhance their ability to survive and be self sufficient. The game starts out slowly, and continues at a rather sedate pace, but it does involve an interesting idea, where the game is always running, even when you close it. As a result of this, they feel a bit more like real people than some that you can just save a position and return to that later. They will continue to do whatever they are inclined to do until you return to influence them again. The game is designed with a younger audience in mind, though many of the challenges that the tribe face require a decent amount of problem solving ability. Graphically it isn't very advanced, but it is clear and consistent in its design, which is often more important than just being very pretty. As a result it will run on low end machines. I quite enjoyed this game, for the month or so that I played it.

## **Virtual Villagers 2: The Lost Children**

The follow up game starts off with a very young group of 'children', some under working age, and some old enough to work. They have been separated from the rest of the tribe and need to solve a new range of puzzles and collect objects in a new environment. The game is still slow moving, which is part of the style, and has continued in the graphical style of the first game. It is still quite a good game, but really doesn't add much to the first game besides from just a new scenario. This was not as enjoyable as the first game, but I still pushed through to finish the storyline.

## **Virtual Villagers 3: The Secret City**

The third (and final?) game in the Virtual Villagers series is another game that doesn't add much to an already working structure. There is more puzzles to solve, more skills to research, more objects to collect. It is nicer than the second game though, and I enjoyed it enough that I found myself playing it longer than either of the first 2 games.

I recommend the series to young gamers, probably 6-12 yo specifically, but can be fun for older gamers that understand the puzzle solving more. If you are only getting one of them, then get the third one. It's the best constructed game of the series and has the best range of problems to solve and the most things to do.

# MOVIE REVIEW: HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS

by Andrew Moshos

I'm going to review both of them together. I don't think it really matters either way. They don't work separately, and together they're just a big old mess of convenient moments, slavish fan service and muggle muddling.

This will not be a good review. This will provide none of the fulfillment that you're looking for. The only thing worse than reading this review would be sitting down and watching both films back to back.

But they are, in their various parts and pieces, the culmination of a bunch of books and the films they were translated into, and an endpoint in a long-running series, and, at least the second part, is the third highest grossing film of all time, at least for another week or so.

And thus it deserves our special attention. It's impossible to discuss anything that happens in these films without spoiling the events of the previous ones as well, so there's virtually no point in issuing a spoiler warning. How else could you talk about the seventh (and eighth) instalments in a series?



There are a bunch of admissions I feel compelled to make before launching into all of this that would inform a reader as to where I'm coming from. I've never read the books, though I look forward to doing so when my daughter's old enough, and we can do so together. I have no snobbish opposition towards the books, their fans, or their popularity. I don't think their adaptation into film form has resulted in particularly great films (except for *Order of the Phoenix*), but, having seen all of them now, I've come to respect the universe J.K. Rowling created and that so many adore.

That being said, my biggest problem with all of the flicks has always been the terribly haphazard plotting, the incredible overuse of multiple deus ex machinas, and the exposition dumping that never felt organic or anything less than strained. In most cases I think the directors did their best (except with the first two, since Chris Columbus is a terribly mediocre director) adapting source material too copious in quantity and broad in scope to do justice in the time allotted. They did their best. And Yates probably did his best here, though there are a few moments that could have been stronger.

*Deathly Hallows* probably needed to be two films, because I think if they'd cut any more out of the story, then it'd be

even more incomprehensible than it already is. As it stands, anyone who hasn't seen the other films or read the books couldn't possibly have the slightest fucking clue as to what's going on, or why they should care.

The first part opens with the kids, Our Heroes, Harry (Daniel Radcliffe), Hermione (Emma Watson) and Ginger (Rupert Grint), sorry, Ron, receiving a visit from some Ministry type, bequeathing each of them something from Dumbledore. Specifically, this is all due to Dumbledore's demise. Yes, the saintly old queen met his end at the hands, or, specifically, wand of Severus Snape (Alan Rickman), which constituted the only interesting thing that happened in the last film, being *The Half-Blood Prince*.

With the evil No-Nose Voldemort (Ralph Fiennes) gunning for Harry, all sorts of black wearing creeps with the unpleasant name of Death Eaters are after him. And they're not just trying to give him a wedgie, or take his lunch money. They're out to kill him! So all the good guys who like Harry do their best to protect him from all these nefarious no-goodnicks, as Harry himself struggles with deciding on what to do with his life, whether his glasses look a bit dated and what sneakers he should wear the next time he goes rioting.

Nah, nothing so prosaic. Two quests start up, or, at least one quest continues, and another flares however briefly into existence: Defeating No-Nose means Harry and his cohorts have to figure out where these items called horcruxes are located, and destroy them. Each of them contains a portion of No-Nose's soul, and whilst they exist, he is invulnerable. As all this goes on, the beloved Hogwarts School that our main characters are so fond of despite the sheer quantity of times that someone has tried to kill them within its confines, is a no-go zone, patrolled by creatures called Dementors that steal people's Christmases or something.

Beyond that, the Death Eaters, and those who might not have declared in favour of No-Nose, but who fear and aren't going to oppose him, have linked in an unholy, totalitarian alliance. As far as I could tell, whether it's obvious to the regular humans or not, the baddies pretty much control everything now. It's a darkly 1984-style totalitarian regime, with the added horror of virtual genocidal persecution against the Jews of this world, who are derogatorily known as mud-bloods. Purity, long the mainstay of supremacists and fuckheads throughout history, has become the priority, which is sickening when there are far worse people worthy of persecution out there.

For what seems like the majority of the flick (though it clearly isn't), after the triumvirate of teen neatness steal their way into the Ministry of Magic in order to get a horcrux secreted there, in what is a pretty thrilling sequence, the kids go camping.

It seems like a strange time to go on holiday, but who am I to argue with their needs for rest and recreation? They're so put upon, these poor kids. The weight of the world, their hormones, and the One Ring they carry is such a burden for their youthful, slender shoulders.

Because the One Ring,, sorry, the necklace horcrux is so evil, it starts doing the heads in of the kids as they swan about in landscapes that wouldn't have been out of place in some other flick where they went on and on about some goddamn ring. Ron especially starts thinking that Harry and Hermione are secretly getting it on behind his back, so he lurches off in a very unattractive snit.

This leads to possibly my absolute favourite moment of Part 1. The 'kids' have a radio with them, and Harry and

Hermione look sadly at each other as Nick Cave's *O Children* plays out over the airwaves. Harry and Hermione slow dance to the song, which is a sweet moment. I remember thinking "It's sweet, because they're just two friends who've been through hell, slow dancing with each other. And it's nice that there's no sexual or romantic undercurrent."

Of course, the scene (I don't care how it plays out in the book, if at all), totally only makes sense because of the sexual undercurrent. Harry ends up looking like he's been totally cockblocked or blue balled at the mournful end of that dance as the song ends, and Hermione naturally starts thinking of Ron again.

It's enough to make you sigh. Or cackle.

That reminds me: one of the only virtues beyond the telling of the story this sequence of very profitable films has delivered is that, if you like the characters and the actors behind the roles, it's been an honour and a privilege to watch these kids grow up. I'm not pretending it's been like having a window into these people's souls, but in an odd way, these flicks have almost been like the fantasy-world equivalent of the *7 Up* documentaries that Michael Apted started back in the 1960s, which revisited a group of people at specific intervals to see where they were with the passage of time.

Of course, the main difference here is that we've been watching them in close increments, with a couple of gaps, of every year or so. So we've literally watched them grow up in public. Lucky us.

It's impossible to not have developed some feeling for these crazy kids over the years. Whatever problems I might have had with them, with their actions, acting, dialogue or whatever, you come to depend on them. The vast number of support crew (acting-wise, not the plethora of people behind the scenes) around them, both heroic and villainous, also have matured, even if their characters haven't, which I'm also grateful to have watched.

Our kids search aimlessly for a sword that will appear when it's ready and not a moment before, and will then get diverted by some strange search for info on Dumbledore and his biographer. All the while, we see scenes, through Harry's eyes, of No-Nose searching for a particular wand with which he can kill Harry, because, apparently, the other ones just won't do.

There's a return of sorts to Godric's Hollow, the scene of the original crime, so to speak, at Christmas time, which is a nice enough scene, but I couldn't, for the life of me, figure out what the fuck happened. There's a snake pretending to be a person, and it just made no goddamn sense at all.

If the search for horcruxes, or magical maguffins as I like to call them, wasn't obscure and pointless enough, they eventually explain what the Deathly Hallows of the title are: more magical objects upon which everything hinges. Because someone kindly stopped for Death, Death gave some three idiots three magical things: the Elder Wand, an Invisibility Cloak and a Resurrection Stone. Can you guess if at least two of these will pop up in the rest of the story, at the most unbelievably convenient time?

More inconsequential people die, a bunch more stuff happens, someone literally appears out of nowhere to save our heroes, and then the first part ends with No-Nose defiling the corpse of Dumbledore, stealing away the wand held

between his hands.

Is there nothing this evil fucker won't do? Just to make sure, part 1 makes no sense and delivers practically nothing worthwhile on its own as a standalone film. But, honestly, no-one expected otherwise.

The second flick has lots and lots of action-y sequences, the biggest of which involves breaking in to the bank vault populated by ugly little gnomes. I can't help feeling this is an anti-Semitic or anti-Swiss dig on someone's part. It's a great sequence, which involves a dragon, and a bit of incoherent action, but which has the spectacular image of a Gemini Curse in action, which causes thousands of cups to duplicate themselves, threatening to drown Our Heroes in metal.

I really liked that scene. For some reason.

There are still more goddamn horcruxes. It never ends, does it? Our heroes have to track down and destroy the last of them, which they've been doing for a long time now. Even then, Harry discovers, through playing someone's tears like a DVD, that there's even an extra horcrux on top of all the other one's he's had to get rid of.



Thank the gods there's also a tremendously wizardy war going on at the same time, because otherwise the tedium could be fatal. The forces of No-Nose converge upon Hogwarts, and they're determined to kill virtually everyone in their pursuit of Harry. So a lot of good people die along the way. A lot of good, decent people who are discarded like the cigarette butts that they truly are. It didn't bug me that much, though I couldn't help but think that the faithful fans might have felt somewhat hard done by.

Harry is shown what has to happen, and after a brief conversation with some beloved dead people, he does half of what needs to be done (or it happens to him, whatever), with a few more things that have to happen, before the flick can call it quits.

Big mistakes, all big mistakes along the way. I don't need to go into it, but there are scenes here which just looked and felt, what's the word I like using at these times? Oh, yes, retarded. There's a scene where Harry and No-Nose are flying through the air above Hogwarts, which looked terrible and made no sense. And, in case I didn't make my case strongly enough, looked terrible.



And the climactic battle between Bellatrix L'Estrange and the Weasley mother couldn't have been handled worse. It amounted to looking like a lazy tennis match between paraplegics that was over in ten seconds. Thrilling stuff.

Yes, I was satisfied with the climax to some extent, because it ultimately couldn't have gone any other way, but the coda really didn't hit the right notes for me. We're subjected to a final scene set 19 years after the battle at Hogwarts, where we're supposed to be gratified by the sight of Our Heroes sending their kids off on the 9th and 3/4 platform of the station, as they go to Hogwarts for their first day of school.

That's not what I wanted to know about their lives. I could care less if they were sending their kids back to the place that gave them the worst experiences of their lives, although it does strike me as deeply unhealthy. I wanted to know if Harry, who looks somewhat sad during this scene, was happy with his life. It's one thing to save the world, but was he able to find meaning in his life beyond that?

Ah, it's all quibbles. The frustrations I face, the problems I've had with the way stuff happens in these books/flicks has not faded with this last instalment. If anything, I find it even more frustrating that so, so much happens and is then explained away and justified almost like technicalities as explanations for why things happen the way they do. No better example of this could be than the absolutely shameful/shameless bullshit to do with the Elder Wand and its 'true' owner that dates back to the ending of *Half-Blood Prince*. The more convoluted and less convincing it is, the less I care.

It's somewhat insulting, but, hell, it doesn't matter anymore. It's done. It's all over. Rowling's as rich as the Queen and doesn't need to write any more. Please, gods, don't let her write any more of these. I have had moments of enjoyment spread over the eight films, some more than others, some significantly less. Order of the Phoenix is still the peak for me, for a whole host of reasons, but that doesn't mean there aren't a lot of great moments spread out over the 20 or so hours of movie magic. Overall, like this flick, it's a net positive to humanity that these books and flicks exist.

I guess 7 times it's hard not to feel a bit sad that many of these actors will never get paid this well as long as they live out of 10

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"Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living and above all, those who live without love." – pity the living instead, for they have to write and read reviews like this – *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

*Originally posted at: <http://movie-reviews.com.au/content/harry-potter-and-deathly-hallows>*



# MOVIE REVIEW: CONTAGION

by Andrew Moshos

dir: Steven Soderbergh

As if germophobes and compulsive obsessives didn't have it hard enough already.

Speaking as someone who has long been pathologically afraid of germs and contamination (the psych term used to be mysophobia, or, having too much time on one's filthy, filthy hands), I don't need flicks like this. I'm already freaked out enough by the prospect of infection that I am the person the scientists lament creating superbugs by using hand sanitiser and giving other neurotics a bad name.

I'm not at the mask or tinfoil hat stage just yet, but, you know, it's only a matter of time.



Contagion does me no favours, does me no help. It's almost as if it's aimed specifically at people like me for whom the horrifying prospect of an epidemic like this, of evil germs finishing off many, many people, is almost too close to home to appreciate. It's easy enough to handle zombie flicks, where the virus is transferred through biting. Hand washing and ethanol can't do anything about that. But a bunker mentality and obsessive hygiene could, actually COULD help if this scenario came to pass. And that's why it hits closer to home. It's practically goading us with the propensities into indulging them further and falling even further down the rabbit hole.

Conversely, or perversely, actual epidemics that the media and World Health Organisation beat up don't affect me at all. I'm no more afraid of the spectre of bird, swine or monkey flues than I am of meteorites or werewolves. But when they explicitly spell out in the flick (Kate Winslet's character does so) the vectors of infection, and how basic they are, my skin crawled, and my stomach lurched multiple times.

Soderbergh does a tremendous job grounding this flick in reality. It's a what if, but played out as a what if in the real world, rather than requiring sci-fi or genre horror concepts beyond the grim reality of what would happen if a percentage, even a small percentage, of the world's population contracted such a virus.

The people that try to deal with this outbreak are the characters that are depicted here, albeit by very recognisable actors. It's the heads of the Centre for Disease Control, the World Health Organisation's epidemiologists, and the microbiologists whose expertise would, we hope, be our species' saving grace.

Exploiting the situation are shitheads like an Australian blogger (Jude Law), and a lot of the American population, who seem to go batshit crazy like they've watched too many post-apocalyptic flicks. A flick like this, like lots of American flicks, contends that the general population, the great unwashed and nicely washed, are always a bee's dick away from turning on each other. All it needs is a flu outbreak or a hurricane called Katrina, and the general American population that doesn't have a panic room or an underground, fully stocked bunker is immediately going to start bashing in the skull of the person next to them in order to feast on the scooped-out goo.

There are a lot of characters in this flick, and because the flick, like the contagion, is moving very quickly, it doesn't matter. There's enough time or effort expended to recognise who's speaking, but there isn't the luxury to spend quality time in their presence. Except for Matt Damon's character, and the daughter he's trying to protect, everyone else is solely what they do. And that's all right for this flick.

It's all it needs to be. Like any good movie, the blame for everything happening rests with Gwyneth Paltrow. In life as well as cinema, all the evil and corruption the world has ever seen begins and ends with The Paltrow. Whether it's Glee or oddly-named children, she is the root of far more evil than money, if you can believe it.

Not only does her character unleash this plague upon the world, but, being a "slut" as the flick sets her up to be, it's her immorality that really is the clincher, even more so than the virus she hosts for long enough to give it to everyone else. She is married to Matt Damon's character, and brings that shit home with her, infecting one of her children as well.

Is there no end to her evil?

Even dead she still haunts the husband, and haunts the rest of the drama, as an epidemiologist (Marion Cotillard) tries to track the path the disease took, and how Paltrow gave it to a whole stack of people at a Macau casino, and thence the world.

Meanwhile, whole sections of the States (and the world) are infected, with people dropping like disease-ridden flies. The pace with which this is all happening is breath-taking, and horrifying. The editing and the soundtrack combine to make this almost entirely action-free flick oddly propulsive, and harrowing all the while.

I'm not sure I can explain it, but this was like a white-knuckle ride for me, far more so than a lot of action flicks. I can't even really tell you why. Soderbergh hasn't been making flicks like this all his career, but he's never really had a type of flick that he specialised in either. He's not bound by any genre, and nothing he does really looks like or plays out

like his previous flicks. Yes, I am deliberately excluding the *Ocean's 11* through *13* flicks. Gods help us if he ever makes another one.

But this? This is like no other flick. The closest antecedent that people can quote is something like *Outbreak*, which had Dustin Hoffman and a monkey saving the world from an evil Morgan Freeman, but this is nothing like that. *Contagion* is far less about the heroic pursuit of the cure, and more about how people would act, how people will act, when the hammer comes down. It becomes, logistically, like the pursuit of the holy grail of the cure doesn't even matter, because how do you produce and distribute a 'cure' to millions of people located around the world? It's a piece of piss to do in *Star Trek*, because all you need to do is maguffin-something-in-the-isometric- dilithium-nanotechnology-Picard's-shiny-head and shoot it into the atmosphere or whatever, just in the nick of time. But here? In the real world? What do we do, children, what do we do?

Jude Law's character as a Julian Assange-type who claims to be speaking truth to power online, but is really just being an annoying shit, crosses so many ethical and criminal lines that he can't help but be fascinating to me. The way the tortured logic he contorts plays out, to the extent where he's potentially right about some stuff even when we know how wrong he is, about how the companies and the transnational health organisations collude for their own ends is spot on. What he does with this knowledge is just pure evil, and the impact it has on an already frazzled population is staggering.

And what does he hold up as his major justification? The number of hits that his blog is getting. Fucking unbelievable, by which I mean, all too believable.

I thought this flick was powerfully strong. Probably one of the sanest and most mature treatments of this kind of subject matter that we're ever likely to see. There's nothing shrill or pedantic about how it plays out. It just posits a brutal setup, and carries through on it (mostly, though it seems that the 'solution' was probably too quickly discovered, all the same, considering the resources at play).

Just don't watch it when you're feeling particularly squirrely, or are about to take public transport, because you'll end up bathing in that sanitiser stuff, and that's not good for anyone

8 times I had to stop myself from running to the bathroom and gargling with Ajax out of 10

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"Blogging is not writing. It's just graffiti with punctuation" – Elliot Gould -*Contagion*

*Originally posted at <http://movie-reviews.com.au/content/contagion>*

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