



ERIC
POWELL

DARK SUN



THE CREATION OF DARK SUN

Defilers of Athas

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Defiling magic formed a central trope in the *DARK SUN Campaign Setting*. The *DARK SUN* rules divided wizards into two classes: preserver wizards who carefully channel the world's life energy and defiler wizards who tap into the planet's energy without regard to the consequences. Indeed, overuse of defiling magic is the central reason why *DARK SUN*'s world of Athas is a harsh, brutal desert rather than the lush land of wonder that it once was.

When a wizard uses defiling magic, he kills all plant life—from large trees to the minuscule nutrients in the soil—within a specified radius. All this plant matter is turned into a fine white ash, and it takes centuries for anything to grow there again. Accordingly, defilers are eager to hunt down the few remaining lush places on Athas, turning them into ash as they power their magic.

Previous incarnations of the *DARK SUN* setting used a variety of rules to model the drawing of power from the life energy of the land itself. Defilers and preservers were split into two separate classes, with complex rules for preservers becoming defilers and vice versa. Sometimes a caster chose whether to defile or not when she prepared her spells; sometimes she chose at the moment of casting. And using defiling magic gave you two main benefits: you needed fewer experience points to attain the next level, and you could sometimes get more—but not higher—spell slots per day. Conversely,

a bad roll could leave you with fewer spell slots than a wizard of your level would otherwise have. Defiling magic was a concept rich with flavor, but *DARK SUN*'s rules for it from previous editions don't translate well to the current D&D rules.

What follows is an interpretation of the defiler magic that remains true to the spirit of the concept: that defiling magic is a constant temptation to take "just a little" energy from the earth in exchange for power. If you're already playing a *DARK SUN* game, this new system might represent too radical a change for an ongoing game. But if you're eager to try something new, consider tempting arcane spellcasters with defiler magic that's available to them whenever they're willing to pay the cost.

DEFILER MAGIC

When an arcane spellcaster casts a spell, she taps into the life energy of Athas. Most wizards and sorcerers train their apprentices to avoid taking too much energy—and thereby killing all plant life in the vicinity of the spellcaster—because the stolen energy doesn't return for years. Thus, the arcane magic defiles the land, leaving it a scarred, lifeless landscape.

Every spellcaster knows, however, that she's voluntarily limiting the power of her spells in this way. With any spell she casts, she can choose to cast off her self-imposed limits and defile the land around her in exchange for a rush

In late 1990 the TSR management was sure that *DRAGONLANCE* had run its course (something they seemed to be convinced of every couple of years). Tim Brown and Troy Denning were given the assignment to create a new fantasy setting that could support both games and novels.

"We looked at what TSR already had," Brown recalls, "and realized that to a great extent, they were all very much in the vein of Tolkien. We decided that it was important for this new product to be completely different." To that end, they planned to make a setting with none of the usual trappings—no elves or dwarves, no orcs or even dragons. "We wanted to make something that owed more to Edgar Rice Burroughs's *John Carter* books than to *Conan* or *Lord of the Rings*. Eventually, though, we realized that if we went too far we'd lose the D&D audience."

The world of *DARK SUN* regained the standard D&D races, but each one was re-envisioned to a greater or lesser extent. "The biggest change was probably to the halflings," Brown says chuckling. "Man, did we do a number on them." Indeed, the savage, cannibalistic halflings are one of the first elements that people focus on when describing the setting. It also gained a few interesting races of its own, most notably the insectoid thri-kreen.

Another way in which *DARK SUN* broke from the mold is the role that art played in developing the world. "We included Brom from the very beginning," Brown recalls. "He wasn't there just to paint what we told him. We kept him involved in the development process. He would bring us sketches of ideas he had, and we'd design rules and story details to fit them. He's as much a creator of that world as the writers are." This might be standard practice for D&D products now, but it was revolutionary in 1991.

by Stan!

DEFILER BENEFITS AND COSTS

Effect	Defiler Points Earned
Make spell silent	1
Make spell still	1
Make spell heightened	1 per level
Make spell empowered	3
Make spell extended	2
Make spell quickened	4
Make spell maximized	4
Recover expended spell	2 per spell level
Recover expended spell slot	3 per spell level
Cast a spell without paying XP cost	1 per 250 XP
Cast a spell without expensive material component	1 per 500 gp

of arcane power. Doing so is an evil act, but many a good-hearted spellcaster has resorted to defiler magic in desperate straits or when facing a greater evil.

In game terms, this extra power from defilement takes the form of free metamagic effects applied to the spell at the moment you cast it. For example, you could defile the land in exchange for a maximized *fireball* or an extended *ethereal jaunt* spell. You simply announce your intention to defile when you cast the spell, and you gain the extra benefit without changing the spell slot you expend or requiring the feat. Unlike normal metamagic, defiling magic doesn't take any extra time, even if you cast arcane spells spontaneously.

Once you're done casting the spell, two other things happen: you earn one or more defiler points, and the land around you is defiled.

DEFILER POINTS

Whenever you use defiler magic, you earn defiler points according to the Defiler Benefits and Costs table:

With each spell you apply a metamagic effect to, you can take a maximum number of defiler points equal to half your caster level. For example, a 6th-level wizard couldn't use defiling magic to cast a maximized *fireball* because that would earn 4 defiler points, but an 8th-level wizard could do so.

For the choices on the Defiler Benefits and Costs table that don't directly mimic metamagic effects, there's no inherent limit to how many defiler points you can gain with a single spell. The nonmetamagic effects function as follows:

Recover Expended Spell: Unlike the other uses of defiling magic, you aren't casting a spell at the moment. Instead, you spend a standard action to draw forth the life energy of Athas (which provokes an attack of opportunity if there's a foe nearby) and recall any one spell that you had prepared and then cast. The spell is then prepared again, just as if it had not been cast previously.

Recover Expended Spell Slot: As above, only it recovers the spell slot for spontaneous arcane casters. Because a spell slot is more versatile than a specific prepared spell, the defiler point cost is higher.

Cast a Spell Without Paying XP Cost: You can gain defiler points to substitute for XP used as a component in spells such as *permanency* and *limited wish*. You need not take enough defiler points to completely eliminate the XP cost entirely. If a spell has a 500 XP component, you could instead pay 250 XP and take 1 defiler point.

Cast a Spell Without Expensive Material Component: As above, but you're replacing diamond dust or a similarly costly item with the life energy of Athas. You can split the cost between defiler points and gp if you like.

THE TAIN OF DEFILING

The defiler points you get from using defiler magic accumulate over time (as described below), and they also destroy the vegetation around the spellcaster. Once you have defiler points, you must deal with the taint of defiler magic by assuming the defilement into your body and increasing your defiler score or meditating to eliminate the defiler points.

Important Note: Defiler points and your defiler score aren't the same thing. Defiler points represent how much you've been pushing your life energy around lately. Defiler score is a historical record of how much you've scarred the planet. Defiler scores only come into play when a defiler assumes the taint of defiling (see Assume the Taint). Once a creature has a defiler score, it can never be removed.

Resist the Taint

Your assault on the planet's life energy is mirrored in your own body. Too much defiling can weaken your own life energy and willpower, and you might subconsciously feel alienated and withdrawn from others. Consult the Accumulated Defiler Points table. You suffer these penalties until you eliminate your defiler points through meditation or assuming the taint (see the Accumulated Defiler Points table). The penalties described in the Accumulated Defiler Points table are cumulative. For example, a defiler with 21 defiler points suffers a -4 penalty on all Wisdom- and Charisma-based skill checks, a -2 penalty to Constitution, and is fatigued if he engages in strenuous action for more than 1 minute.

Assume the Taint

You can voluntarily accept the taint of defilement. If you were fatigued due to your defiler points, you aren't anymore. Add half your defiler points (round up) to your permanent defiler score. Then wipe away all your defiler points. For example, if you have 11 defiler points and a defiler score of 3 when you assume the taint, your defiler score goes up to 9, you have no defiler points, and you lose the ability score and skill check penalties.

Eliminating Defiler Points

Meditating in undefiled areas of Athas is the only known way to eliminate defiler points. How fast the defiler points disappear depends on the terrain in which you're meditating. See the Meditating to Reduce Defiler Points sidebar.

If you have a druid assisting you in the meditation, you eliminate defiler points twice as fast. But remember: Druids don't like defilers, for obvious reasons.

DEFILED LAND

From the mightiest tree to the tiniest lichen, every bit of nonsentient life in the immediate vicinity of the defiling spellcaster is utterly destroyed, turned to a fine ash. The land is sterile and won't sustain life for decades or centuries afterward.

The radius of this destructive effect depends on two factors: the amount of vegetation around and the number of defiler points earned when the spell was cast. See the Range of the Defilement sidebar.

If you cast a spell from within a recently defiled area (often because you defiled it the previous round), add the radius of the previous defilement to half the new radius to figure out how much land is defiled. Calculate the new radius as if the old vegetation were still there. "Half the radius" sounds like a smaller area, but it actually defiles more square footage on a per-spell basis than the original spell. Successive defilements from the same place deal disproportionate damage to Athas; you're effectively attacking an open wound.

For example, if you use defiling magic to cast a maximized *fireball* on a scrub plain, you defile everything within a 40-foot radius. If you use defiling magic again to cast a second maximized *fireball* from the same spot, you add half the usual radius (20 feet in this case) to the original radius (40

feet). Now everything within 60 feet of you is defiled. A third maximized *fireball* would extend the radius of defilement to 80 feet.

COMBATING DEFILER MAGIC

Because they're the guardians of the land, druids often lead the fight against defilers. They've developed several spells to aid them in this fight. Two of the more common are described below.

Detect Defiler

Divination

Level: Drd 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: 60 ft.

Area: Cone-shaped emanation

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 min./level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

You can sense the presence of defilers nearby. The amount of information revealed depends on how long you study a particular area or subject.

1st Round: Presence or absence of creatures with a defiler score or defiler points.

2nd Round: Number of defilers (with either a defiler score, defiler points, or both) and the power of the most potent defiler present, according to the Detect Defiler table.



FOR YOUR CAMPAIGN

You can easily use the defiler magic system in a game that doesn't take place on DARK SUN's world of Athas—fantasy literature is full of examples of corrupt or defiling magic, after all. If you use these rules in a campaign world you've created yourself, you should make some adjustments, however. The world of DARK SUN is basically a desert world where lush, abundant, and fertile places are rare. Furthermore, defilers face opposition from all sides. Druids and other organizations that care about the planet's welfare hunt them down. The sorcerer-kings who rule Athas are defilers themselves, and they don't like competition for the world's life energy; they regard every independent defiler as a potential usurper and act accordingly.

As presented in this article, the defiler magic system assumes that vegetation is hard to come by and that defilers live hunted or secret lives. If you eliminate either of those factors, you make defiling magic more powerful, so you might want to add some more costs to the system. Feat prerequisites, prestige class membership, or more painful penalties for defiler points are all good places to start looking.

Even if you don't use defiler magic in your game, it's relatively easy to give the central idea behind the t'liz—draining people, then using the energy to make spells more powerful—to a vampire spellcaster. Such a villain might drain his own minions before or during a fight with the PCs to get free metamagic.

If the strongest defiler aura's power is overwhelming and the HD or level of the aura's source is at least twice your character level, you are stunned for 1 round and the spell ends.

3rd Round: The power and location of each aura. If an aura is outside your line of sight, then you discern its direction but not its exact location.

Each round, you can turn to detect defilers in a new area. The spell can penetrate barriers, but 1 foot of stone, 1 inch of metal, a thin sheet of lead, or 3 feet of wood or dirt blocks the spell. Athas is a metal-poor place, so metal barriers are rare and lead sheets almost unheard of.

ACCUMULATED DEFILER POINTS

Defiler points	Effect
1+	You suffer a -2 penalty on all Wisdom- and Charisma-based skill checks.
11+	You suffer a -2 penalty to Constitution. If you engage in strenuous action (fighting, hustling, and so on) for more than 1 minute, you are fatigued.
21+	You suffer a -2 penalty on all Wisdom- and Charisma-based skill checks.
31+	You suffer a -2 penalty to Constitution. Your alignment changes to evil if it isn't already.
41+	You become a t'liz (described below) and fall under the DM's control.

MEDITATING TO REDUCE DEFILER POINTS

Terrain Vegetation	Time Spent Meditating
Lush (forest, garden)	2 hours per defiler point
Abundant (grassland, active farmland, mud flat)	4 hours per defiler point
Fertile (oases, scrub plain, inactive farmland)	8 hours per defiler point
Infertile (rocky badland, bare mountains)	1 day per defiler point
Barren (boulder fields, sandy wastes, salt flats)	1 week per defiler point

DETECT DEFILER

Creature	Aura Power
Has defiler points	Faint
Defiler score of 1-10	Moderate
Defiler score of 11-30	Strong
Defiler score of 31+	Overwhelming

RANGE OF DEFILEMENT

Terrain Vegetation	Radius Defiled
Lush (forest, garden)	1 ft. x number of defiler points
Abundant (grassland, active farmland, mud flat)	5 ft. x number of defiler points
Fertile (oases, scrub plain, inactive farmland)	10 ft. x number of defiler points
Infertile (rocky badland, bare mountains)	20 ft. x number of defiler points
Barren (boulder fields, sandy wastes, salt flats)	30 ft. x number of defiler points

Revenge of the Land

Evocation [Earth]

Level: Drd 5

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

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

Targets: One defiler creature/level, no two of which can be more than 30 ft. apart

Duration: 1 round/level

Saving Throw: Fortitude partial (see text)

Spell Resistance: Yes

The life energy of the earth is channeled through your spell, affecting creatures within range that have a defiler score, then returning to the land. Translucent arcs of energy emerge from the ground near you and connect unerringly with each target before connecting back to the ground. The energy deals 1d8 points of damage per 2 caster levels each round. Targets need not be in contact with the ground to be affected by this spell.

Targets can attempt a Fortitude save to negate the damage for that round, but they must apply their defiler score as a penalty on the Fortitude save. As long as targets are within range, they attempt a new save and potentially take damage anew at the beginning of each of your turns, regardless of whether they succeeded or failed at the save in the previous round. If you don't penetrate a subject's spell resistance when you first cast *revenge of the land*, that subject is unaffected by the spell in subsequent rounds. Only by leaving the range of *revenge of the*

land or waiting out the spell's duration can targets avoid attempting the save each round.

Creatures without a defiler score, including those who have defiler points but no defiler score, are unaffected.

Material Component: A live seed, which is thrown at the caster's feet and ground into the dirt.

T'LIZ

Arcane spellcasters who perform a paroxysm of defiling magic sometimes become t'liz, undead defilers who walk the earth, feasting on the living energy of creatures rather than plants. Sometimes becoming a t'liz is accidental, but a defiler often seeks out undeath to prolong his life at the expense of the planet's health.

T'lizes are puppetmasters who prefer to work through minions as they seek magical knowledge and power from Athas's bygone ages of plenty. Most seek power for its own sake, reveling in their more powerful forms. But a few defilers became t'lizes by mistake and stop at nothing to recover a scrap of ancient lore that will restore them to life.

T'lizes appear much as they did in life, but their skin is unnaturally pale and their weight gradually diminishes until they take on a gaunt appearance. Their skin dries up, and many t'lizes anoint themselves in expensive oils to give themselves the illusion of healthy life. Like vampires, they cast no shadows.

Sample T'Liz

The smell of spiced oils fill the room as this pale, gaunt man points toward you with a quivering hand, muttering words in a long-dead language as he does so.

This example uses a human 8th-level wizard/6th-level loremaster as the character.

T'Liz, 8th-Level Wizard/6th-Level Loremaster

Medium Humanoid (Augmented Humanoid)

Hit Dice: 14d12 (91 hp)

Initiative: -1

Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)

Armor Class: 19 (-1 Dex, +1 dodge, +5 natural, +4 armor), touch 0, flat-footed 18

Base Attack/Grapple: +7/+4

Attack: Touch +4 melee touch (energy drain)

Full Attack: Touch +4 melee touch (energy drain)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Energy drain, fear aura, rebuke undead, spawn

Special Qualities: Applicable knowledge, damage reduction 10/bludgeoning and magic, dodge trick, immunities, greater lore, lore, the lore of true stamina, turn resistance +4, undead traits

Saves: Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +17

Abilities: Str 5, Dex 8, Con —, Int 21, Wis 15, Cha 13

Skills: Craft (alchemy) +12, Concentration +17, Gather Information +10, Hide +2, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (arcana) +21, Knowledge (history) +24, Listen +18, Move Silently +12, Search +6, Spellcraft +14, Spot +4

Feats: Combat Casting, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Empower Spell, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Skill Focus (Knowledge [history]), Spell Mastery (*bull's strength, cat's grace, bear's endurance, stoneskin*), Spell Penetration, Spell Focus (necromancy).

Environment: Warm desert

Organization: Solitary or troupe (1 t'liz plus 2d4 spectres)

Challenge Rating: 16

Treasure: Standard coins; standard goods; double items

Alignment: Neutral evil

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +4

Combat

A t'liz will use energy drain (preferably before the fight begins) to amass the negative levels required to use metamagic on his spells. Then he destroys his foes with a prodigious display of arcane might.

The Will save against this t'liz's fear aura and the Fortitude save to prevent the negative levels bestowed by the t'liz have a DC of 18.

Spells Prepared (4/6/5/5/5/4/3/2; save DC 15 + spell level, 16 + spell level for Necromancy): 0—*detect magic* x2, *mage hand* x2; 1st—*magic missile* x3, *obscuring mist*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shield* x2; 2nd—*bull's strength*, *cat's grace*, *see invisibility*, *spectral hand* x2; 3rd—*dispel magic*, *displacement*, *fly*, *lightning bolt*, *vampiric touch*; 4th—*arcane eye*, *bestow curse*, *enervation* x2, *stoneskin*; 5th—*dismissal*, *magic jar*, *teleport*, *waves of fatigue*; 6th—*disintegrate*, *finger of death*, *greater scrying*; 7th—*horrid wilting*, *trap the soul*.

Possessions: *Bracers of armor* +4, *cloak of resistance* +4, *staff of fire*, +1 dagger.

Creating a T'liz

"T'liz" is an acquired template that must be applied to any humanoid creature (referred to hereafter as the base creature) with 41 or more defiler points.

A t'liz has all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size and Type: The creature's type changes to undead. Do not recalculate base attack bonus, saves, or skill points. Size is unchanged.

Hit Dice: Increase all current and future Hit Dice to d12s.

Armor Class: A t'liz has a +5 natural armor bonus or the base creature's natural armor bonus, whichever is better.

Attack: A t'liz retains all the attacks of the base creature and also gains a touch attack if it didn't already have one. If the base creature can use weapons, the t'liz retains this ability. A creature with natural weapons retains those natural weapons. A t'liz fighting without weapons uses either its touch attack or its primary natural weapon (if it has any). A t'liz armed with a weapon uses its touch or a weapon, as it desires.

Full Attack: A t'liz fighting without weapons uses either its touch attack (see above) or its natural weapons (if it has any). If armed with a weapon, it usually uses the weapon as its primary attack along with a touch or other natural weapons as natural secondary attacks.

Special Attacks: A t'liz retains all the base creature's special attacks and gains those described below. Save DCs are equal to 10 + 1/2 t'liz's HD + t'liz's Cha modifier unless otherwise noted.

Fear Aura (Su): T'lizes are surrounded by an aura of death, defilement, and evil. Creatures of less than 5 HD in a 60-foot radius that look at the t'liz must succeed on a Will save or be affected as though by a *fear* spell from a sorcerer of the t'liz's level. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same t'liz's aura for 24 hours.

Energy Drain (Su): Living creatures hit by a t'liz's touch attack (or any other natural weapon the t'liz might possess) gain two negative levels. For each negative level bestowed, the t'liz gains 5 temporary hit points and one point that functions like a defiler point (see below). Temporary hit points gained from this ability expire at a rate of 1 hit point per hour. A t'liz can use its energy drain ability once per round.

Spells: A t'liz can cast any spells it could cast while alive. They retain the defiler score they had in life, but they have no defiler points and cannot earn any. Instead, they can use defiling magic by substituting the negative levels they've bestowed within the last week on a one-for-one basis. Simply keep a tally of how many negative levels a t'liz bestows; that tally represents points the t'liz can spend for free metamagic and the other benefits of defiling magic.

For example, a t'liz that has bestowed six negative levels within the last week could spend four of those negative levels to maximize a fireball and have two negative levels' worth of defilement remaining.

The energy goes into the spell, so the creature that received the negative level doesn't get the energy back. The t'liz loses 5 temporary hit points for each negative level he expends in this way. Whenever the t'liz uses negative levels to power defiling magic,

the surrounding vegetation is turned to ash just as if the t'liz were using defiling magic in the normal way.

Rebuke Undead (Su): T'lizes have a natural ability to channel negative energy so that undead do their bidding—or at least leave the t'liz alone. A t'liz can rebuke and command undead as a cleric of its Hit Dice.

Spawn (Su): A humanoid slain by a t'liz's energy drain rises as a spectre (described in the *Monster Manual*) 1d4 days after death.

Special Qualities: A t'liz retains all the base creature's special qualities and gains those described below.

Turn Resistance (Ex): A t'liz has +4 turn resistance.

Damage Reduction (Su): A t'liz's has damage reduction 10/bludgeoning and magic. Its natural weapons are treated as magic weapons for the purpose of overcoming damage reductions.

Immunities (Ex): T'lizes have immunities to electricity, polymorph (although they can use polymorph effects on themselves), and mind-affecting attacks.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Int +4, Cha +4. Being an undead, a t'liz has no Constitution score.

Skills: T'lizes have a +8 racial bonus on Intimidate, Listen, and Move Silently checks. Otherwise same as the base creature.

Organization: Solitary or troupe (1 t'liz plus 2d4 spectres)

Challenge Rating: Same as the base creature +2.

Treasure: Standard coins; standard goods; double items.

Alignment: Any evil.

Advancement: By character class.

Level Adjustment: Same as the base creature +4. ^U