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Of Mixed Blood

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Total Physical Replacement

Extreme Medicine In OGL Cyber.Net

101 Uses For An...

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On the cover, an intriguing hint of what is to come from Steampunk by Finnish artist Sami Waulu

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Editorial

You are probably asking yourself why there is a picture of a strange bloke holding a photograph of William Shatner in the editorial this month, and, to be fair, it's a reasonable question. The answer is, of course, that it's me. The 'why' is equally simple. It struck me that to date the staff behind this magazine have been relatively anonymous. Apart from a rather rosy picture of August Hahn looking like a well-heeled Ali Baba, and a few shots of Monty the Mongoose, we have remained hidden in the shadows.



Indeed, cynics might say that this has been a deliberate ploy to avoid being hunted down by irate Mongoose fans demanding that their particular favourite game gets more attention in the magazine (see some of the scary guys who play Dredd and you'll know that this is a serious issue). In any case, I thought that I would lead from the front on this one.

Much of this springs from my acquisition of the signed photograph of William Shatner obtained by the aforementioned August Hahn at last year's GenCon SoCal. The mighty Bill is something of a cult figure at Mongoose, and with myself in particular. It has been alleged that I am his biggest fan, although I rather doubt this. He does however hold a special place in my gaming life, having been the NPC who led my first ever Star Trek character to his death way back when.

It went a bit like this. I was playing a junior security man (red shirt, needless to say) and we went down to a planet to do a spot of research on some supposedly unique rock samples. Nothing very exciting or out of the usual so far, I think you'll agree. There were four of us in the gaming group, as I remember. I can't for the life of me recall what characters the others were playing, but they were all clearly more important than me as when we were attacked by the obligatory creatures who inhabited said planet, Kirk ordered the shuttle to lift off before I could get back to the door.

It's strange how some memories of gaming stay with you, and not always the important ones. Anyway, I have digressed. Now you know what I look like, I would greatly appreciate it if you would be gentle if you bump into me at any future convention. Just remember, I'm old, feeble and a personal friend of James T. Kirk...

Ian



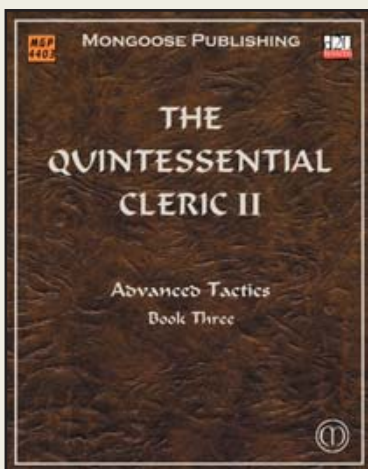
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Babylon 5 created by J. Michael Straczynski

EYE ON MONGOOSE

New Releases This Month



A cleric bears arms and a shield in search of adventure but he is no mere soldier questing for treasure. He wields spell but he is no mere enchanter, hungry for knowledge, in service only to himself.

The cleric is a man of god, the guardian of his faith and spiritual shepherd of the souls of his congregation. The cleric stands undaunted at the gates of eternity, wielding mace and spell against the shambling hordes of living death and the numberless legions of the damned.

Once he is beyond the early stages of his career, the cleric has seen enough and done enough that his holy ideals will be tempered by the realities of mortal existence. This makes the cleric an appealing contradiction, a man with unwavering faith in the glories of the existence beyond that waits for all who believe, who is also more than familiar enough with the many ways in which the mortals of the living world can hurt and betray one another and the gods above to be a hard-bitten realist. This combination of realist and idealist is at the heart of the cleric class' character and that is what this book, the latest in Mongoose Publishing's line of character enhancing sourcebooks, uses as its thematic base.

This new 128-page sourcebook expands the cleric class to levels never before seen, refreshing the whole concept of playing a character of faith.

The most blasphemous of scholars would place the creation of the world not in the hands of the gods, but in the hands of nature herself. In such a creation myth it was not the elves or the dragons who came first, but the reptiles – the dinosaurs, the crocodiles, the lizards and the lizardfolk. Of course, such a myth

has little basis in the truth of things, but it is an interesting aside. There is no doubt that the race of creatures known as lizardfolk, or lizardmen, is an ancient one indeed. Often overlooked because of their savagery and animalistic tendencies, the lizardfolk people are as much a part of the history of the world as men, dwarves and elves.



Lizardfolk appear much as a crocodile would if it were crossed with a man – a scale covered humanoid 6 or 7 foot in height, with clawed hands and feet, powerful jaws filled with teeth and a long muscular tail capable of propelling it through water as it swims or through the air as it jumps. Lizardfolk are a primitive people, banded into small extended family groups known as tribes. To lizardfolk the survival and propagation of their tribe is all, and all are prepared to give their lives to ensure this.

As a reptilian race, lizardfolk prefer to live in the warmer parts of the world, in swamps and marshes throughout such climates. They often build settlements of dome-like mud huts deep within swamps, hidden away and guarded against outsiders who would harm the tribe. Lizardfolk are unpredictable within their habitat – sometimes dealing peacefully with outsiders, sometimes attacking them ferociously. Players travelling through swampland should be ever vigilant – their passing will almost certainly be known to the near invisible lizardfolk sentries but they may never realise that they were being watched. If provoked into a fight, lizardfolk are a very dangerous people indeed.

The Slayer's Guide to Lizardfolk is the latest in Mongoose Publishing's celebrated series of creature guides, designed to flesh out and develop the beasts, monsters and inhabitants of fantasy worlds.



Excalibur. The One Ring of Power. Merlin's Staff. Gandalf's sword Glamdring. The Spear of Destiny. All names for objects of legend. Objects of power. To speak the name of one of these items is to evoke images of great deeds done, of dragons, of heroism and of terrible villainy. The true power of magic items comes not from their ability to work miracles but from their ability to evoke wonder in all of us.

It is no wonder then, that magic items continue to dominate the imaginations of both fantasy readers and, more importantly, fantasy gamers. Who among us does not remember the first time their character, at the successful conclusion of a hard fought adventure, lifted a new sword and pulled it, glittering and smoking in the dim light, from its bejewelled sheath? Who among us does not recall with fondness the first time their wizard pointed a staff, uttered a few cryptic phrases and caused the world to erupt in fire? And who among us, for that matter, does not feel a sudden thrill each and every time a simple *detect magic* spell wreathes the treasury in cold, blue possibility?

Yes, magical items have a long and storied and wondrous history in fantasy gaming and the future holds limitless possibility, particularly now that d20 gives us rules that allow our characters to construct their own items of power.

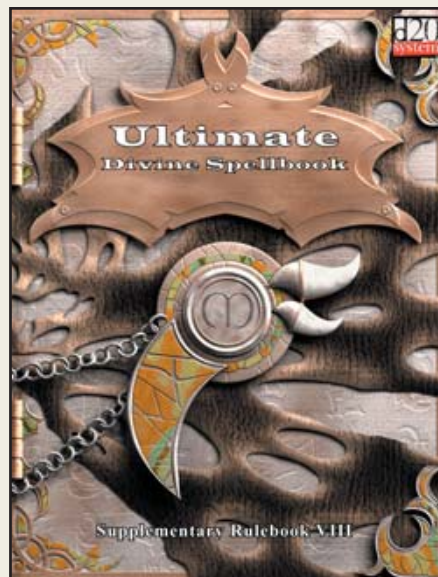
This book, the *Encyclopaedia Arcane: Magic Item Creation*, is dedicated to the expansion and exploration of all the possibilities of magic items in fantasy role playing. Within these pages, you will find many new options to take the magic items of your characters and your campaigns to the next level. There are new powers, new feats and even a few new prestige classes, all focused on the use and creation of magic items. There are rules for expanding the role of intelligent magic items and for placing unique qualities and drawbacks in your magic items. Most importantly, there is a new system, the Mythic System, which supplements the basic rules for creating magical items and allows you to forge items of power in a way which is more in line with the stories and legends of old. With the Mythic System, when you want to create a flaming sword, it matters less that you know how to cast *burning hands* than it does that you know where to go to pluck a tail feather from the phoenix. With the Mythic System, your swordsmen and rogues will be able to take a more direct hand in constructing what will be their most prized possessions, giving them a greater sense of ownership and accomplishment.

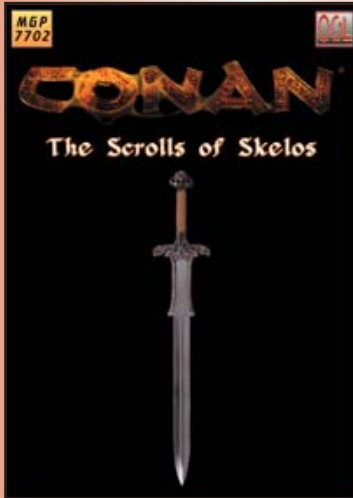
No two magic items should ever be the same and thanks to this book, and to your imagination, they never will be again.

Ultimate Divine Spells is the latest in the highly successful Ultimate Series, bringing together the best of the best of all that is d20. This 256 page, fully-illustrated, hardback is no leap of faith.

Covering every divine spell you are ever likely to need as well as some great new clerical domains, all within one easy to use tome, it's as if your cleric is carrying his deity's words within his hands.

Alphabetically laid out with a spell list and index, this book makes it simple to cross reference what spells are available to you at any time in your cleric's career.





In **Conan The Roleplaying Game**, sorcery is a subtle but powerful force. An experienced sorcerer can cast spells undreamt of by wizards in other fantasy games, but he may need to sacrifice a dozen virgins, dose himself up with black lotus, cast the spell and then rest for several days afterwards, rather than simply being able to fire off magic whenever he chooses.

During Conan's time, the Hyborian Age, much of the most powerful magic has been lost for centuries and more. The wizards of Stygia, Khitai and Vendhya are renowned for their arcane lore, but even they would find it difficult to match the power of the sorcerers of Acheron and Old Stygia at their height many thousands of years ago.

The dedicated sorcerer can still hope to attain such heady heights, but he must work for it. Calling up demon lords, hunting for crumbling scrolls in dusty tombs, searching out fiend-haunted isles in the Western Ocean, gathering magical herbs in devil-infested swamps beyond Khitai. . . the sorcerer who desires serious magical power must do all these things and more besides. A sorcerer who has a master, coven

or secret society to teach him has something of a head start over a lone scholar, but may never learn more than his tutor knows. Even he will need to quest after knowledge if he wishes to achieve his full potential.

More so than any ancient artefact or scholarly teacher, arcane books can grant a sorcerer not mere fragments of the long-lost sorcerous knowledge of the ancients, but full-blown spells, magical formulae, and the secrets of the most powerful wizards of the old times. The *Book of Skelos* is the most fabled and sought-after volume of them all.

The Scrolls of Skelos is the first 128 page supplement for **Conan the Roleplaying Game**. Here you will find information on rounding out sorcerous characters in the game, whether run by players or the Games Master.

This includes additional sorcery styles and spells; full rules for creating permanent magic, including magical weapons and other sorcerous items; and a large section on the creatures of sorcery, whether the demons called up by scholars, the demon lords who act as their patrons, the strange monsters some wise men find in the wilderness and train as servants, or the weird aberrations crafted by certain sorcerers in their quests to make life itself.

The book is rounded out with a number of Non-Player Character profiles covering those prominent sorcerers of the Hyborian Age who have not already been dealt with in the main rulebook, an overview of some of the weird religions practised by certain wizards, new sorcerous feats and a sprinkling of scholarly prestige classes. There is also a Games Master's section giving advice on handling characters' relations with their demonic patrons, allies and servants, among other useful tips. Scrolls of Skelos is the most exciting study of sorcery in Conan's Hyboria ever produced.

WINNER Caption Competition #5



Congratulations to Neil John Gunn who has won a copy of *Macho Men With Guns* with : 'I know I said I wanted to see *Return of the King* three times but this is ridiculous!'

Also an honourable mention for Dave Nellis for the amusing: 'Huh, thank you very much.' (say it in an Elvis voice and it works, i promise)

EYE ON MONGOOSE

New Releases This Month

FEATURE RELEASE:

◊O◊G◊L◊ ◊S◊T◊E◊A◊M◊P◊U◊N◊K◊

256 page, full colour hardback

Imagine a world where computers were developed a century before their time, running on levers and steam engines instead of microprocessors or even light bulbs; a world where the zeppelin never went out of fashion as new technology made it safer and faster, where brave men (and women) explored a yet undiscovered world to find wondrous ruins of lost civilisations or entrances to entire new worlds, where the wondrous age of magic is slowly fading away to give place to an age of reason. This is the world of steampunk, a subgenre of fantasy and science fiction that is devoted to marrying the possible with the improbable more than exploring the future or exploring fantastic themes; steampunk explores a past that might have been, had some things happened a little differently.

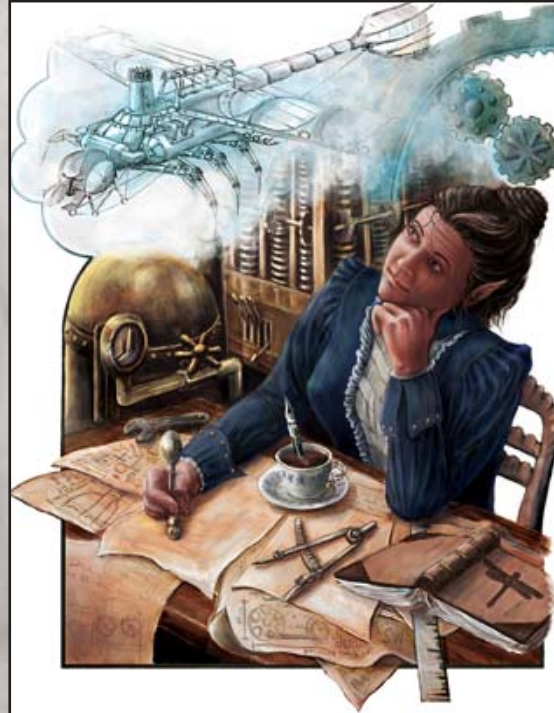
◊O◊G◊L◊ ◊S◊T◊E◊A◊M◊P◊U◊N◊K◊

Steampunk stories are dominated by strange technology and weird science. While hard science-fiction bases its principles on proven or theoretical science in our time like quantum physics and the advances in biotechnology, steampunk takes a look backwards, at the early advances in scientific and technological inspiration. Phenomena like electricity is beginning to be fully understood, steam and mechanics move most of the age's machinery and telecommunications are being born in the form of the telegraph. Now... consider that if Charles Babbage had counted with sufficient funding, he could have invented the first computer around 1842 and, connected with the power of the telegraph, the Internet could have been born two World Wars earlier. What kind of world may have evolved from networked computing based on clicking machines and mechanical modems? Such are the kinds of questions that you can answer in steampunk.

Technology in a steampunk setting is either elegant or incredibly clunky, using basic mechanisms and primitive wiring to achieve the performance that would occupy a fraction of the space using modern technology, but would not look as quaint. Brass tubes, wooden handles, and Edison's new incandescent lamps (aka light bulbs) replace fibre optics, touch screens and LEDs as the material of choice for machinery. Steam-powered cars roam the streets while airships cross continents and giant cannons shoot people to the moon. Or not.

◊O◊G◊L◊ ◊S◊T◊E◊A◊M◊P◊U◊N◊K◊

OGL Steampunk is the latest in Mongoose's fantastically successful OGL range of game books, providing all you need to play the game within one book. Above all, the feeling that dominates steampunk is a sense of wonder, a certainty that humanity can defeat any challenge with guts and ingenuity. Although the Victorian worldview saw Nature more as an enemy to be conquered than as a source of magnificent wonders, there was a pervading sense of adventure, that the world offered untold opportunities for discovery and exploration. Because of a relative period of stability, the people of the Western world had a chance to look around and see what surrounded them, stretching their legs to chart what had remained unexplored until then, which includes not only blanks on geographical maps, but also gaping holes in the way the humanity understood the world's phenomena, from planetary orbits to microbiology. Science is challenging religion boldly with each new postulation in both the natural and the social sciences, old dogmas are being questioned while new ones are born. OGL Steampunk opens new worlds of adventure for roleplayers to explore!



Write for the Mongoose

Want to write for your favourite RPG publisher? Want to get paid for it? Got a great idea for an article? If the answers to these questions are 'yes', then Signs & Portents wants to hear from you.

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Things to Remember

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Subject Matter

First and foremost, the article has to be based on one of our product lines. That is not as limiting as it sounds, however. The d20 fantasy family alone should give you plenty of scope. Think of all our various products, like the Quintessential series and the Slayer's Guides. With more than 80 fantasy-based books to choose from...well, you get the idea. But don't stop there. Think Babylon 5, Judge Dredd, Slaine, Armageddon 2089, not to mention the barrage of forthcoming games that we have coming. If you have ideas for any of our games we want to hear them.

So, you have chosen your game, but what do you actually write about? Scenarios are good. In fact, we love them. Give me a scenario to edit and I am a happy camper. Perhaps you want to discuss the philosophy of a game. That's good. We encourage intellectual thought process around here. If you have something meaningful to say, then try us out. If we don't like it, we *will* tell you. Think hard before you try humour though. With guys like Jonny Nexus about, you will need to be sharp if you want to break in. If you think you have what it takes, though, then feel free to try your hand. Just be prepared to be told you may not be as funny as you think you are.

If you want to write new rules for a game, with new uses for skills and maybe some new feats, then be our guest.

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It is a painful fact that whatever you write, it will get edited. That is why editors exist, after all. Even this passage will have been edited. If you can get over this hurdle you are well on your way to attaining the mentality needed to be a writer. It will help if you can handle criticism as well. Take it from us – writing is a tough business. Just ask any author doing the rounds looking for a friendly publisher.

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Remember to run the article through a spell checker before you send it in. It will still get proofread, but it shows willing. Anything not spell checked will be rejected straight away.

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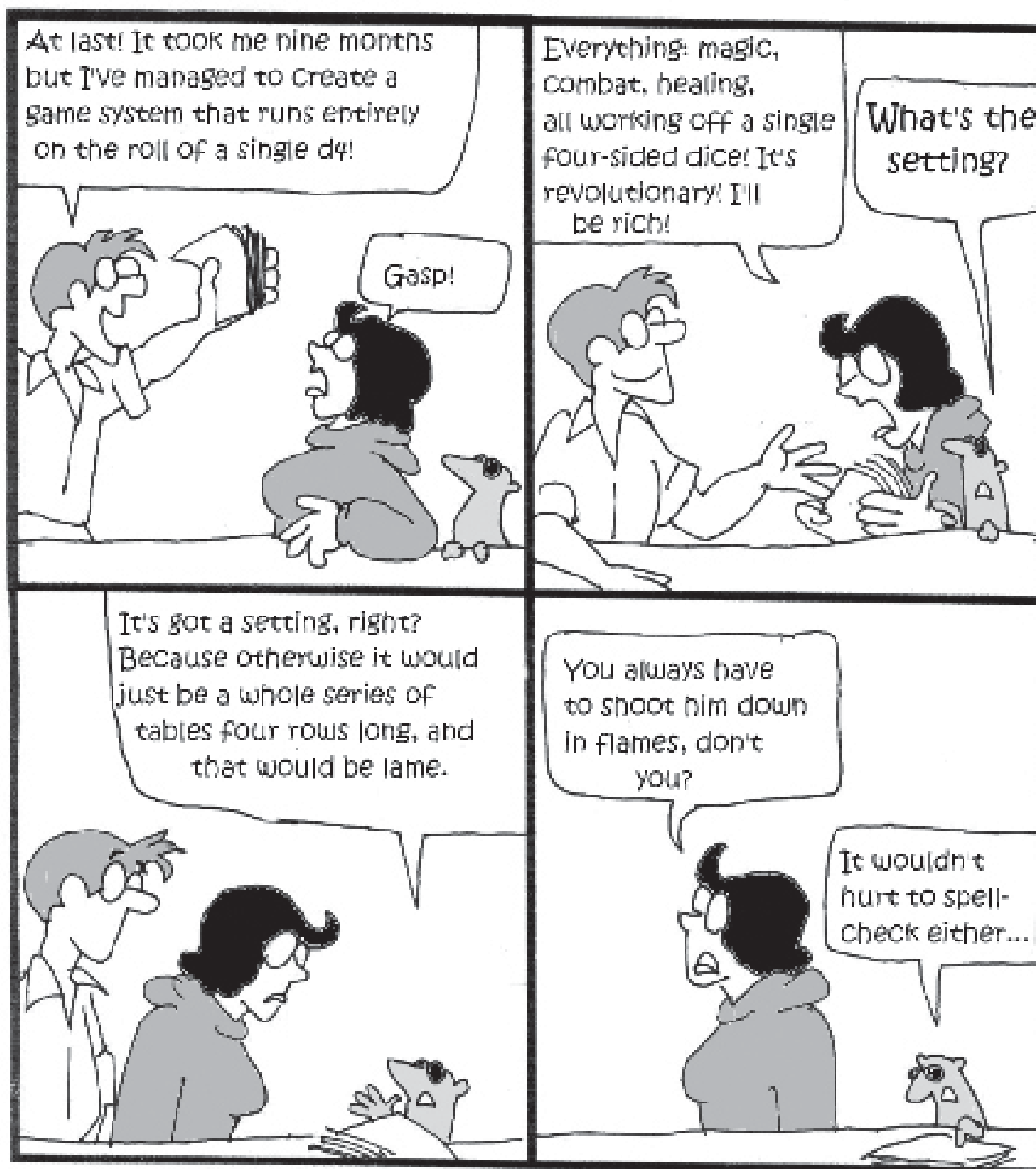


Can Amy come
out to play?

We have been threatening a cartoon strip for some time, and here it is! This is the brief: There are three games designers who live with a mongoose (so, thoroughly plausible so far). Anyway, these three aren't all that bright, but for some reason their games do rather well. Could it be something to do with the enigmatic Monty?

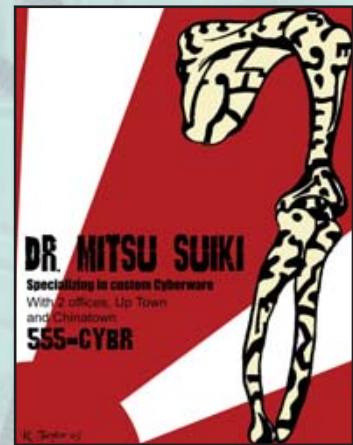
Design and Conquer

by Adrian Czajkowski





August Hahn

TPR - Better
Bodies Through
Robotics

Total Physical Replacement

'Hello, Mister... Phillips. I see by your monitors that you are conscious. Excellent. We need to go over a few things before we can proceed. All right?'

'His coherency and comprehension factors are all in the green, doctor.'

'Excellent. Mister Phillips, Derrick. Can I call you Derrick? Fine, Derrick then. You had quite a nasty turn in the corporate jet, I'm afraid. According to your chart, this is the first time you've been awake since the accident. I know you must have a lot of questions, but they will have to wait for another time. We don't have long before your remaining physiology goes into separation shock, so I need to make sure we have your consent to the operation. Can... can he indicate compliance?'

'Yes, doctor. His EKG is admissible to the Board of Standards and Ethics. This spike here, on the theta band, is legally recognised as an affirmative.'

'That's wonderful. Your corporation must value you highly, Mister Phillips, to go to this much expense to have their CEO back. We will be moving you to an isolation chamber now for the procedure. This time tomorrow, I'll be shaking your hand at your post-op examination. It will look like a hand, right?'

'Yes, doctor.'

The technologically advanced world of *CyberNet* has given rise to some amazing pieces of technology. With a Web box, a person can enter a digital reality and interact with information as if it was a different world. Remote control rigs allow a person to control a car, or a tank, with nothing but their mind. Cyber-enabled guns are guided by pure thought and there is a designer drug for every possible mood or memory. Cybernetic replacement of limbs, organs, and even soft tissue sensory structures has been possible for some time, leading inevitably to the next logical step – Total Physical Replacement.

A radical procedure, even by the high-tech standards of the dark tomorrow, a Total Physical

Replacement (TPR, in medical and technical parlance) is not quite an accurate term. Used when a subject's body is too badly damaged to salvage much of anything, a TPR involves harvesting the patient's brain and spinal column. The rest of the body is discarded, though bone marrow is retained whenever possible to keep for blood cloning purposes. The 'brain train', as the remaining physical mass is called, is placed in a life sustaining fluid matrix and kept active through electrical stimulation until transplantation into a mechanical holding chassis can be accomplished.

This chassis is typically a column of metal and resilient plastic laminate, chosen for its non-reactive properties. The column contains

the chemical survival matrix and a small nuclear power source capable of sustaining the brain train for at least twenty years. The power source is replaceable, but only through a surgical procedure; this level of effort to access the TPR's power source ensures that it cannot be accidentally disengaged. Any interruption in power to the brain train results in immediate death, so a certain amount of complication is desirable.

Once placed in a column chassis, the subject's brain can be kept alive indefinitely and even connected to a Web interface for communication purposes, but this stage of recovery is only half of the TPR equation. Many times, connection to an interface is not bothered with,

especially when the subject is not trained in Web use. There is a growing concern that stimulation of the raw cerebrum past a certain point can cause irrevocable psychological harm, so it is avoided in all but the most necessary situations.

Typically, a subject is rushed through a set of procedures that hasten the time period between harvesting and implantation into a host form. The host forms are a progression of cybernetics that take the concept of limb and organ replacement to the next level – a fully automated robotic body. This level of technology is still very cutting edge and not always an assured success, but there have been promising breakthroughs in its dependability. By the time TPR becomes a technical possibility, three out of every five procedures succeed. The other two, in the eyes of the medical community, provide valuable data for next time.

The number of functional TPRs in the world of CyberNet is remarkably low, but those that exist tend to be very distinctive. While the procedure is by its nature exorbitantly expensive, even greater funds can be expended to make the resulting robotic 'life form' as human appearing as possible. The best grades of TPR host bodies are virtually indistinguishable from human beings, but these are very rare. More often, a layer of flesh coloured latex is placed over a skeletal framework, resulting in someone who more resembles a manikin than a man.

The psychological impact of this procedure is severe, causing roughly half of those who undergo the replacement to require lengthy periods of therapy, sometimes unsuccessfully. Former TPR cases have been known to place themselves in the path of oncoming bullet mag-lev trains, tear out their own power cores, and subject themselves to massive EMP just to end their unnatural lives. Even survivors of

this procedure are far from 'sane', often referring to themselves in the third person and developing an inordinate fascination with taking themselves, and others, apart to see how 'machines', organic and otherwise, work. More than one TPR has become a fugitive from the law, disappearing into the shadows of the night with nothing but their electronic derangements and inhuman physical capabilities.

Using TPR in a CyberNet Game

Each Games Master will need to decide how far Total Physical Replacement has come in their campaign. It is not recommended that Player Characters be allowed to start a CyberNet campaign as a TPR, but the option might exist for them at a later point in the game, perhaps even without them knowing that it is an option at all. As a way of bringing back a Player Character presumed dead, TPR technology can be a great story telling device.

The cost of the TPR procedure is so incredibly expensive, it has not even been given a Purchase DC. If a character does not have the resources of a major world government or mega-corporation behind him, there is little chance of the procedure being possible. The specific technical and medical training required to harvest a brain train and make it ready to interface with a



robotic host body is so in-depth, few Player Characters would even be in a position to hear of it, much less learn the procedures. The Games Master can of course make exceptions, but knowing how to perform a Total Physical Replacement is still a far cry from having the resources and equipment to do so.

In essence, a Total Physical Replacement is a template applied to an existing Player Character or Non-Player Character. At present, any living being can theoretically become a TPR, since the procedure was perfected on animals before moving to human trials. In practice, this is rarely done, as animals do not typically have the ability to cope with the loss of their physical bodies without reverting to feral, instinctual behaviour. It is rumoured that this is not an altogether undesirable outcome; several militaries and corporations are said to have TPR

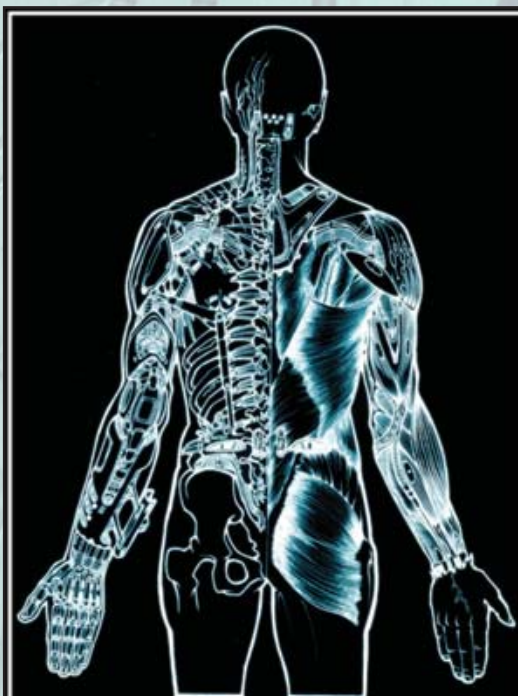
dogs (and other animals) as pseudo-robotic sentries. The truth of this is also for the Games Master to determine.

Just like most cybernetic systems, the Total Physical Replacement template comes in four grades. The lowest grade, Gamma, represents the lowest cost option and is typically what is available to civilians with incredible wealth and smaller government/corporate entities. Gamma grade TPR is all that should be available if the technology is still in the prototype stage. Gamma grade TPRs cannot accept syntheflesh grafts and will always look distinctly robotic.

Delta grade TPRs are the typical form of the technology once it has been refined and undergone several successful applications. A delta grade TPR can accept syntheflesh, though only in its crudest forms (Gamma and Delta quality), making it a less than optimal choice for TPR characters that must continue to function in an interpersonal role. Most delta grade TPRs are used for individuals who will not likely see or interact with large groups of people again, making it perfect for military and corporate guards and lower level executives.

Beta grade Total Physical Replacement is the best form of the technology available in most CyberNet games and should be considered the cutting edge of the field in all but the most advanced settings. A beta grade TPR can accept all grades of syntheflesh and

has a much lower chance of causing cyber-rejection syndrome because of its all but human appearance. Some beta grade recipients choose to make their physical forms 'artful'



and can get very inventive with their appearance. Within certain limits, the Games Master should approve any decorative change a beta grade TPR wishes to make, though outlandish changes should come at a serious financial cost.

Alpha grade Total Physical Replacements are the procedure perfects, a model of robotic body so indistinguishable from humanity that the first sign any onlooker should have of the character's mechanical nature should only be when he takes damage and the metal shines through. Alpha TPRs are utterly state of the art when they exist at all and should be the sole province of genius inventors, mega-corporation executives and superpower military agents.

Creating a Total Physical Replacement Character (TPR)

'TPR' is an acquired CyberNet template that can be added to any living creature (referred to hereafter as the base character), provided it undergoes the TPR procedure. A TPR has all the base creature's statistics, class and special abilities except as noted here:

Size and Type: The creature's type changes to construct. Do not recalculate base attack bonus, saves or skill points. Size is unchanged (though a military grade TPR may become Large at the Games Master's discretion). At the time of the template's application, the grade of alteration must be chosen; Gamma, Delta, Beta, or Alpha.

Hit Dice: Increase all current and future Hit Dice to d10s.

Defence Value: A TPR's electronically enhanced reflexes provide a +2 bonus to the base character's current Defence Value. This bonus increases to +3, +4 or +5 depending on grade (up to +5 for an Alpha grade TPR).

Attack: If the base character can use weapons, the TPR retains this ability. A base character with natural weapons (such as a dog and its bite) retains those natural weapons. A

TPR fighting without weapons uses either its normal ability to attack unarmed or may use its limbs as unarmed weapons and is considered armed because of inherent strength and physical resiliency. A TPR armed with a weapon uses this form of unarmed attack or a weapon, as it desires.

Full Attack: A TPR fighting without weapons uses either its special unarmed attack status (see above), its own ability to fight unarmed, or its natural weapons (if it has any). If armed with a weapon, it usually uses the weapon as its primary and secondary attacks, provided it has a way to make those attacks.

Damage: A TPR without natural weapons has a crush attack that uses mechanical hand and limb strength to deal 1d6+Strength bonus points of bludgeoning damage to living creatures and physical objects. A TPR with natural weapons can use it by itself or augment it with this crushing ability, as it prefers. If it chooses the latter, it deals 1d6+Strength bonus points of extra bludgeoning damage on one natural weapon attack.

Special Attacks: A TPR retains all the base creature's special attacks and gains those described below:
Unyielding Strength (Ex): TPRs have completely articulated bodies and do not have a 'weak' side or inability to apply their strength evenly. As such, weapons wielded in the 'off' hand still retain the TPRs full strength bonus and weapons wielded in both hands that would normally qualify for 1.5x Strength bonus to damage gain 2x Strength bonus instead.
Full Articulation (Ex): TPRs are automatically considered ambidextrous and never suffer an off-hand penalty to attack rolls. TPRs do not automatically have the Two-Weapon Fighting feat, but their mechanical strength and stability treats all melee weapons of their own size category or smaller as if they were small enough to be considered

balanced for purposes of their 'off' hand.

Special Qualities: A TPR retains all the base character's special qualities

Universal Mounts (Ex): A TPR can accept any form of cybergear up to their own grade of TPR enhancement. Cybergear added to a TPR never impacts the character's



and gains those described below:
Self Impact (Ex): The alterations required to a character's physiology required to become a TPR effectively sever the character's connection to his concept of a physical body. The character loses his Self score and must generate a random Charisma score again. The character's previous Charisma modifier is applied to this generation roll as a bonus or penalty. There is no set maximum to this new score, but a result of 2 or less after the modifier results in cyber-rejection syndrome (the character goes insane and becomes a Non-Player Character automatically). Beta and Alpha grade TPRs have a minimum 3 and 5 Charisma scores, respectively. Onset of cyber-rejection syndrome can take up to 2d6 weeks to set in, leaving the TPR seemingly normal until that time.

Self score, but follows all of the other rules for cybergear listed in the core rulebook. All TPRs must possess two cyberarms, two cyberlegs, two cybereyes, two cyberears and a vocoder; these systems are all included at the TPR's grade and can be later upgraded as need and resources allow.

Damage Reduction (Su): A TPR's robotic body is tough, giving the creature damage reduction 10/-.

Immunities (Ex): TPRs have immunity to cold, poison and disease.

Vulnerabilities (Ex): A TPR takes double damage from electrical and EMP based attacks, though the brain train itself is fully shielded from EMP, making it impossible to use an EMP generator to shut down its life support system or power source.

Construct Traits: A TPR gains the following traits automatically:

- No Constitution score.
- Low-light vision.
- Darkvision out to 60 feet.
- Immunity to all mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, phantasms, patterns and morale effects).
- Immunity to poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromancy effects.
- Cannot heal damage on their own, but often can be repaired by characters with Technical skills or through purchased repairs. A construct with a nanobox still benefits from that equipment, though its function is significantly changed. Repairing a TPR requires one hour for every ten hit points of repair and an hourly Complex Repair check (DC 20). Negative hit points are based on the TPR's organic matter and must be recovered with medical attention.
- Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, ability drain, fatigue or exhaustion.
- Immunity to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on inanimate objects, or is harmless).
- Not at risk of death from massive damage. A TPR is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less.
- Because of its robotic body, a TPR is extremely hard to destroy. It gains bonus hit points based on size, as shown on the following

table. These extra hit points are lost last and are considered to be the reinforcement of the TPR's brain train capsule; when these are gone, the capsule is breached and the TPR begins to truly die. TPRs cannot stabilise by themselves, automatically losing one hit point per round after being reduced below 0. Medical attention can still save a TPR at negative hit points, however.

- TPRs do not eat, sleep or breathe. A TPR does require one hour each day to 'go offline' and rest its physical brain in a form of accelerated REM sleep.

Abilities: Altered from the base character as follows: Str 14 (civilian model) or 18 (military models), Dex 12 (civilian model) or 16 (military model), Int +2, Cha (random generation).



TPR Size	Bonus Hit Points	TPR Size	Bonus Hit Points
Fine	—	Large	30
Diminutive	—	Huge	40
Tiny	—	Gargantuan	60
Small	10	Colossal	80
Medium	20		

Being a robotic construct, a TPR has no Constitution score. Strength and Dexterity scores can be modified after the initial procedure and have a Purchase DC equal to the desired score (maximum scores of 30 and 24 respectively). TPRs with character levels can never use level ability increases to affect their Strength or Dexterity scores and all previous increases to these statistics are lost. Cybergear bonuses can be applied to these statistics normally.

Skills: TPRs have a -2 circumstantial penalty on Hide and Move Silently checks. Otherwise same as the base creature.

Advancement: By character class.

Level Adjustment: Same as the base creature +1 per grade level, up to +4 for an Alpha model. Military models have an additional +1 Level adjustment.



'Somebody get a lifter in here! I think I see a live one! Hurry it up! What the hell am I looking at, Rodriguez? It looks like a damn war zone in here.'

'I am having trouble getting the story from corporate security, sergeant. They've been mangled pretty badly. The one who passed out on me said it seemed like the boardroom just exploded. Blood everywhere, he said... as you can tell. Oh man, these were new pants.'

'Save me the drama, detective. I just want to know what tore through this place. It looks like another lancer hit, but this high up in the tower? With no disturbance on the lower floors?'

'Well, sir, it would seem we are dealing with an internal problem. The door was locked on the inside, with no signs of forced entry, and the bodies all look to have been torn apart... by hand. And someone on the board of directors is missing.'

'What? Oh, damn it. Not another one. Let me guess, CEO, too valuable to lose?'

'Yes, sir. According to the corporate manifest, a Derrick Phillips was nearly killed during a skiing vacation when the jet he was in took a header over Aspen. Everyone else aboard bought it, but he was alive enough to save... sort of.'

'That's all I needed to know. There's no sign of a 'bot here, so we'll assume the hole in the pavement outside was him hitting the sidewalk.'

'That would match witness testimony on the street, sir. Guess we can't say they were crazy, after all.'

'Damn it. Somebody get Ordnance on the link! We've got another rogue glitch on our hands.'

Inside The Chainmail Bra

Is Gaming Sexy?

asks

Fey Boss

The typical picture: a group of underage, underwashed teens, sitting around a table in a basement or living room or garage. The dice are rolled; paper crinkles. Someone groans while someone else laughs.

If your mind fills in the pregnant pause with images of an illicit, crap game, guess again. If, on the other hand, you almost hear the cry of 'Aw, crit! That takes out my half-orc barbarian!' or some similar plight, you're probably a gamer – one of those pasty, acne-ridden, perennially overweight or underweight minions of Satan. Anyone remember the Satanism scare of the 80s?

The idea that most of us who were teenaged roleplayers in the 80s, whether or not we fell into the above general physical description, were considered to be at best misled by Satan-inspired notions or at worst were plotting together to rise up and act out human sacrifices because of paper and dice seemed, and still seems, ludicrous.

I for one didn't even know where to find a steam tunnel, living as I was at the time in the humid suburbia of southern Florida. The suggestion of running around and killing rats – giant or otherwise – would have been met with considerably less enthusiasm than anything other than possibly cleaning my room. I didn't want to deal with rat guts on my shoes. I didn't particularly have much interest in summoning up ancient evils – or even new and



Some girls will do anything for a Games Master...

original evils. As a roleplayer or as a teenager, those ranked pretty low on my list of desires.

As a teenaged roleplayer, what did I want? Well, I admit it – I didn't entirely know. But meeting boys was certainly right up there, and the crush on the GM when I was 14 is probably all that kept me going back to the game after he and another player teased me about my character's CHA stat. (Incidentally, Andy, if you're reading this, I do forgive you. That is, assuming you even noticed my pique.)

Since then, I like to think that I've grown up a little bit. Presumably,

so has Andy. But sex remains a motivational factor for both gamers and their characters. Men don't seem to go to games to meet women as a rule, but women have gone to games and ended up sticking around due to interest in another player. In my own case, it's usually ended up being the GM; Andy may have been the first, but he was by no means the last. Many of my friends ended up dating or even marrying men they met or got to know through roleplaying.

So how is it that gaming has gone from being utterly geeky to having the potential to be sexy? How can the geek guy score with the hot

babes? What does it all mean? If you really want to know, write to the author care of this magazine, I'm always open to ideas.

First, a note of caution – most of the women who are attracted to dice-bound men are themselves roleplayers. We don't go to a game in the hopes of finding a boyfriend; we go to a game in the hopes of finding a game. ('Look at what I caught! A 20 point dwarven fighter!' 'Yes, so? I've got myself a half-elf bard – and he brought mead for everyone!')

No. While men's fears are valid in that, yes, we women do compare notes, right down to the critical fumbles, the game is above all else the game – part social event, part RPG. It's not going to replace clubbing or the beach or even the grocery as a pick-up place any time soon.

That being the case, how do such 'social misfits' as gamers deal with sex when it crops up? A crashing relationship can end a good tabletop game; the discomfort of the couple-no-longer in each other's presence,

the custody struggle over who gets the friends, to say nothing of the painted miniatures, have turned well-oiled games into steaming rubble.

And then there's the in-character relationships – more than one player has been reduced from witty repartee to outright pouting when a Games Master didn't have a given NPC fall immediately for his or her charms, or only did in order to rob, steal or attempt to kill the character in question. (Thus supporting the general rule of thumb: the GM is *not* on your side.) Not all of these players were male.

It's a tricky topic to handle. Sex is something awkward for most of the population and even if we've managed to grow up a bit since the awkward salad days of adolescence, in some ways we never fully overcome those roots. Rejection, be it 'in game' or in the real world, hurts. And with the make-believe element, sometimes it can be more than just confusing.

Yet that stereotypical picture of the adult gamer being still the same as

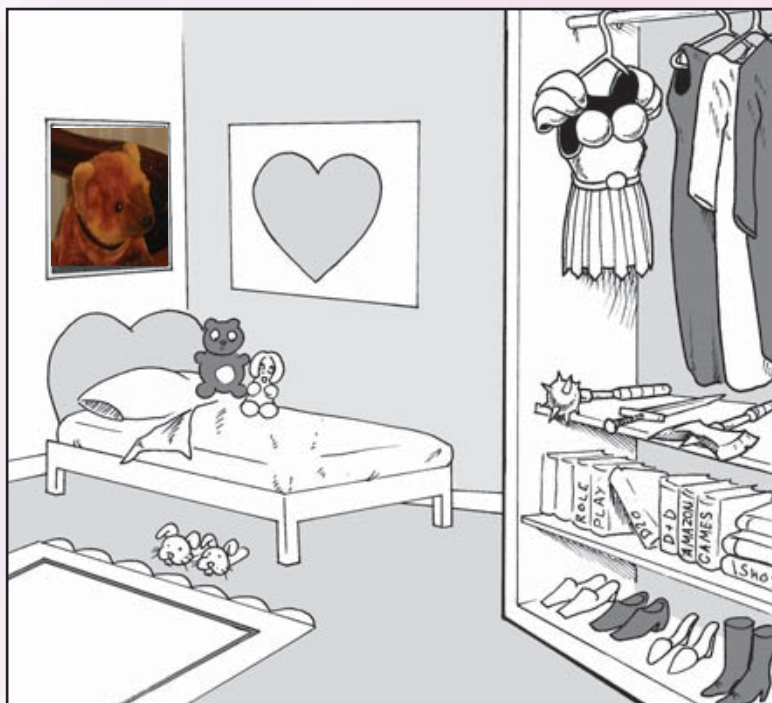
his or her adolescent self, only a little heavier and with a little more soap, does not quite apply to gamers as individuals. We've all felt the confusion, but while captains of the fitness industry are something most of us will never be, utter social rejects we are not. Gaming as it is presently pursued is still a relatively young hobby; it's something that has grown up with those of us in our 30s and 40s as much as we've grown up with it.

This may explain why to some extent video games now take the beating that roleplaying games did a decade or so ago; as adolescence is generally demonised for its more antisocial pursuits, so too was roleplaying in its adolescence – and it had quite a lengthy adolescence. Now it's the video game industry's 'turn'; while the two may relate, they are still separate, although they share a clientele.

And with having grown up a bit, the problems that roleplaying games commonly face mirror those of the players, mimicking them: divorce, bankruptcy, even mid-life crisis. Did anyone else view the arrival of CCGs on the scene as the miniskirted blonde in the passenger seat of a red Miata? (Don't worry, she's grown up a bit since then, too. They all do.)

So what's next? Mortgage counselling for your 30th level fighter? Fibre supplements for your wizard? Adult diapers on your druid? It seems unlikely. For now, we get to enjoy the fruits of maturity as games continue to develop – the equivalent of gaining an appreciation for fine wine or scotch – and corrupt the next generation into games.

Psst, kid, the first session was free. But this time, you've got to buy your own dice...



Fey's Room...probably.



More Most Wanted

The Executioner

The
JUDGE DREDD
Roleplaying Game



Real Name: Blanche Tatum
Also Known As: Blanche Kominsky
Class/Level: Citizen 10
Hit Points: 50
Initiative: +2 (+2 Dex)
Speed: 30 ft.
Defence Value: 16 (+5 Reflex, +1 Dodge)
Damage Reduction: 0
Attacks: Hand gun +12/+7 ranged, +8/+3 melee
Damage: By weapon
Special Qualities: Prior life – failed cadet
Saves: Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +4
Abilities: Str 11, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 14
Skills: Balance +14, Bluff +8, Climb +12, Computer Use +8, Concentration +15, Hide +13, Intimidate +15, Jump +10, Knowledge (law) +4, Listen +11, Medical +5, Move Silently +13, Search +10, Sense Motive +5, Spot +11, Streetwise +9, Technical +4
Feats: Dodge, Improved Critical (hand gun), Nerves of Steel, Point Blank Shot, Weapon Focus (hand gun)
Possessions: Walther Mitsubishi PPK II hand gun (3d6/4), silencer

History File:

Shortly after the end of the Apocalypse War in 2104, citizen Hebismond 'Hebby' Swarf was gunned down whilst taking a shower in his luxury penthouse apartment. The killing bore all the hallmarks of a professional 'hit' – Swarf had long been suspected of being a kingpin of Mega-City organised crime, and the murderer certainly seemed to be a highly skilled assassin. The intruder had successfully avoided several security systems and had

killed Swarf with a single, deadly accurate shot from a .38 calibre pistol. The judges found only one clue that indicated that the killer was anything other than a mob controlled contract killer – the victim was clutching a business card, bearing the hand-written message ‘Justice Is Done!’ The note revealed more about the culprit than any other trace of evidence found at the scene of the crime – analysis of the handwriting revealed that the killer was a woman. It seemed that the Mega-City had a new vigilante to deal with – an unusually highly skilled and dangerous one.

Soundbite

When pressed for more details on the killer, a Justice Department spokesman said: ‘Get that camera out of here or you’ll do time, creep’.

(Excerpt from the Channel Hep! news report on the discovery of Hebbly Swarf’s corpse.)

Firmly establishing that there was no honour among criminals, Chally had been caught embezzling from the illicit cash he was supposed to be collecting for Beauty. He had been summoned to the roof garden and was in the process of facing some gangland ‘discipline’ inflicted by a pair of heavies when he was saved by an unlikely source – a woman, clad in a synthi-leather catsuit with her face concealed beneath a hood-like mask, suddenly burst into the room and shot down the two enforcers before they could begin to react. She called herself the Executioner and paused only to drop another note, identical to the message left at the Swarf murder.

The investigating judges could find no trace of Beauty himself, who had left the room a few moments before the murders. His broken body was eventually located dangling from the girders of Skedway 44, a mile below the hovering nightspot. The discovery of a note in his pocket, bearing the now familiar message, ruled out the possibility that he had fallen accidentally. Subsequent questioning of the restaurant staff

revealed that the killer had been a patron, but she had left a false name and address before vanishing without trace. A comp-ident was put together from their descriptions – the woman was tall, blonde and in her late twenties. Analysis of the crime-scene revealed something far more disturbing to the judge in charge of the case, one Joseph Dredd. Questioning Chally revealed that the killer had an instantly recognisable style, one that he knew very well. The killer moved – and killed – like a judge.

Dredd set about investigating possible suspects. Only one judge who fitted the description could not account for her movements – De Gaulle had been off duty at the time of the attacks and refused to say where she had been. However, even though Dredd was unable to determine her movements, intensive lie detector tests revealed that she had nothing to do with the Executioner murders. As the interrogation session ended, there was a report that the Executioner had been apprehended. Unfortunately, these new murders did not match

The killer struck again the following night. This time there was a witness. ‘Chally’ was a minor hustler who acted as a bagman for Jack Beauty, a high profile ‘businessman’ who ran many of the local protection rackets. Beauty owned ‘The Highlight Rooms’, an exclusive restaurant that hovered above the Mega-City, and co-ordinated many of his activities from his headquarters in the roof garden.



Justice Department

Sector 190

752-6182

S 190

Internal Memo - Eyes Only

Subject - The Executioner

S 190

Listen up, people. None of us know who this dame is, but the fact that this is a woman doesn't make any difference to how we approach it. She's out there killing perps - and that's OUR job!

Saddle up and bring her in by the end of your tour, or people here will be pulling double duty for the next month.

Deputy Sector Chief B. Cooksey

with the killer's usual modus operandi, although they were superficially the same. Two small time hoods had been gunned down on a sidewalk and a note had been left on the bodies. However, the victims were hardly in the same league as Swarf and Beauty and the handwriting on the note did not even come close to matching the real Executioner's. Most damning of all, the culprit had been apprehended at the scene and was clearly male. The intense media interest in the case had caused a problem that regularly besets such high profile investigations – 'copy-cat crimes'.

Soundbite

If we don't catch this Executioner soon every crazy in town is gonna be out there on the streets in his superhero mask!

(Judge Dredd, speaking after the first copycat murders.)

The real killer did not strike again until the next night. Rookie Judge Garrett was investigating the Chivo Bros Discount Depository of the Semi-Dead as part of his final assessment test. His careful investigation into a possible body sharking operation fell apart when he discovered the body of Maurice 'Mo' Chivo sprawled under the reception desk, a single .38 calibre bullet through his heart. Like the other victims, a telltale note was found nearby. His brother, Rafael, was found upstairs, locked into one of the cryogenic vaults. It appeared that he had been forced into the drawer and had been conscious when the chamber was flooded with liquid nitrogen – naturally, without

the necessary preparation, the effect proved to be fatal.

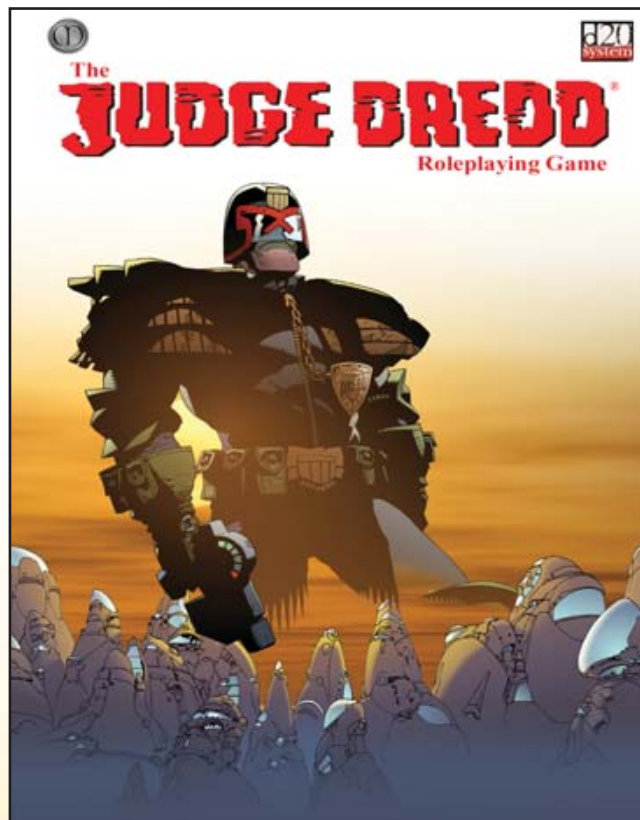
Judge Dredd was summoned. As he was introduced to Garrett, the last piece of the puzzle fell into place. The killer had been so professional he had assumed that she must be a judge – he had not thought to check out *rookies*. A database check with MAC brought instant results. Cadet Blanche

Kominsky had been expelled from the Academy in 2093 following an unauthorised liaison with a citizen, Nicholas Tatum, whom she later married. Recently, Tatum seemed to have become involved in a shady loan operation and had killed himself shortly before the first murder. Five major gangsters were suspected of financing the operation – Hebbly Swarf, Jack Beauty, the Chivo brothers and Dutch Sagan, a numbers runner. A check on Blanche Tatum's movements revealed that she had left her two children with her mother and had departed, her destination unknown but her final words had been 'I have a job to finish.'

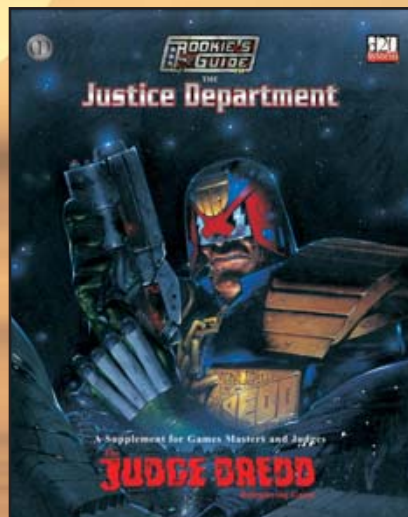
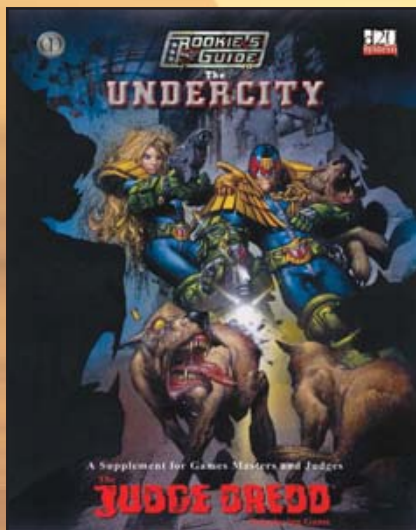


A squad of judges rushed to Sagan's yard, but they were a few minutes too late. From within, gunfire could be heard. The Executioner had cornered Sagan and was deaf to his pleas for mercy, shooting him down as he hid in a closet. Her task finished, she turned to the waiting judges. Refusing to surrender, she raised her pistol...and was shot down where she stood. Judge Dredd put a single round straight through her heart, just as he had been taught in the Academy. The judges later found that her weapon was not even loaded, and clutched in her hand was a final note – 'Justice Is Done!'





**Mega-City One. It's a great place
to visit. Just remember one thing
- the LAW.**



There are loads of great (and some not-so-great) pieces of equipment available in fantasy roleplaying, but what happens in the heat of a game? You forget that the item exists, or worse, you look dumbly down at your character sheet wondering what on earth you can actually use this stuff for. Johnathan M Richards feels for you. So much so that he has started an occasional '101 Uses' series of articles specifically dedicated to giving you more use out of those items you never bother to add to your total carrying weight... One of the handiest magic items to appear in *Core Rulebook II* is the *immovable rod*. No, stop laughing, it really is, and we can prove it.

Immovable Rod: This rod is a flat iron bar with a small button on one end. When the button is pushed (a move action), the rod does not move from where it is, even if staying in place defies gravity. Thus, the owner can lift or place the rod wherever he wishes, push the button and let go. Adventurers have found the *immovable rod* useful for holding ropes, barring doors, and all sorts of other utilitarian tasks. Many adventurers have found it useful to have more than one. Several *immovable rods* can even make a ladder when used together (although only two are needed). An *immovable rod* can support up to 8,000 pounds before falling to the ground. If a creature pushes against an *immovable rod*, it must make a DC 30 Strength check to move the rod up to 10 feet in a single round.

Moderate transmutation; CL 10th; Craft Rod, *levitate*; Price 5,000 gp.

101 USES FOR AN IMMOVABLE ROD

Johnathan M. Richards

1. One of the most obvious uses, in fact one mentioned in the item's description (and illustrated in *Core Rulebook II*), is using several *immovable rods* as a ladder. In the illustration, a bard has placed a series of five *immovable rods* at approximately 18-inch intervals and is using them as a ladder. This is all well and good but as the item's description states, you really only need two *immovable rods* to form a ladder. It works easiest if the two rods are tied together, using a 2-foot length of rope or so. The process works as follows: Put the first *immovable rod* in place and activate it. Step up onto it, place the second rod in place as far as the rope will allow and activate that one. Hold the topmost rod in both hands, support your weight on it and kick the bottom-most rod's button with your foot, deactivating

it. Pull yourself up onto the topmost rod, pull up the other rod by the rope, activate it as high as it will go and repeat as necessary. Climbing down is even easier.

2. You can effectively bar a door by placing an activated *immovable rod* against it. This does the same job as pounding an iron spike into the floor to bar a door but is quicker, quieter and works no matter what the floor is made of. Some things to remember: This only works if the hinges of the door are on the same side as the *immovable rod* (although depending upon the construction of the door knob, it might be possible to activate an *immovable rod* between the door knob and the door jam, preventing the door from being swung open). It also does

nothing to prevent a wooden door from being chopped apart. However, the fact it can be literally undone at the touch of a button means you can have fun with your pursuers if you hear them giving the door the old heave-ho with their shoulders... (Try doing *that* with an iron spike!)

3. You might also place an *immovable rod* above the door jam and hang small bells from it using twine or string. That way, when the door opens it rings the bells and alerts you to intruders. This is an inexpensive alarm system.

4. *Immovable rods* make handy portable coat racks and such, providing you a place to hang your good cloak overnight when camping out in the wilderness.

5. While camping out, why not activate your *immovable rod* above the campfire so you can hang the meat from your latest successful hunt (or maybe a pot of water for soup) at the appropriate level above the flames?

6. Then, at night, you might want to put all of your perishable goods in a backpack or large sack and hang it from the *immovable rod* so it dangles in mid-air, away from overhanging tree limbs. Otherwise, you might learn firsthand just how determined racoons can be when it comes to stealing food!

7. You can hang a hammock between a pair of *immovable rods* and sleep in mid-air. This is a good way to ensure you do not wake up in the morning with a rattlesnake, scorpion or similar creature sharing your bedroll!

8. For those wishing to keep in shape, an *immovable rod* allows you to practice your chin-ups and pull-ups whenever you have a free moment.

9. You could also use it to 'do the limbo', setting the *immovable rod* progressively lower and lower and practising bending down backwards underneath it. Rogues and monks might find this useful training, not only for keeping the body limber but getting in good practice in avoiding touch-triggered traps.

10. An *immovable rod* can also be used to settle once and for all just who is taller: balance it level upon one person's head, activate it and have that person duck away. Then see if the next person can stand up straight underneath it. If there is room between the top of his head and the hovering rod, he is shorter; if he bumps his head on it, he is taller.

11. You can use an *immovable rod* as a tripping hazard, placing it about



Crowns, armies, swords...and now an immovable rod!

three inches above the ground in some dark area (like a dungeon corridor). It might be handy when being pursued, or as part of an ambush where you spring out at the victim once he falls prone.

12. For those whose familiars have aerial movement and the requisite manual dexterity (such as hawks, crows, owls and so forth, as well as magical constructs like homunculi), an *immovable rod* makes an excellent aerial perch. The familiar can rest in the middle of the sky, looking down upon those below it for many hours without

tiring. Just ensure your familiar knows enough to deactivate the *immovable rod* and take it along once it has served its purpose.

13. An *immovable rod* can be used to pull yourself up out of range of a ground-based threat. For example, you might be in the middle of an underground cavern when you run into a black pudding. One easy escape is to leap up as high as you can, activate the *immovable rod* at the apex of your jump and pull yourself up onto the rod. You might have to wait awhile until the pudding loses interest in you but it will not be able to follow you up there.

(Just keep an eye out for puddings dropping down on you from the ceiling!)

14. You might also want to perch on your *immovable rod* above a doorway, so you can jump down upon unsuspecting foes passing by beneath you.

15. *Immovable rods* are also good for immobilising captured enemies. One way to keep them out of trouble is to bind their arms and stick an *immovable rod* through the back of their belt. Hoist the enemy into the air, activate the rod and let him dangle from his belt in mid-air, out of harm's way.

16. Another option, once your enemy's arms and legs have been properly bound, is to have him lie on the floor with his head in a corner. Place the *immovable rod* tight up against his throat (diagonally between the floor and the nearest wall) and activate it. That keeps him from moving in the direction of his feet (his chin gets in the way), while the other wall prevents him from moving any further in the direction of his head. Just make sure he cannot reach the activation button on the rod; you might want to tie his bound hands to his bound feet or his belt with a length of rope.

17. If your captured enemy is a spellcaster, you might want to put him in the same position as described above, only instead of placing the *immovable rod* diagonally against his throat, put it in his mouth and activate it. This not only prevents him from moving his head, it keeps him from casting any spells requiring speech.

18. Imagine you are racing on horseback with a mounted enemy in hot pursuit. If you activate an *immovable rod* behind you at throat level and let it go you stand a good chance of at least unhorsing your enemy, if not crushing his windpipe altogether.



...They even work underwater!

19. If you are one of those fancy riders who can lean way over on one side of your horse without falling off and find yourself in the situation mentioned above, you might want to activate your *immovable rod* much lower so it trips your pursuing enemy's horse instead.

20. If your enemy is riding at your side ('enemy' in this case might be nothing more than your racing opponent), you might try sticking your *immovable rod* vertically down his shirt or through his belt and activating it. His horse will continue moving forward but he sure will not.

21. For that matter, an *immovable rod* is a quick way to dismount yourself. Hold the rod horizontally with both hands above your head and activate it. Your mount continues forward while you dangle in the air; another quick push of the button and you drop to the ground. This is a handy way of getting *behind* your pursuers before they can react.

22. An *immovable rod* can often keep an opponent immobilised for just long enough to allow you to take the one action that will save your life. An example: You and an enemy have just fallen into a deep pit. You look around you and discover you are not alone; hungry owlbear fast approaches. Why not slip an *immovable rod* vertically (button end first) down your opponent's boot? When it hits the bottom it presses the button and your opponent can now no longer move until he pulls his foot free from his boot. By that time you will have moved to a safe distance and you will have all the time it takes for an owlbear to dine upon your immobilised foe to figure out how to climb back up out of the pit.

23. An *immovable rod* can be used as an awkward substitute for a *ring of feather falling*. Let us say, for the sake of argument, you fall off an airborne pegasus. Immediately activating your *immovable rod* allows you to dangle there in mid-air, safe at least for the moment. Now comes the fun part: You have to deactivate and reactivate your rod so you only fall a few feet at a time. (It is no good just letting yourself free fall until right before you hit the ground; even if you could time it that well, your momentum would yank you off of your *immovable rod* after having fallen so far, probably to a squishy and rather unpleasant end.)

24. If you have two *immovable rods*, 'climbing down' through the air becomes much easier: You hold one rod in each hand. Deactivate your left-hand rod, so you are dangling from the rod in your right hand. Lower your left hand and activate that rod, then deactivate your right-hand rod. You now fall a little bit and are hanging from your left-hand rod. Lower your right hand, activate your right-hand rod, deactivate your left-hand rod. Continue as necessary.

25. Climbing up or down a cliff is made much easier with even one *immovable rod*, as it gives you at least one handhold on which to put your weight while you find places for your other hand and your feet.

26. You can hang all kinds of things on an *immovable rod*. How about hanging a dead guy by the back of his collar? It might trick enemies into thinking there is an extra soldier on duty at the top of the castle's battlements, or trick an enemy into wasting spells on the unmoving 'zombie' guarding a door in a dungeon corridor.

27. You could use an *immovable rod* as a 'marker buoy,' activating it to stand upright just above the surface of the ocean where you have discovered a sunken ship, or to mark the location of the entrance to the kraken's lair you will wish to easily find again once you have mustered up enough force to battle the creature.

28. If you are being swept down a raging river, activating an *immovable rod* allows you to remain stationary - much better than getting pitched down the waterfall which is no doubt just ahead. With luck, your companions can throw you a rope and reel you in. Otherwise, you can always try the 'fall in small increments' trick all the way down the waterfall. (See #23.)

29. An *immovable rod* can save your life at sea, especially if you cannot swim. You need only activate it near the surface of the water, so you can sit on (or at least hang onto) the rod with your head above water. Granted, it will not help you get to shore but at least you will not drown and you have a better shot at being seen and rescued by another ship.

30. An *immovable rod* can be useful underwater as well. Since sharks must constantly keep moving to stay alive (it is a function of their gills: Swimming allows them to take in water, from which they extract oxygen; if they stop swimming, they stop 'breathing' and die), you could hold your *immovable rod* pointed straight at the monster shark headed your way, ready to gobble you up. Right before it gets to you, activate the rod and move away. (Rapidly works best.) The shark swallows up the immobilised rod and finds itself unable to move further. It will probably thrash around for awhile in frustration before suffocating and dying. Then it is up to you to cut the shark up and retrieve your *immovable rod*. (You might want to do this pretty quickly, too, since cutting up a dead shark is sure to attract any other sharks in the vicinity.)

31. The above ploy can be used against land-bound creatures, of course, although it will not have the same suffocating effects. Still, an immobile *immovable rod* placed in the path of a striking hydra's mouth might prevent it from chasing after you at least momentarily (long enough for it to extricate the rod from its throat, in any case).

32. Two *immovable rods* can be used to travel horizontally as well as vertically. With a pair of these items, you could walk through the air over an open pit trap, ditch, or crevasse. Optionally, with an *immovable rod* in each hand you

could swing through the air like Tarzan through the trees or a kid on the monkey bars.

33. You could even use a pair of *immovable rods* to cross just slightly above the surface of a raging river or a flow of molten lava. Of course, the process works the same for simply crossing a room if for some reason you do not wish to touch the floor. (Perhaps suspecting there is a pressure-plate trap, for instance.)

34. In a narrow passageway (as found in many dungeon networks), you could activate an *immovable rod* standing vertically, about waist high, in the centre of the corridor. This would likely prevent large or bigger creatures (like owlbeats) from reaching you, since they could not easily move the rod, climb over it, or duck under it. Just remember not to try this ploy against a creature with an effective ranged weapon, or one smart enough to simply push the deactivation button!

35. Of course, if you wear gloves or gauntlets and your enemy does not, you could try the above ploy in a futile attempt to keep a humanoid opponent at bay while you run off. Watch as he laughs at your fruitless efforts and casually deactivates the rod. Laugh right back at him as the contact poison you smeared on the button takes effect!

36. By placing and activating an *immovable rod* at the bottom of a treasure chest and placing your valuables on top of it, you can ensure no one will walk off with the chest. (Of course, you still have to worry about them picking the lock and helping themselves to both treasure and rod...)

37. You can use an *immovable rod* as an impromptu chair. It comes in especially handy when you are supposed to be standing for long periods of time (parade formations, guard duty, drunken wagers

about how long you can stay on your feet): Just position it at the appropriate height, surreptitiously lean your butt on it and take the load off of your feet for awhile.

38. An *immovable rod* can be used as a measuring scale. Of course, the drawback is it only measures 8,000 pounds (its maximum load-carrying capacity).

39. Standing on an *immovable rod* placed at the surface of a pool of quicksand could lure an enemy or a monster to their death.

40. Of course, an *immovable rod* can prevent you from sinking into quicksand (or a bog or quagmire) yourself.

41. You can even use a patch of quicksand to your advantage, by activating an *immovable rod* three feet below the surface and balancing a small chest on top of it. The chest remains out of sight and no one is likely to stumble across your secret cache. This can be a good place to stash stolen loot, a supply of healing potions for emergency use, an 'emergency fund' for when you need extra money fast, or whatnot.

42. An *immovable rod* can be used outdoors to determine direction. Simply point the rod directly at the sun so it casts a shadow directly behind it and activate it. When the sun's movement causes the shadow to move, you will know which way is which. (Assuming Earth-like conditions, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, so the shadow of a rod pointing directly at the sun eventually points to the east.) Of course, you can do the same thing with a stick but a hanging *immovable rod* will not accidentally get jostled or moved by the wind and is therefore more accurate.

43. Having an *immovable rod* hanging in the air might make it easier to coil rope nice and evenly.

44. In a pinch, an *immovable rod* makes a fine substitute for a tent pole. You could even improvise a tent with a large enough piece of canvas, an *immovable rod* to hold it up and a bunch of sufficiently heavy stones to keep the bottom of the 'tent' from flapping around.

45. You could place a helmet or hat on an *immovable rod* placed at the appropriate height to fool someone into thinking there is really a person wearing it. This might work well against someone spying through a window, on the other side of a large rock, or around the corner of a dungeon corridor. In the meantime, while your enemy thinks he knows where you are, you are busy sneaking around to try to flank him (or possibly fleeing for your life, depending on the relative strengths of your enemy and yourself).

46. Propping an appropriately-sized skull onto a hovering *immovable rod* might give an enemy pause; most people get a little unnerved when confronted with a skull apparently hovering in mid-air. Is it some type of undead creature? Some new magic item? A defensive trap? Only you will know the answer with any confidence.

47. You can use an *immovable rod* as part of a simple pit trap. Say you have a 10-foot by 10-foot opening in your wooden floor, leading to a pit of whatever depth you deem appropriate. Activate your *immovable rod* horizontally in the centre of the opening at floor height and place a 10-foot-square piece of plywood onto it. When somebody steps onto the plywood, it pivots on the rod and sends the intruder plunging to the bottom of your pit. (Best of all, when the plywood flips

up as a result of being stepped on it shields the *immovable rod* from being grabbed by your victim!) Outdoors, you can use the same approach and cover your plywood with a light sprinkling of grass or dirt.

48. You can 'hang' an *immovable rod* in the air at the top of a vertical shaft and use it as a pulley to lift items up and down the shaft with an appropriate length of rope. Instant elevator!

49. Presumably, with a couple of *immovable rods* hanging horizontally at various levels, you could practice jumping from one to another and keeping your balance. Such a skill might come in handy when leaping along rooftops or from one narrow cliff ledge to another.

50. When nothing else is available, an *immovable rod* is a handy place to tether an animal, whether it be a riding mount or a guard dog.

These are just some ideas as to various uses for an *immovable rod* or two. Next month in part two we present even more interesting, useful and occasionally bizarre ideas for you to mull over, peruse, and generally digest. No doubt there are many others and players will undoubtedly have a great time coming up with new and even wilder uses for their Player Characters' *immovable rods*. As with all magic, the only limits are those of your imagination and that has always been one of the hallmarks of fantasy roleplaying games.



Gaming Symposium

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Storytelling D20

S&P's resident brainiac is back, and he wants to tell you a story...

When we sit down to play a roleplaying game (RPG), what exactly do we do?

Why do we do it, how do we organise our thoughts about it, and how does that organisation hinder us? Although these seem like abstract questions that have little bearing on the enjoyment we derive from sessions, a quick delve into them reveals a host of little nagging issues that hold our hobby back from becoming anything more than a marginal activity.

Before we get into this analysis I want to say a few things up front:

- 1) I do not think that the 'standard' games we play have fundamental problems. I do think that they cater to a very narrow band of personality traits and desires. In order to understand why we need to understand what we build for and why.
- 2) I do not believe that a distinction exists between game systems in terms of their ability to support narrative. D20 supports stories as well as other systems. However, each system includes a number of design decisions that make them better for supporting specific kinds of narrative.

I do think that RPGs and LARPs have far more strength than we give them credit for. I think that if we honestly

look at our own preconceptions we can overcome our limitations. What is more, it seems to me that narrative games, games that help us to tell stories, actually fall directly into a type of play explored by children the world over. Why then do we fail to capture most of those children as active, imaginative players?

This article cannot answer all of the questions. But it lays out a possible foundation from which we can look for them.

Elements of a Roleplaying Game

What are these games we play? More importantly, what elements of them attract us yet repel others? How do we use these elements to make our time with our friends more enjoyable?

All RPGs and most live action roleplaying (LARP) contain the following elements: a rules structure designed to resolve conflict, persistent characters, goals that last for more than one play session, and a world setting in which the characters interact. These elements intertwine to create the framework we enter when we sit down at the table to play. This framework controls how we approach situations within the game, as well as how we create conflicts to play out.

First Element: Rules

The first element, the rules, certainly stands out in gamers' minds. I know

that I immediately flip to the 'rules and combat' chapters of whatever book I pick up. I want to see what 'crunch' the authors came up with. We get so involved with the rules that some of us, the rule lawyers, even place them above the basic reasons that we gather together with our friends: conversation and fun. *[and chocolate...Ed.]*

These rules exist to help resolve the conflicts presented as part of the game setting. Rather than simply saying 'Boris the Bold Blade bounds up the banister and beheads the boisterous Baron' we instead use random rolls (or other uncontrolled methods) to determine the result. The amount of detail supported by the system varies: in most game systems combat actions require the computation of multiple values while often things like social interactions receive a single dice roll. The D20 examples of this (Bluff, Diplomacy and Gather Information) tend towards the most simplistic of models: a single check resolves hours, days and even weeks of work.

The level of detail provided in the system affects how we as players think about conflicts regarding the system. Taking the example of D20, we are faced with a highly granular combat system with detailed rules, and a very loose structure around every other kind of conflict. Note that I did not say realistic. Realism and simulation in game design are beyond the scope of this discussion. I

should also mention that LARPS, by their nature, tend towards very non-granular rules for everything. This de-emphasises all aspects of the rules equally.

Regardless of the level of granularity assigned to specific tasks all rules serve an important purpose. In RPGs and LARPs players come into conflict with one another though the medium of their characters. This conflict may be many on many (in the case of LARPs) or many on one (in most RPGs, where a Games Master creates conflicts for the characters). By using rules we depersonalise this conflict, defusing the potential negative results of having friends at odds with one another.

Second Element: Persistent Characters

Games of make believe occupy much of our time as children. We imagine and play out situations together without worrying about things like narrative structure, conflict resolution or what happens to the people we play afterwards.

In fact, it is the concept of a persistent character that helps to create the idea of a 'roleplaying game' as opposed to simple roleplaying. We have this idea that each of the characters exists apart from the immediate conflict. After the resolution of the conflict they will move on, perhaps learning from the experience. This concept is relatively unique to RPGs; our wargaming roots do not truly support it, nor does it appear in most other games that use tokens to represent the players.

Characters that persist over time do not have to change. We see examples of characters in many television dramas and in a variety of fictional genres. These characters remain the same though every crisis, and rarely do their pasts come back to haunt them. They are icons as much as people, representatives of ideal types that do not need to change under the pressure of time.

However, most RPGs subscribe to a slightly different philosophy. Like the characters in a slightly better grade of drama or novel, RPG characters change over time. Their experiences alter the way that they interact with the world, how they handle crises, and the abilities they bring to bear on any given situation. Areas where the rules are more granular have a greater amount of detail, and therefore receive the majority of the focus for character progression.

Progression in RPGs generally follows a liner path, starting from some point of lesser power over the rules system and progressing to ever-greater heights. Character evolution in terms of power therefore becomes a matter of time, measured and metered for appropriate advancement within the context of the gaming group. This generally translates into advancing one quantum (a new level, new skills, etc.) every three to four gaming sessions.

The concept of persistence also raises the question; how long does a character exist? Do they exist for four sessions? Ten? Years? Decades? As long as the character persists he engages in the general upward power progression, necessitating ever more complex conflicts, usually revolving around the most granular mechanics. The potential for conflict exists if the game players disagree on the degree of persistence the characters should display. For example, if a character run by the Games Master proves to be unexpectedly persistent (surviving encounter after encounter) some players feel 'cheated'. The unspoken covenant of the group was broken. Similarly, if a player's character dies suddenly or unexpectedly in the middle of what the players thought was a year-long campaign, there is a real sense of betrayal and loss. Here again we see a great deal of effort on the part of rules designers to create 'fair' ways to resolve the conflict by building persistence into the rule set.

Persistence also allows us, as players, to invest time into each character. We invest time as we play the characters though the game, as they progress forward and resolve crisis after crisis. The accumulation of advancement quanta within the system becomes a measure of the amount of time invested into the character. They are also the visible signs of that investment, a reward or status symbol for achieving a particular goal.

Third Element: World

Just as characters persist, so to do the worlds that they inhabit. This raises a number of problems for whoever takes on responsibility for keeping the shared world. Each of these problems is in turn solved in a different way by the various rule sets presented for our use.

The idea of a rule set divorced from a world, any world, has circulated though the gaming community for quite some time. On the surface of it the idea seems possible. One can certainly hang various settings off of just about any rule system. However, the methods of conflict resolution, advancement and which areas to create granularity selected by the designers all indelibly mark the settings. The world rules are the same; no amount of tinsel can really distract players from that fact.

What purpose, exactly, does the world serve then? If the game could take place simply within the context of the rules then why do we spend so much time creating these settings? What importance do issues like internal cohesion, back-story and dynamic worlds truly have?

To some extent the importance of the world stems from the original division of gamers into players and Games Masters. Players have characters that persist over time. Games Masters generally see the characters they populate the world with fall before the characters' varied and generally unpleasant weaponry. Rather than invest time in these

characters, many Games Masters invest time into the world instead. The characters may fall, but there is always more going on to explore. In this way both sides of the group derive a benefit from the invested time. This again helps to defuse a potential conflict between the various players.

The second, and perhaps more important, part stems from the word 'roleplaying' in RPGs. The players, as a general rule, do not care if the world changes around them. But they do care if the characters do not play within the same world. Think back to those early imaginative games we played as children. We all played the same thing at the same time. If one person wanted to play 'Cops and Robbers' and another 'Cowboys and Indians' we selected one or the other; not both at the same time. In the same way, game worlds supply all of the players with a shared context to act out their roles.

Elements of A Story

How, then, is a story different from a roleplaying game? Can we tell stories with RPGs, or are these two fundamentally incompatible concepts? If we can tell a story with an RPG, should we? Would it interfere too much with the game aspects of the activity?

What is a Story?

At its most basic level a story describes the actions of a character to resolve a conflict. This conflict may be internal, external or caused by the actions of another party in the world. So long as the conflict exists the story continues. After the conflict is finally resolved, the story may give us some level of 'resolution' describing the consequences of the actions taken. Further stories with the same characters usually involve the introduction of another conflict that they must resolve.

So far, so good. RPGs revolve around the introduction and resolution of specific kinds of conflicts. Characters

conflict with the environment and with other characters, boldly solving impossible problems with a flick of their thick wrists. As they push forward they shrug off the consequences of their actions, growing ever more powerful.

Failure before Success

Do you see the problem with the above description? Think back to the great stories of our time, the great works of fantasy literature that inspired us. Other than Robert E. Howard's body of work (which has a different appeal) how many of the good stories involved invulnerable characters charging boldly forward to slay hordes of enemies?

Stories build involvement and tension by constantly forcing the characters into situations where they cannot resolve the primary conflict. Minor issues may sidetrack them. Solutions they try fail. Situations occur where they must back away from a possible solution because it would be fatal to them or their loved ones. With each successive failure they learn more about the conflict and generally walk another step down the road to solving it.

Success and failure in a story lies in the hands of the author. Success and failure in a game lie in the hands of the rules, which exist to resolve conflicts between the characters. Although as Games Masters we can 'slip' success and failure into the mix by manipulating the results created by the rules, doing so too often destroys the point of the rule set. More importantly it removes the buffer between the players that allows them to proceed through success or failure without involving their feelings.

The Concept of Sacrifice

One of the primary elements of fiction is that great deeds demand great sacrifice. Not only do the heroes have to fail, but also in the end they often have to give up a great deal more than they personally gain. Probably the most familiar example

of this principle in fantasy literature comes from the end of the *Lord of the Rings*. Frodo sacrifices everything for Middle Earth and in the end cannot enjoy the peace he paid so dearly for. He lets go of mortal life, hoping to find some rest in heaven. However, we can see a subtler example of the same phenomenon in Howard's *The Hour of the Dragon*. Conan makes the considered decision that by becoming king he gives up the wild and carefree lifestyle so dear to him. He places his adopted people's needs before his own, to the point of repeatedly turning his back on opportunities to return to his original lifestyle. The freebooter and mercenary died; now only the king remains to protect his people.

Characters in RPGs rarely sacrifice anything. Rather they accumulate power over time, becoming stronger and more fearsome as the adventures pass. They may have to give up a replaceable item or two along the way, but nothing permanent can happen to characters. Even death, the ultimate sanction and sacrifice, can be nullified. Nothing can interfere with the steady upward progression inherent in the game cycle.

Note that this unspoken assumption persists even in so called 'art games' which claim to be above the common run. Whether you play a god or a mortal, RPGs do not call for real sacrifice on the part of the characters. The only exception to this rule would be games in the horror genre, which generally have mechanisms for reducing or removing player involvement with a single character. We expect characters in this type of game to go insane and/or die horribly so the rules help us to look forward to that experience.

The Art of Resolution

Stories come to a resolution. The protagonists struggle, fail, and then finally succeed in accomplishing their goal. They fight through internal struggles and external problems, eventually emerging covered in triumph.

Each individual session/scenario/campaign displays a similar structure. Character's progress through a series of encounters designed to test them although failure rarely occurs. When the characters finalise the goal they emerge covered in victory, with rewards suitable for a conquering hero.

Now what? Unlike in a story, once the characters in an RPG achieve their goals they continue to exist. Sometimes they seek out new goals. More often they progress forward by doing more the same, only with bigger, shiner toys and more powerful opposition.

The system of constant progression actually assists games in this regard. Rule sets come with pre-established goals, whether levels or new special abilities. However, these goals rarely make for good narrative. No one other than the player really cares if Jejerella the Jumping Jezebel acquires her next vampiric ability, or if the great dwarven warrior gets a new mithril axe.

What this means for

D20

The D20 system, for better or for worse, dominates today's RPG market. Even a bad, slow selling D20 book ships more units than some of the most successful small press games. If we assume that D20 is therefore something of a 'standard' approach for most players, what does this analysis tell us?

Let us start with a quick analysis of the system:

- 1) D20 contains highly granular rules for combat and character advancement. These two elements will therefore form the core of any D20 game. Character advancement occurs once every three to four sessions.
- 2) D20 contains highly abstract rules for political and social interaction. These two elements will therefore exist on the periphery of any D20 game.
- 3) Persistent characters in D20 personify linear development. The system supports advancement through conflict resolution as defined by solving tactical encounters.
- 4) Characters are remarkably resilient to damage. Not only can they take a lot of punishment in the established conflicts and even if they die the penalties are relatively light.
- 5) The world character is relatively open for definition within the limits of the rules. This allows Games Masters to spend endless hours customising the player experience, or to use pre-established worlds with a similar feel.
- 6) Rules exist to help codify things like travel time and economic transactions, but not for calendars, national level economics and history.

The above six points ground our discussion of creating narratives that run using the D20 rules. When we apply them to the elements of a story outlined above what do we discover?

It seems obvious that D20 supports stories in which combat and tactical problem-solving figure highly. The emphasis in the rules on armed conflict and hazard detection lead the players in this direction. Social issues are to be quickly resolved, hopefully with a quick interaction in character or through the use of single skill checks. The acquisition of more exotic abilities should coincide with the development of similar abilities in the enemies.

Characters are not generally required to sacrifice anything to succeed. In fact, the opposite seems true: as they succeed they gain more and more power. There may be temporary sacrifice in terms of systemic ability when facing particular creatures (i.e. ability drain, energy drain) but these effects can be cured easily enough. Since there are few rules for such things, social and personal sacrifice rarely enter into the equation.

The 'world character' is highly generic. This creates an opportunity for Games Masters to spend time creating their own worlds, within the constraints of the system. This in turn allows the game world to become highly customised to the characters without breaking any of the 'worlds rules'. Contrast this with a large story game like *Legend of the Five Rings*™ or even *Babylon 5* where the world possesses an established story arc.

The idea that character advancement occurs on a regular basis creates a natural story 'box' within the game structure. Adventures that last three to four sessions allow the characters to move through a story and resolve it, gaining the next level advancement as their reward. It also provides us with a convenient marker for world persistence. As the characters advance through discrete stories the world can similarly advance, adding layers in response to their actions.

Bringing it Home

What does this mean for our D20 games? What practical methods can we derive from the above analysis? Or are these just the airy meanderings of a person who has nothing better to do?

The above analysis tells us something non-trivial about D20 games in general. Specifically, it helps to point out the fundamental problem with running political/intrigue games in the D20 system. Politics and intrigue both require two components missing from the D20 system: sacrifice to gain

a goal and a method of manipulation that is truly interactive. These games fall flat when the resolution to specific communications issues rides on a single roll of the dice. Similarly, games involving interpersonal conflict or miscommunication ('romance' games in particular) cannot have the core issues resolved with a simple flick of the wrist.

By understanding the problem we can approach a solution. In the case of political or intrigue games, we do not necessarily have to create an elaborate structure to make these conflicts more meaningful. Rather, we can use the existing rules in creative ways. Take the following examples:

- 1) What if in a political game we set the Diplomacy skill check DC to convince the primary actor fairly high. Let's go with 50. However, we also establish that various characters around him are easier to convince (DCs 30 to 40) and each of those characters who agrees with the players' characters grants a +2 bonus to the Diplomacy roll. Now the characters have to gain access to and manipulate a variety of characters, opening up the possibility for additional goals and interactions.
- 2) What if we slightly alter the function of the Diplomacy skill itself? Rather than improving the target's attitude, what if a successful check caused the target to agree to an exchange of favours? The target will do X for the characters if they do Y for him? Now the skill becomes truly interactive, with each use generating a subgoal for the characters in their story. This also introduces an element of risk; if the players fail to achieve the subgoal

then they must try again, potentially at a penalty.

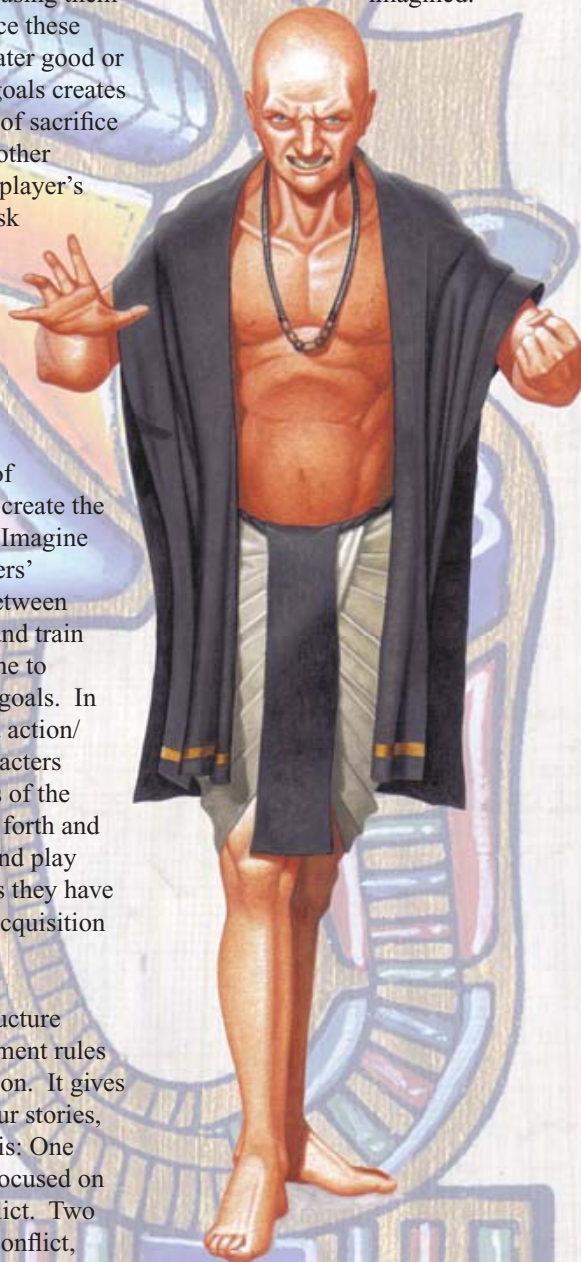
- 3) Character sacrifice does not just have to come in the form of death or dismemberment. Characters in D20 acquire a wide variety of interesting and powerful items over their careers. Causing them to have to sacrifice these items for the greater good or to achieve their goals creates the same feeling of sacrifice as death does in other games. Watch a player's eyes when you ask him to sacrifice his beloved flaming sword to close a portal to the Abyss.

We can also use the idea of character advancement to create the opportunity for sacrifice. Imagine a game where the characters' must constantly choose between opportunities to go forth and train and actually taking the time to advance a different set of goals. In my head I see a combined action/political game where characters take on the role of knights of the court. They can either go forth and adventure, or stay home and play with all of the other things they have to do: court intrigue, the acquisition of political power, etc.

The four-session story structure suggested by the advancement rules also deserves some attention. It gives us a framework to build our stories, running something like this: One session for introduction, focused on creating a believable conflict. Two sessions to deal with the conflict, one probably involving travel and the second involving some kind of large fight. One session dedicated to resolution with the largest fight and an opportunity to go back and examine the results the characters' labour. If the game continues past the first four sessions the resolution may

or may not contain a lead or hook into the next adventure.

The point of the exercise is to give us a way to look rationally at the assumptions we make while gaming. By facing these assumptions we can overcome them, taking our hobby and our games in directions we never imagined.

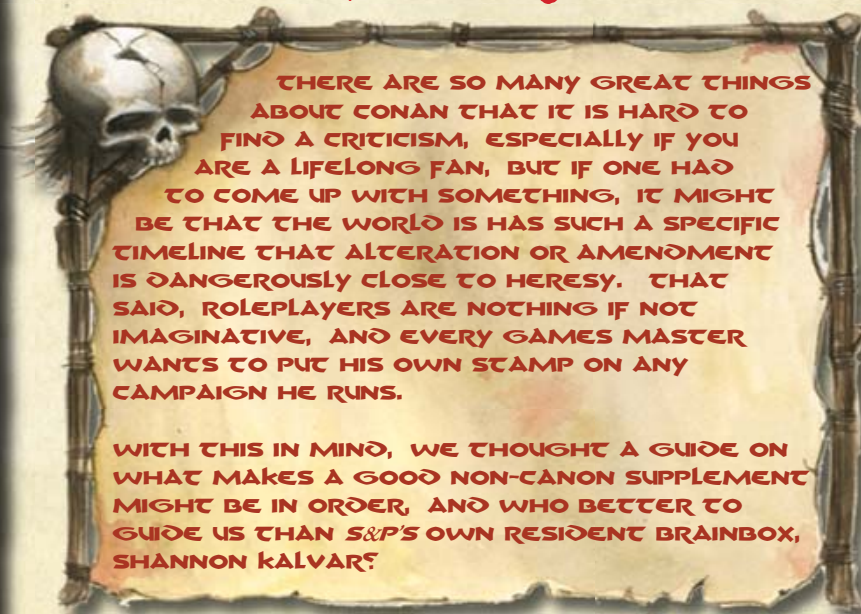


Self portrait of Shannon or Egyptian priest from OGL Ancients? You decide.



CONAN

Roleplaying in the Hyborian Age



Shannon Kalvar

what lurks in those forgotten places, or what might come out of these forgotten times?

When we start to look at other materials, though, we must be careful. Conan is one of the primal sources of fantasy literature. Game concepts derived from other sources will seem terribly out of place in a well run Conan game. The following suggestions should help, both by pointing us towards useful resources and showing one method for vetting resources for suitability.

Every month Mongoose Publishing prints six or more new books. Over a few years this creates quite a catalogue of materials. It also transformed us from a start-up company to one of the largest publishers of D20 materials in the world. Now, in 2004, one of the largest D20 publishers will be putting out arguably one of the most highly anticipated titles ever: *Conan*. Adventurers will finally be able to take up steel and fight in the bloody world described so vividly by Robert E. Howard.

Even though the imagery of Conan lies at the heart of fantasy gaming, the standard D20 conventions do not adequately express his savage world. In the effort to create a reasonable simulation we forged new territory

in D20 combat, magic, and crafting rules. Unfortunately, although this did allow us to mimic the feel of the original stories, it seems to have invalidated the aforementioned body of work. What good is a book about fighters in a world without them? What place do yuan-ti and harpies have in a world where monsters are either devolved humans or necromantic revenants drawn from some foul reach of the outer darkness?

If we walk around with canonical blinders on then this is certainly the case. Limiting ourselves to only what appears in the books does severely constrain our available resources. However, Howard himself admitted that he deliberately left vast swaths of the world unknown, and huge tracts of history untouched. Who knows

THE METHOD

If we assume that we want to use books from outside the core Conan line, we find ourselves faced with a dilemma. We bought and play Conan specifically for its 'feel'. Books outside of the core line might or might not have that feel. Introducing material from them, even material that makes us bounce around with excitement, might very well destroy the game we want to run.

In order to avoid doing this we need a coherent set of rules for analysing these products. Anything that fails to meet the majority of our criteria can be discarded. Those that do fit can be brought into the game as supplements with whatever modification seems necessary.

These criteria are as follows:

1. The supplement should add to the existing rule set rather than replacing it.
2. Combat changes should not extend combat, but rather create more tactical options for killing foes.
3. Magic must remain dark, dangerous and relatively misunderstood.
4. Gods may or may not exist, but if they do their power can only be expressed through the followers.
5. The supplement should not contradict what we already know about the world.
6. Components of the supplement may be useful without using the entire book. Fully integrated rule sets break this rule, as they cannot easily be used in components.

Each criterion can receive one of three ratings: meets (positive), neutral (neutral), or fails (negative). In the final tally positives and negatives cancel one another out. In order to recommend the book for Conan we need a positive balance of two or more.

Author's Note

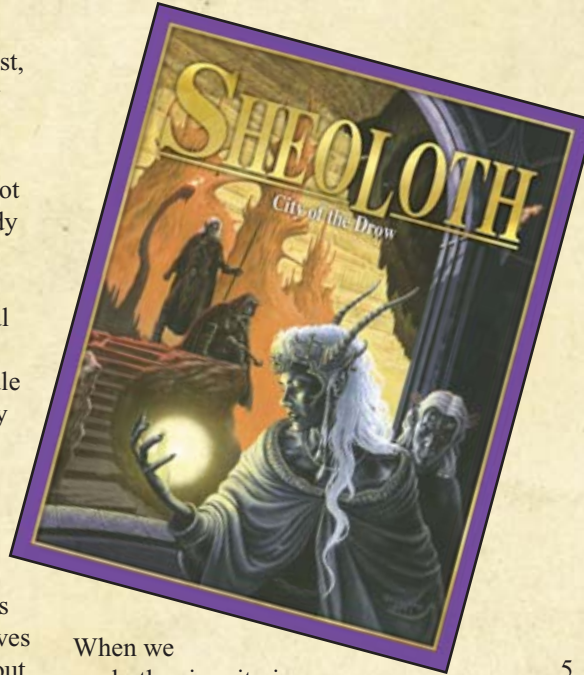
In order to properly simulate the experience of using this method to analyse unknown products I used reviews from several RPG news sites rather than a direct research into the books below. I also did not include any of my own work in the analysis, as I know it too well to give it a fair review.

BORDERLINE BOOKS

After some analysis the following books from the collection might or might not fit in with a Conan campaign. In the final analysis they almost qualify as immediate buys.

SHEOLOTH – CITY OF THE DROW

Sheoloth – City of the Drow provides us with a detailed underground city. At first glance it seems fairly tempting: Conan is cool. Drow are cool. Underground cities generally give us giant dungeons to explore. Why not use it?



When we apply the six criteria we see:

1. There are very few new rules in *Sheoloth*, although it includes extensive references to rules presented in *Quintessential Drow*. The referenced rules involve drow biotechnology and feats, as well as their relationship with their divine patron. The supplement is neutral with regards to this criterion; although there are no rules for drow magic or biotechnology in the Conan books, neither are these things in keeping with the tone of the setting.
2. The book does little in either direction with combat, other than providing an underground arena for characters to interact with. Again, the supplement

receives a neutral rating on this criterion, as it does not apply.

3. Drow magic and society certainly qualifies as dark and degenerate. They consort with demons, carve up the bodies of their enemies, and breed deformed creatures for personal pleasure. This supplement successfully meets this criterion.
4. The goddess of the drow defines their civilisation. Whatever name she goes by, her influence rules over everything. Although she could be replaced by a theocracy that rules through pure sorcery, this loses the core idea of a personal goddess who corrupted the entire society. The supplement fails to meet this criterion; the change would gut the flavour of the race.
5. As it stands there are no elves, drow or otherwise, in the worlds of Conan. The drow could be changed out with a degenerate human race from the primordial past, but the above problems would still apply. This supplement as it stands fails to meet this criterion.
6. All city books can be broken apart to create smaller towns, individual encounters and shops. This supplement meets this criterion.

Total tally for *Sheoloth*: 2 positives, 2 neutrals, and 2 negatives. Total score 0. This is a great book for standard d20 fantasy, but is less suitable for a Hyborian setting.

Similar Products: *Encyclopaedia Arcane: Components & Foci* and *Quintessential Psychic Warrior*.

QUINTESSENTIAL DWARF

At first glance the *Quintessential Dwarf* seems entirely unsuitable for use in a Conan game. What role do the mighty miners and craftsmen have in a game about the fall of civilisation?

If we apply the criteria we see:

1. Components of the rules in *Quintessential Dwarf* address issues that have no bearing the world of Conan. Others (rune magic, brewing, and some of the feats in particular) provide rules that could be used in the setting. This supplement meets this criterion.
2. The feats in the book provide some combat bonuses, but most of the book deals with other issues. This supplement is neutral in regards to this criterion.
3. The rune magic system presented in *Quintessential Dwarf* allows the character to 'store' magic for long periods of time. It requires a great deal of time and effort to execute. Although not strictly cannon it does lend itself to explaining some of the longer-term magical effects encountered by Conan during his journeys. This supplement is neutral in regards to this criterion.
4. The section on dwarven gods and goddesses neither hinders nor strengthens the book. We can easily discard it. This supplement is neutral in regards to this criterion.
5. Dwarves, especially mountain dwelling miners, are not a part of the Hyborian age. They also do not fit in well with the

devolution to ape/evolution to man cycle demonstrated by several Hyborian races. This supplement fails to meet this criterion.

6. By design *Quintessential* books contain compartmentalised rules. Although some are more integrated than others, all of them can be easily broken apart for use in chunks. This supplement meets this criterion.

Total tally for the *Quintessential Dwarf*: 2 positives, 3 neutrals, 1 negative. Total score: +1. This supplement borders on being a good buy. If we discard the concern about dwarves being outside of the canon, the book moves to a final score of +2.

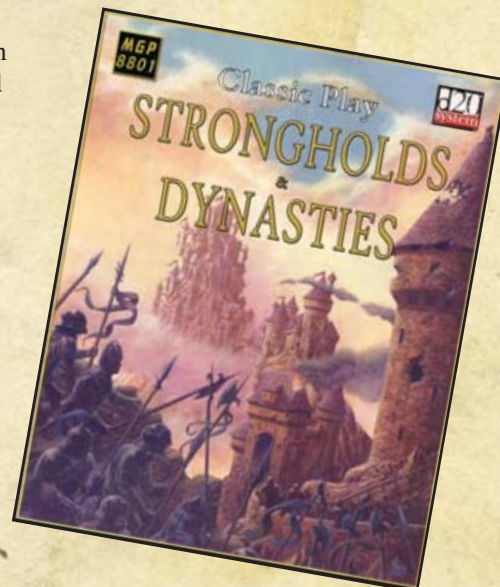
Similar Products: *The Quintessential Halfling* and *The Quintessential Sorcerer*.

BOOKS THAT MEET THE CRITERIA

Finally we come to the books that score well enough to be 'good buys'. By that, I mean that these books contribute in a significant way to world presented in a Conan game.

BOOK OF STRONGHOLDS AND DYNASTIES

Although we only see a single lifetime, much of the background of the Hyborian age comes from the epic sweep of history. Nations, states and strongholds rise and fall with dramatic effects on the lives of their people. On a more human scale many of the 'nations' in this age are, on close inspection, little more than collections of domains. The *Book of Strongholds and Dynasties* thus seems to be a natural extension of the setting, giving Games Masters and players a much needed way to detail the world outside of Conan's narrow view.



When we apply the six criteria we discover:

1. The rules for managing nations, building strongholds and becoming a leader of men add information to the primary rulebook. This supplement meets this criterion.
2. Nothing in this book directly affects combat. This supplement is neutral with regards to this criterion.
3. Nothing in this book discusses the effects of magic in any great detail. This supplement is neutral with regards to this criterion.
4. Although this book discusses theocracies, it does not stipulate the existence of gods as a requirement. The discussion of theocracies and temple politics allows us to more accurately portray the influences exerted on Stygian characters. This supplement therefore meets this criterion, rather than receiving a neutral rating (which would mean that it either had no useful content or did not concern itself with this matter).

- Although components of this book deal with non-human lairs, the bulk of the book can be used for any fantasy setting. As such it does not contradict known setting elements. This supplement meets this criterion.
- The book is highly modular, allowing the players and Games Masters to easily lift parts for their games. This supplement meets this criterion.

Total tally for *Strongholds and Dynasties*: 2 positive, 4 neutral. This book almost falls off the radar by this method, but it is strong enough in what it does present to be useful. For Games Masters looking to run a dynastic or political game this book provides a great deal of handy reference material.

Similar Products: Book of Encounters and Lairs, Seas of Blood, The Quintessential Human, Ultimate Equipment Guide and Ultimate Game Designer's Companion.

ENCYCLOPAEDIA ARCAE: CROSSBREEDING

Sorcery in *Conan* calls up demons from the outer darkness and shackles them in mortal flesh. No two look the same, or have the same attributes. Sorcerers usually also possess notable menageries of bizarre creatures at their beck and call. All of this would seem to point towards a need for some rules for monster creation or at least an opportunity to use such in the game.

When we apply the six criteria we discover:

- The rules for crossbreeding cover details not currently in the core *Conan* rulebook. These rules allow for the formation of a nearly infinite number of deformed monstrosities for our

characters to boldly hack though. This supplement meets this criterion.

- Other than presenting innumerable fierce foes *Crossbreeding* does not slow down or speed up combat. This supplement is neutral in regards to this criterion.
- The magic presented in *Crossbreeding* requires considerable time and preparation for both



players and characters. It covers subject matter not directly discussed by the main book, but which is well within the realms of possibility. This supplement meets this criterion.

- Crossbreeding* has little to do with gods, other than potentially allowing for demonic hybrids like the brothers seen in *Beyond the Black River*. This supplement meets this criterion, with the added bonus providing coverage for an unexplored aspect of the setting.
- Conan personally witnesses dozens of malformed creatures wandering the world. Most of these were summoned from

'unspeakable depths' but a few were holdovers from previous ages. *Crossbreeding*, by giving us rules for creating such things, does not contradict the known setting. This supplement meets this criterion.

- This is the one place where *Crossbreeding* falls short. It is a complete system in and of itself. It cannot be easily broken down into its components. As such, this supplement fails to meet this criterion.

Total tally for *Crossbreeding*: 4 positive, 1 neutral, 1 negative. Total score: +3. *Crossbreeding* adds to the overall experience of both Games Masters and players in the *Conan* world. It would therefore be a good purchase, although we can run our games without it.

Similar Products: *Encyclopaedia Arcana: Blood Magic*, *Encyclopaedia Arcana: Constructs*, *Encyclopaedia Arcana: Familiars*, *Encyclopaedia Arcana: Tomes and Libraries*, *The Quintessential Half-Orc* and *The Quintessential Witch*.

SLAYER'S GUIDE TO GOBLINS

On first glance the *Slayer's Guide to Goblins* seems like an unlikely candidate for inclusion in a *Conan* game. After all, goblins are not exactly a large part of the stories. Most 'degenerates' we encounter are either civilised men who fall to corruption or ape-men whose physical strength surpasses that of normal beings.

When we apply the six criteria we discover:

- SG: Goblins* does not add anything significant to the rules. It does, however,



Savages in Conan don't come much more barbaric than the Picts...

- provide us with a detailed description of a possible degenerate culture. If we replace the word goblin with 'ape-man' or even 'Pict' it becomes much more useful. As such, this supplement meets this criterion.
2. Other than giving some basic advice about using group tactics, *SG: Goblins* does not deal with the subject of combat. This supplement is neutral in regards to this criterion.
3. Magic is not a big part of the *Slayer's Guide*. The spells that are included could be transformed into *Conan* spells fairly easily. This supplement is neutral in regards to this criterion.
4. The 'Mighty One' presented in the book could just as easily be one of the unnameable gods of prehistory. This supplement meets this requirement.
5. Goblins themselves are not a part of the *Conan* mythos, but various subhumans and primitive humans do show up on a regular basis. This supplement is therefore neutral in regards to this criterion. Note that *Slayer's Guides* that deal with more unusual humanoid races (like Gnolls) would fail to meet this criterion.
6. Bits and pieces from the *Slayer's Guide to Goblins* (particularly the adventure structure and psychology sections) can be used

independently. However the book provides the most value as an integrated piece about goblins. Its utility as component parts is limited. It therefore is neutral with regards to this criterion.

Total tally for *Slayer's Guide to Goblins*: 2 positives, 4 neutrals. This is a fairly marginal score that the product earns mostly by containing both racial information and an adventure. If the product addressed one of the less human races or failed to provide a number of adventure hooks it would be not be useful in a *Conan* game.

Similar Products: *Slayer's Guide to Amazons*, *Slayer's Guide to Derro*, *Slayer's Guide to Duergar* and *Slayer's Guide to Orcs*.

CONCLUSION

Because of the wide diversity of the range, not all of Mongoose's products work well with every game we publish. However many were designed to be adaptable to any fantasy setting.

Since *Conan* (and all of the Howard characters) were a part of the initial design of fantasy RPGs, it should come as no surprise that generic supplements adapt reasonably well to the setting.

The criteria suggested in this review apply generally to the application of supplements to fantasy games. By adapting them to specific settings we can more rationally build up the core rules of our favourite games, thereby creating more and more coherent fantasy worlds for our players.



THE ROAD OF KINGS

‘Know, oh Prince, that
the lands of Hyboria
beckon. Gilded warriors
and brazen wenches
abound, but beneath the
veneer lies DEATH.’



**COMING SOON FOR CONAN THE
ROLEPLAYING GAME - THE
DEFINITIVE HYBORIAN GAZETTEER**

Of Mixed

Adrian Bott

In this article we will look at those rare and exceptional individuals who have one human parent and one parent either not of the same species or not of this world at all. Half-elves are the most common instance of interspecies breeding among humans but as they have been covered in depth elsewhere, we need not consider them here. Instead, we shall confine our attentions to three much more exotic hybrids; the half-celestial, the half-fiend and the half-dragon.

Rules for generating creatures of these kinds are given in *Core Rulebook III*. Rather than look into the rules mechanics for these hybrids, which are thoroughly spelled out in the volume referenced, we shall look into how they come to be engendered in the first place, specifically how they come to be born to one human parent.

One asks why it is that humans are so often the second parent in cross-species breeding. Part of this undoubtedly has to do with a certain xenophilia on the part of many humans. They love variety. Unlike more insular races who prefer to stick to their own, humans gladly embrace (in the most literal sense) beings of all different shapes, sizes and hues, including those whose resemblance to them is fleeting at best. While it is true that even the most adventurous humans draw the line *somewhere*, as a race they seem quite content

to form relationships with creatures other than themselves and care for the children that result from those relationships.

This instinct for the strange and exotic has been attributed to the comparatively short human lifespan. Those who have troubled to think deeply on these matters have concluded that human beings bloom for so short a season that their bodies are desperate to find *any* means of carrying on the bloodline, whether the other party is likely to preserve the line in a recognisably human form or not. Humanity is, in evolutionary terms, a rapidly sinking ship and it is a key human instinct that when the ship is sinking, you sail for whatever port presents itself, whether it is inhabited by your own kind or not. Moreover, humans do seem to be able to absorb the traits of other species remarkably well. Their habit of cross-species breeding may be their race's way of strengthening the species, rather than endlessly diluting it. It is not as if humans do not already have substantial variety within their own race.

Humans alone cannot be held accountable for these trends. The obverse of the coin is the question of why it is that so many other races should favour human beings as breeding partners. What is it



about humanity that is so very attractive? As a species, they are not especially comely. Their features have little of the refined beauty of an elven countenance, much less of the redolent alien glory of a dragon in human form. Compared to the celestials, they are so many clods of anthropomorphic mud. Yet, all of these races have bred with humans in the past quite willingly and will doubtless continue to do so. One wonders what the attraction can possibly be.

There are two main contenders here, one somewhat romantic, the other far more prosaic. The romantics would suggest that the human soul is what

attracts other races. Human souls, it is said, burn brighter than any other, with a unique energy that other beings crave. They know that they can never possess it, as a human's time on the earth is short, but they can at least merge with it, blending their own uniqueness with it. The very brevity of a human life makes that life poignant, meaningful and rich. That can be a nigh-on irresistible pull for the kind of creature who has a sensitivity for rare and beautiful things, as many elves and good dragons do.

The mundane answer is that humans are, quite simply, the most fertile of all the races. It is not that other races do not enjoy liaisons with species other than their own. One suspects that they do and that these relationships are just not talked about. The difference is that when a human is involved, it is much more likely that the human's fertility will result in conception and thus a lasting reminder of the liaison. Humans' fertility compares with that of other races in direct proportion to their mortality, for obvious reasons. Humans need to be fertile, as they live for less time; elves and dwarves do not need to conceive nearly so often. If elves had birth rates equivalent to those of humans, they would rapidly find themselves overpopulated.

In the following section, we study the most common circumstances in which half-fiends, half-celestials and half-dragons are conceived, the relationship between the parents (if any), the kind of upbringing such a child can expect to have and the degree and nature of its integration into human society.

Humans: The Motherly Race

Many human mothers express the tolerance of their race by completely accepting all of their children equally, irrespective of their origins. A human mother will frequently take

in a foundling or an abandoned child and raise it as her own, despite any freakish characteristics it might display. Such is the human drive to breed that a human couple who do not have a child and are incapable of conceiving one themselves can sometimes adopt orphan babies of other races, even going so far as to adopt bizarre or monstrous children, just so that they can have someone to call their own. The love and acceptance of human parents has often caused a child who should by rights have grown up brutish and rapacious (such as a child with ogre or orc blood) to grown up into a fine young adult with no more evil in him than is in his playmates. Unfortunately, some creatures (such as fiends) are so inherently corrupt that only exceptionally loving parents are able to stymie the evil in them. In those few cases where a half-fiend finds the inner strength to turn from his heritage, it is the fact of his human parent's acceptance of him despite his fiendish nature that lays the foundations for that strength.

Optional Backgrounds for Half-Breeds

In the section that follows, several specific backgrounds are given for characters of half-fiend, half-cestial or half-dragon stock. A player may choose an appropriate background during character creation; only one background may be applied to any one character. The modifiers, special abilities and other additional features reflect the life experiences that the character has had, which may lead



him to favour one parent over another, or develop certain of his inherent abilities at the detriment of others.

Half-Celestials

Half-celestials are conceived as the result of three typical events. Each of these is covered in the section below.

Heaven Embraces Earth

The first is what one might call the typical boy-meets-angel story, or 'Wings of Desire'. On the celestial's own initiative, as opposed to the directive of any heavenly or earthly power, a relationship develops between a celestial and a human being. The codes by which celestials habitually operate forbid such liaisons, or at the very least counsel strongly against them, as they have the potential to cause a good deal of pain for those involved. The celestial's responsibilities will not cease just because he or she has found love on the material plane, while the human parent will have to live with the unearthly child in the early years of its life.

Some celestials in this situation do take the ultimate step and renounce their position in the heavenly hierarchy. A celestial who does this chooses to remain on the material plane indefinitely, severs itself from all continued obligation to protect its plane of origin (which leads to it becoming outcast from its fellow celestials, as the defence of the home plane is sacred) and renounces all right to continued use of any weapons or items associated with its former role. For example, a trumpet archon must give up its holy greatsword and eponymous silver trumpet. These are kept on the home plane in case the archon should ever repent. Some celestials who are winged symbolise their turning from the heavens to the human world by cutting their wings off, a horrifically painful act. The wings would ordinarily heal over time but archons who have done this prevent them from doing so by force of will.

Parents: The human parent in these situations is almost always good and almost always ordinary. Celestials are drawn to simple, good people and can be more taken with a village girl washing her hair in a stream than with some dazzling beauty of a woman in an evening dress. A celestial creature who is not obviously such (with no visible wings to give his or her nature away, for example) will sometimes pretend to be no more than a mortal traveller, so that the human will not be frightened away by the presence of such an unearthly being. Celestial creatures who are carrying out important missions while disguised as mortals can easily find themselves keeping up the pretence once the mission is concluded in order to continue a relationship with the human that they adore. Although the lie seems sweet at the time, it cannot be carried on indefinitely, especially once there is a child to consider.

Upbringing: Celestials, being good creatures through and through, rarely abandon a human female if she has been impregnated and will do their utmost to ensure that mother and

baby are provided for. If the celestial does not renounce his responsibilities to the heavenly planes entirely, then he will do what he can to visit in between times. A male celestial is willing to place his own happiness second to the child and its mother. If this means stepping back and letting the mother take a human husband so that the child will enjoy a more secure upbringing, then he will usually do so. Half-celestials do not always find out the truth about their origins until they come of age, at which point the human parent feels they are ready to know where they truly came from.

Such children are usually raised in remote places far from the hustle and bustle of human society, as a child with the characteristics of a half-cestial is big news and is likely to attract the attention of evildoers. The parent usually wants to give the child as normal a childhood as she can, which means finding somewhere to live where the world will not be at their door. It is not unknown for elven communities, respecting privacy as they do, to take in human mothers who have half-cestial children.

When the celestial is the mother of the child, she is much more likely to return to the heavenly planes to raise the infant in the company of her own kind. Some human fathers of good alignment have in fact helped to raise their children after their own deaths, when their souls have ascended to the same plane from which their lover came.

Integration: Half-celestials cannot hope to be considered ordinary, as the wings that sprout from their backs mark them as different. They do not integrate well to mortal societies, even though they are willing to do good and selfless deeds for people. Many half-celestials yearn for the place of their childhood, where they feel they were accepted even though they were odd-looking. The majority of prejudice against half-celestials is a form of reverse elitism. Half-celestials growing up on the material

plane are sometimes accused of being 'holier than thou' or and a good deal of abuse is thrown at them by those who are simply jealous of their origin and assume that such a beautiful creature must be flawed by arrogance or vanity.

Background: A half-cestial with the Heaven Embraces Earth background has the following features:

- † The character has more experience of ordinary mortals than a half-cestial would who had been raised on the heavenly planes. This influences the character's interactions with mortals. Good-aligned people are likely to see the character as an avatar of hope, while evil-aligned ones view him with suspicion. Accordingly, the character receives a +2 racial bonus to all Diplomacy and Charisma ability score checks when interacting with good creatures and a -2 racial penalty to these checks when interacting with evil ones.
- † Survival on the mortal realms is tough; there tend to be fewer threats in the realms of light. The character's body attempts to compensate for this as he grows up. This results in a +1 increase to the character's natural armour, in addition to the +1 increase granted for being a celestial.

Breed Your Own Messiah

This scenario involves the efforts of a group of good-aligned humans (almost always lawful good) to create a half-cestial so that they will have a hero figure or even a leader for the church on earth. It is worlds away from the simple spontaneity of the 'boy meets angel' story above. In this case, the whole course of the character's life is organised for him in advance. The members of the religion organise the conception, planning a ritual to invoke a celestial

being (most usually a trumpet archon) who will mate with a willing, pure-hearted human female volunteer. The resultant child will, so the church hopes, be a hero that will defend the church and its interests, or even lead its people into a new promised land. The title of 'redeemer' is often given to these engineered half-angels. They are steered into the paladin or cleric classes and spend their whole early lives being groomed for these roles.

Parents: This scenario always involves the presentation of a human female to the heavenly powers; the candidate is never male. In order for the act to be compatible with good alignment, she must be entirely willing to undergo the process and bear the half-celestial child. Similarly, the celestial in question must be willing to do what is required of him. The whole process strikes some as unpleasantly artificial and even cultish but it must be remembered that all participants are doing so voluntarily and the intent is to produce a paragon of good who will retain his or her own free will, not a mere automaton who will act as the church directs.

Upbringing: Half-celestial children are reared in the bosom of the church and given such guidance as is believed fitting. They are read to from sacred texts, encouraged to pray several times a day, educated firmly in their eventual role and given training in weapons, armour use and the healing arts from a very early age. This can be extremely frustrating, as the child can often feel that it has no more say in its own destiny than a fashioned tool or a weapon does. Some half-celestials reared in such strict,

controlled environments rebel against them, break out of the community and go out into the world to make their own way as best they can.

Integration: Half-celestials who were prepared in this way do not have many problems with self-doubt, as a rule. They were born to lead and most of them do a very good job of it. They do not integrate with normal human society because they do not



need to. Their attitude to the common people is very much like that of their celestial parent; they see themselves as benevolent, compassionate and yet not of the world. They can be lonely people but the moral rigour of their upbringing keeps such sorrow locked away for their private moments.

Background: A character with the Breed Your Own Messiah background has the following features:

† The character has a strong sense of his own destiny, which enables him to triumph over the vicissitudes of random chance. Once per game session, he may reroll any single die roll that he has just made and take the new result instead of the old one. He must accept the second result.

† These half-celestials are natural born leaders. They were bred to do a job and take to it as soon as they have achieved sufficient experience. A half-celestial with this background gains the Leadership feat for free as soon as he achieves 6th level in any character class.

† The character's destiny is so strongly defined that there is little, if any, room for variation. He may never multiclass; should he take an experience level in a different character class than that with which he started play, he permanently loses the benefits described above, including the Leadership feat if he had acquired it for free as a background feature.

† These half-celestials have such a rich concentration of Outsider blood in them and are conceived under such artificially rarefied circumstances that they do not count as native Outsiders. They do not need to eat or sleep but they cannot be raised or resurrected by the usual methods, as their soul and their body constitute a single unit. See *Core Rulebook III* for more information on Outsiders.

Heroes to Come

This process is not essentially dissimilar from that which is described above in Breed Your Own Messiah. The main difference is that Heaven, rather than Earth, takes the initiative. Gods do not often breed with mortals and when they do the

results are such powerful beings (the demigods and heroes of legend) that players are not likely to get anywhere near playing them as characters. It is much more likely that a good deity will dispatch celestials to Earth in order to breed the next generation of half-celestial heroes.

In contrast to the previous scenario, it is usually the female celestials who breed with humans. They seek out the best of human males to father the coming heroes, so that their bloodlines will be preserved. Most male heroes do not question the presence of a beautiful and angelic-seeming female who seems to want only one thing and is gone in the morning, so the conception of heroes by these means is fairly reliable. Those who are unwilling are, of course, left alone.

Parents: Those chosen by the powers of good to be hero-fathers must always be good themselves. Paladins are not often chosen, as their oaths generally prohibit them from fathering *anyone*, so the usual candidate is a fighter or ranger. The celestial parent has to be willing to bring up the child without its father being present. She can count on the assistance of the other powers of good, as she has undertaken this task in the service of the celestial realms.

Upbringing: Most half-celestials bred in this way never meet their fathers. They spend their lives being prepared to fight alongside the other celestials to protect their home plane or go on important missions to the material plane. Half-celestials are supposed to be the ideal intermediaries between celestials and

mankind, being sufficiently close to humans to relate well to them, while having the singular powers of angelic blood.

Integration: Half-celestial heroes are taken to visit the prime material plane on numerous occasions while they are growing up, so it will not be too much of a shock for them to leave the pleasant elysian realms above and enter the grubby, flawed domains below. Despite this preparation, many of them find the material plane a harsh and demoralising place. They are not immortal, so they have not had the many aeons of familiarity with mortals that their parents have. As a result of this, they can be overly trusting of humanity at first, or too prone to see their good side.

When they first descend to earth and take up their responsibilities, it is customary for half-celestial heroes to be placed under the guidance of an experienced male mortal who acts as a surrogate father and gives the emergent hero some lessons in how

the world really works. This can, on some rare occasions, be the hero's actual human father.

Background: A half-celestial with this background has the following features:

- † Half-celestial heroes retain strong ties with their patrons on the upper realms. They frequently turn to them for guidance in difficult circumstances. A half-celestial hero can use *commune* once per day as a spell-like ability but he is limited to only one question, irrespective of his character level.
- † Heroes of this kind always have a vulnerability. This is part of what makes them heroes; they cannot be perfect in all respects and there is always some part of life from which their celestial heritage cannot protect them. In the legends, it is almost always this vulnerability that lays them low, though a player naturally has more freedom to choose his own destiny. The character must choose to forego either the +4 racial bonus to Fortitude saving throws against poison, the immunity to disease, the spell resistance, the damage reduction or the resistance to acid, cold and electricity from which he would ordinarily benefit.



Half-Dragons

Unlike the half-celestial or half-fiendish crossbreeds, those who have one dragon parent do not have a cosmic agenda bound up with their very existence. Dragons have alignment but do not serve the powers of the hells or heavens unless it pleases them so to do. The offspring of dragons are similarly free. They tend to follow the alignment of their dragon parent, partly because of the urges of their draconic blood and partly because the activities of the parent tend to give rise to a given alignment type anyway.



For example, a good-aligned dragon parent will either care for the child itself or see to it that good care is found for it and its human parent, while an evil dragon parent will often simply abandon the child, so that it is left with a human parent who often cannot cope and abandons it in turn.

Good-aligned dragons rarely beget children upon human parents as they realise that the child would have a very difficult life. Instead, it is much more likely that a female good-aligned dragon will go in search of a mate from among the human male population and if conception occurs will raise the child herself, teaching it draconic lore and bringing it up as if it were a small bipedal dragon rather than a mutated human. Half-dragons brought up this way are much better adjusted and do not resent their hybrid nature.

Seduced and Abandoned

The most likely origin for an evil half-dragon is that a dragon took its human mother unwillingly while the dragon was *polymorphed* into human form. The chromatic dragons are quite capable of doing such a thing, would consider it amusing and would think no more of it than of killing a fly; it is a moment's distraction

without significant consequence.

The unfortunate mother then has to contend with the dual burden of a terrible memory and an unwanted child, which when born proves to be a freakish mutant. It is very common for the mother of a half-dragon to die in childbirth, as the ridged carapace and vestigial horns of a half-dragon can cause shocking damage to a human body. All Constitution damage suffered during childbirth is doubled.

Unlike a human child, which is helpless, a half-dragon child is capable of surviving on its own without assistance, as its instincts drive it to seek food and protect itself with its breath weapon. A child who grows up in this way will be savage, uneducated and bestial, unable to speak any language and little better than a wild beast. Of those mothers who survive the birth process, a surprisingly large number will attempt to keep the child and raise it. Blood, however, will out and sadly the most common occurrence is for the half-dragon to slay and devour its own mother when it decides that it has had enough of being told what to do.

Half-dragons of this type often have a deep sense of self-loathing. They think of themselves as aberrant, as creatures that should not have been born. This encourages them to deepen the evil that they do, as if they were affirming their aberrant status and justifying the world's hatred of them. They judge themselves to be monsters, so they make up their minds to act the part. Rarely indeed does a half-dragon achieve any measure of self-acceptance. Most of them live short, bloody, destructive lives.

Parents: The human mother of such a child can be anyone. An evil dragon with an especially twisted sense of humour may beget a child on a hated human enemy, just because it can. (Consider the utter depravity of an ancient red dragon's breeding

with an unwilling human paladin, for example.) It is especially gratifying for a dragon to watch a presumptuous mortal carry its own seed to term, knowing that the resulting child will almost certainly be irredeemably foul. Many human females would rather be killed cleanly than suffer such a ghastly fate as this.

Upbringing: Half-dragons of this kind have a harsh upbringing. They already tend toward evil and a life of abuse, jeers and thrown stones only entrenches them in this mindset. They either live in isolation, feeding themselves as best they can, or throw in their lot with people who are more concerned about the money they can make out of the freak than they are about its feelings. Most evil half-dragons have done time in freak shows, carnivals and criminal dens, turning to mercenary work or piracy as they grew older. An adolescent half-dragon can make his freakish appearance into an asset, as by this stage he has learned to appear intimidating rather than merely deformed.

Integration: A half-dragon rarely gives a damn about humans, though he shares their blood. He has grown up thinking of them as tormentors and persecutors, so he has no love for them at all. His attitude to society is that the strong take what they want and the weak fall by the wayside. Depending on the colour of his dragon parent, he will seek to manipulate others through force or guile.

Background: A half-dragon with the Seduced and Abandoned character background has the following features:

- † The character is used to looking after himself and not depending on help from others. He gains the Self-Sufficient feat for free at first level.
- † The character is socially maladjusted and has difficulty communicating with other

creatures. Although his Charisma ability score is increased by virtue of his being a half-dragon, this reflects more on the power of his personality than his eloquence. Accordingly, he suffers from a -2 racial penalty to all Bluff, Diplomacy and Disguise skill checks.

Half-Fiends

The half-fiend is never conceived out of love but only ever out of lust or calculating design. Those fiendish creatures of a chaotic bent are more likely to engender offspring rapaciously and without heed for the consequences, leaving embryonic half-fiends scattered across the material plane, while the lawful hells tend to produce half-fiends on a more considered basis, as if they were making an investment.

Cult-Bred Half-Fiends

Devils and those who consort with them (such as clerics of lawful evil alignment) often set out to engineer the conception of half-fiends in much the same way that lawful good cults aspire toward the conception of half-celestials. In a grotesque parody of a wedding ceremony, a human female is given over to the embraces of a devil or similar fiendish creature. This can be a willing priestess of the cult, though it is often thought to be more appropriate if the vessel for the half-fiend is a human female who knows nothing of the process. The traditional method is to render her pliable with drugs or mind-affecting magic for the duration of the ceremony, so that she recalls nothing of it but images glimpsed

in nightmares. This scenario in fact forms the basis of many folklore tales traded by terrified young humans around campfires; the tale of 'the girl who carried the devil's child' is an old one, with basis in fact.

When the child is the product of a cult's planning, the mother is observed secretly and the child taken away from her as soon as it is born, so that it can be raised to do the dreadful work for which it was bred. Half-fiends of this kind almost always become clerics, leading their congregations shoulder to shoulder with the ranks of the damned and devilish.

Background: A half-fiend that has been produced as the result of a cult's machinations has the following features.

- † The character has a strong sense of his own destiny, which enables him to triumph over the vicissitudes of random chance. Once per game session, he may reroll any single die roll that he has just made and take the new result instead of the old one. He must accept the second result.
- † These half-fiends are natural born leaders. They were bred to do a job and take naturally to it as soon as they have achieved sufficient experience. A half-fiend with this background gains the Leadership feat for free as soon as he achieves 6th level in any character class.
- † The character's destiny is so strongly defined that there is little, if any, room for variation. He may never multiclass; should he take an experience level in a different character class than that with which he started play, he permanently loses the benefits described above, including the Leadership feat if he had acquired it for free as a background feature.
- † These half-fiends have such a



rich concentration of Outsider blood in them and are conceived under such artificially rarefied circumstances that they do not count as native Outsiders. They do not need to eat or sleep but they cannot be raised or resurrected by the usual methods, as their soul and their body constitute a single unit. See *Core Rulebook III* for more information on Outsiders.

Incubi and Succubi

Of the half-fiends who are raised in the lower planes as opposed to the material, succubi are the mothers of the vast majority. The licentious, energy-draining behaviour of these demonesses is well known and detailed in *Core Rulebook III*. They can sap a human's energy with a mere kiss, though if truth be told they prefer to exhaust males by more thorough activity. Succubi are sometimes encountered in the course of adventuring, when they will use their seductive abilities in a combat setting to try to deceive or drain the party but their regular feeding cycle is much less confrontational. They prefer to seek out strong males in quiet places, such as settled country communities and drain them until they are dissipated husks.

Succubi prey on the same man night after night, allowing him to gather his strength again before returning for another visit. A victim who is kept alive over several days is much more

energising than one who is consumed utterly in the course of one session. These assaults take place while the male is in a half-awake state, much like the traditional dreamlike state in which human women are visited by vampires. Unless the visitations are



stopped, the victim invariably dies, upon which the succubus moves on to a new settlement and a new conquest. The succubi sometimes conceive as a result of these visits, which they consider to be a triumph. For a succubus, the breeding of a half-fiend is a successful corruption of humanity, who they despise. Every time they return to the abyssal planes bearing the child of some foolish human male, the ranks of the demons gain a new ally.

Incubi are a more rare, male form of succubus, without wings but with slim tails and tiny horns. They do not possess the energy draining ability of their sisters but they do

have all the other abilities. Their sole pleasure is the begetting of half-fiend children upon mortal women. Unlike the offspring of the succubi, these half-fiends are left to fend for themselves in the world. They are likely to meet a fate similar to the evil half-dragons above, falling in with corrupt humans and working their way up to a position of leadership. Unlike half-dragons, half-fiends try to use guile and deception wherever they can, pleading with human beings not to judge them by appearances and announcing tearfully that there is good in them, if they could only be helped to find it. These deceptive tactics can gull many good-natured humans into trusting them and providing them with shelter, a kindness the half-fiend usually repays by robbing and murdering them when they are no longer useful.

Background: Those half-fiends born of visits by incubi or succubi have the following features.

- † The character inherits a goodly proportion of its fiendish parent's deceptive nature. These half-fiends are smooth and accomplished liars, able to feign innocence with considerable skill. They benefit from a +2 racial bonus to all Bluff skill checks.
- † These half-fiends also inherit their demonic parent's mutability of appearance. They may use *alter self* three times per day as a spell-like ability. If this ability is used to create a disguise, the half-fiend receives a +10 circumstance bonus to the Disguise skill check.
- † These half-fiends are not quite so robust as others, as they are descended from the infiltrators and seducers of the abyss rather than its warriors. They only receive a +2 increase to Strength and a +1 increase to Constitution when the half-fiend template is applied.



Jonny Nexus

PLANNING - HOW
NOT TO DO IT

The British Army has a principle called the 'Five Ps', which stands for 'Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance.' (Although I understand that in operational use the phrase is often converted into 'Six Ps' by the addition – before the 'Poor' and after the 'Prevents' – of a word that begins with P and ends with S). [What, Panathanaikos? – Ed] But when we're roleplaying, how often do we plan properly? In my experience the answer would seem to be 'not very often' – except where planning involves twisting game logic into something that bears only a vague resemblance to anything approaching reality¹. I refer – of course – to combat where, in the time it takes the bad guy to fire a three round burst, the player characters will have managed to fit in a half hour of discussion in which various tactical action plans were proposed, insulted, discarded, re-proposed, forgotten, retrieved, modified, and finally adopted.

If Keanu Reeves thinks his 'bullet time' dodges are cool he's clearly never seen our combats!

But outside of combat we generally just blunder about, bashing down random doors and killing anyone who looks vaguely suspicious. We figure that we don't need planning, because we have the plot on our side.

And that is true – your Games Master will usually dig you out of whatever pointless hole you've jumped down. But, occasionally, lack of planning can reduce a game to farce, which is pretty much what happened to our Call of Cthulhu game a few months ago.

WARNING: - I should at this point warn you that the rest of this article will contain some relatively minor spoilers about the Horror on the Orient Express campaign. As is usual with these articles, the spoiling effect of my revelations is substantially lessened

by the fact that we are – for the most part – playing the campaign extremely badly². But there will still be some small (though slightly disguised) clues. If you later go on to play this campaign they won't spoil your enjoyment in any significant way, but if you are currently playing this campaign, or planning to, you're probably best off skipping this article. Sorry.

We'd had to leave Venice in a hurry after being accused of the brutal murder of three blackshirts³, a despicable and unfounded charge that we were wholly innocent of. (Although it is true that shortly before the murder, we'd given three blackshirts a damn good hiding and left them unconscious in some waste bins in an alleyway). After a hurried night-time escape by water-cab we'd ended up hiding in a building site in Porto Marghera, the port city located on the opposite side of the lagoon from Venice. This was not – as I'm sure you can imagine – a state of affairs that my character Ralph was entirely happy with. It's extremely difficult for a gentleman to maintain a reasonable standard of dress and decorum when sleeping rough on a building site, no matter what the quality of his accompanying staff. So we were all pretty keen to get to the railway station (which was also in Porto Marghera) and head on to Trieste, the next stop on our Orient Express trip.

OUR RECONNAISSANCE OF THE PALACE THE PREVIOUS DAY HAD REVEALED IT TO BE INHABITED BY A GRUMPY OLD CARETAKER WHO WE SUSPECTED MIGHT REQUIRE SOME DEGREE OF BEATING

There was just one slight problem.

We couldn't leave without a certain statue, and that statue was in a certain palace inconveniently located in the centre of Venice – a fact established

through diligent detective work by our hired interpreter. And it goes without saying that we were already in enough trouble with the blackshirts without giving them reasons to suspect us of the theft of a major antiquity. (Especially since our reconnaissance of the palace the previous day had revealed it to be inhabited by a grumpy old caretaker who we suspected might require some degree of beating during the theft.)

So we needed to work out a method by which we could travel across the lagoon to Venice, perform the robbery and then return – without our journey being either detected, recorded, or noted. In short, we needed a plan, and after two hours of confused debating full of out-of-character tangents one arrived, from the most unlikely source of General T's teetotal Presbyterian doctor.

It was a brilliant plan, covering the two key aspects of transport and security. I (the well-mannered English aristocrat) would walk along the coast to the railway station and hail a water cab, directing the cabby to sail along the coast to pick up three friends of mine. However, when we reached the wharf and picked up my three waiting 'friends', one of them – Doctor Dalton – would inject the cabby with a fast-acting sedative.

And this is where the plan got especially ingenious. When we'd first arrived in Porto Marghera my character Ralph had – as was his usual practice – established the location of the nearest high-quality brothel⁴. We would take the now 'coming round' cabby to the brothel, hand a large wedge of cash to the madam, and tell her that we wanted our friend – 'who'd had quite a bit to drink!' – to have a really good time. By this point he'd have regained consciousness, but would still be very woozy and suggestible, and by the time he became fully aware of what was happening to him he'd already have enjoyed the attentions of several ladies of dubious virtue.

All he would remember is having his cab hailed by a well-spoken man... and then waking up with several prostitutes. If he was a good Catholic, as most Italians are, he would be stricken with guilt, and whilst he would certainly be confessing his sins to his priest, the chances of him sharing his shame with the police would be extremely low. And if he wasn't a good Catholic – well he'd be too busy enjoying himself with the best tip he'd ever had (i.e. several free prostitutes) to worry about what had happened to his boat. *[Any self-respecting group would just shoot the cabby in the head and have done with it – Ed.]*

A boat that would – in any case – later be found tied neatly up at a deserted wharf.

It was a brilliant plan. Morally abhorrent, but brilliant. And it would be totally derailed by just one detail... It started well. I walked to the railway station, hailed a cab and headed back to the wharf. We pulled alongside, and my three companions stepped aboard: My (NPC) servant Jones; Robert, the private detective; and hiding a hypodermic syringe behind his back, noted Harley Street medic, Doctor Dalton. Myself, Jones and Robert grabbed the cabby and held him still while Doctor Dalton jabbed at him with the syringe.

And missed.

By this point the terrified cabby – who probably thought he was about to be murdered – was desperately, and loudly, attempting to break free, his long, piercing screams shattering the night's silence. Fortunately the three of us managed to wrestle him to the ground and muffle his cries, allowing Doctor Dalton to make another jab.

Which also missed.

By this point the cabby had lost control of his bodily functions and the plan was in serious danger of

unravelling, along with any future prospect of me again passing as an English aristocrat (at least until a good wash and a change of clothing). We wrestled him to the ground a second time, allowing Doctor Dalton to make a third attempt to inject him, and this time, quite to everybody's surprise, he succeeded.

It was at this point that the following exchange occurred between John (the Games Master) and General T (who was playing Doctor Dalton):

John: *Have you got the details of the drug you're using?*

General T: *Yeah, here it is. [Takes hand-written sheet out of his 'character pack' and slides it across the table to John].*

John: *[Reading] ...produces unconsciousness in thirty minutes... lasts for 24 to 36 hours...*

The Other Players (i.e. myself and Robert's player): *Half an hour! You said it was a fast acting sedative!*

General T: *Half an hour is fast acting. This is medical stuff not Hollywood!*

THE CABBY WAS SCREAMING, CRYING, BEGGING AND WETTING HIMSELF

So the situation was this: The cabby was screaming, crying, begging and wetting himself, and would continue to do so for around thirty minutes, at which point he would fall into a deep coma, awaking 24 hours later (at the earliest) with a full recollection of the most horrifying experience of his entire life.

Were we going to take him to the brothel? No, because while delivering a woozy gentleman to a whorehouse will result in him having



an exceedingly good time, delivering a man in a coma will result in an ambulance being called. The plan clearly required some adjustment, and in this case the adjustment consisted of binding and gagging the cabby and locking him into a cabin on the building site. That done, we set off across the lagoon

in search of the Grand Canal which – somewhat surprisingly given that it was night and we were using the ‘point and pray’ method of navigation – we found after only one failed attempt. Within minutes, using a ladder cunningly stolen from the building site, we’d entered the palace through a second floor window and

were prowling around in search of the courtyard, a search which was rendered considerably easier by Robert discovering a set of stairs.

It had been a long day and an even longer night. We had faced many hardships, overcome many obstacles, brutally assaulted innocent men. But now we were at the threshold of our final goal. Carefully, quietly, brimming with anticipation, we crept through an arched doorway into the courtyard beyond – and found that our planning had missed one small but vital detail. You see we didn’t actually know anything about the statue we were looking for other than the fact that it was in the palace courtyard.

The courtyard did indeed contain a statue. Unfortunately, it also contained nineteen other statues.

Planning. Don’t leave home without it.



¹The obvious exception to this rule is in Star Trek (Next Generation) games, where it is entirely ‘genre appropriate’ for the entire senior bridge crew – upon finding out that the ship will be destroyed in 45 seconds time – to retire to the Captain’s Ready Room for a discussion.

²It is true that we have managed to achieve most of the targets the campaign has so far set before us – but I think the person who deserves the most credit for that is John, our Games Master, closely followed by Jones, my NPC servant.

³The ‘blackshirts’ were the paramilitary bullyboys of the Italian fascist movement, serving much the same purpose as the ‘brownshirts’ did in the rise of Hitler. Whilst it is true that there were many complex socio-economic factors affecting Italian politics during that period, I think it’s fair to say that they were complete and utter [INSERT EXPLETIVE OF CHOICE].

⁴This information had been acquired from the water-cabby who had taken us from Venice to Porto Marghera. Since we had no language in common, this was actually quite an achievement, relying as it did on a complex series of communications involving mime, obscene hand gestures, nudging, winking and rapid head flinching – and the exchange of a large sum of money.

We like *Design and Conquer* so much we thought we'd treat you to a second helping this month. I know, we're too kind.

Design and Conquer

by Adrian Czajkowski





Having failed to provide the promised Quintessential Q&A last month, **Bob Roberts** has been brutally reprimanded and made to do the kind of penance that can't be mentioned in front of the children. Anyway, enough of that. Here's the Q&A.

Quintessential Bard

Q Under the Prestige Class Soul Taker, the informational paragraph for the 4th level ability 'Enrapture' is missing from the page entirely.

A The text below should help.

Enrapture (Su): At 4th level the soul taker masters the art of luring others. Targets affected by the soul taker's lure ability must attempt to remain close to the character for eight hours. Additionally DC to resist the soul taker's lure ability increases by +2.

Q The First Strike feat allows an Attack of Opportunity to affect the target before that target's action is completed. But isn't that what Attack of Opportunity's normally do anyway?

A Not really. For example, if someone firing a bow provokes an Attack of Opportunity, normally you would act after he releases the arrow. With this feat you act the split second before he does, possibly upsetting the shot. As you say, in a lot of cases the effect is similar but there are a few where the Attack of Opportunity is generated by an act which, while you interrupt it, still happens no matter what happens with your successful Attack of Opportunity.

Q One of the Songs of Power for the World Singer Prestige Class is Song of the Moon, which forces creatures not in their natural form to immediately change shape. This is the only Song of Power that does not have an area of effect or radius listed for it. What is the 'official' word on what that area of effect is?

A It should cover 'enough area to encompass a village circle dance', about a 30 ft. radius.

Quintessential Wizard

Q How many tattoos can a wizard have? From what I understand, for a medium-sized creature 9 tattoos are the limit. Since this is supposed to be an 'alternate' spellbook, does this mean my body is a travelling spellbook and I am then not carrying another spellbook? Is this correct? It does not seem this makes a good alternative to a normal spell book.

A You only get 9 because you have to keep them where you can see them. So if you put one on your back, you could not study it. If you have all 9 tattoos then all areas visible to you are going to be covered. These are not going to be small tattoos. We do not really want to get into a discussion of how much skin is covered for each tattoo as that is slightly over the top.

It is very useful for keeping your spells with you, no matter where you are, as you have to be skinned before you can lose these spells. You may tattoo other people as well, but I would expect them not being too keen to have tattoos of your spells all over their body.

These tattoos are not supposed to replace your spellbook entirely. They could never do that. What they are there to do is to ensure that you always have certain spells available to you no matter where you are. So you will want to choose carefully. For example, maybe the knock spell is something you will always want at your fingertips just in case you are imprisoned.

Q Where are the stats or rules for the Book of Bone and Blood for the Soulforger prestige class? I cannot find them anywhere.

A They have been left up to your Games Master to create. It basically allows you to access this prestige class, so would give all the details on how to create and use the class's special abilities.

Q Is the Mage Armour affect always in effect or do you have to activate it and it lasts normal duration?

A You need to use 3 0-level spells at the start of the day to empower the staff. The power is then activated and will have a duration and all other effects as per the spell.

Q For the burning hands, does it take up any spell levels?

A At the start of each day you encode into the staff a *burning hands* spell; for each spell you encode you can use it once per day.

Q The Arcane Avatar prestige class has the 'Call Spell' feature. Does it also allow you to call divine spells or only arcane? The book says 'from his spell lists' so if the Arcane Avatar is also a 1st level cleric, would he then be able to call 3rd level cleric spells (as they are changed into arcane spells)? And in that case, can he scribe them into arcane spells?

A No, only Arcane knowledge may be used for this feat, therefore only Arcane spells. It is a class ability not a character ability. Even if he could use this feat to learn cleric spells, there is no way that he would then be able to scribe them as Arcane spells.

Q The Arcane Avatar prestige class has the 'Master of Magic' feature. It says that he remains in a trance for 2D4 rounds, but it also says he must decide how long he wants to remain within the flow of magic. So can he decide himself or is it randomly decided by 2D4?

A He chooses a duration, the Games Master rolls 2d4, the ability ends when the lower of the two numbers happens. So if the mage chooses 5 but the Games Master rolls 4, it ends on round 4.

Q The Arcane Avatar prestige class has the 'Replenish Magic' feature. It says that 'If the avatar chooses to use this option for one round, he immediately regains one spell of up to 3rd level he previously cast that day. If the avatar spends one round doing nothing, he may then use this ability to regain a spell of up to 6th level.' I suppose that means 'If the avatar spends AN ADDITIONAL round doing nothing, he may then use this ability to regain a spell of up to 6th level'.

A Not quite, it works like this, 1st round – may gain up to 3rd level spell, 2nd round – does nothing, 3rd round – uses this ability again and may regain up to a 6th level spell.

Quintessential Fighter

Q On page 21 it states that to become a Master Bowman you need the Quick Shot feat. I have examined all the books that I have and can't find it.

A This feat should have been called Rapid Shot and can be found in the Feats section of the Player's Handbook.

Q What is the Leaping Dodge feat listed under the Swashbuckler prestige class?

A The swashbuckler may add his class level to his Armour Class when not wearing armour or carrying any kind of shield. He may not use Leaping Dodge when caught flat-footed.

Q The Living Blade prestige class provides abilities called Weaponmastery and Superb Specialisation. They both offer named (competence) bonuses so I guess they stack with everything else, including GWF/GWS (and/or Exotic Mastery), plus EWF/EWS, am I right?

A Yes these will stack.

Q I guess that Improved Weapon Focus does NOT stack with GWF since they are exactly the same thing, just with different names.

A Correct.

Q When you take the Massive feat do you get the ability score adjustments as per the *Monster Manual* rules for this?

A There are no ability score adjustments. The size increase alone is more than enough of a benefit.

Q If you do not get these ability score adjustments then why take the Massive feat?

A Try two-weapon fighting with a greatsword in one hand and a longsword in the other. How about the ability to wield a Huge weapon (with a correspondingly high damage class) in both hands?

Q For some fighting styles and Lightning Initiative you need a Fort save +6 or +12 and for Lightning Initiative you need Reflex save +6; now does this mean total save with other bonuses or just the base save?

A Unless otherwise mentioned take it as meaning the total save. Quite a few abilities state Base save specifically.

Quintessential Drow

Q What are the XP costs for using the *gravebond* spell?

A There are no experience point costs for establishing a *gravebond*, it has built-in side effects that make its use risky (see *Approaching the Grave*). Essentially, you follow the process outlined in the *Gravebond* chapter, then you cast the *gravebond* spell and you have a bond in place. When a bond is broken or the energy is all used up, there's a chance of a backlash of sorts (also detailed in *Approaching the Grave*).

Q Where are the Rogue Abilities for the *Gravebond* ability?

A Here they are:

Corpse Shroud

By expending a point of energy from his *gravebond*, the rogue is able to shroud his life essence in a cloak of death. This makes him more difficult to detect, providing a +4 bonus to all Hide or Sneak checks made for ten minutes per use of this ability.

Death's Stiletto

The rogue is able to convert one point of energy from his *gravebond* into a single dose of poison, which immediately coalesces around the weapon currently held in his primary hand. This poison is treated as black adder venom (see *Core Rulebook III*), except for the save DC which is equal to 10 plus the rogue's current total character levels.

Q The *Fleshcrafting* feat is mentioned in the *Fleshcrafting* section, but not described in the *Drow* Feat section.

A This feat was removed from the final edit, as it was deemed taking skill ranks was enough and having to take a feat as well was overkill, but if you want to include it here it is:

Fleshcrafting (Drow)

You have the ability to work *fleshcrafting* procedures on subjects. This is a difficult and dangerous bit of work, requiring extensive training and skill.

Prerequisites: Heal (5 ranks), Knowledge (Physiology) (5 ranks), Knowledge (Arcana) (5 ranks)

Benefit: You are now able to take ranks in *Craft (Flesh)* and perform *fleshcrafting* procedures.

Q The Reversions under the headings for cosmetic, functional and systemic all seemed to be cut and pasted and the DC's are the same. What should the DC's be?

A The DC's are correct; they may appear to be cut and paste but that is only due to the text needing to be the same in each case. There was some extra text needed though and here it is:

Cosmetic Fleshcrafting Reversion

The chance for reversion is very minor when cosmetic *fleshcrafting* is performed. Immediately after the operation is completed, the subject must make a Fortitude save (DC 35). For every *fleshcrafting* procedure the subject has endured in the past, the DC of this save is increased by 5. If this save is successful, the target will suffer reversion in 1d3 days.

Reversion from cosmetic *fleshcrafting* is painful, but not damaging. The subject's body throws off the effects of the reversion completely, returning to its normal state. This process requires 1d3 days, during which the subject suffers a -2 circumstance penalty to all skill checks and attack and damage rolls. At the end of this time, the subject is free of all *fleshcrafting* changes from the reverted process – it is as if the *fleshcrafting* never occurred and this attempt does not count toward the total number of times the subject has been *fleshcrafted*.

Functional Fleshcrafting Reversion

The chance for reversion is moderate when cosmetic *fleshcrafting* is performed. Immediately after the operation is completed, the subject must make a Fortitude save (DC 25). For every *fleshcrafting* procedure the subject has endured in the past, the DC of this save is increased by 5. If this save is successful, the target will suffer reversion in 1d3 days.

When reversion occurs, the subject immediately suffers 1d3 points of temporary Constitution damage. His body struggles to throw off the effects of the reversion, literally tearing itself apart in an attempt to free itself of the alterations. The reversion process occurs over the course of 2d4 days – the subject suffers the initial damage, above, on the first day, and an additional 1 point of temporary Constitution damage at the start of each subsequent day.

During the reversion process, the subject suffers a -2 circumstance penalty to all skill checks and attack and damage rolls. At the end of this time, the subject is free of all fleshcrafting changes from the reverted process – it is as if the fleshcrafting never occurred and this attempt does not count toward the total number of times the subject has been fleshcrafted.

Systemic Fleshcrafting Changes

The chance for reversion is moderate when cosmetic fleshcrafting is performed. Immediately after the operation is completed, the subject must make a Fortitude save (DC 15). For every fleshcrafting procedure the subject has endured in the past, the DC of this save is increased by 5. If this save is successful, the target will suffer reversion in 1d3 days.

When reversion occurs, the subject immediately suffers 1 point of permanent Constitution damage. These deeply rooted changes are more difficult for the body to shake off and it is nearly as likely the subject will die as survive. For the next 2d4 days, the reversion process continues and the subject must make a Fortitude save (DC 20) at the beginning of each. If this save fails, the subject immediately suffers an additional point of permanent Constitution damage. Damage suffered in this way cannot be healed in any way until the reversion process has ended.

During the reversion process, the subject suffers a -2 circumstance penalty to all skill checks and attack and damage rolls. At the end of this time, the subject is free of all fleshcrafting changes from the reverted process – it is as if the fleshcrafting never occurred and this attempt does not count toward the total number of times the subject has been fleshcrafted.

Q For the spell *dire gestation* what happens if the target dies before the spell duration is reached?

A It is as if the duration had run its course, so the caster emerges from the target's body.

Q The spell *dire gestation* seems to get worse as the spellcaster gains levels because the target gets a saving throw at the end of every round. The DC for the save doesn't increase by caster level, so this just gives the target more chances to save. The caster should be casting this at the lowest possible level he can.

A I see what you mean, but as this spell does kill the target outright it is quite powerful. There is nothing to stop you (unless your Games Master says otherwise) learning this spell at a lower level.

Quintessential Elf

Q What do you think about the 'Ranged Threat' feat? I find it a bit too powerful considering that the Peerless Archer (Silver Marches) gains a similar class skill at 8th level (so you'll have to be at least character level 13 or so) which is less powerful (granting just a 10-foot reach).

A I quite like it as is; if however you think it is too powerful for your campaign, then change it. We have no problem with you customising these feats for your games.

Q Does the 'Eyes of the Hawk' feat stack with the 'Far Sight' feat from *Player's Handbook*?

A No. If it does not specifically say so, it is a safe assumption that the answer will be in the negative.

Q Does 'Eyes of the Hawk' also influence the 'Ranged Threat' feat?

A No, because Ranged Threat covers Reach. Eyes of the Hawk covers Range Increments.

Quintessential Ranger

Q Several two-weapon fighting-type feats list improved feint as a prerequisite. Which book is improved feint located in?

A This feat is listed in *Core Rulebook I*, version 3.5, in the main Feats section.



CREATURE FEATURE!

Johnathan M. Richards

POISONOUS CREATURES

One of the many adaptations found in the natural world is the creation of biotoxins or poisons. A creature's own natural poison can be used to keep it safe from predators or to allow it to quickly slay its own prey and there are a wide range of delivery methods available including fangs, stingers, claws, spray, and even simple touch.

The monsters of most fantasy roleplaying games are no strangers to the ways of poison. Even though most games have for the generally veered away from the 'save or die' types of poison, many terrible creatures exist whose venom is no less dangerous for taking slightly longer to kill their prey. The majority of these are found in the vermin and animal (specifically, reptilian) creature types but other examples abound. This article introduces another nine monsters into the fold, each one with a different type of biotoxin having a different effect upon its victims. These monsters run the gamut from bicephalous, serpentine beasts that spit venom to living, mobile clouds of toxic gas, from floating jellyfish capable of leaving the seas

in search of land-based prey to bloated monster slugs whose horrific poison might just make their victims long for the old 'fail a save and die immediately' days of old.

The poison table at the end of the article can be used to supplement **Table 3-16: Poisons** in *Core Rulebook II*, should you wish to use these new types of poison in your campaign. However, not all of these poisons should be easily obtained: the creatures are often quite rare and definitely not inclined to provide 'free samples' to alchemists (unless said 'free samples' are introduced directly into the alchemists' bodies and said bodies are thereafter consumed). However, many poison-makers might pay good money for the capture or killing of these venomous creatures in order to get their poison glands intact.



Not much puts the fear of god up an adventurer than the mention of poison. There's that inherent feeling that it will be far worse than just a quick smack with a sword. That being the case, here's nine of the worst...

BANCALI ('SPLIT-SNAKE')

Medium-size Aberration

Hit Dice: 2d10+2 (13 hp)

Initiative: +3 (Dex)

Speed: 20 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 20 ft.

AC: 16 (+3 Dex, +3 natural), touch 13, flat 13

Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+2

Attack: Bite +4 melee (1d4+1 plus poison)

Full Attack: 2 Bites +4 melee (1d4+1 plus poison)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. / 5 ft.

Special Attacks: Poison, spit poison

Special Qualities: Scent

Saves: Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +1

Abilities: Str 12, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2

Skills: Spot +6

Feats: Weapon Finesse (Bite)

Environment: Temperate and warm land, aquatic, swamps, and underground

Organisation: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 1

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement Range: 3-4 HD (Medium-size), 5-6 HD (Large)

The bancali, or 'split-snake', is an interesting creature seemingly composed of two identical serpents. The creature's body is shaped like a 'Y' at either end: a wide torso splits off into two distinct heads and necks, while the creature's tail similarly

splits in two at the end. A bancali crawls along the ground using only its 'shared' body portion, with the heads and necks raised in the manner of racing snakes. Each head is shaped like that of a horned viper; the horns are used only to rub off the bancali's old skin when it sheds. Scale coloration varies from a glossy black in some species to a mottled green-brown in others.

Combat

Bancalis attack with a pair of bites, one from each head. Because of the comparative shortness of their necks, they usually strike out at a single victim with both heads. Each bite not only causes puncture damage from the creature's sharp fangs but also injects a deadly poison into the victim's bloodstream. This venom can also be spat at victims; in such cases, each head usually targets a different foe.

Poison (Ex): Bite, Fortitude save (DC 12), initial damage blinded 2d6 rounds, secondary damage 1d6 temporary Constitution.

Spit Poison (Ex): A bancali can spit its venom into the eyes of an opponent up to 30 feet away with no range penalty. The victim must make a successful Reflex save (DC 12) or suffer the full effects of the venom, although in this case the Fortitude save against the poison is made at DC 15 due to the direct contact with the victim's eyes. A victim who makes his Reflex save manages to duck out of the path of the stream in time and suffers no ill effects. Each head of a bancali can spit venom once every 1d4 rounds; the heads can spit at the same time or separately and each can target a different victim.

BLOAT SLUG

Huge Vermin

Hit Dice: 10d8+30 (75 hp)

Initiative: -2 (Dex)

Speed: 20 ft., swim 20 ft.

AC: 14 (-2 size, -2 Dex, +8 natural), touch 6, flat 14

Base Attack/Grapple: +7/+21

Attack: Bite +11 melee (2d6+9)

Full Attack: Bite +11 melee (2d6+9)

Space/Reach: 10 ft. / 20 ft.

Special Attacks: Spit poison

Special Qualities: Vermin, immune to bludgeoning weapons, blindsight

Saves: Fort +10, Ref +1, Will +3

Abilities: Str 23, Dex 7, Con 17, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 2

Skills: -

Feats: -

Environment: Temperate and warm forests, swamps, and underground



Organisation: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 7

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement Range: 11-20 HD (Huge), 21-30 HD (Gargantuan)

Bloat slugs are hideous creatures,

with overripe, pale bodies covered in a viscous slime. Twin antennae wave blindly about as the creature shuffles forth, dragging its bloated body along on a cushion of dripping slime. Bloat slugs grow to be 20 feet long, with a girth of nearly 8 feet at their widest point.

Combat

A bloat slug is a slow-moving creature for a being of its size but its primary attack – a glob of poisonous spittle – negates this inherent disadvantage. After its poison has rendered its victim incapable of moving (or at least slowed it to the point where the bloat slug can catch up to it), the enormous gastropod slithers up to its prey and bites it to death. Bloat slugs concentrate on a single target at a time and once one falls victim to the poison's effects the creature heads straight toward it to devour its next meal. However, they are not against spewing their venom at other nearby creatures to prepare them for future meals.

Spit Poison (Ex): Once every round, a bloat slug can spit a globule of poison at a single target up to 60 feet away with no range increment. If hit with this contact poison, the victim must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 18) to avoid its effects and then another one a minute later. The initial damage is 1d4 points of temporary Dexterity, caused as the victim's body swells uncontrollably. The victim's movement rate is halved and he takes 1d6 points of constriction damage from his clothing and/or armour, if applicable. The secondary damage is an additional 2d6 points of temporary Dexterity, an additional 1d6 points of constriction damage if armour was worn (clothing is ripped to shreds as the victim's body swells but this causes no further hit point

loss; armour is similarly ruined during the rapid swelling process, although a kind Games Master may allow magical armour to alter to fit the wearer's new body shape), and movement is halved again or drops to 5 feet, whichever is less. In addition, the victim is unable to speak coherently as his lips and tongue swell up (preventing the casting of spells with verbal components) and as his fingers balloon out he loses the ability to maintain a hold on any items or cast spells with somatic components. Bloat slugs are immune to the effects of their own poison or that of others of their kind.

Immune to Bludgeoning Weapons

(Ex): A bloat slug's rubbery flesh and lack of bones prevents it from taking damage from bludgeoning weapons. Piercing and slashing weapons do normal damage.

Blindsight (Ex): A bloat slug can sense all foes within 60 feet using scent, sound, and vibrations.

Vermin: Bloat slugs are immune to mind-influencing effects.

BLOODPOOL

Large Ooze

Hit Dice: 6d10+27 (60 hp)

Initiative: +0

Speed: 20 ft.

AC: 9 (-1 size), touch 9, flat 9

Base Attack / Grapple: +7 / +15

Attack: Slam +10 melee (1d8+6 plus poison)

Full Attack: Slam +10 melee (1d8+6 plus poison)

Space/Reach: 10 ft. / 10 ft.

Special Attacks: Poison

Special Qualities: Ooze

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +3, Will -2

Abilities: Str 19, Dex 11, Con 14, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 1

Skills: —

Feats: —

Environment: Any land and underground

Organisation: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 5

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement Range: 7-12 HD (Large), 13-18 HD (Huge)

The bloodpool was aptly named, for it looks like nothing so much as a mobile puddle of recently-shed blood and bears the coppery smell often associated with the same. Bloodpools can range up to 10 feet in diameter, although their dimensions fluctuate while in motion. As oozes go they are remarkably 'liquid' in form, although their bodies are solid enough to keep them from being intermingled with other liquids. (A bloodpool cannot be 'diluted' by pouring water on it, for example.)

Combat

Bloodpools strike out with a pseudopod in the manner of most oozes. This slam attack – and,

Poison (Ex): Touch, Fortitude save (DC 17); initial damage 1d4 points of temporary Constitution, secondary damage 2d6 points of temporary Constitution. The virulent poison of a bloodpool causes the victim's blood to ooze out of all of its natural orifices and pores; if the victim's Constitution score drops to 0 as a result of this desanguinisation he dies, leaving behind only a dried-out husk. The bloodpool mingles with its victim's newly shed blood, absorbing it into itself like a sponge. Victims of bloodpool poison are often thought to be victims of vampires or stirges, until the lack of puncture wounds on the bodies is discovered.

Blindsight (Ex): A bloodpool's entire body is a primitive sensory organ that can ascertain prey by scent and vibration within 60 feet.



indeed, any contact between the bloodpool's body and the flesh of a living victim – spreads the ooze's contact poison onto its victim, where it is absorbed into the skin and often has a powerful effect.

Ooze: Bloodpools are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, *sleep*, paralysis, stunning and polymorphing. They are not subject to critical hits.

FEARMONGER

Large Magical Beast

Hit Dice: 7d10+21 (37 hp)

Initiative: +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

Speed: 40 ft.

AC: 14 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +4 natural), touch 10, flat 13

Base Attack / Grapple: +7 / +15

Attack: Claw +10 melee (1d6+4 plus poison)

Full Attack: 2 Claws +10 melee (1d6+4 plus poison), bite +5 melee (1d8+2)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Poison, rake 2d6+2

Special Qualities: Scent

Saves: Fort +8, Ref +8, Will +3

Abilities: Str 19, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 5, Wis 12, Cha 9

Skills: Climb +8*, Jump +6, Listen +4, Move Silently +3, Spot +4

Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes

Environment: Temperate forest, hills, mountains and underground

Organisation: Solitary, pair or pack (4-7)

Challenge Rating: 3

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement Range: 8-14 HD (Large), 15-21 HD (Huge)

The fearmonger is a large, predatory cat often found roaming the countryside in small packs. Fearmongers are noted for their six-legged build, an unusual but not unknown phenomenon among feline species. They have lynx-like tufts of fur at their ears and a wide, curved mouth filled with razor-sharp teeth. These teeth are displayed fully when the fearmongers hunt their prey; the creatures often seem to be grinning evilly at their victims.

Fearmonger fur is a scruffy light brown or grey that grows shaggy during the winter months and thins in the summer. There is often a freckling of darker spots on the creature's back and sides. A fearmonger's eyes are a yellowish green and glow in the dark.

are very adept at sensing when their venom runs its course in a victim and are quick to pounce, ripping with their front claws and possibly raking with their middle set as well as clamping down with their powerful jaws.

Poison (Ex): Claws, Fortitude save (DC 16); initial damage fear effect. The first time a Fortitude save is failed after receiving claw damage from a fearmonger, the victim is shaken. If the victim fails a subsequent save from an additional wound while shaken, he becomes frightened. Failing an additional save from another wound leaves the victim panicked. See *Core Rulebook II* for details on the conditions shaken, frightened, and panicked. Each effect lasts for 1d6+6 minutes, unless superseded by a more powerful effect. Creatures immune to fear effects suffer no ill consequences from fearmonger venom.

Rake (Ex): If a fearmonger succeeds with

both claw attacks, it can rake with its middle sets of claws for an additional 2d6+2 points of damage. The fearmonger's middle claws are similarly envenomed, forcing additional Fortitude saves to negate the poison damage as detailed above. Fearmongers seldom rake a victim unless they sense their poison has run its course through his system and they wish a quick end to their game before the victim has a chance to fight back or escape. (For the same reason, they seldom bite victims until ready to kill them.)



Combat

Fearmongers exhibit the worst of feline behaviour, delighting in playing with their victims before finally slaying and devouring them. They usually strike first with their poisoned claws, allowing their venom's fear-inducing effects to overcome their prey, and then they take great pleasure in chasing after their victims while they flee in mindless panic. Fearmongers worry at their prey one claw-strike at a time, taking care not to kill their victims too soon and ruin their own fun. However, they

Stability (Ex): A fearmonger's six-legged build grants it increased stability, rendering it immune to being pushed back as the result of a bull rush manoeuvre. This stability also prevents pushes from spells like *forceful hand*.

Skills: *A fearmonger receives a +4 racial bonus to Climb checks due to its six legs providing increased stability.

INJECTOR SPHERE

Diminutive Construct

Hit Dice: ½d10 (2 hp)
Initiative: +3 (Dex)
Speed: Fly 30 ft. (perfect)
AC: 27 (+4 size, +3 Dex, +10 natural), touch 17, flat 24
Base Attack / Grapple: +0 / -13
Attack: Slam +3 melee (1d3-1 plus poison)
Full Attack: Slam +3 melee (1d3-1 plus poison)
Space/Reach: 1 ft. / 0 ft.
Special Attacks: Poison
Special Qualities: Construct, hardness 10
Saves: Fort +0, Ref +3, Will +0
Abilities: Str 8, Dex 17, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1
Skills: —
Feats: —
Environment: Any land and underground
Organisation: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 1
Treasure: None
Alignment: Always neutral
Advancement Range: —

Injector spheres are simple constructs often used as guardians or attack forces. Each injector sphere looks somewhat like the head of a morningstar or dire flail: a 2-inch, metal sphere with numerous spines projecting out in all directions. One section of the sphere unscrews, revealing a hollow interior into which poison can be poured.

Injector spheres obey simple orders from their creators or those whom they have been commanded to obey. If left to themselves, they obey the last orders they were given (often, 'attack anyone who enters your patrol area who does not say the password' or something similar). They fly through the air with exceptional speed and grace and can hover, motionless, indefinitely if needs be. One or more injector spheres might easily be camouflaged unobtrusively among the weapon-heads of a dire flail mounted on a wall.

Combat

An injector sphere's only method of attack is slamming into an opponent. If the sphere was filled with poison, its slam also injects that poison into its victim.



Poison (Ex): Injector spheres can be filled with any type of injury-type or contact poison. Each sphere holds enough poison for 10 doses, after which it must be refilled. Common poisons used in injector spheres include black lotus extract, bloodroot, blue whinnis, deathblade, dragon bile and greenblood oil. See *Core Rulebook II* for details on these poisons.

Construct: Injector spheres are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, disease, and similar effects. They are not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

LEAF-BEARERS

Tiny Fey

Hit Dice: ½d6+4 (5 hp)
Initiative: +4 (+4 Dex)
Speed: 20 ft., fly 60 ft. (perfect)
AC: 19 (+2 size, +4 Dex, +2 natural, +1 leaf-sword as shield), touch 16, flat 15
Base Attack / Grapple: 0 / -11
Attack: Stinger +6 melee (1d2-3 plus poison) or Leaf-Sword +6 melee (1d4-3)
Full Attack: Stinger +6 melee (1d2-3 plus poison) and Leaf-Sword +6 melee (1d4-3)
Space/Reach: 2½ ft. / 0 ft.
Special Attacks: Poison
Special Qualities: SR 16, Speak with insects
Saves: Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +3
Abilities: Str 5, Dex 19, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 9
Skills: Craft (any one) +5, Escape Artist +8, Hide +16, Listen +5, Search +5, Spot +9*, Survival +5
Feats: Toughness, Weapon Finesse (leaf-sword) #, Weapon Finesse (stinger) #
Climate/Terrain: Temperate and warm forest
Organisation: Gang (2-4), band (6-11), or tribe (20-80)
Challenge Rating: 1
Treasure: No coins; 50% goods; 50% items
Alignment: Usually chaotic neutral
Advancement Range: 1-3 HD (Tiny)

Racial feat

The mysterious leaf-bearers are a strange race of fey bearing more than the usual quota of insectoid features: while many races of fey have dragonfly or butterfly wings and



leaf-bearers not only creates a swordlike edge along the leaf's exterior but also hardens it enough that it can be used alternately as either sword or shield. (In the latter case, the leaf-sword grants a +1 shield bonus to the leaf-bearer.) Leaf-swords are held by the leaf's stem, which is similarly hardened in the process and used as a hilt. Leaf-swords have no crossguards and the leaf-bearers use no scabbards for these weapons.

Most leaf-swords are

antennae, the leaf-bearers sport not only a set of dragonfly wings but a head to match and a long, insectoid tail equipped with a poisonous stinger. They get their name from the weapons they make and use: razor-sharp swords made from magically hardened leaves. Leaf-bearers stand a little over a foot tall and have two-foot wingspans.

Despite their insectoid heads, leaf-bearers can speak both Common and Sylvan perfectly, although they can also talk to insects of all types at will. (Treat this as a *Speak with Animals* spell affecting insects instead of animals.) Leaf-bearers are much more intelligent than might be assumed at first glance; many shrug them off as some sort of magical insect, never suspecting their true natures.

Combat

Leaf-bearers are excellent combatants for creatures of their size. Their primary method of attack is with their envenomed stingers but they train long and hard with their leaf-swords as well. A leaf-sword is made from a wide, rounded leaf that comes to a point. (The leaves of elms, beech, chestnut oaks, birches, alders, poplars and aspens are common choices.) A magical process known only to the

about 6 inches long and can easily be mistaken for mere leaves unless examined closely.

Poison (Ex): Stinger, Fortitude save (DC 11) or suffer the equivalent of the effects of a *suggestion* spell for the next 1d6 minutes. Leaf-bearers enjoy suggesting things to their victims that make them appear foolish: doing a handstand, rubbing mud on their faces, singing bawdy songs or simply 'dancing around like a fairy'. Their chaotic natures cause them to revel in the discomfort of others but they are not unduly vicious in their pranks unless angered.

Skills: *Leaf-bearers gain a +4 racial bonus to Spot checks due to their multifaceted eyes, which are geared toward detecting movement.

LEVITATOR JELLY

Large Ooze

Hit Dice: 2d8+2 (11 hp)

Initiative: -1 (Dex)

Speed: Fly 20 ft. (clumsy), swim 20

AC: 8 (-1 size, -1 Dex), touch 8, flat 8

Base Attack / Grapple: +1 / +6

Attack: Tentacle +1 melee (poison)

Full Attack: 7 Tentacles +1 melee (poison)

Space/Reach: 10 ft. / 5 ft.

Special Attacks: Poison, levitation, swallow whole

Special Qualities: Vermin, blindsight, immune to bludgeoning weapons, cold resistance 10

Saves: Fort +1, Ref -1, Will +0

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 9, Con 12, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 10

Skills: Hide +11*, Move Silently +7*

Feats: —

Environment: Any land, water or underground

Organisation: Solitary or colony (2-7)

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement Range: 3-4 HD (Large), 5-6 HD (Huge)

Levitor jellies are an unusual type of jellyfish with the ability to travel through the air as effortlessly as they move through the sea. Like many jellies, they are virtually translucent, although levitor jellies have vertical rows of knobs on their cap-like upper bodies and along their dangling tentacles that flash with bioluminescence when they use their magical abilities.

A levitor jelly has a 5-foot, umbrella-shaped upper body, which houses its expandable stomach and reproductive organs. From this hang seven lumpy tentacles of irregular length, spaced roughly equidistant around the rim of its body. The tentacles average some ten feet long and are highly manoeuvrable. The jelly uses its tentacles to 'steer' its flight through the air or passage through the sea but it is highly susceptible to air and water currents.

Combat

A levitor jelly's seven tentacles are each covered in thousands of tiny barbs. The touch of a tentacle causes a stinging sensation and the transfer of poison into the body of the jelly's victim.



Poison (Ex): Tentacle sting, Fortitude save (DC 12); initial and secondary damage 1d4 Dexterity.

Levitate (Su): At will, a levitator jelly can levitate any creatures or objects in contact with any of its tentacles. This ability is preceded by a pulse of flashing bioluminescence generated in the body section and travelling down the tentacles. The targets are affected as if by a *levitate* spell cast by a 3rd level sorcerer. Note that unlike the spell, the targets need not be willing to be levitated. Unwilling victims who make a successful Will save (DC 12) can avoid the levitation effect. The levitation effect lasts for as long as the creature or object remains in contact with at least one of the jelly's tentacles, plus an additional 1d10 rounds after that. Additionally, the levitation effect remains in place after

a creature has been swallowed whole and is being digested inside the jelly's stomach.

Swallow Whole (Ex): Levitator jellies swallow their victims whole only after they have fully succumbed to the effects of the jelly's poison (when their Dexterity reaches 0 and they are no longer able to move). A jelly can only swallow creatures at least one size category smaller than themselves; its expandable stomach can hold one Medium-size, two Small, four Tiny, eight Diminutive, or sixteen Fine creatures.

Swallowed creatures take 1d4 points of acid damage each round. Because of the jelly's translucent body, its victims remain perfectly visible through its skin until completely digested.

Immune to Bludgeoning Weapons (Ex): A levitator jelly's soft, pliant body absorbs damage from bludgeoning weapons. Slashing and piercing weapons do normal damage to the jelly and an equal amount of damage to anyone swallowed whole.

Cold Resistance 10 (Ex): Levitator jellies ignore the first 10 points of cold damage each round.

Blindsight (Ex): A levitator jelly's entire body is a primitive sensory organ that can ascertain prey by scent and vibration within 60 feet.

Vermin: Levitator jellies are immune to mind-influencing effects.

Skills: *Levitator jellies receive a +16 racial modifier to Hide checks due to their translucence and a +8 racial modifier to Move Silently checks.

VAPOUR FIEND

Large Elemental (Air)

Hit Dice: 8d8+8 (42 hp)

Initiative: +4 (Dex)

Speed: 30 ft., fly 30 ft. (perfect)

AC: 17 (-1 size, +4 Dex, +4 natural), touch 13, flat 13

Base Attack / Grapple: +6 / +12

Attack: Slam +9 melee (1d8+3 plus poison)

Full Attack: Slam +9 melee (1d8+3 plus poison)

Damage: Slam 1d8+3 and poison

Space/Reach: 10ft. / 10 ft.

Special Attacks: Poison, engulf

Special Qualities: Inhabit corpse, gaseous form, damage reduction 10/magic

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +10, Will +3

Abilities: Str 15, Dex 18, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 11

Skills: Disguise +16*, Hide +6, Intuit Direction +7, Listen +7, Move Silently +18*, Spot +7

Feats: Alertness, Flyby Attack, Weapon Finesse (Slam)

Environment: Any land and underground

Organisation: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 5

Treasure: None

Alignment: Usually neutral evil

Advancement Range: 9-16 HD (Large), 17-24 HD (Huge)

Vapour fiends are sentient, noxious clouds of deadly gas. They are normally found roaming the eternal skies of the Elemental Plane of Air but can be summoned to the Material Plane or pass through interplanar gateways of their own will. They are frequently found in the service of powerful air elementals or djinni, often performing an assassin's role (especially against air-breathers on the Material Plane who have offended their masters).



While they cannot speak themselves, vapour fiends understand the Common and Auran languages. Many also pick up other languages, Infernal and Abyssal being quite common.

Combat

A vapour fiend's only attacks are with its own poisonous body. Merely coming into contact with the noxious fumes of a vapour fiend is deadly to those of 3 or less HD. In addition, a vapour fiend can rotate part of its body into a whirlwindlike swirl of spinning vapours and use this semisolid airy form to slam into enemies, causing its poisonous effects at the same time.

Poison (Ex): Slam or touch, Fortitude save (DC 15); effects are as a permanent *cloudkill* spell.

Engulf (Ex): A vapour fiend can use its gaseous body to completely engulf several victims at once. It merely moves over the opponents, affecting as many as it can cover with

its body. Unlike the engulfing attack of more substantive creatures like oozes, potential victims cannot avoid being engulfed by a vapour fiend, although they are still allowed their saving throw as normal and can step away from the engulfing vapour fiend at any time.

Inhabit Corpse (Su): A vapour fiend can compress its gaseous body into the lungs of a slain victim of Medium-size or larger and animate it as a

zombie. While residing inside the corpse, the vapour fiend sees through its eyes, hears through its ears and moves the zombie as if it were its own body. The zombie has its own separate statistics (see *Core Rulebook III* for the appropriate statistics based upon creature size) but has no self-will and slaying the zombie has no effect upon the vapour fiend other than forcing it out of the corpse in search of a new 'habitat'. Oftentimes the first the Player Characters will see of a vapour fiend is immediately after they slay the 'zombie' it inhabited. A vapour fiend can only animate the corpse of a body while completely ensconced inside its lungs and cannot extend a portion of its gaseous body from its host's mouth to combat enemies. Vapour fiends use animated corpses as 'living quarters' and a means of communicating with others, for they can speak out of their host's mouth while inhabiting it.

Gaseous Form (Ex): Since the vapour fiend's body is composed of vapours, it shares many

characteristics of a creature under the effects of a *gaseous form* spell. It can pass through small holes and narrow openings and has damage reduction 10/magic.

Skills: *Vapour fiends receive a +10 racial bonus to Disguise checks when trying to pass themselves off as harmless fog and also receive a +8 racial bonus to Move Silently checks.

VLAAGH

Huge Outsider

Hit Dice: 8d8+48 (84 hp)

Initiative: -1 (Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

AC: 15 (-2 size, -1 Dex, +8 natural), touch 7, flat 15

Base Attack / Grapple: +8 / +24

Attack: Bite +14 melee (2d6+12) or tongue +5 ranged touch (1d4+8 nonlethal)

Full Attack: Bite +14 melee (2d6+12) or tongue +5 ranged touch (1d4+8 nonlethal)

Space/Reach: 10 ft. / 10 ft. (20 ft. with tongue)

Special Attacks: Breath weapon, improved grab, swallow whole

Special Qualities: Outsider

Saves: Fort +12, Ref +5, Will +8

Abilities: Str 26, Dex 9, Con 22, Int 4, Wis 11, Cha 8

Skills: Climb +19, Jump +19, Listen +8, Move Silently +10, Spot +11

Feats: Iron Will, Point Blank Shot (tongue), Precise Shot (tongue)

Environment: Any land and underground

Organisation: Solitary or colony (2-4)

Challenge Rating: 8

Treasure: 50% coins, double goods, standard items

Alignment: Always chaotic neutral

Advancement Range: 9-16 HD (Huge), 17-24 HD (Gargantuan)

Vlaaghi are giant, toad-like beings native to the Outer Plane of Limbo, although they are often encountered elsewhere as well. Vlaaghi are squat creatures, with short, stumpy front legs and fat bellies that drag along

the ground when they walk. Their hind legs are toad-like in build and can actually scoot the vlaaghi forward at a somewhat respectable rate of movement. Jumping is possible but vlaaghi rarely exert the effort to do so unless absolutely necessary.



Vlaagh skin is seldom a single colour or hue but more often a swirling miasma of different (often contrasting) pigments. Their skin is coarse and lumpy, with a twin row of bone-like ridges running down their backs from their brows to the base of their hips. While quite sharp, these bone-spikes are not used in combat.

Combat

Vlaaghi attack with their vicious bites, often dragging victims into their mouths with their long, sticky tongues. They also make heavy use of their breath weapon, a cone of poison gas as chaotic and unpredictable as the plane on which most vlaaghi make their homes.

Breath Weapon (Su): 30-ft. cone of poison gas, Fortitude save (DC 20). The effects of the vlaagh's poison gas are variable: each time the vlaagh uses its breath weapon roll a d20 four times on the chart below to determine how much of what attributes are affected.

As an example, if the four d20 rolls were 6, 17, 12 and 3, the poison gas would have

an initial effect of 1d3 temporary points of Intelligence damage and a secondary effect of the loss of 1d4 hit points. A vlaagh's poison gas is multicoloured and no two blasts of it are likely to bear the same coloration or have the same effects. A vlaagh can use its breath weapon every 1d4 rounds.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this attack, the vlaagh must hit with its tongue attack. If it gets a hold, it begins to drag its victim to its mouth. In subsequent rounds, the vlaagh and the victim make opposed Strength checks, with each combatant gaining a +4 bonus per size category above Medium-size or a -4 penalty per size category below

Medium-size. (Vlaaghi normally have a +16 bonus: +8 as a Strength modifier and another +8 for being of Huge size.) If the vlaagh wins it drags its victim 1 foot closer per point of difference between the check results. If the victim wins, he breaks free. Once the distance between vlaagh and victim reaches 0, the vlaagh makes an immediate bite attack, with the victim considered grappled (losing any Dexterity bonuses to AC).

Vlaaghi also have improved grab with their bite attacks. A

vlaagh that successfully bites can swallow whole.

Swallow Whole (Ex): A vlaagh can try to swallow a grabbed (bitten) victim at least two size categories smaller than it is. To swallow a creature, the vlaagh must make a successful grapple check. (Vlaaghi have an overall +16 bonus to grapple checks.) Once inside, the victim takes crushing damage equal to the 2d6+12 bite damage and 1d4 acid damage per round. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by using claws or a light slashing weapon to kill the vlaagh from the inside (AC 15).

A Huge vlaagh can hold one Medium-size, two Small, four Tiny, eight Diminutive, or sixteen Fine creatures in its gut.

EFFECTS OF VLAAGH POISON GAS BREATH WEAPON

Die Roll	Range	Ability Affected
01	1	Charisma
02-03	1d2	hit points
04-07	1d3	Strength
08-12	1d4	Constitution
13-16	1d6	Dexterity
17-18	1d8	Intelligence
19-20	2d4	Wisdom



WORKING FOR YOUR BUSINESS



BETTER COMBAT THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Behind the Scenes

**A new Babylon 5 scenario for 3-5
beginner level characters**

Pookajoo & Lizard

General Plot

It is well known in Downbelow that heavy gambling surrounds the activities of the Mutai. As long as it is not brought to the arena, the Muta-Do and Mutari tend to keep an 'out of sight, out of mind' attitude. Lately, though, there seems to be something more going on. On more than one occasion, a combatant has ignored the rules of fair combat and continued attacking an opponent once he is down. The offending combatant has been described by onlookers as frenzied and almost impossible to control. It appears to be more than battle rage. Similar reports of such uncontrolled violent behaviour are coming from other places on the station. Isolated incidents of violence are not uncommon on Babylon 5, but there seems to be a common thread to the manner of these attacks. The players must find out what is causing the rages, and then determine how best to stem the violence.

Getting the Players Involved

Almost any character class or race can take part in this adventure. There are many different agendas to be followed, and many directions the adventure can be taken in. Following is a breakdown of ways to involve your players in the behind the scenes action of the Mutai.

Agent: Is there an outside influence at work in Downbelow? Getting



to the bottom of the source of the problems in the Mutai may garner more information than one would expect. Keep your ear to the ground.

Diplomat: Only a certain few alien races seem to be exhibiting symptoms of these violent rages. If the diplomat represents one of these worlds, he will want answers before issues of racism compound the problem.

Lurker: The Lurker could be a go-between for a bookie, or a bookie himself. The recent turn of events in the Mutai might be slowing down betting, thus cutting deeply into the lurker's means of survival.

Officer: Anyone involved with B5 security will have a vested interest in stopping the violent outbursts, and the sooner, the better.

Scientist: The cause of these alien rages would pique the interest of any

xenobiologist. The casualties from these incidents is causing grief in Medlab as well, using up valuable resources and tying up personnel.

Soldier: Now that Walker Smith has won the right for humans to participate in the Mutai, an occasional Gropo visiting the station tries to make a name for himself in the Mutai. If he comes up against one of these aliens in a rage, he could be nearly killed. He might want revenge for a bad pummelling, or for the 'accidental' death of a friend in the ring.

Telepath: The use of a telepath may come in handy for information gathering. While unauthorised scanning is illegal, it is less likely to be made an issue of in Downbelow.

Worker: Gambling on the favourite used to be an almost sure thing in the Mutai, but now the winner could

be anybody's guess. You have lost a bundle on the last few bouts, and you want to recoup your losses.

What is Going On?

A research scientist on a remote outpost, who was sympathetic to Free Mars, was trying to find a tool or weapon to support the movement. He stumbled across a substance that, in a select few alien races, acts much like PCP does to humans (impervious to pain, progressing to violent outbursts). The discovery happened by accident. He was testing something completely different, and an alien in the control group reacted violently to his placebo, trashing the scientist's lab. He could not be subdued, and was killed.

During the autopsy, the scientist discovered the reason for the bizarre actions of the alien – a bad reaction to antacid, a common substance found in any human medicine chest. The incident that destroyed the lab did so much damage – including fire damage – that the scientist decided to go underground with his discovery and allow himself to be listed as presumed dead. He is actually very much alive and continuing his research in B5, funding his hidden lab in Downbelow through rigged fights in the Mutai using the alien drug. A small amount of the drug is euphoric, but going just slightly overboard on the dose turns the user psychotic.

ACT I: Getting Started

These are only some of many different ways the Games Master can involve the players in the events:

Big Brawl

Some of the group could be minding their own business, having a social drink in a bar, or shopping in the Zocalo. They notice an altercation between an alien and a merchant, (alien and a bouncer if you use the bar scenario) which quickly escalates beyond an ordinary disagreement. Soon people are ducking for cover and the alien is flinging security personnel around like ragdolls. Security has to resort to morph gas to bring the perpetrator under control. Unfortunately the gas also knocked out several of the merchants and patrons on the Zocalo. If in a bar, all patrons will likely be rendered unconscious, unless some have gas

these dangerous races removed from the station altogether. They are citing damage to businesses and goods, and the driving away of patrons from the Zocalo. Although B5 Security is hesitant to eject an entire race from the station, unofficially the security teams that have had to break up these brawls wouldn't miss them very much.

Piece of the Action

The scientist (biochemist) is dealing with an intermediary such as Na'Grath for setting up the rigged fights. He also has a courier for delivering the substance to the Mutari



masks on their person. Needless to say, this has not been fun for the players, who were likely caught in the crossfire. They will want to find out for their own peace of mind, just what's behind the violence.

If they start asking around they will find out by talking to staff in the bar that a couple alien races have been making a habit of coming in and busting up the place of late. There is talk of banning these races from the club, due to their danger to staff and patrons.

Likewise, merchants on the Zocalo are also talking about petitioning the Babylon 5 Advisory Council to have

involved. The unrelated outbreaks of violent behaviour are occurring because Na'Grath has figured out the properties of the substance, and has been marketing it to more than the Mutari. There's money to be made on several levels here, and greed is not limited to being a human failing.

Deal With It

If any of the players work for B5 Security or Earth Alliance they will be ordered to get to the bottom of these outbursts immediately, before things get to crisis level. Earth Alliance Intelligence may have discovered that the researcher did not die, and they have tracked him

to B5. They will also discuss their suspicions of his ties to Free Mars.

Act II: Getting to the Bottom of Things

Once your players have taken the hook, they have to find out who is involved. This will be tricky. The research scientist doesn't want to be found out and suffer death of personality for supporting Free Mars. Na'Grath and his minions don't want to lose their hold on the lucrative substance trade. And the Mutai and Mutari don't want the bad publicity that would ensue following the exposure of corruption.

Identifying the suspects

Having access to Medlab, or a contact in Medlab may help the players

discover what agent is reacting adversely in what races. If anyone had a background in medicine or B5 security they may be able to request certain tests be done during an autopsy, or request copies of the medical records of alien(s) admitted to Medlab exhibiting the behavioral problems they observed earlier in the bar or on the Zocalo. They can also poke around the Mutai itself, remembering to always be careful to respect the etiquette of the Mutai. Checking around Downbelow is also a possibility, as there are more individuals in that part of the station who would be willing to pass on information for a price. As long as that price guarantees anonymity and a guarantee of non-reprisal, that is.

Players should be able to find out fairly easily which races are exhibiting the unexplained violent outbursts. Medlab reports and scuttlebutt around the Mutai should give them a pretty good idea. Discovering the compound will be more difficult, without some medical

There is an awful lot of red tape and material to sift through if the characters are going to explore the docks. The Dockers' Guild is very protective of their tradesmen, and does not want anything done that may compromise their position on the station. It may be possible to get access to restricted shipments or look at ship's manifests but it may necessitate some costly bribes and fast talking by the players.

Just because a bribe has been made, doesn't mean that the information given will be what they have been looking for. It may be inaccurate or a complete fabrication. The players could spend several hundred creds to gain access to ABC Corp.'s shipping manifest. On it they will find shipments of antacids to Medlab. After taking hours or even days to track down the individuals on the station responsible for handling ABC's products, they will find that this is a legitimate pharmaceutical company that has done regular business with Medlab for months. This is not a restricted substance on B5. The players will have to research what the size and frequency of a normal shipment is, then extrapolate from there what constitutes an inordinate amount of antacid coming into Medlab.

The Mutai is an excellent opportunity for the Games Master to add plenty of flavour text to the adventure. All the pomp and formality of the Mutai should be described in detail along with the heat of combat. The players' adrenaline should be pumping after being immersed in a Mutai bout.

The event begins with all different alien species crowding around the dimly lit ring. A few humans can be seen in the audience, now that Walker Smith has made human presence in the Mutai acceptable. Vendors will be wandering around selling yoghtri (fried tree worm that resembles a pretzel). Banter in a myriad of languages will be going on all around the ring as individuals debate the merits and flaws of their favourites.

The lights go up and the Muta-Do strides into the centre of the ring. He introduces each combatant: 'Into the Sands of Blood comes Drakh of the Drazi, bravest of his race. Drakh would now step into a spotlight at one corner of the ring. The Muta-Do then introduces the opponent in the same fashion. Each combatant's fans will be chanting his name. The Muta-Do drops his baton between the combatants. They face each other, raise their hands to shoulder height, then clasp fingers in front of their chest briefly, and come out fighting. There are no rounds, no rules, and the winner is whoever remains standing. The Muta-Do proclaims the winner by touching him with his ceremonial baton. The loser is then dragged out of the Mutai by his associates.

knowledge or assistance. If they think to check with the docks, they may be able to find a manifest for an unusual quantity of antacid being shipped to B5. A bit more detective work will get them the name of a lab tech that signed for the order. He was bribed to redirect the shipment to sources Downbelow, who then got it into the hands of either the research scientist or Na'Grath.

The characters will want to spend time in and around the Mutai learning about its unique culture. Purchasing admission to a fight is not difficult, unless they want to get into a Sho'Rin match, then tickets will be hard



to acquire, and expensive. If they attend three or four Mutai combats and are perceptive, they will be able to pick out a couple regular faces in the crowd. One is Ta'Leen, a Brakiri fence for redirected goods, the other is Mike Adams, a Medlab tech who is betting heavily and winning quite regularly on the Mutai. Ta'Leen will be seen more often than not hovering around the winner's corner of the ring.

Talking to the Sho'Rin or the Muta-Do will be very difficult and not very productive. The Sho'Rin will not entertain the thought of corruption in the Mutai. The Muta-Do is hard to gain an audience with. When he is not sitting in judgement over a bout, he will be overseeing practice in the Mutai training facility where only Mutari are allowed to enter. If the characters can gain his ear, he will give them his blessing to conduct their investigation into the drugging issue. He will deny any involvement with the characters if he is confronted with evidence or is asked to speak out against another Mutari.

Following are some of the individuals they may use for information:

Ta'Leen
3rd Level Brakiri Lurker (Fence)
Hit Points: 11
Initiative: +0

Speed: 30 ft.
DV: 10
Attacks: +1 melee or +2 ranged
Saves: Fort +3, Ref +0, Will +4
Abilities: Str 8, Dex 10, Con 11, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 13
Skills: Appraise 10, Bluff 10, Sense Motive 10, Spot 7, Gather Info 8, Hide 5, Listen 7, Pick Pocket 5
Feats: Iron Will, Run, Endurance
Racial Bonuses: Darkvision 60 ft., No fortitude penalty in hot conditions

Ta'Leen is a fence for redirected goods. He's the one who makes sure the occasional case of antacid goes missing between the docks and Medlab, and ends up Downbelow. What the research scientist doesn't know is that he is not getting all of what he's been paying for. Ta'Leen has been providing enough antacid to him to prevent him from being suspicious of any other wrongdoing. The rest of the drug is being sold to Na'Grath's syndicate for distribution. Ta'Leen will not name names, but another fence looking to poach Ta'Leen's turf will be more than happy to implicate Ta'Leen.

Dr. Douglas Cary
5th Level Scientist, 1st Level Agent
Hit Points: 15
Initiative: +1
Speed: 30 ft
DV: 14
Attacks: +2 melee or +3 ranged

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +7
Abilities: Str 10, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 18, Wis 16, Cha 15.
Skills (Scientist): Computer Use 13, Concentration 8, Medical 15, Knowledge (Pre'lek) 7, Knowledge (Free Mars) 7, Spot 10, Technical(Toxicology) 13, Technical(Chemistry) 13, Technical(Pharmacology) 13.
Skills (Agent): Bluff 7, Disguise 7, Escape Artist 6, Hide 6, Listen 8, Move Silently 5, Sense Motive 7, Search 11.
Feats: Contacts (Free Mars), Skill Focus +3 (Chemistry), Resist Scan, Iron Will.

Dr. Cary sees his discovery as a noble effort to further the cause of the Free Mars movement. He knows he is going to be found some day, but he has spent all his time hidden Downbelow since coming to the station. He has no idea that authorities have found he's not dead, nor that they're tracking him here to B5. As far as the antacid goes, he believes that it is being used as a performance enhancing drug in the Mutai, and that it is being used by the athletes as responsibly as possible. He is not concerned that overdoses or black marketing of the antacid has been going on, or that portions of his supply are being usurped for the black market. He staunchly defends the rights of Free

Mars without fear. If he suspects his operation is in jeopardy, he will use his Free Mars contacts to get him off the station immediately. Better to run to another outpost and continue his research for Free Mars than to suffer the consequences of staying on B5 and getting caught. He's a gadgeteer, and carries things on his person all the time to help him escape, such as tear gas, smoke bombs and paralyzing neurotoxins. If he suspects his operation is in jeopardy, he will use his Free Mars contacts to get him off the station immediately.

Drahk

6th level Soldier/4th Level Drazi

Mutari

Hit Points: 38

Initiative: +1

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 15

Attacks: +14/+9 melee or +11/+6 ranged

Saves: Fort +12, Ref +5, Will +3

Abilities: Str 18, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 10

Skills: Balance+4, Climb +4, Concentration +6, Hide +2, Intimidate+6, Jump +2

Feats: Toughness, Weapon Focus (Unarmed Combat), Endurance, Dense Scales

He was prepared to challenge the Sho'Rin a month ago, but then Drahk started losing bouts to opponents he should have walked over. Since that time, he has been accused of throwing matches, and he has been trying to clear his name. He can share his suspicions about drugging with the players, and can point out Mutari who are likely using the antacid.

Vashka

6th level Soldier/2nd Level Pre'lek

Mutari

Hit Points: 30

Initiative: +5

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 15

Attacks: +11/+6 melee or +9/+4 ranged

Saves: Fort +11, Ref +5, Will +5

Abilities: Str 16, Dex 13, Con 15, Int

12, Wis 12, Cha 10

Skills: Concentration +6, Hide +4, Intimidate +6, Move Silently +5, Tumble +6

Feats: Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Weapons Focus (Unarmed Combat)

The Pre'lek are bipedal reptiloids with prehensile head-tentacles. There are two Pre'lek 'sexes': neuter and fertile. The neuters, called Pre'leki, dominate Pre'lek culture. They control all aspects of life. Vashka is of the Pre'leki and views combat in the Mutai as a way to enlighten other alien races regarding the Pre'lek's culture, as they are a very minor race in the League of Non-Aligned Worlds. Vashka is exhibiting signs of the antacid rages, but so far he is keeping it mostly under control in the Mutai. (Pre'lek racial information courtesy of the Encyclopaedia Xenobiologica by Christopher Russa)

G'Tok

6th level Soldier /2nd Level Hurr

Mutari

Hit Points: 32

Initiative: +2

Speed: 30 ft

DV: 18

Attacks: +10/+5 melee or +10/+5 ranged

Saves: Fort +9, Ref +8, Will +3

Abilities: Str 15, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 9, Cha 14

Skills: Balance +6, Concentration +6, Hide +2, Intimidate +9, Listen +2, Move Silently +5

Feats: Lightning Reflexes, Skill Focus (Intimidate), Toughness

As a member of the Hurr race, G'Tok is typical of their barbaric, powerful and warlike nature. Humanoid in appearance, the Hurr are distinguished by their four nostrils. The Hurr are a people that are physically dangerous and untrustworthy. Victory and dominance is everything in their culture and politics. G'Tok has been taking more and more antacid to improve his prowess in the Mutai. His rages have killed at least one opponent but he has been allowed

back into the ring as he is making a lot of money for his underworld backers. (Hurr racial information courtesy of the Encyclopaedia Xenobiologica by Christopher Russa)

Mike Adams

1st Level Human Scientist (Medlab Tech)

Hit Points: 7

Initiative: +2

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 12

Attacks: +0 melee or +2 ranged

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +1

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 15, Wis 9, Cha 15

Skills: Bluff +4, Computer Use +6, Concentration+5, Forgery +4, Knowledge (Lurkers) +6, Medical +6, Profession (MedTech) +3, Search +4, Sense Motive +1, Technical (Drugs) +6

Feats: Contact (Underworld), Alien Anatomy

Unsatisfied with his position, Adams jumped at the chance to increase his bank account for very little effort when approached by agents of Na'Grath. He may or may not offer information to the players, depending on how they approach him. He is likely more afraid of reprisal from the underground thugs for exposing them, than he would be afraid of losing his Medlab position. If the players have no other way to gain access to medical records, some veiled threats to Adams should get the information they need. If they can access his bank account, they will find that he has about 2,400 creds on hand – almost 1,000 more than someone of his position should be banking.

Marty Green

4th Level Worker

Hit Points: 19

Initiative: +0

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 11

Attacks: +3 melee or +2 ranged

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +2

Abilities: Str 12, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 15, Wis 13, Cha 14

Skills: Computer Use +6, Drive +5,



Knowledge: Shipping and Receiving +9, Spot +7, Climb +5, Appraise +9, Gather Info +6, Search +7, Listen +10

Feats: Data Access, Alertness

A dock worker and member of the Dockers' Guild. Marty was involved in the July 2258 strike and will be less than forthcoming with anyone identified with Earth Central. If anyone mentions the Rush Act in his presence, the characters might as well forget about getting any help from him. The same goes for anyone approaching him in a Babylon 5 Security uniform. He does pride himself on doing his job well and efficiently. He and his co-workers are loyal and appreciate what Commander Sinclair has done to improve their working conditions. Marty may let a character look over his shoulder at shipping documents, but he will not let anyone remove any paperwork or property from the docks without proper ID and signatures.

From Here

What direction the characters take is entirely up to themselves and the Games Master. Some concepts are:

Blackmail: Anyone on the inside track is not going to want their involvement exposed, especially if on the surface they have a position on B5 such as security, cargo or medical. The characters might want to keep their involvement in their back pocket so to speak, in case they need to use the source in the future.

Income: There is a lot of money to be made both in the Mutai and in the trade of the substance. Why not take a piece of the pie?

Prestige: Do the right thing, expose all the criminals and make a name for yourself on the station. But is it worth making enemies Downbelow?

Red Herring

If the Games Master wants to give the players more to work on, he can throw this plot twist into the scenario. Although the Muta-Do has declared humans are allowed to fight in the Mutai as brothers, there is still a lot of prejudice and in some cases outright hostility towards human involvement. Any human character that is too obvious asking questions and poking around the Mutai may find him at the wrong end of a poison dart or dagger. The assassination attempt should not kill the character, but it will put him out of commission for awhile. Now the players have to decide if they want to pursue this assassin. Does the assassin know something they need to know? Can he lead them to information about the antacid trade?

Finding the assassin and bringing him to justice, or at least to the attention of Babylon 5 Security is about all the players will be able to do. The assassin has no other motive than prejudice against humans entering the Mutai.





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