

PC PEARLS

A COLLECTION OF
CHARACTER INSPIRATION



PC PEARLS VOLUME 2: A COLLECTION OF CHARACTER INSPIRATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction by Greg Oppedisano.....	2
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CHAPTER ONE: CREATING MEMORABLE CHARACTERS

Character Questionnaire by Liz Courts	3
What's In a Name? by Hal Maclean	5
Fifty Family Units by Russel Brown, Adam Daigle, Tom Ganz, Stefan Happ, Tim Hitchcock, Phil Larwood, and Willie Walsh.....	6
Go, Team Theme, Go! by Louis Agresta, Clinton J. Boomer, Tom Ganz, Phillip Larwood, James MacKenzie, Greg Oppedisano, and Craig Shackleton.....	8
Colorful Places of Origin by Clinton J. Boomer, Russell Brown, Elizabeth Courts, Scott Gable, Tom Ganz, Stefan Happ, Phillip Larwood, Greg Oppedisano, Ted Reed, and David Schwartz.....	10
Ties That Bind by Stefan Happ	12
Backstories by Stefan Happ, Rob Manning, and Adam Daigle.....	13
Life Without Letters by Russell Brown	15
Huh?! 13 Ways to Role-play Illiteracy by Louis Agresta, Clinton J. Boomer, Russell Brown, Tim Hitchcock, and David Schwartz.....	16
Fifty Personality Quirks by Elizabeth Courts, Adam Daigle, Scott Gable, Stephen S. Greer, Tim Hitchcock, John E. Ling, Jr., David Schwartz, Craig Shackleton, and Willie Walsh	16
Faiths for the Faithless by Louis Agresta, Clinton J. Boomer, Ashavan Doyan, Phillip Larwood, and David Schwartz.....	18
Every Character is a Biography by Hal Maclean.....	19
Out for Revenge! by Rone Barton, Clinton J. Boomer, Scott Gable, Tom Ganz, Stefan Happ, Ed Healy, Phillip Larwood, James MacKenzie, Greg Oppedisano, and Ted Reed.....	20

CHAPTER TWO: THE EARLY LEVELS

Twenty Questions for the Captured by Stefan Happ, Tim Hitchcock, and Hal Maclean.....	22
Organizations by Archetype: Thieves by Adam Daigle, Stefan Happ, John E. Ling, Jr., Scott Gable, and Rob Manning.....	23
Organizations by Archetype: Warriors by John E. Ling, Jr., Stefan Happ, Rob Manning, and Craig Shackleton.....	24
Organizations by Archetype: Spell Casters by Stefan Happ, Ed Healy, John E. Ling, Jr., and Greg Oppedisano	25
I'll Ask Around... by Clinton Boomer, Scott Gable, Tim Hitchcock, and James MacKenzie.....	27
Never Leave Home Without Them by Hal Maclean	28
Luxuries in the Wild by Stefan Happ.....	29
Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep by Stefan Happ, Michael Kortess, and Craig Shackleton.....	30
Twenty Distinct Voices by Louis Agresta, Adam Daigle, Stephen S. Greer, Stefan Happ, Ed Healy, and Rob Manning.....	31

CHAPTER THREE: THE MIDDLE LEVELS

Lord Bedlam Havok's Rules of Survival by Louis Agresta, Clinton J. Boomer, and Greg Oppedisano	33
Ten Unique Mounts by Louis Agresta, Adam Daigle, Phillip Larwood, and Rob Manning.....	37
Mommy? by Adam Daigle, Stefan Happ, Craig Shackleton, and Clinton J Boomer	37
Seriously... What Do We Do about Humanoid Babies? by Rone Barton, Steve Greer, Stefan Happ, and Liz Courts.....	38
Questioning the Gods by Hal Maclean and John E. Ling, Jr.....	39
Know Your Role: Multitasking by Hal Maclean.....	39
How to Stage a Successful Ambush by Jonathan Drain, Stefan Happ, Michael Kortess, Hal Maclean, James MacKenzie, and David Schwartz	40
Paint Me Righteous: Twenty Tattoos to Die For by Clinton Boomer, Elizabeth Courts, Adam Daigle, Stephen S. Greer, Phillip Larwood, Rob Manning, and Craig Shackleton	41
When All Else Fails by Hal Maclean.....	42

CHAPTER FOUR: THE HIGHER LEVELS

Splinter Religions by Lou Agresta, Clinton J Boomer, Dave Hall, Stefan Happ, and Rob Manning	44
Because a Little Meta-Gaming Never Hurt Anyone by Lou Agresta, Clinton J. Boomer, and Greg Oppedisano	46
Off Into the Sunset: Retiring Productively by Rone Barton, Clinton J. Boomer, Elizabeth Courts, Ashavan Doyon, Stefan Happ, and John E. Ling, Jr.	46

CREDITS

Project Manager: Greg Oppedisano
Project Developers: Rone Barton, Adam Daigle,
and Steve Greer
Writers: Lou Agresta, Rone Barton, Clinton Boomer, Russell
Brown, Liz Courts, Adam Daigle, Ashavan Doyon, Jonathan
Drain, Scott Gable, Tom Ganz, Stephen Greer, Dave Hall,
Stefan Happ, Ed Healy, Tim Hitchcock, Michael Kortess, Phil
Larwood, John Ling, Hal Maclean, James MacKenzie, Rob
Manning, Greg Oppedisano, Edward Reed, Dave Schwarz,
Craig Shackleton, Willie Walsh
Editor: Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel
Art Director and Graphic Designer: jim pinto
Cover Artist: Scott Purdy
Interior Artist: William McAusland
Publisher: Joseph Goodman

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INTRODUCTION

The job of the role-player seems simple at first glance: you roll dice, make characters, shop, defeat evil, loot, and level up. Have fun and repeat. If you ask gamers what makes for a great game, their replies return as varied as snowflakes. Everyone has an individual style of play and personal preferences, but in general, no one tops his or her list with rolling dice, shopping, or looting. The ingredients of a great game lay beyond the basics of game design. Take the advice of Lord Bedlam Havok himself...

Chapter One: Creating Memorable Characters

Lord Bedlam Havok Says:

"When creating your character, choose an ethical system that can justify nearly any fit of temper, greed, cowardice, or vindictiveness, for example, Chaotic Violent..." — The Protocols, Advanced Protocol #10

Chapter Two: The Early Levels (Starting a Campaign)

Lord Bedlam Havok Says:

"You've more to fear from your comrades, especially incompetent comrades, than from any dungeon — unless you're in charge. Thus, sow the seeds of fear early..." — The Protocols, Advanced Protocol #11

Chapter Three: The Middle Levels (Playing the Campaign)

Lord Bedlam Havok Says:

"Sit next to the players running evil characters — they will be more likely to scheme with you and not against you..." — The Protocols, Advanced Protocol #12

Chapter Four: The Higher Levels (Wrapping Up the Campaign)

Lord Bedlam Havok Says:

"My Golden Rule — they say there is no way to 'win' a role-playing game. While this may technically be true, there is most certainly a way to lose: dying a chump's death. If you've got to go, go out with a bang — and try to take the rest of the party with you, because there's no glory in showing up to Valhalla without your buddies..."

— The Protocols, Advanced Protocol #13

The best games have invested players who bring good ideas to the table. This is where *PC Pearls* might handily assist you — by inspiring players to make the best characters, to assert their creativity, to make their mark on the game world and tell the best stories. Talented players help the Game Master create the best games by constantly providing input, adding color, taking risks, and actively playing in the communal sandbox that is the group constructed, shared narrative world of role-playing games. *PC Pearls* will inspire players to immerse themselves in the game, making for the most engaging, most enjoyable, most exciting time. ♦

PC PEARLS

If you enjoy the contents of *GM Gems* or *PC Pearls*, please tell us on the Goodman Games forums at www.goodmangames.com, or drop the authors a message at www.werecabbages.com.

Happy gaming!

This is a systems-neutral sourcebook. It is designed to be used with any role playing game you choose, in any edition. Most role playing games share certain conventions, such as attack rolls, saving throws (or their equivalent), and magical spells. We make reference to these generic terms where it helps to clarify a point, but you should feel free to apply them to the game of your choice.



CHAPTER ONE: CREATING MEMORABLE CHARACTERS

CHARACTER QUESTIONNAIRE

For both new and jaded role-players, coming up with a character's background can sometimes be a tedious process, often short-changed for the sake of brevity and getting to the dice rolling quickly. These questions will quickly spark your imagination, and help to make your character much more than just a sheet of paper.

LIFE, DEATH, AND BEYOND

1. Who were your parents?
 - a. Are they still alive? If not, why?
 - b. What is your relationship with your parents?
2. Do you have any reviled or celebrated ancestors?
 - a. Who were they?
 - b. How do most others feel about them?
 - c. Do others treat you differently once they find out?
3. Do you have any siblings?
 - a. Are they still alive? If not, why?
 - b. Are you still friendly with your siblings?
 - c. Do they still live with your parents?
4. What was your childhood like?
 - a. Did you have a best friend? Are you still in touch?
 - b. Did you have a rival? Are you still rivals?
 - c. Did you have a role model? Describe him or her.
 - d. Did you witness or remember an event that was historically important? What was it?
5. Were you wealthy or poor growing up?
 - a. Did your family's fortunes change? If so, why?
6. Can you read and write? If not, why?
7. Have you ever been married or coupled with a significant other?
 - a. Are you still together? If not, why?
 - b. Do you have any children together? Have you adopted any children?
 - c. How do you feel about your significant other's family?
8. Did you practice any trades before becoming an adventurer?
 - a. Why did you change careers?
9. Who trained you in your current skills?
 - a. How do you feel about this person or the organization he or she represents?
10. Do you have any close friends?
 - a. Why are they your friends?
 - b. What would you do for your friends?
11. Do you have any bitter enemies?
 - a. What caused this person or persons to become your enemy?
 - b. Would you kill your enemy?
12. What are your goals and dreams in life?
 - a. Why do you have these goals?
 - b. How do you plan to attain these dreams?
 - c. How does adventuring fit into those goals and dreams?
13. Do you have any retirement plans?
 - a. Do you have a will? If not, why?
 - b. Who would your possessions and wealth go to if you should meet an untimely end?

14. How do you feel about killing?
 - a. What would drive your character to kill, and why?
15. How do you feel about death?
 - a. Do you believe in the afterlife? Describe your beliefs.

RELIGION

1. What are your moral or religious beliefs?
 - a. How far would you go to defend these beliefs?
 - b. Who or what taught you these beliefs?
2. If opposing religions exist, how do you feel about them?
 - a. Do you get along with other members of your church or belief system?
 - b. Do you practice a form of religion that is considered heretical?

FOR THE GM

These many questions might be too much for some new players, especially children, to fill out. Instead, you might ask them to answer just ten or as few as five. The answers to even a few of these questions can really help flesh out a character.

Freely expand these questions to suit your campaign setting. If there was a recent historical event, such as a large-scale war, you might ask your players how their characters feel about the event, if they were involved, or if they lost a loved one because of it.

PERSONALITY

1. What are your personality traits and personal habits?
 - a. How do others react to them?
2. Do you have any distinctive physical traits?
 - a. Scars or tattoos? How did you acquire them?
 - b. How do people react to them?
3. Do you get along with other people?
 - a. If not, why?
 - b. Do others consider you trustworthy?
4. How do you treat other people?
 - a. How do you handle their quirks and personalities?
 - b. What personalities irritate you the most?
5. Do you have a daily routine? How do you react to its interruption?
6. Do you have any mental quirks or illnesses, such as phobias or obsessions?
 - a. How do others react to them?
 - b. Where do they stem from? ♦



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Names matter. Whether they are for a child, a business, or even an adventuring party. Many cultures believe names possess their own special kind of magic, shrouding them in taboos and elaborate rituals to safeguard their use. In their own enigmatic ways, the shamans and tribal chiefs who lead these societies understand that a name is part of a person, perhaps as integral as a hand or foot. They set a tone, sending a message to the rest of the world.

Throughout history, folklore, and fiction, the most celebrated and infamous groups have taken on a separate reality. With their own names, their own identities, these organizations evolved and took shape. Sports teams already recognize this very primal aspect of human nature. Names give groups life.

NAMING NAMES

Potential sources for names abound, filling our imaginations like stars in the night sky. Yet, even in the firmament above, some stars shine brighter than others. Outlined below are six of the most common sources of inspiration drawn upon when naming adventuring parties.

Remember, a party's name ought to reflect its members' highest aspirations and most fundamental values. When choosing a name, give some thought to the sorts of themes you hope to explore in the campaign, and to the types of adventures in which you are most interested. Do you want to get rich? Then perhaps a name like the Gluehands — implying that valuables shall never leave your grasp without a struggle — might fit. Are you intent upon defending the weak from a hostile world? Maybe a name like the Bladewalls sends the right message.

Affiliation: You use your party's name to demonstrate or at least suggest a connection to a more powerful and well-known organization, such as a church, a merchant league, an order of wizards, or a similarly influential group. Since powerful groups tend to have powerful enemies, this approach puts you at risk, especially at lower levels. However, if you actually do manage to strike up some kind of relationship with the group, perhaps becoming one of its strike forces, you gain the ability to draw upon its formidable resources for your own purposes.

Names of this type rely heavily upon the cooperation of your GM and his willingness to shape the campaign around the relationship. Since affiliation usually ends up as a two way street, often requiring you to go on missions or deal with problems arising from your connection to the organization, most GMs readily see the appeal. A campaign set in a city modeled upon early Constantinople, where political factions organized around support of various chariot teams, might spawn a group calling itself the Thunder of the Red Banner, a hit squad for the red team. On the other hand, a group working as troubleshooters for a merchant league called the Iron Throne might take to calling themselves the Ironclads.

Animals and Things: In this, perhaps the most common approach, you associate your name with a living creature, a natural phenomenon, or an object. Usually you hope to imply a link with one of the virtues of the namesake, a shared quality such as lethality or resilience. Unless someone in the campaign world reveres, or loathes, the namesake

of your group and tries to punish you for your blasphemy, this approach seldom incurs much of a penalty. However, it also rarely draws many advantages to your group either. The key to using this approach revolves around deciding what sort of image you wish to convey, and then finding a suitable candidate to make the link. For instance, boars have a reputation for their ferocity; so if you wanted your group identified by aggressiveness and combativeness, take a moniker like the Band of the Boar. On the other hand, if you wanted to send a message of deadly grace, a name like the Silk Sabers or the Diamond Dragonflies might seem more appropriate.

Location: You use your party's name to show support and affection for a particular place or time. Groups adopting this approach often base names upon their hometowns or the area in which they devote much of their adventuring time. This approach gives you the advantage of creating a sense of kinship with others who share your attachment to the area you have chosen. Conversely, taking a name of this type makes you a dangerous obstacle for those who hate the area, and it presents your enemies with a wonderful target when looking for a way to hurt you.

Since, as mentioned above, this approach gives GMs many opportunities for plot development, most welcome these sorts of names. With your GMs consent, it also gives you an opportunity to take on a role as a campaign designer by creating interesting game elements focused on the area for which you feel such regard. This includes things like cherished NPCs (relatives, childhood friends), community events (the annual monster parade) and special places (the old fishing hole, lookout rock). A group spending most of its time probing into a dangerous wetland might dub themselves the Exiles of Everswamp. On the other hand, a group intent upon protecting their hometown from all threats might take a name like the Guardians of Graydale.

Goal: You associate your name with a noteworthy objective you hope to achieve. This includes things like political change, the discovery of a lost treasure, the eradication of a particularly feared monster, or just about anything else that comes to mind. Names of this type tend to throw you into the maelstrom of your campaign world's politics right from the beginning. By taking such a public stand on an important issue, you immediately discover both enemies and allies.

This approach relies heavily upon the cooperation of your GM. However, since it rapidly brings the campaign into focus and makes it very easy to create and link adventures together, most welcome names of this type. A group intent upon overthrowing a cabal of tyrannous undead might call themselves the Gravediggers. While a group devoted to restoring an exiled royal family might call themselves the Crownguard.

Patron: This approach incorporates the name of person into that of your group, either usually to show support or to indicate that you enjoy some sort of relationship with a powerful backer. A well-known example from popular culture is *Charlie's Angels*, a team of beautiful women working for a mysterious and hidden figure of mystery.



This approach only requires the cooperation of your GM if you hope to derive some benefit from it. Simply calling yourselves the True Blades of Princess Althea in no way requires that she actually use her influence on your behalf. Often, your GM might demand that you earn the trust of your patron, requiring you to prove your worth over a number of adventures. Sometimes, you might take a name purely as a tribute, not expecting any sort of benefit from it. For instance, you could call yourselves the Fist of the Prophet, even though you enjoy no actual relationship with the faith or church the prophet founded.

Signature: Recognizing that the members of your party enjoy some sort of identifying trait, you take a name that celebrates this shared connection. Names of this type often note a common race, gender, national origin, and similar things. Alternately, it could represent some distinguishing characteristic such as a tattoo, badge, or item of clothing.

Names of this type seldom need much GM involvement since they largely depend upon your own conception of your character. A party of albinos might sweep across the land gaining fame as the Frostguard. An early encounter with lycanthropes, and a hastily improvised modification of a helm, could lead to a party famed as the Silverspikes. ♦

FIFTY FAMILY UNITS

Characters are not just products of where they were born. Perhaps more important is who raised you, and how. Below is a selection of parents and families for your next fifty characters. Simply find one you like, and change the name.

1. Callisto's talent for mapmaking and calligraphy won him a prestigious apprenticeship with a master cartographer. However, after his mother's death, he had to give up his apprenticeship to care for his six younger siblings and drunkard father.
2. Cleaning the ferret cages every morning was always a chore for Dimmon, but with the help of his brother he used the ferrets to torment his boorish stepsister and stepbrother.
3. Breren worked in the sawmill for four years without knowing the foreman was his father.
4. Calluna would defend her siblings to the death, even though they were sired by a different father. Her own father — a dangerous man — was seldom unmentioned in the home.
5. Gerwin spent little time with his diplomat father and socialite mother. Instead, he took after his halfling nannies.
6. Holissa frequently came home scraped and bruised from fighting the neighborhood bullies in defense of her father (and his unusual penchant for necromancy).
7. Markel's orc mother tutored him in the skills of the woodsfolk, while his well-connected human father introduced him to metropolitan high society.
8. Urson's father runs a shabby burlesque theater in the docks district. His sister tends bar, serving reeking platters of questionable meat to drunks and rogues.
9. Pinare's aunt never realized the beauty her niece would become. At fourteen, Pinare ran away from the farm, but her aunt forgave her when Pinare charmed the Guilder boys into bringing in the harvest that fall.
10. Sharnor's fanatical parents never tolerated any deviance from scripture. Predictably, he rebelled and ran away at an early age. Always the charismatic scoundrel, he left the village with half its teenagers in tow.
11. Ilissa's beloved Aunt Jolea sewed the gown for her wedding, but when Uncle Bori got drunk and propositioned her at the reception, Ilissa fled the village, leaving scandal in her wake.
12. Linbert's schoolmaster was a firm believer in harsh discipline, but it was nowhere near as cruel as the treatment Linbert received at home.
13. Marnar's family apprenticed him to an undertaker, a distant cousin by marriage. Marnar spent the nights of his first year watching over corpses, forced to use caskets as makeshift beds.
14. Pino's father abused his family without remorse. Mother could never stand up to him, so Pino staked her father to his bed with a pitchfork and fled the village forever.
15. Master Kroff was hard to look at. His burnt visage was terrible to behold, but he was the kindest of all attendants at the Black Rock Orphanage.
16. The son of a local priest who always faltered during his sermons, Lomgrin grew up fighting the bullies that mocked his father's stuttering.
17. Hawstings' father was a gifted storyteller whose tales of heroes and monsters entertained the local children. His father's heart was broken, though, when Hawsting set off to live those same tales.
18. Abech, an aging shaman, gave his grandson Uboge of the clan Heresti a sacred task: spare the life of every tenth enemy, so that their people's prophecy might come true.
19. Grz'lk'ah's hive is deep in a volcanically active pit. Though he misses the warmth of home, the telepathic soothing of his thousand siblings comforts him.
20. Horbal's father, Bekk, had three wives: Majmar, Loralle and Gerta. Bekk also had three co-husbands, Olan, Rabban and Cann. His mother was Loralle, but he loved Majmar more. Bekk was a fine father, while Olan and Rabban were more like brothers. Cann, he does not know all that well. He often wonders how it is possible that he is an only child.
21. When Wislaw hears the sweet tune of a hammer working iron upon an anvil, he drifts back to Kopina Village and Uncle Tobiasz's workshop ... and how it was before the bandits came and changed everything.
22. Aristides never suspected that his father, Oulixeus, lied about winning the city lottery. Sent to pick up the winnings, he fell into the hands of slavers who knew his father by name.

23. Braezel, the son of a prosperous baron, never wondered where his next meal was coming from. After falling in love with the daughter of a servant, he forsook his life of luxury for one of asceticism.
24. Neena took over the operations of her father's copper mine after he lost his leg and left hand, but she was not jaded enough to keep it from slipping into her uncle's insidious hands.
25. Raised by a single mother in a house with six sisters, Garendell learned what type of songs and stories interested the ladies, and used that to further his career as a minstrel.
26. Never knowing his father, Cleston ranged from town to town on the Bleak Peninsula searching for the man who abandoned his mother to a life of poverty and crime.
27. Minda's parents never understood her bizarre powers and scolded her ceaselessly. Leaving that puritanical town was the best thing a sorcerer could do.
28. A youth spent hauling in the seine nets gave Kian muscles of iron. When he was abducted by the Jagtooth pirates they sold him to an arena, but it was those same muscles, and his skill with a net, that won his freedom.
29. Bored with being the third son in a dying noble house, Nellus left the big city, forsook his legacy and struck out to win his own name in the world.
30. To win the respect of his father and the village elders, Vikrym left his people to become a skald in the lands of the unclean. One day he will return to unite his people under one banner and lead cleanse the lands of the wicked.
31. When people think she is sleeping, Imani's spirit joins those of her people in her distant homeland. She meets nightly with her parents, Ayanna and Ashur, entwining their love with her own.
32. Phyzar's parents are famous retired adventurers who have saved every kingdom from certain doom at least twice. For years, Phyzar tried to escape the shadow of their greatness. Now he is not shy about using their names to hustle free drinks and woo a tavern wench or two.
33. Temra's bloodline carries the curse of insanity, and most of her family members are confined to asylums or worse. She escaped their fate but searches the world for a cure, sending back gold in the hopes of improving their conditions.
34. Peasants on a poor lord's manor, Joaram was born into his family's grinding poverty. Embarrassed by his uncouth brothers and toothless parents, he seldom sends home gold, for fear that they might come to join him.
35. A drunken slattern raised poor Qur, leaving him tied up with the dogs while she serviced her johns or binged on wine and opium. One day, he chewed through his ropes and ran off. His short stint as a street tough, and subsequent arrest, led to a pardon when he agreed to join the city guard. Though he remains illiterate, the guard gave him solid military training.
36. The townsfolk of Kronisboro expected the Baron's firstborn son, Sterim, to one day inherit his father's throne. This all changed when his father took a younger mistress as his queen. Sterim, unable to suppress his affection for his new stepmother, fled the city, forever scorned. Now that his father has died and his stepmother is queen, who will rule the barony?
37. The daughter of the royal washerwoman, Yvella grew up longing for more from life. One night, she found a key to the prince's bedroom in the wash and stole it. Later that day, she entered his chamber and made off with the prince's jeweled crown. When the royal guards found the key hidden in a laundry basket, they accused her mother of the theft and had her executed.
38. On the long journey out of Agaros, a harsh winter storm stranded the caravan carrying Wynton's family. The family survived by cannibalism, and when the storm broke there was one fewer pack wagon headed east. Their family, and others members of the caravan, do their best to keep this secret well hidden.
39. The son of a pig keeper, Bokao used to find strange things ground into the feed. Unbeknownst to him, his father was paid by a local crime lord to dispose of victims' bodies by mixing them with the slop. Later he would come to learn that it was this same grisly practice that put him through an expensive and prestigious academy.
40. Brought to the Priory of Saint Ganang as a very young boy, Yuzang knows no family but the monks who raised him and taught him to read, write, and perform his daily duties. Their memory is an inspiration, but it is hard to live up to their pious example outside the monastery walls.
41. Phenairis' father died at war. His mother took up with the next warlord, abandoning her son to the mob of beggars and orphans that followed the troop from one battle to the next.
42. Jalli carries five candles representing members of his family: two white for the deceased, and three red for the living. He lights them for a few minutes every night, and speaks to his family while the candles burn.
43. Raised by her aunt, a wretched harridan with breath and a visage to match, Olana knew only hard work, misery, and pain. No matter how high she climbs in life, she will never forget the lessons learned at the end of her aunt's barbed whip.

44. Born to a lovesick peasant maid and a foolish nobleman, Fasco has always been dismissed by his father's family as "the mistake." Only the youngest of the lord's daughters acknowledges his existence with generosity and kindness.
45. Roodin's father was a famous sea captain who fought battles against pirates and sea monsters. His father's death on the high seas broke his mother's heart. Today she is but a ghost of the woman she once was.
46. Emiq's grandfather was a murderer and psychopath, and his uncle a fearsome necromancer. The family's tainted bloodline took Emiq's father and brothers. Is Emiq next?

Will he too hear voices urging him on to wicked deeds with the promise of power? Only time will tell.

47. While Zem knows her parents, they are no more important to than any other member of her tribe. Raised by several elders, she learned the secrets of her trade from a man she came to think of as her true father.

48. Raised on a commune, Gilmea was never quite able to determine which of the elders were responsible for her birth. Life was easy with everyone working together to complete the tiny village's tasks, and though she mastered many skills under the tutelage of so many parents, out in the world she found alienation for having more than one mother and father.

49. Despite the superstitions of the crew, Dhundro's father took his pregnant wife onto the ship. The poor woman died in childbirth, leaving Dhundro to be raised on the high seas. Years later, the crew begged for their first mate to stay with the ship and forsake the life of an adventurer, but the land called to him.

50. Stolen by mischievous fey in the night and replaced with one of their own, Glissy grew up in the airy and supernatural

realm of the faeries. Her proxy grew up in the common drudgery of a village with human parents, while Glissy's sprite parents taught her to draw magic from the natural world, sip nectar from flowers, and speak with the beasts of the meadow. ♦

EPISODE I

In which Bedlam Havok faces the necessity of limitations.

"...And there we stood in shock, my party and I, the extra dimensional beast finally revealed in all its horrid glory. The thing was a full fifteen feet taller than we'd expected, and its purported allergy to silver just an old-wives tale."

"Goodness! Was the creature's power worse than you had feared, Lord Havok?"

"Worse? Ye gods and trolls, that's a bit of an understatement! You idiot, we were doomed! And so I learned that..."

"When faced with the overwhelming force of an angry deity, demon prince, or extra dimensional godling, your best course of action is to take one step back from the rest of your party and shout 'Have them!'"

— The Protocols, Party Member Protocol #7

GO, TEAM THEME, GO! PRE-GENERATED THEMED ADVENTURING PARTIES

Honestly, how is it that a group of distrustful, misfit adventurers from every conceivable walk of life miraculously bond together as BFFs over a cup of sour ale, worn cards, and salty bread, in a dimly lit tavern to equitably share their exploits and treasure? Let us be realistic, the odds of that occurring particularly often should be abysmally low.

Below we present nineteen unique and classic preassembled companies, each composed of erudite explorers, daring heroes, and cunning rapsallions. They allow some or all of your party to generate bonded back-stories:

COMMUNITY LEADERS

Your village might not be much, but it has everything your people need to get by. When people have trouble, they know who can help them; and when real trouble looms, they call together an impromptu council of the most important contributors.

Player Options: Doctor/Midwife, Retired Veteran/Militia Leader, Local Priest/Wise Man, Trapper/Hunter, Merchant/Trader, Miller/Smith/Cartwright, etc.

DESERTERS

Having experienced the absurdity of war firsthand and suffering from a cruel and oppressing general, you finally decided to run away from the battlefield. Not because you and your friends are afraid of a fight, but because you have your own wars that still need to be fought, and which make more sense to you than killing people because some politicians couldn't find a compromise over a childish subject. It was time to leave the front, even if you had to steal yourselves away.

Player Options: Scout, Fighter, Duelist, War Mage, Spy, Medical Officer, Special Unit Member, Soldier.

DIPLOMATIC ENTOURAGE

Many a young noble son or daughter is sent afar to take stock of a rival court, or to make proclamations of peace or war with a neighboring kingdom. A staunch guard is a necessity in hostile lands such as these. Your master, Lord Vashor Haans, bids you escort his youthful heir safely through the wilds, against the advice of his council. War is brewing, the seasons are shifting unnaturally, and foul, unknown beasts are afoot.

Player Options: Expert Guide, Noble Born, Servant, Bodyguard, Military Commander, Soldier, Cultural Expert/Translator, Religious Advisor, Arcane Advisor.

DWARVEN BATISTA CREW NO. 7

Operating as a well-oiled machine, your expertly trained ballista crew finds itself out of work when a long-fought conflict inconveniently ends. Is there anything sadder than a ballista crew without a ballista?

Player Options: Officer, Loader, Gunner, Soldier, Medic, Carpenter.

EXILES

Driven from your homeland, your companions are all that remain of a once-mighty noble house. Your king has fallen, his partisans scattered before the bloodthirsty mercenary armies of the usurper. Once you fought to strike down the tyrant, but your king's final wish was that the realm should know peace, even if it must be under the vile heel of his foe. Forced to make new lives for yourselves, you have nothing left but your honor. While you long to return to your homeland, to free it from the foul dictator, you must remain true to your oath. The old regime's supporters must accept exile, lest their land be plunged once more into civil war.

Player Options: Fallen Noblemen, Quixotic Knights, Loyal Servants, Scheming Courtiers, Steadfast Men-at-Arms, Magical Advisors, and Cunning Pretenders.

FREAK-SHOW ARTISTS

When brigands attacked your wagon train, you and your fellow performers escaped from the unscrupulous wizard who enslaved the lot of you due to your unique physical abilities and strange physical characteristics. Now you find yourselves stranded in the wilderness, and must band together to make your way to safety, or even fortune.

Player Options: Strongman, Midget, Fortuneteller, Bearded Lady, Fish-Boy, Circus Geek.

GREW UP TOGETHER

You grew up together in the same small town. You stole the same apples from the same orchards, hid from the same farmers, and chased the same lads and lasses at puberty. Always watching each other's backs and fending off the local bullies, you played knights or highwaymen, holy avengers and mages amidst the fields and back alleys of your village. Sometimes you even picked up a thing or two from the resident healer or a retired veteran of the long bygone wars. Then you got the bright idea to dodge the drudging servitude of trade apprenticeship and seek your fortune together.

Player Options: Scout, Fighter, Cleric, Sorcerer, Bard, Peasant Farmer, Shopkeeper.

HOLY WARRIORS

The clarion call has been sounded; the stain of necromancy must be rooted out. Take up arms for the good of the church and repel the humanoid infidel; drive the invader from your lands. You are holy warriors taking up the cause of Mother Church to right the wrongs and drag the vilest evil of the realm into the searing light of Good!

Player Options: Paladin, Crusader, Man-at Arms, Healer, Visionary, Martyr, Peasant, Cleric.

JUNKYARD DOGS

All the junk people toss out has to go somewhere, and a lot of them will pay you and your crew to haul it away. Better yet, many will then pay you handsomely for your other garbage, as some of it is, in their eyes, the missing element in a collection or a bit of important artistry. Certain rough types figure they

can take whatever they want from your dump, since it is all just garbage, and often enough, you have to correct that mistaken belief with force. Of course, there is no reason not to give whatever you cannot sell to the odd beggar. It is a dirty, dangerous job, but it pays, and someone has to do it. Though few recognize you and your team, your knowledge of the refuse of others gives you keen insight into your city's more interesting characters; enough inside information to gain leverage over or blackmail criminals and politicians, or even to assist those who hide their need for help.

Player Options: Guard, Dog-trainer, Bookkeeper, Scrounger, Craftsman.

LORDS OF THE GUTTER

Hailing from the low quarter, you are men of hidden depths. The 'ancient' traditions of your fathers tell you never to steal from those less fortunate than yourself, never talk to the authorities, and never turn on your friends. When you learned of treasure waiting to be found, you gathered a few of your rougher friends and set out, confident that nobody is tougher than those who have spent their lives at the bottom of the heap.

Player Options: Thuggish Rogue, Roguish Thug, Common Criminal, Criminal Commoner, Hardened Wench, and Barroom Philosopher.

MERCHANT CARAVAN

You travel from place to place buying and selling. Your established routes may be your bread and butter, but it is always worth exploring new trade options. Sometimes it is hard having no home but the road, but more than once, you have been glad to be able to move on quickly. Cities rise and fall, but the road is always there.

Player Options: Merchant, Animal Handler, Entertainer, Scout, Guard, Cook, Healer.

PRISONERS

Hardened by your time together in prison, united by your desire to survive, thrust together by your escape from the confines of the deep dark hell, you take an oath to amass wealth and power by whatever means necessary to ensure you never return to jail.

Player Options: Brawler, Visionary, Cutpurse, Innocent, Insane, Accountant, Crimelord, Punk, Murderer, Debtor, Political Exile.

REVOLUTIONARIES

The king is not dead, but he should be. Evil overlords, despotic necromancers, militaristic juntas, theocratic oligarchies, all have one thing in common — they need to be overthrown. The suffering of the people must be mitigated. A call has gone out to all people of good conscience and stout heart. Will you answer it?

Player Options: Infiltrator, Assassin, Recruiter, Guerrilla, Propagandist, Holy Martyr.



SACRIFICIAL LAMBS

Yours was one of the numbers drawn in the lottery, and now, for the town's safety, you and a small group of others are lowered into the dungeon to feed the depraved horrors lurking below. When you arrive in the darkened pit, you discover that a mysterious benefactor has left you a cache of weapons and armor to give you a fighting chance!

Player Options: Any.

SEWER WORKERS

You and your associates work hard for the comfort of the citizens in the city above, keeping the municipal sewer lines free of debris and rats. Despite the filth you trudge through each day, it is the strange, unmapped tunnels and mysterious chambers your team regularly uncovers that fill each of you with enthusiasm. Below the bustle of civilization lays a world of exploration and reward for the taking.

Player Options: Dungeon Delver, Thief, Worker, Fighter.

SHIP. CAPTAIN. CREW

The wind-worn trade-vessel the *Storm Torn Solace* is neither beautiful nor proud, but it is the wandering home to a collection of hardworking, adventure-minded crewmen from across the world. Well-known in scurvy ports dotted along the oceans, this infamous smuggler's ship takes on a few passengers here and there to help pay the bills and keep her afloat. Of course, someone aboard the ship might have a dark secret or two.

Player Options: Captain, First Mate, First Hand, Deckhand, Shipwright/Engineer, Medical Officer, Navigator/Cartographer, Passengers, Stowaway.

SLAVE'S ESCAPE

The great Bloodletting Empire marches across the land, crushing beneath iron-shod boots all the cities and countries of the world. Slaves are shipped overseas and marched over mountains to toil for the glory of the Empire's reign. All are set to grueling, pitiless work as best suits the mad whims of the Deathless Emperor Kaohl and his Council of Nightmare Ascendant. However, in the fields and the pits, some have begun to prepare for escape and revolution, forging bonds stronger than any chains.

Player Options: Exotic Foreigners, Gladiators, Pleasure-Slaves, Sympathetic Soldiers, Religious Rebels, Former Nobility.

TRADE SQUARE APPRENTICES

The trade square is the heart of the economy in every village and booming metropolis. The skilled middleclass toils under the term of indenture — promising to trade their hard labor for well-kept guild secrets. A tight knit community within a community, you and your friends have longed for brighter, more heroic futures.

Player Options: Blacksmith, Cooper, Tinsmith, Weaver, Armorer, Carpenter, Mason, Clerk, Porter, Messenger, Laborer, Pickpocket, Scribe.

WHARF RATS

Trade flows more easily over water than by land, and the heart of most nations' commerce beats strongest at their bustling ports of call. You and your friends, though finding different ways to eke out an existence on the docks, band together to form an adventuring group when an enticing opportunity arises.

Player Options: Sailor, Fisherman, Sail maker, Shipwright, Pirate, Thief, Prostitute, Merchant, Sailor, Officer, Cartographer, Monger. ♦

COLORFUL PLACES OF ORIGIN

Every hero starts out small, and although the place he comes from can be humble or not so humble, it certainly plays a large part in the person he eventually becomes. Whether a sprawling metropolis, humble village, or otherworldly locale, heroes come from somewhere. Provided below are some interesting places of origin you may use to provide your character with some roots and an explanation for why he behaves the way he does.

Ashdonnig Brewery: When the dragon Ashdonnig outgrew its network of caves, an eclectic group of dwarves, gnomes, and halflings moved in. You grew up in these complex caves, which are fed by a clear spring and heated by underground vents, making them the perfect place for brewing the ales and beers your town is famous for.

Aurumrun: This seasonal logging and gold rush town in the cold north was where your mother, an irresponsible camp follower, birthed you and left you with your father, a local logger. He treated you little better than a hireling once you were old enough to do any kind of work. The town's rough and hard-working spirit is a part of you.

Balmorhall: You grew up a servant in an ancient, stone mansion looming over thousands of acres of moors. Gothic fetishes and gargoyles festooned the somber, brooding structure. Locals feared the manor, claiming its attics and sub-levels creaked and bulged with necromantic secrets. Shifting shadows and whispered promises haunt your childhood memories.

Bay of Many Sorrows: You were born on the merchantman "Grimmur" while anchored in the Bay of Many Sorrows on the Isle of Farrow. The crew spent the day fighting the tides and keeping the ship from getting hung up on shallow reefs. Your birth heralded the change of tides, and you have been considered good luck ever since.

Beggar's Town: Back alleys, sewer grates, warm doorways and dumpsters... That's Beggar's Town. And it was your town until the corrupt, dung-hill whoresons calling the shots forced you to flee the only life you had ever known.

Boathome: A tributary of a much larger river has been the depository of storm-tossed boats mired in the strangling weeds of this backwater. A nomadic clan adopted the wrecks, lashing them together and building walkways between them. With each new wreck that washes in, the shantytown grows. It doesn't look like much, but for you it is home.

Child of the Hoarridan: Upon the frosty plains of the Hoarridan, dozens of extended clans gather annually in the



Great Lodge to wait out the month of Deepest Winter. In the year of your birth, the wind was particularly bitter and the number of children born during that time was twice what the lands could support.

Clifftown: This fishing village was built into a series of steep cliffs along the beach after years of raids grew too burdensome for your people to bear. The villagers beach their boats below, but use rope ladders to climb up to their homes. Here they are safe from aquatic predators that lack the ability to climb and pirates that are easy to repel from the high vantage point.

Deepwood: Deep in the Black Woods, where most sane people dare not travel, a small community of survivalists gathered long ago to build a community far from civilization and the nonsense that goes on there. Cloistered in their remote tree houses, your people normally shun "civilized" folk, but occasionally trade with interesting folk or welcome travelers with similar worldviews.

Devil's Parlor: Located in the roughest section of the big city, the Devil's Parlor is home to vagabonds who have lost their way, along with the people that exploit them. Your experiences on those tough streets are a big part of why you can never trust anyone or anything but yourself.

Duerenior: At one time, this subterranean community was a highly productive mine. When its ore deposits were depleted, rather than leave the area to find a new mine, a few families stayed behind and turned it into a thriving town. An underground lake brought mushroom farming and eel fishing to the area. An aqueduct was built from the underground lake to supply water to the plainsmen nearby. After years of gratitude, gifts, and aid from their warriors, the plainsmen have grown bitter over their dependency on Duerenior's water.

Elthealean Menhirs: You have no memories of early childhood. In your first memory, you awoke naked and shivering, lying amidst a towering circle of standing stones on a wilderland hilltop. Now, you occasionally dream you knelt on that hilltop, weeping, surrounded not by stones, but by adults with caring eyes who said, "For you... live... and remember."

Fendithoril Vale: Dryads raised you in the silver forests and star-lit glens of the fey's river valley. One evening, long ago, you wandered into the surrounding lands to see the farms and villages of the songless folk who look like you. You have never since been able to find your way back.

Fungstone: No one knows where these giant fungi came from, or when, how, and why they became petrified. Your ancestors dug caves into them over 450 years ago. Your homeland is made up of over a dozen of these ancient and cyclopean stone-fungi in the valley, connected via bridges and ropes.

Longwall: The long, high wall that keeps out the creatures of the wilds is far from the nearest town, so it has become its own. Soldiers' families and the merchants that have moved in to take their money live in settlements along the wall. Many of them overflow the top of the wall, which also acts as a narrow highway between settlements.

Master Slither's Dungeon: This dank slave complex is owned by a powerful naga slaver known only as Master Slither, and is a breeding ground for slaves. When you were still a child, you were sold to a sadistic noble and eventually earned your freedom, but you still remember that horrible dungeon every time you close your eyes.

Recinia: This sweltering region of rice paddies and coconut groves is inhabited by large family groups that work the land from clusters of thatch-roofed huts. The huts are concentrated on the few areas of dry land scattered about the area. Jaguars and nearby cannibal tribes pose a constant threat. You and your Recinian kin have been taught from an early age to defend your lands with slings and spears, and to be vigilant for signs of danger.

Redcave: A labyrinthine assortment of dwellings was once part of the Red Minotaur's lair, which was cleaned out by adventurers hundreds of years ago. The adventurers settled in the area and taught their progenitors to never utter the Red Minotaur's true name within Redcave. It said that if the minotaur's true name was uttered there, the creature would return to reclaim its lair.

Shanni Jyn's Parlor: You grew up in a brothel, and were doted on by all of its lovely ladies. They said you were found on the street as an infant, but you suspect that was a lie. One of working girls was probably your mother, but you have no idea which.

Stagwater: This town of ribald elven vintners is widely held to be a place of sin and vice. Every building uses a combination of suggestive imagery and pictures of grapes and fey creatures in its architecture, and the main fountain in town produces wine instead of water. Perhaps they are to blame for your lascivious and immodest behavior.

Steamtown: A vast plain of pack ice scrapes the shores of your fishing village like a glacier. Below lies a dark, mysterious sea warmed by seabed volcanic activity. Orange radiance rises from the deep, and columns of blue luminosity gleams down through ice above. Within, you've fished for many strange denizens, from pallid rays riding volcanic bubble thermals to leviathan-sized narwhales singing in the depths.

Thaldur: Located just outside one of the most famous dungeons in the world, this bustling community does a brisk trade supplying adventurers with the tools of their trade. Most of the buildings in the town are situated to either side of the road heading towards the dungeon's marble and iron gate. Townsfolk gather to watch people enter the deadly dungeon, yet none bother to wait for their return.

The Temple of Askeasis: Raised by monks in the Valley of Indus, you spent your youth searching for harmony and enlightenment before setting off to experience the world outside the Jungles of Sahaptia.

Templeton: The sleepy little town of Templeton has always harbored its share of superstitions, but when you became the target of a witch-hunt, and the town elders began building a gallows in the village square, you fled. Perhaps one day you'll return to set things right and end the horrible cycle of prejudice and fear.

Thune: The remote walled town of Thune is home to the most prestigious school of necromancy in the land. As the child of a wizard's servant, you were raised as much by living corpses and magically bound creatures as by your own parents.

Towerfall: Your small village was built in and around the ruins of an ancient tower long abandoned by the mysterious cult that erected it. A massive storm toppled the upper levels of the tower, giving the town its name. Perhaps because of the indecipherable hieroglyphs carved into most of the ruined tower's surfaces, your people are rich in stories, legends, and superstition.

Vel-Tor: This large town lies on a marsh plain regularly flooded during the spring and autumn rains. Its buildings are built on massive stilts to avoid the mud and water, and are connected by a series of narrow wooden bridges and walkways. Your people love wind chimes, and hang them from their rafters to fill the town with music.

War Caravan: As the Great War raged, many families supported the needs of the troops by traveling with them in small caravans. You, along with many other children, were born in the midst of the conflict and grow up knowing little else, following the armed camps wherever they went, taking in the grim reality of war with your mother's milk.

West Wind Castle: Only children and fools believe your tales that you grew up as a servant in the soaring cloud castle of a storm giant clan. Only children and fools believe your stories of floating flagstones and roc rides. But whenever a thunderstorm rolls in, your pulse quickens, and you remember...

Wildsgate: The frontier keep of Wildsgate, standing at the edge of civilization, beset by savages, and teeming with opportunity, was where you drew your first breath. The Barons of Wildsgate have long needed followers with strong arms and stronger nerves, and so the children there are bred to accommodate them. ♦

TIES THAT BIND

There are a lot of ways to improve your role-playing experience. One is the art of binding your character to your Game Master's world. All too often, characters are faceless reflections of the player's personality that move through the game with little interaction with the GM's world. The player simply goes along with the rest of the party, looting dungeons, slaying monsters, and heading back to town to liquidate his share of the treasure.

The same analogy applies to other genres of gaming. The players ignore or yawn throughout the GM's "color" discussion, waiting for her to drop the hammer on "where the next adventure is." The GM gets frustrated because the players do not seem to appreciate the world she has built for them, and the players just want to "get on with the game," which they equate to action. Action is fun, and is a big part of what draws players to role-playing games, but players can raise the game to the next level by building ties that bind their character to the setting. For those players primarily concerned with maximizing their character's power and capability, they will benefit by taking a few minutes each gaming session to strengthen those ties. This can help your character make better contacts for obtaining knowledge and items, while giving the GM hope that you are not a lost cause when it comes to appreciating the finer points of her finely crafted world.

How can you build ties that bind?

First, do not ignore character background after the game progresses. Use your character's background as a springboard to envision his personality and his outlook on life and the world around him. When encountering new NPCs, a player might ask if there is a chance his character has met them before. Good GMs seize such an opportunity to say, "Yes, you have met this person before." Use such statements to expand on your role-playing experience by embellishing your character's background on the fly.

Jot down NPC names, even faceless shopkeeper names in nameless villages. You can make the encounter an important one, even if the GM has not had time to make it memorable.

Guards at town gates that collect tolls, innkeepers, shopkeepers, beggars, courtesans and tavern wenches are all “color” NPCs that the GM usually does not take the time to give names. Never turn down a chance to make those NPCs come to life. Tell the GM that in your character notes you gave the gate guard the name of Aross. The GM might not realize what you are doing now, but when you return to the town a month later and ask the GM if Aross is around, he’ll understand. When you encounter Aross again, role-play your encounter with the guard your character has met before. Turn the guard into a recurring contact for your character. The GM has no notes on Aross, but based on your questions and interaction, he may be tempted to turn Aross into a more important contact for you, solely because you took the time and care to make a bland encounter important.

Jump on the GM’s background material as personal quests or goals. When the GM narrates background material, such as describing a city or area, or gives out information about the power factions and groups in his world, take notes and determine how your character might use this knowledge or interact with the factions presented. Often, the GM does not really plan to use all the factions he describes or background material he presents as active factors in his game. However, you can take the initiative and actively seek out those factions (such as trying to make contact with the band of thieves that runs the gambling dens down by the docks, or going to the merchant’s tavern to buy drinks for the caravan leaders) and engage your GM’s world actively, rather than passively. You might take the GM by surprise, but if he is worth his salt, he will appreciate your desire to interact with his world, and your unexpected participation in the background interaction of his world may gain your character additional knowledge, contacts, adventure opportunities, and friends.

Wrap up some loose ends from previous adventures. Did you rescue the farmer’s daughter? Did you deliver critical medicine to the remote mountaintop village? Did you clear out a castle of ogres threatening the passes between lands a year ago? The whole adventuring party might not agree to this, but slip the GM some notes, or discuss it between sessions. Let her know your character would like to revisit some of these people and places to make sure that evil undone remains so. GMs appreciate such interest in their world. You didn’t just see that adventure as experience points and treasure to be looted. You saw it as a vital part of your character’s development, and you are playing your character like those people and places are real to him—something he cares about and should not just ignore now that the game has moved on to other areas. Additional adventures, more role-playing opportunities, and a sense of nostalgia might convince other players that following up on those old adventures might be fun and enrich everyone’s gaming experience.



Join an organization, perhaps an unexpected one. Some character classes are expected to be part of an order or guild, but that does not mean your character cannot be part of one too. How about the warrior who joins a merchant’s guild, first as a guard, but then invests some of his hard-earned treasure in caravans and ventures? The rest of the guild is typical soft merchants, but this character stands out as the veteran warrior and tough-as-nails fighter dabbling in business on the side. Surely, the GM will seize on such unusual opportunities with additional adventure ideas, quests, and enemies to fight. Your character gains exposure to new angles of the GM’s world by making unusual or unexpected choices in alliances and faction membership.

Role-playing is great stress relief, it is fun, and it is a worthwhile mental and social activity. Engaging the GM’s world, and making an effort to participate in it will make the game more fun and enjoyable for you and the GM. Novices particularly find it difficult to do more than “hack and slash” for the first few gaming sessions. Shyness and the strangeness of playing an unusual game are understandable reasons for this behavior. However, don’t let this become the *only* behavior in your group. Hacking and slashing is just one dimension of role-playing games. It is a fun dimension, but is ultimately flat. If you bind your character to the GM’s world, you, the player, will feel less like you are playing an invader from 21st-century Earth trapped in a native’s body, and more like your character is truly part of that wonderful world of make-believe that your GM took such great care and time to bring to the table. ♦

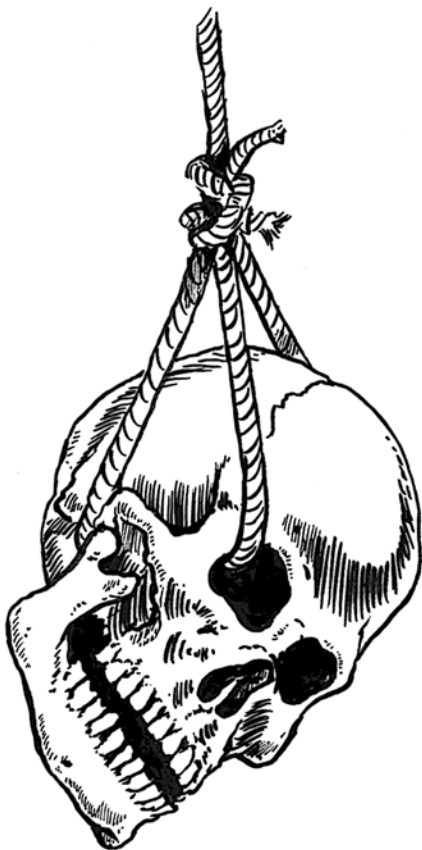
BACKSTORIES

Choosing your characters’ class or role implies sets of known skills. But your backstory is what defines how he came to be, what he is, and drives him to what he will become.

Here are some inspirational samples:

THE AVENGING TEMPLAR

I grew up in an isolated monastery on the fog-shrouded island of Zerika. My vows of peace, poverty, and studious isolation were shattered on a cold morning several years ago when the masked raiders of the Bone Fleet landed on the shores of my life-long home. Father Merikus herded the young acolytes into the cellars, but I was old enough to wield a cudgel. The herald’s call to arms, unheard on Zerika in decades, brought my friends and me to action. The raiders forced the courtyard gates, yet I stood resolute and shoulder-to-shoulder with my unarmored brethren. Ensorcelled by an enemy witch, I fell down, my cudgel clattering off the cobblestones, useless. When I came to, my friends and fellow monks were all dead, their sides pierced like hunted boars. The children in the basement were dead of sinister magic, their faces green and their lips puffed in agonized grimaces.



The treasury looted, the raiders gone, I hurled my weapon against the monastery walls, my raging scream of frustration the first sound to escape my lips in years. I found the hidden fishing boat that Friar Perso took into town to buy salt and spices, and I left the monastery determined to develop the skills that would bring vengeance upon the Bone Fleet and the defilers.

THE DARK URCHIN

I've felt the kick of the boot, the sting of the lash, and the thrill of the chase my whole life. "Street trash," "roach," "lil' dump," and more were the names I answered to then. It was easy; a distracting bump before lifting a purse, a quick strike to the base of the neck in a lightless alley, or a silken rope thrown over a small chimney and a quick climb to the second-story window.

Born with a quick eye, hand and mind, I was supposed to assume my father's role and perform for scraps on stages and plazas in the bright sunshine under the derisive eye of the opulent. I chose a different path, scoring more gold on my first raid than my father made the entire month, even after paying off the watchman and the percentage to the fence.

I left home at the age of twelve to join taskmaster Cleavon and learn the craft of stealth and thuggery. I kept up my physical training there in the warrens under the streets, mostly to gather my own group from the other urchins. Cleavon noticed I bristled under his constant abuse and decided to test me. I found myself in a room with a fresh corpse when the watchmen burst through the door. Murder? I have never drawn a blade other than to jimmy a lock or cut a purse. Now I run.

THE DESPERATE BLADE

Ugly as I was, I knew that I could never amount to anything. My father ran a theater and good looks were required for appearance on stage. Sweeping the sawdust and keeping the limelight up were my destiny, unless I changed it.

Fury the Swordsman was an actor in Father's theater. He choreographed the fights and saw payment only in meager portions of food and unsparing swigs of liquor. This washed up swashbuckler called himself a duelist. At times, strange men and women would come to the theater and he would tutor them after hours, fencing and sparring behind the velvet curtains until the early morning. The clink of coin or the uncorking of a bottle always signified that Fury had received his payment and the lesson was over.

I found father's hidden cache of fine Allyrian brandy years before, buried under the tool shed out back. Could it be this simple? Yes, it could. I traded the brandy, one bottle at a time, for months of grueling training at the hands of the alcoholic swordmaster. I was almost ready when Father discovered my theft and threw me out. I took a battered old weapon from his stage props and set out into the world, my head held high for the first time.

THE FATED DEFENDER

I'm following my father and brothers into the family calling. Was there ever any doubt? Father was always gone, and even mother would sometimes call a nanny to watch my little sister and me when she and father went off into the wilderness. As I grew older, they told me what they did out there, protecting the borders of the land against the incursions of evil creatures.

As soon as I was strong enough to pick up a wooden sword, mother had a martial tutor come over daily, a crippled man who once held the same job as my father, but lost one of the tendons in his leg to the hungry maw of a monster. He showed me not only how to wield the sword, the bow, the throwing axe, and many other weapons, but also how to sever the hamstrings of my enemies, to puncture their airway from behind with a stiletto, and to strike them in a vulnerable spot and rupture their livers. I learned to move quietly, to close in on these fiends unnoticed and deliver their destruction with but a jab and a whisper. I thought I would never be ready, but one day the tutor came no more, and Father held my shoulder, urging me to join him on the long walk to the border.

THE HARDENED KNIGHT

The cold stones of the church floor comforted me. They were my bed for years as I learned the ways of the church under the tutelage of the elders. After fourteen hours of daily lessons and two hours of daily chores, I curled up among the pews with a thin blanket, taking in the scents and faint hollow dripping of a faraway fountain before falling fast asleep.

Once the doctrine instilled in me a blazing fire of pious glory, the fighting lessons began. My religion expected its most stalwart to fight in a particular style. The church floor was always there for me at the end of the day, even though the chill of the flagstones carried through my tired bones like

the breath of a frost maiden. The others like me fell off, one by one, until only a few remained. Those not strong enough felt no shame at reassignment to priestly duties or cloistered research, for our god demands and requires service in many ways. Even now, my training complete, as I stride down the church aisle, my armor's straps creaking and the sword heavy across my back, I look wistfully at the row of pews that sheltered me from the night's demons for so long.

THE PRIVILEGED CRIMINAL

My wealthy and powerful family had so little time to attend to me that my forays into the less desirable districts of the city went unnoticed. Carousing with the thugs and riff-raff on the docks, I learned to keep my identity a secret while learning the ins and outs of street life. I fooled the gang into thinking I was a clueless farm boy from the sticks, and they took me in and taught me how to tinker with traps, loosen locks, and pilfer pouches. After a while, the novelty wore off and the dark side of the trade began to show.

As I discovered the depth of the corruption in the guild and in the city, I realized that I was in too far to simply walk away. Some of the acts I participated in could easily be held over my head. Disguising myself, and keeping my family ties secret became increasingly difficult. When a scheduled hit on my family holdings came down the chain of command, with my sister as the main target, I lashed out against the guild, disrupting the operation, and fled the city. Now, both my family and the guild have my name on their lips.

THE MEPHISTOPHELIAN OUTSIDER

I was never meant to be. The midwife smuggled me out of the birthing lodge, looking back just in time to see my mother struck down by the warriors of our tribe. I remember things I know I should not — sense memories some might say. I know my father, Isca-cuari, seduced my mother while masking his true incubus form. My mother, Freidel, was destined to be the warrior queen of the plains, if not for the lethal consequence of my birth.

Myn, the midwife, brought me up in the shamanistic ways of her people. I learned quickly and produced flame from my fingertips at the age of sixteen months. I learned to speak in the wrym's tongue at two years and to draw the magic circle at three. Myn showed me texts and scrolls she had secreted away. Trouble followed us as my powers grew, and we stayed ever on the move until we found shelter in the Dreadfens.

Many years passed in the sulfurous marsh, and I found myself learning by plucking Myn's words from her deteriorating mind before she could speak them. On the night I first made contact with the Lower Planes, I returned the next morn to find Myn had passed in her sleep. I now return to civilization, eager to know more of my heritage and find the means to exploit it.

LIFE WITHOUT LETTERS

Your character can dodge attacks from every direction, shrug off damage that might destroy another, and fly into a rage to hack his way through the toughest enemies or the thickest wooden door, but he cannot make any sense of the strange little marks on signboards and parchments. What does it mean to be illiterate in a fantasy roleplaying game?

NO READING

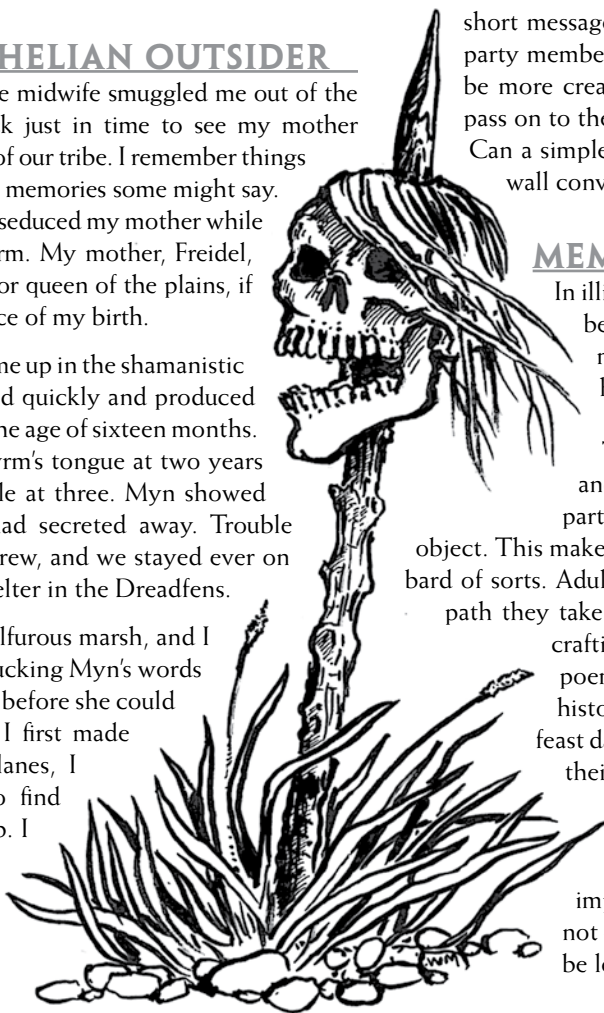
An illiterate character's inability to read can make things difficult. He always needs help to read a map, or the name on a sign above a shop, or the inscription on the wall of the dungeon. He cannot help the party search the ancient library for a specific book, or read it when it's found. This is not as much of a disadvantage as it may first seem. Maps are often expensive or dangerously inaccurate, so it is often better, even for literate adventurers, to ask directions or hire a guide instead. In a society where many people are illiterate, signs over shops may include simple pictures to represent the establishment's name, and ancient inscriptions and dusty books are likely written in dead or obscure languages, effectively making all but the most studied scholars illiterate in some situations.

NO WRITING

An illiterate character will have a difficult time communicating anything to a person who is not within earshot. He cannot write a note to give to the clerk at the temple in order to get the attention of the high priest, and he can't scratch a short message on the wall of the prison cell to let his party members know his fate. Illiterate characters must be more creative. Is there a token item the clerk can pass on to the priest that has the same effect as a note? Can a simple picture or crude map scratched into the wall convey the same message?

MEMORIZATION

In illiterate societies, memorization techniques become very important. Illiterate characters must remember all the details of their history, their family, and their craft, because they cannot write them down. They remember by using poems, songs, and simple mnemonics that associate the parts of a list or a story with parts of a common object. This makes nearly everyone in an illiterate society a bard of sorts. Adults may make up songs that represent the path they take to their hunting ground, or the steps in crafting a shield. Their children learn the epic poems of ancient heroes, the moving songs of historic battles, the rhymes of the months and feast days of their calendar, and the family tree of their chiefs. Illiterate societies must sing songs and recite poems often or they may forget. If an entire nation is illiterate, this becomes extremely important, because anything not committed to memory will be lost forever.



ROLE-PLAYING ILLITERACY

Illiterate characters are probably the last to admit that they have a problem. Illiterate characters may despise those "silly little marks." They may believe that people with something to say should just say it, plain and simple, not record it in some strange code and hope that someone will figure it out later.

An attitude like this might add a new dimension to an illiterate character. Does the wizard in your party find the character picking his teeth with her precious writing quills, or does she wake at the end of the illiterate character's shift on watch to find he has wedged the door of the room shut with her spellbook? Does the cleric discover that the illiterate character

has borrowed a couple of his fine leather scroll tubes to carry trail rations? When the party is trying to decipher the riddle written above the levers on the wall, does the illiterate character just step up and pull?

EPISODE II

Bedlam Havok relates how he came to distrust local wisdom and other commonly held beliefs.

"...Unfortunately, our other mage was quite overwhelmed by the sharp stench of owlbear, to be any real help. If I recall, he was introducing the contents of his stomach to Leander's boots at that exact moment."

"I don't mean to interrupt, my lord, but I didn't know that owlbears were particularly known for their 'sharp stench'."

"Not on the outside. No. Anyway, we tried to flee, but the kobolds had dropped a heavy gate over the door and released a pack of hungry, rabid dire weasels through holes in the ceiling. And so I learned that ...

"There is no such thing as an easy dungeon. 'Don't worry, there are only kobolds in there,' is a very bad sign."

— *The Protocols, Dungeon Crawl Protocol #14*

PERSONAL MARK

Although illiterate characters cannot even write their own names, they can develop a special personal mark to use when signing documents. This mark can also be used to let other characters know that the illiterate character passed by a certain area, or that a piece of equipment belongs to him. The mark of a more artistic character may be intricate, but most prefer a runic design of straight lines that can be easily and quickly carved with a knife. ♦

HUH?! 13 WAYS TO ROLE-PLAY ILLITERACY

So your character is illiterate. A barbarian I'll bet. What does that mean? How does it change the way you play? Well, here are thirteen fun ways to role-play your illiterate character.

1. Decide on a few letters that your character knows and devise wrong names for them, like "squiggle," or "chicken foot." Pretend to read any words you see that start with those letters as some random word that begins

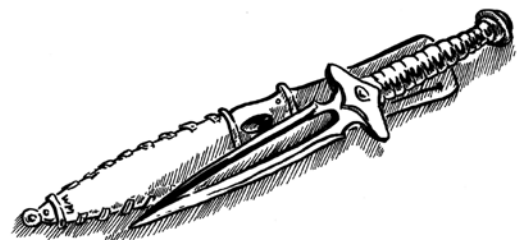
with that sound.

2. Write notes to other party members using crude pictures for each word. Develop your own language over time.
3. Use pages from old books to clean your sword.

4. Carry around learned tomes from the high university and pretend to read them by the campfire each night — upside down. See who notices.
5. Espouse an over the top hatred for 'high brows,' 'sages,' 'universitwits,' 'do-nothing-say-alls,' 'better-than-thous,' and all educated persons. Threaten them in taverns. Batter scribes, and anyone who reads in front of you.
6. Fawn grotesquely on anyone who shows the least bit of education and literacy. Squeeze your hat and call him "guv'nor." Bat your eyes and flip your hair, "Oh really? Wow, I didn't know that..." Constantly refer to how you cannot read. The moment the literate character asks you for anything or references your illiteracy — burst into tears.
7. Avoid touching anything that has writing on it, or looking directly at the writing. You are not worthy.
8. Claim to be literate in your tribal language and look down on others for using ignorant Common Rush to read the magic writing on every tomb wall or sarcophagus you encounter. Snootily tell your less-educated companions what the mysterious writing means, as if you have actually translated it from the ancient writing of your great people.
9. Though highly intelligent, things tend to get mixed up in your head. You have trouble putting things in order and you sometimes spy soonerisms.
10. Actually, you can read, but, Shhh! Don't tell anyone! Or they'll make you take notes for the party journal.
11. Ask other party members or NPCs to read you stories before bed.
12. Organize your party caster's scrolls into categories of Extra Soft, Soft, and Too Rough.
13. Hire an NPC to follow you around, and read and write for you. Have him record everything everyone says. Nickname him, "Scribbles." ♦

FIFTY PERSONALITY QUIRKS

Some players have a knack for standing out among their fellows for creating memorable characters. A hilarious accent, perhaps a strange or annoying habit, a signature catchphrase or an unusual code they doggedly adhere to. Whatever the case, for players aspiring to stand out with their own memorable characters, but lacking the creative spark to come up with more than one or two oft repeated character types, the following list of sample quirks has been provided. Choose one you like, roll 1d100 for a random quirk, or simply use them as inspiration to create your own.



Id 100 Result

- 01–02 You are a heavy smoker with a raspy voice. You clear your throat nearly every five words.
- 03–04 A minor phobia of birds and small, flying critters causes you to scan the horizon obsessively.
- 05–06 Your diet of aged cheeses and smoked meats has the side effect of producing terrible flatulence you are often unaware of.
- 07–08 Your walleyed ocular condition was never corrected during childhood. People are never sure whether you are looking at them or elsewhere.
- 09–10 Raised on the desolate badlands, you stand in amazement over any body of water larger than you can bathe in.
- 11–12 You have a drinking problem that you try to hide. You conceal your favorite liquors in strange places, and can't resist a tippie here and there when no one is watching.
- 13–14 Your lowly upbringing in the slums taught you important things about survival and the value of many things most take for granted. Unfortunately, personal hygiene was not one of them.
- 15–16 Personal failings rank as the highest form of humor among your people. That might explain your numerous pratfalls, some of which have resulted in a number of missing teeth, bruises, and broken bones.
- 17–18 Never having read a book and taught to speak by a hair-lipped father, despite your intelligence, you constantly mispronounce words.
- 19–20 While on the trail, you note new smells every few minutes, more often than not asking if anyone smells an owlbear.
- 21–22 Everything you say has an upward inflection and sounds like a question.
- 23–24 As an obsessive-compulsive, your fears of death and disease cause you to wash or bathe every chance you get. You resist touching anyone or anything for fear of contamination.
- 25–26 You unconsciously say, "True, true, true," after every sentence.
- 27–28 You were attacked by a rabid dog and forced to throttle the crazed animal when you were a kid. Ever since then, you make strangulation gestures with your hands when you're nervous.
- 29–30 You curse unselfconsciously every third or fourth word, regardless of company.
- 31–32 You wink at anyone who makes eye contact with you, as though letting him in on an intimate secret.
- 33–34 You pick flowers wherever you walk, braiding them into crowns and chains that you wear or try to put on others.
- 35–36 Your smile looks like a frown except to those who know you well.
- 37–38 You carve your initials into any wall, table, or tree that you spend more than a few minutes near.
- 39–40 You hate sunlight. You wear a hooded cloak regardless of the weather, and always walk in the shadiest areas.
- 41–42 When you are nervous you blink hard; your eyes close tightly for a full second at a time before you re-open them.
- 43–44 You get so involved in conversations that you attempt to finish the sentences of others. Sometimes you add inappropriate comments like, "and that's why I hate elves."
- 45–46 You have a habit of mumbling the last several words you've said under your breath.
- 47–48 Longhaired and slight of build, you get offended whenever you are mistaken for a girl.
- 49–50 Though you never shirk your duties (and indeed often volunteer), you always complain about them as you work.
- 51–52 You wear your hair in a tight ponytail, and are often mistaken for a man due to your bulky clothing and square face. Your stocky frame and muscles make you shy around men and awkward around women.
- 53–54 You speak mainly in cryptic koans, leaving listeners more than a little confused.
- 55–56 You admire yourself every chance you get, pulling out a mirror and brushing your hair, carrying on a conversation with anyone in earshot through muffled lips closed on multiple hairpins.
- 57–58 You give tactical advice to everyone, whether they appreciate it or not. When others speak of such matters, you sigh loudly, roll your eyes and tap your foot impatiently.
- 59–60 You are above the mundane matters of the material plane. Your thoughts and attention drift off at inopportune moments while you examine strange cloud formations, pick at the mortar between dungeon wall stones, or simply disappear to empty your bladder.
- 61–62 You doodle constantly, carrying a scratchpad and quill everywhere you go. You take great care to fold and put away any drawing you were working on before engaging in such distractions as combat or rescuing a fellow party member.
- 63–64 Your sinus problems cause an incessant whistling noise from your angular nose. It is particularly problematic when silence and stealth are needed.
- 65–66 You involuntarily cringe at the faintest hint of fish odors, flinching if you see a fish or when people talk about them in front of you.
- 67–68 You cannot help but respond to anything with a less than serious smarmy comment. This leads to arguments, bar fights, and many nights in the town jail.
- 69–70 You obnoxiously talk about yourself in the third person, mentioning your name frequently throughout conversations in a self-aggrandizing way.
- 71–72 Overly self-conscious for a troll, you constantly smash your face in with a small hammer, hopeful that one day it will grow back perfect.
- 73–74 As a child, you lost two of your fingers trying to feed an apple to a horse. As a result, you are particularly cruel to equines. You refuse to ride them, and constantly make remarks about glue factories.
- 75–76 Your skin is particularly dry and flaky. You scratch yourself habitually to relieve the constant itch. You can't resist purchasing good skin creams or other remedies whenever you encounter them.
- 77–78 An obsessive pommelphile, you cannot resist a good pommel. You stare at other people's pommels, inquiring about their make and meaning, and whatever else pops into your head.
- 79–80 You have always been embarrassed by the second syllable in your last name, and speak your full name in almost a whisper, rushing through the end.
- 81–82 Breaking camp in the morning, you use most of your daily ration of water to ensure that the fire is indeed out.
- 83–84 Your dedication to seeing the dead properly buried extends even so far as to include carrion found along the roadside.
- 85–86 Ever since realizing you are colorblind, you always verify that the dragon is indeed green and not blue.
- 87–88 Greedy as a skinny hound, you hide everything you have in innocuous clutter in your backpack.
- 89–90 Never found without a gleam of sweat on your brow, you ask if anyone else is hot no less than 24 times a day.
- 91–92 You constantly and rapidly blink your eyes. An uncontrollable reflex that leads people to either think you are slow or suspicious.
- 93–94 Obsessed with clothing, you smooth your collar, tug at your cuffs, adjust your coat, and tighten your leggings nearly every waking moment.

Id 100 Result

95–96 A son of a phrenologist, you catch yourself staring uncontrollably at the dome of people's heads. You have to stop yourself constantly from reaching out to feel their skulls.

97–98 Not only are you a savage drunk, you insist on keeping and collecting every cork, cap, and label from any bottle you've imbibed. Your backpack bulges with your worthless drinking trophies.

99 Your rural upbringing resulted in a small vocabulary. Too embarrassed to ask the meanings of the big words your companions use, you often misinterpret their instructions and other important details.

00 You were born with a terrible speech impediment that causes you to stutter t's and p's, often resulting in excessive spittle that drenches anyone standing too close.

FAITHS FOR THE FAITHLESS

In a heroic world where angels, demons, and the walking dead mingle in the affairs of mortals, where the awesome power of prayer can heal the sick, raise the fallen, and part the seas, why is *everyone* not a priest of unswerving devotion? Many times players want to make a character that has no affection for any specific deity, and perhaps even animosity towards the entire pantheon. While it seems that agnostic and atheistic beliefs are an anachronism, they have their place in a fantasy setting. Use these ten ideas for your next godless character.

1. Only old souls may speak words that the gods will hear, and a string of reincarnations leads inexorably to a strong bond with the powers of the Afterlife. However, you are a young soul, a child-spirit who has no rapport with the Great Judges of the Dead. Thus, you must do without the power to sway the Laws of the Universe — at least for this lifetime. If your deeds are great, however, the Keepers of the Eternal Records will stand in awe, and bless your next lifetime with power over the very turning of the sky.
2. The long-slumbering god of your great grandfathers is an old and exhausted deity, who forged the world and set the stars in their heavens long before the coming of men and elves. He has no time for hearing prayers, fast asleep on his vast throne above the heavens — those who invoke his awesome name, in fact, set themselves ready to suffer greatly upon the waking of the High Eldest. Better then, simply to raise a glass of ale quietly to him with each meal, and to live a life that will not stir him from his dreams.
3. As many others reared in a deeply religious community, the lessons of love for the Harvest-God and fear of Hell were seared into you before you could speak. Yet you possessed a gift unseen for generations — inborn talent with a blade. You asked, in secret, a bargain with the Harvest-God, for the love of Jessandra, you would forsake the sword to become a farmer. She chose the love of the Mayor's son. You departed to make your way in the world without a god — only a blade.
4. Of course, the gods answer your prayers. Does not fire come from steel when bidden by the ritual of flint? In every sorrow is there not a lesson taught by the Hidden Spirit who moves behind the order of the world? Your gods

provide miracles in subtle ways that others might deem mere opportunity meeting preparation; they whisper in dreams that more good blossoms through observation of nature than through dogma. As it is said, "Do not kick dogs. Though he may not bite you, a dog will bite when he is hurt. Likewise, do not kick men."

5. You believe that the gods are holding back the rest of the world from reaching true enlightenment. They do not really care about the faithful, but merely the power that worship brings. Those that die do not journey to some idyllic afterlife, but rather become slaves for the immortals. If people knew the secrets of the universe as the gods do, they would have no need to worship divine entities, and could forge their own destinies free of divine influence. This does not mean that you do not believe in the gods, but merely that they are not as worthy of respect or adoration as many claim.
6. Arcane magic is your god, your salvation, and your creed. With it, you can overcome almost anything the world can throw against you. Even death is no obstacle when one holds the power of magic in hand. You respect the gods for the power they hold, but do not bow down to them. They are simply beings that have mastered arcane magic in ways that ordinary mortals have not. Clerics receive adoration for their dedication and devotion, but reliance on divine entities for power holds them back. You have no such restrictions.
7. Just as you would not marry a man who did not propose to you, hire a servant who could not be bothered to apply, or take as a confidant someone who sent a cousin to demand your favor; you will take no god as a patron who does not seek you out. After all, any being deserving of worship must behave like a civilized creature, and meet with you personally. As no deities have met your simple requests, you have no particular reason to meet theirs.
8. Destiny subverts even the will of the gods. The true path of enlightenment lies in the single unwavering truth that the gods themselves seek to hide. The only true exercise of faith is to be true to the heart and make choices unhindered by the beliefs of others. The gods, in their hubris, believe that they can subvert free will, but you know better. Their own machinations are part of the grand design, and easy for you to ignore. While most people spend time in prayer and communion, you reflect deeply upon your choices. Unlike the masses, you know you have only yourself to blame for misstep.
9. It is the oldest reason in the world, but perhaps the truest. The gods love us not. Oh, they are all right — watching, manipulating, and toying. However, they remain as pitiless as a foodless winter, as remorseless as a burning summer lost at sea, and as indifferent as the plague. You will bow and scrape, sure. You will humble yourself and mutter praises, blending in with those around you. The gods' power commands the behavior. Their threat demands it. Why abase yourself by asking favors like a legless beggar? Just as no abused slaves ever *love* their masters, you will never care about the gods.

10. You are a philodox. You love beliefs even though you hold none of your own. The tradition and rituals of others, even of your enemies, endlessly fascinate you. Missionaries are often encouraged by your eagerness to learn, but soon find disappointment in your inability to submit to one faith. Though you are very practical in your everyday life, you know more about religion than many of your devout friends. The teachings of various religions have aided you in the past, and you see no reason to confine yourself to just one. ♦

EVERY CHARACTER IS A BIOGRAPHY

Want to bring your characters to life? Then base them on people who actually lived. History offers countless thousands of potential candidates to transform into characters. Each has memorable backgrounds, vivid personalities, and unique traits fairly begging for introduction into a campaign. Even a quick scan of the resources available offers up historical figures to suit any need. There are great generals, dedicated martial artists, holy warriors, entertainers, scholars, saints, and scoundrels to list just a few of the possible approaches.

SCRATCH THE SURFACE AND THEN DIG DEEPER

Start by keeping a notebook handy and jotting down any interesting facts you learn about historical figures as you go about your everyday life. At this point, avoid actual research; let them come to you. Watch TV, go to the movies, read books, and surf the Internet. Get on with the day, and see who falls into your net. If something about a historical figure appeals to you, a character based upon that person might also pique your interest long enough to sustain a campaign.

Eventually, after adding a few names to your notebook, budget some time to do more detailed research. Once again, begin small and let your own enthusiasm provide the momentum. When you find your attention flagging, and the notion of spending any more time researching a person too tedious to bother with, move on to another candidate. If it seems like "homework" merely to research this person, imagine actually trying to play a character based upon him or her.

Begin your investigation with the Internet, particularly *Wikipedia*. These days, most historical figures (and quite a few imaginary ones for that matter) have some sort of presence on the web. If you experience trouble finding useful information about your candidate on the Internet, you likely would encounter even more difficulty with books. Regard any setbacks at this stage as early warning of things to come, and strongly consider moving on to a better-documented person.

Next, push beyond the basic biographical details. Look for movies and TV shows based upon your candidate. *A&E's "Biography"* proves especially valuable at this stage. Finally, get the perspective of at least two different authors on the subject. Relying upon only one book leaves you vulnerable to bias and error. At this point, you should be interested enough to make that kind of time commitment.

WHERE TO LOOK

Certain character archetypes in particular seem to spring up in many different RPGs. At least some of this comes from the fact that they arise from the deeds of actual people scattered across a wide variety of cultures and situations. When looking for ideas based upon the archetypes touched upon in this article, pay particular attention to the careers and origins most closely associated with them.

Barbarians: Raiders and conquerors hailing from beyond civilized lands. Alternatively, champions of native populations leading the resistance against European and other explorers.

Bards: Performers and innovators in the field of entertainment.

Clerics: Saints and ethical leaders. Great reformers and moral philosophers.

Druids: Hermits and naturalists. Students of the wild.

Fighters: Generals and commanders of all sorts. Military heroes and legendary outlaws.

Monks: Martial artists and athletes. Also, look at masters of meditation and other "inner directed" fields.

Paladins: Martyrs, crusaders and anyone else who fought for his convictions, even at the risk of his own life.

Rangers: Explorers, rugged individualists and others who survived impossible odds.

Rogues: Notorious lawbreakers, charlatans, and great crime fighters as well.

Sorcerers: Poets and visionary artists, particularly those who offered new perspectives on the world.

Wizards: Scholars, scientists and other explorers of reality.

IF YOU WERE A TREE...

Regard yourself as both an actor preparing for a role and a journalist getting ready for an interview. Make sure you ask and answer all the important questions about your subject. Ranging from pivotal childhood moments to the great regrets of adult life, you must get inside your subject's head if you truly want to model a character on him or her.

NICE GOING, EINSTEIN!

Basing a character upon one of history's titans such as Julius Caesar, Leonardo de Vinci, or Albert Einstein has its appeal. However, playing a second-stringer, someone less well-known, but who still played a significant role in his own time, might end up more enjoyable in the long run for a number of reasons. First, it cuts down on meddling from the GM or fellow players, who have their own opinions about how Alexander the Great would act. Equally important, playing a mere mortal lets you develop your character at *your* pace without the pressure of running a genius like Isaac Newton or a moral colossus like Gandhi.

For instance, rather than create a character based upon Napoleon, consider looking at his marshals for inspiration. While little known today, they represented an extraordinary collection of driven and talented men, each with lifetime's worth of peccadilloes and contradictions to explore. Consider just two. Ney, the cooper's son, called the "bravest of the brave" even by his enemies, almost single-handedly held Kowno Bridge during the retreat from Moscow. Similarly, Massena, "the darling child of victory," left many of his peers appalled by his greed, lecherousness, and cynicism. Yet even with this unsavory reputation, few dispute Massena's status as the finest cavalry general of his day, or that his men all but worshipped him and charged cannons at his command.

EPISODE III

Wherein Bedlam Havok learns how art disarms the unwary.

"...Well, we eventually convinced Buick that the statue was actually 'smiling', not so much 'bearing its fangs', and he reached in to grab the gem."

"Amazing! And what manner of magic did it take to so soundly undo his mind?"

"Whiskey. And so I learned that..."

"If the bas relief has a hole in an orifice — don't put your hand in it."

— *The Protocols, Dungeon Crawl Protocol #15*

KEEP THE SPIRIT, CHANGE THE FACTS

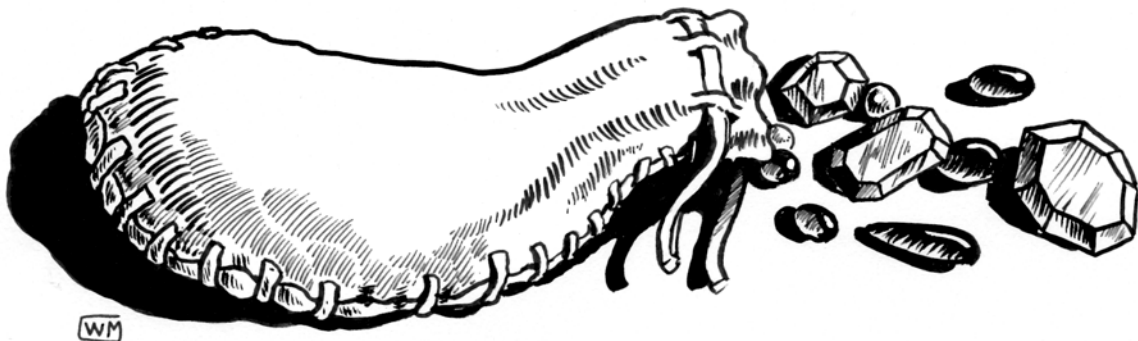
Events shape each and every one of us. However, these events must make sense within our frame of reference. Adapt your subject's biography to fit the history of your campaign world without changing its substance. Consider Sir Winston Churchill, the younger son of a prominent aristocratic politician and a descendent of Marlborough, the greatest general of his age. His deep roots in Britain's past helped to define him as a man and leader. Driven every day to equal the many generations who had served the crown, Churchill felt his only true rivals were his own ancestors. This helped to give him the confidence he needed to stay the course during those times when he took unpopular positions. To play "Winston of Church Hill," simply change a few of these names and events to make them consistent with the

history of your own campaign world without altering the ways they affected your character. ♦

OUT FOR REVENGE!

Revenge is a popular aspect of character backgrounds. The burning desire to set things straight acts as a great motivator for a character, especially when crafted around a campaign. Your lifelong search for the person who wronged you can easily tie into many aspects of the campaign. From a minor chip on the shoulder to a survivor of genocide, revenge can propel your character forward, helping to make important decisions in your adventuring career. Supply your next avenging character with one of these fifteen reasons for vindication.

1. The tax collector repossessed the family farm, forcing your sister to marry horrible old man Greybeard and your mother's early death. Your father went insane trying to prove that he did pay those taxes, but the receipt scroll disappeared under mysterious circumstances. He now lives in an asylum. Tales that the tax collector and old man Greybeard drink ale together at the Green Griffon Tavern are not just rumors.
2. The hated Swampstalker regiment came through town on a recruiting trip sixteen years ago and ensnared your beloved older brother. At first, he wrote regularly and sent money from the regiment's successful foreign ventures, but the letters and the money gradually stopped coming. The regiment went into garrison duty and turned soft. Your brother is now a fat, drunken embarrassment to the family, and he lost his commission when he could not make muster as the regiment received reassignment to a hostile region. Had he only stayed, he would not be the low-life, back alley drunk he is today.
3. Vav Verym was never interested in the love of your life, Nyaiss Pevuturo, but she was sure interested in him. A brief affair left her pregnant, shamed, and cast out of her family estate. Before you could find her and tell her your true feelings, she stepped off the old abandoned lighthouse on the outskirts of town, and her battered body washed out to sea. Vav moved on, you have not.
4. You cannot recall much about the family restaurant, save for the fire that consumed it. You can recall nothing about your little sister, save her screams as she perished in the flames. You have better memories of Father—his outline consumed by a cloud of smoke that billowed from the front door. It is your memories of Mother, wasting away in hopeless destitution, that smolder and will not die.



One day, you will find those responsible, and when you do, your hate will consume you no more. They will taste the flame of justice.

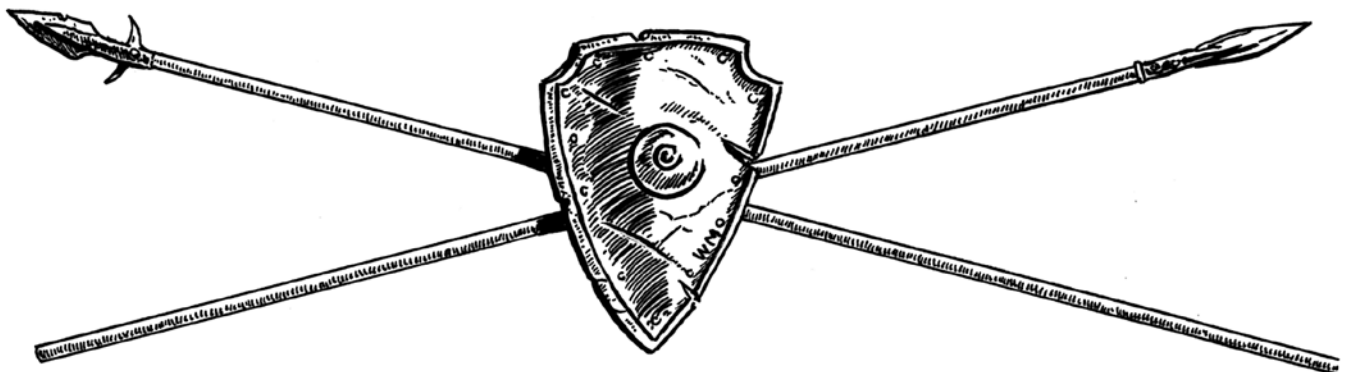
5. Your father denied your first and only love's request for your hand in marriage. Distraught, the one boy who ever understood or appreciated you walked out into the winter rain at night. He was discovered lifeless on the moor, clutching your velvet hair ribbon to his heart. Your father, a powerful man, thought he could control every aspect your life. No matter how severely meted out, men in authority are all in need of humbling.
6. Vicious werewolves murdered and dragged off every horse in your stable during the one week your father left you in charge. Losing his respect was a blow, to be sure, but losing the lives of your dearest friends left a hole that can only be filled with the blood of the wicked. You spent the next few years apprenticing with a silversmith, filching enough silver to coat 1,000 arrow tips. Armed with your grandmother's longbow, you will rid this world of shapeshifters, one cur at a time.
7. Your wife died a horrible death because the city guard responded too late. You sold your estate, your property, and everything you had to pay the temple priest for performing a resurrection ritual, but they failed her as well. You can hear your wife's scream to this day. This whole damn city will pay for this. One day you will return, and give them reason to care for their citizens.
8. Sold into slavery at a young age, you have not seen your family in years. The slavers claimed it was your family that sold you, but you could never believe it. You earned your freedom the old-fashioned way: you cut your owner's throat, choked the blacksmith nearly to death until he agreed to cut off your collar, and then went home to learn the awful truth. Your parents did indeed sell you, but since then, they moved to another town in parts unknown. You will find them, some day, and when that day comes...
9. He was a swordsman of exceptional skill, you know that much. That quiet night the grey-cloaked man came to the farmhouse, he slew your father, both of your uncles, and your older brother before any of them could so much as raise a hand against him. Without a word or glance at the survivors, the umbral figure descended into the cellar, where he retrieved a curious statue from a long-locked chest. He vanished as swiftly as he arrived, sparing but a single moment to scar your face forever with the white-hot tip of his blade.
10. It seems that the smiling, soft-spoken man who seduced your wife cheated her of a small fortune and then abandoned her, driving her to a gruesome suicide that also took the life of your young daughter — this was not his first such conquest. Legend tells of a heartless man who wanders the world, sowing misery and heartbreak purely for the love of bitter tears. The fall of great empires is his joy, the ruination of *True Love* his song. Though he cannot die, it is said that he can be sent away — if your blade finds his heart.
11. He stole it! You slaved in the lab for nearly a decade purifying the formula and perfecting the ritual. Everything was ready for publication. The eyes of academia from across the nations would be on you. Finally, you would earn the respect you were seeking for so long, but it's gone! All your notes, admixtures, and distillations, they are all gone. Your colleague took everything. The culmination of your life's work is now just a fading memory. You will find him and make things right.
12. Once your extended family of traveling stoneworkers finished erecting the priests' cathedral, they declared you all unbelievers. Their ecclesiastical tribunals sewed your mouths shut before trial, "lest you speak blasphemy." After a swift conviction, a ghastly fortune wheel determined your fates. Your sisters burned at the stake. They force-fed your father burning coals. They piled stones on your mother until her bones stopped snapping. They boiled your brother alive. They nailed you spread-eagle to a door and sent you over the great falls into the badlands. Three days later, the force of the rapids splintered your door... yet somehow you survived.
13. In your youth, each one marked you. The first ones, brutish and unsophisticated, used branding irons in visible places. The later ones, of venerable houses and noble bloodlines, tattooed you with their intricate ownership symbols where clothes conceal. Each of your owners also beat and degraded you when you revealed your potential. However, you persevered, eventually earning your freedom lawfully. Your mind hides many memories of the horrors you endured, but the nightmares remain. You will never escape them until you destroy each slaver, each house. Your memory falters, but no matter...you have a checklist.
14. How could they do such a thing? How could they destroy your life and everything you cherished? You should have been able to trust them. Your people treated them like kings, and they threw it back in their faces with a laugh and a sneer. They burned your village to the ground with their magic and slaughtered all the men who stood against them. The adventurers were supposed to be heroes, but they turned out to be worse than the monsters they killed. Now you will teach them the true meaning of heroism.
15. You waited, promising yourself that the ravaging hordes of the orcs would soon arrive. You believed in destiny. Cleansing fires of orcish vengeance would purge the land's corruption. The land's decadent inhabitants deserved no better treatment. Then they came... and passed your homeland by. Despite their threats and bloodthirsty oaths, the orcs turned aside, bought off by the land's corrupt rulers, looking elsewhere for blood and treasure. The festering wound that you called your home was free to continue degrading itself. You could not strike down your own people, but the orcs could have. How dare they fail you that way? If they would not ravage your land, you would make them suffer until they did. ♦

CHAPTER TWO: THE EARLY LEVELS (STARTING A CAMPAIGN)

TWENTY QUESTIONS FOR THE CAPTURED

After a well-targeted spell and a handy set of manacles, your nemesis lies bound and unconscious at your feet. You just learned that there are darker, more powerful forces behind her machinations. Asking the right questions is important. From questioning minions to interrogating a key player, having the right question at the right time makes all the difference in gathering information. These twenty suggestions go deeper than simply inquiring, "Who's your boss?"

1. What does your boss pay you?
2. Why do you work for your boss?
3. Does your boss have any exploitable weaknesses or special interests?
4. What other people, creatures, or groups serve your boss?
5. Why do you, and the others, serve your boss?
6. What is the source of your boss's power?
7. How do your boss's followers identify each other in case I want to infiltrate?
8. What does your boss want, and can any of his schemes help or hurt me?
9. Will anyone pay a ransom for you?
10. What can you tell me about your gear and that of your friends?
11. Can you draw a map of your home for me, including traps, passwords, and hidden doors?
12. Do you know the layouts of any other interesting places?
13. Do you know any useful secrets?
14. Are you willing to work as a double agent?
15. Whom else could we capture to gain useful information on your group?
16. If I killed only one person in your group, whose death would hurt your group the most?
17. What special tactics have you been practicing lately?
18. Does your boss/organization have covert allies or spies within the local town/keep?
19. Is there anyone in your organization that is jealous of the position of your leader?
20. Do you believe in God? (Often used to get the prisoner to blab about their beliefs.)



ORGANIZATIONS BY ARCHETYPE: THIEVES

Life as a criminal, though fraught with peril and the threat of betrayal, makes for some of the most fun and rewarding role-playing experiences. And what campaign rife with thieves, cutthroats, and ne'er do wells is complete without criminal organizations? They maintain a semblance of order where lawlessness is the rule of the day, and pay off the pesky politicians and city watchmen that might impede the lucrative trade of the everyday footpad, scam artist, or burglar.

Provided below are a few criminal organizations you and your GM can drop into your existing campaign to provide the leg up any scoundrel needs to help him make it in this dangerous profession. You may also use these organizations as inspiration for designing your own with your Game Master's help.

THE ASSOCIATION

The most dangerous organization of thieves is one that achieves societal acceptance and legitimacy. The Association is one of these. Life in the city is unthinkable without the Association. Their hands and ears are everywhere. Every shopkeeper pays a "protection" fee. Every city watch sergeant receives a little extra coin in his pocket. The Association's membership reaches every level of the City's society. Full meetings are rare, presided over in secret by the Association's long-time president. No one is sure who is and who isn't a member since everyone wears a hooded mask to meetings. Prostitution, teamster protection, gambling, and fencing stolen goods are the Association's bread and butter. Membership is by invitation, which consists of a frightening covert nocturnal visit by heavily armed, masked individuals. Few stand against them, for the Association ensures its relevancy in every aspect of city commerce at the point of a dagger or drip of a poisoned cup. Members can contact the Association as a whole through a complicated network of secret informants, and if in need of help, they are rarely turned away. Payment in return is always collected in full.

THE CHARMING CHARLATANS

This band of rogues focuses on bilking people out of their belongings through elaborate schemes, rather than resorting to violence or actual theft. The Charming Charlatans have been known to complete their scams within minutes, or months for more elaborate con jobs. The goal never changes, though: convince the target to willingly give over their wealth. Their network stretches to most cities and many large towns throughout the land.

THE DESTROYERS

When a siege is required, when an impenetrable vault must be breached, when demolition of any kind is called for, the Destroyers are first in line. The Destroyers are loosely structured, and are without any centralized leadership. They maintain small cells of operatives (typically three to ten individuals) of varying backgrounds. Each cell remains isolated and maintains sporadic contact with only two to three other cells. This structure has enabled them, as an organization,

to limit the liability of a compromised cell. They generally maintain a policy of mercenary neutrality, and thus, can avoid the most vicious of reprisals for their actions.

Each cell seeks out recruits with great care. Membership varies greatly, but may include engineers, alchemists, locksmiths, burglars, ex-soldiers, miners, and the occasional artist that finds his muse in the act of destruction. The decentralized structure of the organization means that there are fewer hands taking cuts from each job, and individual cell members get a significant percentage of the profits.

HANDS OF VENGEANCE

This guild of thugs and assassins was formed by an aggressive activist, who was eventually captured and executed for his crimes. The Hands hire themselves out for intimidation and murder, but only target marks related directly to the Empire. Political motivation is an important factor for membership, but one special condition stands above all the rest. To join, a person must be missing one hand. In the Empire, theft from a citizen is the same as stealing from the Empire itself. Those caught stealing have their left hand cut off. Those accused of dissent have their right hand removed. The Hands of Vengeance are survivors of the Empire's harsh penal system.

The Hands of Vengeance have spies and contacts in all levels of society. Thus they also traffic in information. If something takes places in the Grand Hall, eventually the Hands will know about it.

THE INVADERS

This thieves' guild for hire specializes in town invasions. Masters of disguise and infiltration, the Invaders perform destabilization missions for their employers. Engaged by nobles and bishops alike, the Invaders are a tool used when open warfare is not an option. They penetrate their target cities and towns and corrupt guards, steal state secrets, drain coffers, sabotage critical defenses, dig covert tunnels, and plant spies. They open legitimate businesses to gain the trust of the locals and put their own people into positions of power and influence, such as aldermen and guild members. The Invaders work in small teams of three to four, although several teams are often combined to help destabilize larger cities. Teams do not know the identities of other teams. When more than one must work together, they receive instructions from the main guild via encrypted magical messages or secret message drops.

To join, a thief must show talent in subterfuge and be sponsored by a team member in good standing. With the use of truth-detection spells, candidates are sorted into an appropriate talent pool and assigned to a team. Benefits include tremendous profit and an unrivaled network of contacts.

MOCKING BIRDS

Mocking Birds travel the country performing bawdy one-act plays and generally lifting spirits — and anything not nailed down at the end of the night. The Mocking Birds make liberal use of costumes and false identities disguise troupe's true intentions. Cells, called nests, travel different regions



until the heat gets close, and then go quiet for a while. During "migration" members gather at the headquarters and train before going out again to swindle the common folk and fill their own coffers. Many times the Mocking Birds, despite their popularity, agree to perform for drinks and lodging in order to gain favor with the house.

To join, an applicant must have some manner of performance skill. Theatrical disguise is as important as actual pickpocketing. Many talents are needed in a successful nest, and thieves of a feather find their focus in entertainment and misdirection.

THE PUSHERS

These social butterflies are the masters of the con game. Strictly developing the subtle charismatic skills needed to separate nobles from their coin, the Pushers study local customs, politics, and power hierarchies to better blackmail their prey.

"Steal in plain sight," is their motto, and most devotees have this or other insightful sayings tattooed on their flesh. The tattoos are part of the ritual of joining the fraternity, and a shortcut for members to recognize each other. Murder is frowned upon, since it removes a source of money.

To join, a pledge must have a sponsor within the group and possess a promissory note from a noble in excess of 200 gp. The more outlandish the lie for the note or amount over the minimum garners a stipend from the guild.

Access to a network of information and new techniques and magic to gain the confidences of the rich, as well as a long list of tailors, medicine men, actors, fences, forgers, caravan masters, and other types of thieves (for dirty work) is promised in return for total loyalty. ♦

ORGANIZATIONS BY ARCHETYPE: WARRIORS

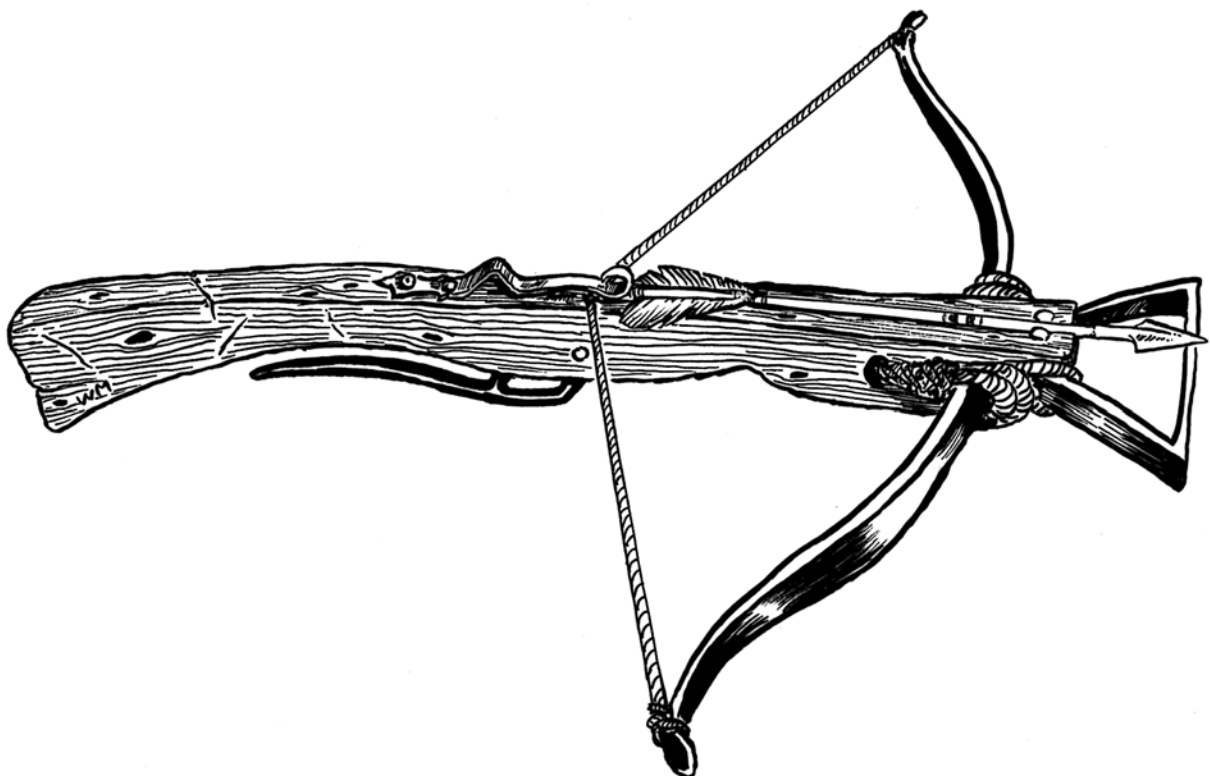
A sure way to turn a bland, blade-slinging warrior into a memorable character is to tie that armored brute to an organization. Many examples of knightly orders and companies of fighting men dot the history books; and in a fantasy setting, the field is more open to creativity. Below are five examples of groups of men and women rallying under the same banner and drawn by a common goal. Use these examples to move your next warrior off the front lines of battle and into the imaginations of your fellow gamers.

THE CORDED WHIP

This company of light infantry fights wearing light armor and wielding whips, flails, and polearms useful for disarming and tripping opponents. They specialize in tactical immobilization and disarmament of their foes. Corded Whip teams use their front ranks to trip and entangle opponents with whips and nets. Their second rank pins opponents with polearms. The team also uses bolas to immobilize opponents out of reach of their favored weapons. The goal is to capture, not kill.

The Corded Whip hires itself out to the city watch to capture dangerous fugitives or to keep the peace during periodic celebrations. Some barbarian tribes even hire them to keep the tribes from killing each other during tribal gatherings. While the Whip's goal is to capture opponents alive, they do not hesitate to resort to deadly tactics when necessary.

The Corded Whip looks for recruits among the downtrodden and oppressed. The organization's sergeants teach recruits how to act in civilized society and how to take people into custody humanely and without mistreatment. This reputation



for fair treatment of those it captures helps the Whip recruit, and helps them obtain honorable employment. Of course, what happens to prisoners taken by the Whip once turned over to the authorities is less predictable.

THE CROSSED SWORDS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

History teaches many lessons to those who pay attention to the details. The Crossed Swords Historical Society believes its associates can become more productive members of society, and better protect it, by learning the lessons the past can teach them. The Crossed Swords are a combination of a learning academy and a club. The society takes in new students every year and teaches them proper use of arms and armor, as well as sensible, time-proven battle tactics. Alumni often continue their association with the society long after they have graduated. Some come back from time to time to serve as instructors; others share information. All, however, share a deep bond with one another that no sword can sunder.

HARLOTS' HORDE

Originally, a rough-and-tumble group of swordsmen employed to protect the thriving Red Lamp District of the port city of Bocz Harbor, this now-massive organization commands respect from all the northern territories. Joining is easy; many claim to have served time in the Horde, though advancement beyond a menial soldier is difficult.

Leadership comes from a mix of the madams of Bocz Harbor and highly skilled veterans within the Horde. Those in charge subtly acknowledge warriors lucky or skilled enough to garner attention and put them through a magic-enhanced interview to test loyalty and discover evil tendencies. Though seemingly chaotic, every member believes in defending the good of the world.

Secret missions await these special fighters. The Ghoul Expulsion of Beyern and the Lighting of Javisio Peak are two legendary victories attributed to the Horde. Many groups from the Horde function throughout the land, trying to complete various dangerous tasks that might require additional help.

Lightly armored, with a tendency to carry short swords and daggers, most Horde warriors also learn a few thieving skills and fighting techniques. Members of the Horde are easily identified by their flashy silver jewelry and deep green jerkins.

THE IRON PHALANX

The Iron Phalanx was an elite company loyal to King Kleitias of Akeillia. During the last stages of the civil war, they were ordered to guard the palace while Kleitias and his family escaped by sea. The rebels captured Kleitias' ship, yet the Iron Phalanx refused to budge, and the insurgents could neither dislodge them from the palace nor prevent them from resupplying by sea.

The Iron Phalanx maintained their independence and turned the Akeillian palace into a military training center. Military officers from many nations journey to the palace for training in strategy and tactics. Getting safely through the rebel blockade

is one of the entry tests for the school, and students must bring payment in food, medicine, and other supplies. Graduates of the school are also required to send regular tithes to support the Iron Phalanx.

Graduates of the Iron Phalanx go on regular field missions, either in groups or as individuals. The overall goals of the Iron Phalanx are to acquire supplies for the academy, to build a widespread, well-trained military force with loyalty to them, and ultimately to restore the Akeillian monarchy. Agents of the Iron Phalanx can call upon other members for assistance in times of need.

THE NORTH STORM

Founded by four retired royal bodyguards who served their king or queen, the North Storm is a company of warriors who freelance their services to any nation facing invasion by humanoid tribes or barbarians. The North Storm does not engage in political conflicts, but are available to fend off the forces of darkness and chaos. Anyone can join, but those lacking skill or experience find themselves relegated to less desirable guard and training duties until ready for the initiation raid. This involves four experienced North Storm warriors that take the rookie out to hunt orcs or bugbears, testing his or her mettle in the process.

North Storm warriors perform any mission, from forming a phalanx in the heat of a major battle to scouting forests ahead of a friendly formation of massed troops. Training in scouting skills is as important as skill with the blade. The symbol of the North Storm is an angry dark cloud with lightning bolts flashing from beneath it. Nobles who cannot afford to pay their fees outright in cash make other arrangements, such as land grants or special goods and services. ♦

ORGANIZATIONS BY ARCHETYPE: SPELL CASTERS

Most who practice the arcane arts study for years to learn their skills. Typically, this brings them together in the fellowship of large academies or specialized wizards schools. While reasonable in a fantasy setting, these institutions do little to spark creativity in designing a background for a spell-casting character. Those who play with dangerous powers are the movers and shakers of society, and should have organizations to represent the many facets of wielding such mystifying power in the context of an otherwise mundane world. Use these five organizations to spice up your next book-toting spell caster.

THE CURRENT

A guild of seafaring wizards, the Current, allows any wizard who can show one or more of the following to join: sailing or navigation experience, worshipping a nautical god, or a member of a traditional seafaring family. The Current has offices in most major port cities and functions as a contact point for ship captains seeking to hire shipboard wizards. Member of the Current, trained to be good crewmembers, will not openly oppose other members of their

guild. This leads to occasional frustration as two opposing ships try to fight each other and rely on their wizards to gain an advantage. When the wizards will not fight, the patience of many a captain with the secretive Current members is tried.

Current membership brings constantly updated sea charts, access to exclusive nautical spells, and deep discounts of magical items related to the sea, such as water breathing assistance or language scrolls that allow communication with reclusive sea races. The Current's goal is enrichment of its members, safer shipping lanes, and exploration of arcane power drawn from the oceans. Members pay 10% dues of their earnings whenever they make port in a town that has a Current guild office.

EPISODE IV

Relating how Bedlam Havok learned that sometimes, the tree of curiosity bears ill fruit indeed.

"...In the interest of time, I'll just say that we had very good and immediate reason to want through that door. For one, the flooding was soaking my second best boots."

"Flooding, sir? There was water?"

"Gods and trolls, you piton, have you been listening?! I only wish it had been water! Water, at least, neither stains nor eats cloth. My point is, the door was right there, and Draxynyr One-Eye bent over to take a peek. And so I learned..."

"Never, ever look through a keyhole."

— The Protocols, Door Protocol #8

In exchange for donating books, maps, scrolls, and the like to the Enclave, members are able to access the rich tomes of knowledge present in all Enclave Libraries throughout the realms, as well as ask questions to other Enclave wizards — often experts in esoteric knowledge.

Wizards learn to recognize the markings and symbols that designate Enclave Libraries, and how to make the arcane mark of the level of their station as proof to gain access.

THE ENCLAVE

The Enclave is a secret — though well-known — innocuous society of wizards founded by Belrath Olwian, who upon his retirement from the adventuring life, founded the first Enclave Library. Hidden Enclave Libraries of various sizes and usefulness stand in every major city and most significant towns. Four levels of membership exist in the order — Initiate, Associate, Bibliothec, and Librarian.

Bibliothecs and Librarians, often acting as book buyers, are able to welcome new members — usually looking for initiates from the ranks of questing wizards who sell rare and interesting books, tomes, and scrolls. Initiates often do not know that they are in contact with a member of the Enclave until they have traded or sold multiple books. The Enclave never invites those deemed untrustworthy or of low moral character. Initiation is a simple process. The organization is apolitical and does not require its members to take oaths or make promises other than to keep the location of the Enclave Libraries secret, and to contribute to the shelves on a regular basis.

THE HEDGE WIZARDS

This organization caters to the lowly village spellcaster, such as the town watch's wizard or the innkeeper who can cast a few spells. These working wizards labor without glory or credit in the background of society, smoothing along the axles upon which the wheels of civilization depend. The Hedge Wizards use information and numbers to give them power. Allied with many thieves' guilds and mercenary companies, the Hedge Wizards have one of the best information networks on the continent, and back each other up when facing difficult odds.

The organization has a high, informal code of honor, and a great deal of camaraderie that comes from being underestimated and laughed at by the more famous wizard organizations. Hedge wizards use many arts and skills, other than magic, to accomplish their goals, since many members have skills outside of spellcasting. Benefit of membership includes a vast information network to solve problems and seek advice and the ability to find a helpful Hedge member in remote areas where the hands of large wizard guilds would never dirty their reach.

THE INSPIRED

This group of air elementalists believes all creation, starting with the act of thought, is made possible by the element of air. Inspired are active in artist communities, organizing themselves into small cells that follow a particularly charismatic leader. They are known for crafting *breeze ware*, a form of statuary composed entirely of air, within which are suspended small particles of colored gasses. The Inspired nurture the bardic arts, many of them learning to play woodwind instruments, or training as vocalists.

All Inspired must be specialists dedicated to the study of air elementalism. This is the only common requirement, but certain cells require more from prospective members, often restricting membership to certain types of artists, or asking for donations to fund a strain of research. With few exceptions, membership brings a modicum of respectability, especially among the urbane. Inspired gain easy access to institutions and social gatherings normally reserved for the privileged and highborn.

LADY SERAPHELLE'S SCHOOL OF CHARM

Sometimes, social settings can be at least as dangerous as the world's worst dungeons. Saying the wrong thing to the wrong person can have catastrophic effects for your character. Lady Seraphelle took note of this, and offered to teach some young enchanters the fine art of social graces. Members focus on using their potent mind-altering magic in subtle ways. They combine the effects of magic with natural charm and grace, which makes them quite dangerous in social settings. Members of this select group often spin intricate plots, embezzling gold, jewels, and more from nobles, all the while laying the blame at the feet of their enemies. Few members realize, however, that Lady Seraphelle is actually a greater doppelganger running her own intricate plot. ♦

I'LL ASK AROUND...

"Gaptooth" Gammon slunk up to the Green Griffin's stout barkeep, a handful of golden coin changing hands as he ordered his drink. "I need to know who Wicked Pierre runs with these days. I hear his boys stole the Dragontooth Scepter."

(Gammon's player grabs his dice: He rolls... badly.)

"Umm... Never mind, then. I'll try somewhere else."

We've all had it happen.

We lose the trail in the middle of an adventure. Maybe we're investigating the villain's past or want to discover his next move. Perhaps we need to know where an ancient treasure awaits, but we find ourselves thrashing about, clueless; hoping the next random thug we encounter has a vital clue.

The information has to be there somewhere and approaches that are more specific may unearth it. Rather than trusting the dice to break better next time, a creatively played search almost forces the GM to give some information up. The following suggestions give alternate approaches to the same old Gather Information, Library Use, Credit Rating, or Knowledge checks.

1. **Visiting the University:** "Certainly, we know of the Scepter you seek, but I'm not sure if your mind is ready for such hideous lore..." The keepers of arcane power amass knowledge unknown to lesser men. Blasphemous secrets in buried archives, eldritch tomes hidden from most mortals, those gathering information here may discover magical rituals forgotten by recent mages, or learn their ancient foes' vulnerabilities.

2. **Calling upon the Office of Records:** "Pierre the Wicked? Hmm... I think his family owns an old mansion on the edge of town. Let me check the file."

Wherever mankind settles, bureaucracy soon follows. The clerks may need some convincing, but their information is incredibly valuable. Land transactions, laws and loopholes in those laws, arrests and convictions, tax records, and business or guild permits all molder for decades in the musty files of the records office.

3. **Confess at the Cathedral:** "Yes, my brother, there was once an old scepter among the church's relics. It was given to the church centuries ago, but Bishop Cortic authorized its sale to Lord Nash." A few coins in the poor box and a faithful parishioner can recall or discover a myriad of interesting facts. The church's dusty records go back to the founding of the city, while the weathered inscriptions of its ancient tombstones can be read in more ways than are obvious. The prelates try to help those bent on noble errands, and often tell more than they should. Births, marriages, and deaths,

who attend church and who do not, and what charitable activities they support or receive support from; all can be discovered at the church.

4. **Buttering Up the Servants:** "Oh, Lordy, no. I used to work for that Pierre fellow, but not anymore. I could tell you such stories!" Noblemen often forget that their omnipresent minions hear every word they say. A bit of wine or flattery to loosen their tongues, and they'll soon reveal every secret their employer ever had.
5. **Beat the Streets. Literally.** "Have mercy, sir! Mercy — he can take no more! I've not seen your 'Wicked Pierre,' but folks with a lot of gold and a fancy tongue have been seen on the docksides for a time! Let my father live, and I swear I'll take you there myself!" People waste all sorts of time checking records, chatting and buying drinks for scum when a couple of broken jaws are all that the situation requires — you'd be surprised how helpful a man is willing to be to save his own hide. Colloquially known as "Banack's Iron Rule," this technique assumes that if you beat up everyone you meet, a small percentage will invariably confess or give you a clue.

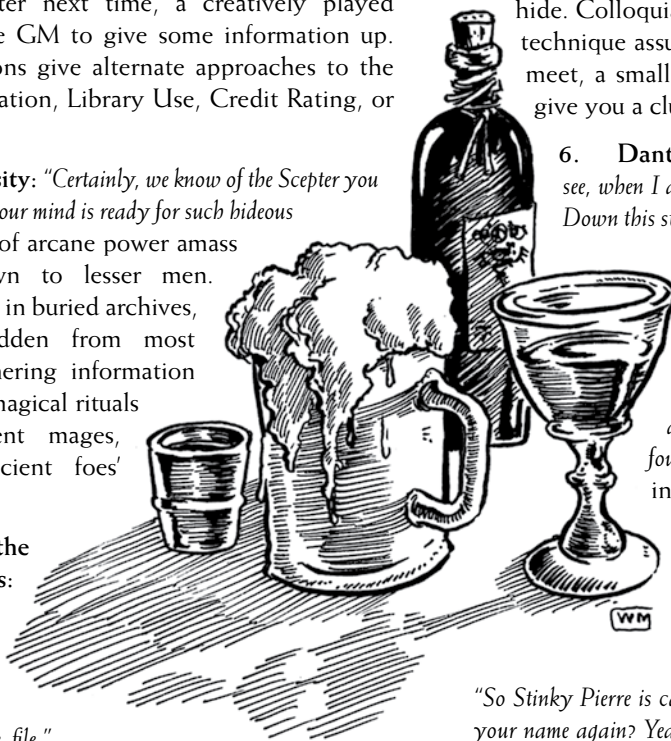
6. **Danteus "Eyes" Jarvin** "Pierre? Everyfing's fuzzy, see, when I ain't had nuffin to eat and all... *clink, clink* Down this street, second right, keep going until..." Danny sees everything. If you have the coin, he likely has your information.

7. **Hiring a Detective Agency** "Of course I can find this Pierre, did somebody say I couldn't? I'll need 10 gold a day and all my expenses paid. Once he's found, 200 gold more." There are enterprising individuals in every city leveraging their hard-won skills for the fading notion of a steady income. Their knowledge of the area and experience in the field should never be underestimated.

8. **Asking a Favor of the Crime Boss** "So Stinky Pierre is calling himself 'Wicked' now? Hub? So, what's your name again? Yeah. So, what could YOU possibly do for ME that I would waste my precious time and resources on someone like Pierre?" No knowledge long evades the local crime boss. With ears, eyes, and fingers everywhere, he is in a position to know exactly what you need to know. He probably already knows you are looking for information before you even come to him, though his price may be more than you are willing to part with.

9. **Donating at the Brothel** "Hey baby. Pierre? I'll bet I can make you forget about him. Mmmm." Working ladies know what happens in their town. They don't flaunt their knowledge for fear of reprisal, but they never forget the names, faces, overheard conversations, and midnight confessions that fall into their laps. Knowledge is their best protection.

10. **The Oracle** "You seek Pierre. I have seen it in the flames. You will not like what I have to tell you." The old, blind hag spends most of her



time dancing naked about a bonfire built in the alleys of shantytown when she is not yelling nonsensically at the sky or obscenities at every passerby. No one will harass her though for she "knows things" and "brings bad luck." In rare moments of lucidity, she will express the truth that she constantly sees around her, sometimes unbidden, but the cost — the steep cost that each prophecy ultimately exacts upon its participants — is rarely ever worth it.

11. **Ask the Rats** *"Well last night I was out in Shinbone Alley scouring the gutters behind the alehouse for bread and you won't believe what I saw..."*
In a fantasy setting, it is certainly possible to use some sort of magic power or spell to speak with small animals

such as birds, rats, wolves, or whatever creatures might have surreptitiously witnessed a happening or stumbled upon a secret location.

12. **Drundlepote** *"Ya know what I 'eard 'bout Gretchy the ettin? She ain't just got two 'eads..."* This crazy troll cannot keep his mouth shut. He incessantly pries into everyone's business and loves to spread rumors, creating drama to satiate his personal amusement. Widely recognized as a troublemaker, sensible monsters run when they see him coming, or else keep tight-lipped in his company. However, he often carries good wine, and is an expert tongue loosener. While an excellent source of monstrous news, non-monstrous folk are forewarned when seeking his council — bring him plenty of food and gold, for he has no qualms about seizing it from the inquisitive. ♦

EPISODE V

In which Bedlam Havok relates the meaning of solitude and takes important moral instruction.

"...Apparently, the townsfolk shunned the blasted hill less out of a clever plan to keep their treasure hidden and more out of a general interest in public safety. We experienced what might be described colloquially as a Very Near Total Loss."

"Very Near Total, sir?"

"Yes — and if not for my ingenious plan to abandon them all to die, it would have been total!"

"But . . . but what about your plucky, good-hearted torchbearer, Knobbyface Triggerstep?"

"Who? Oh, him. No, he died as well. And so I learned to..."

"Avoid the big tree standing alone on the hill — for gods' sakes, already!"

— The Protocols,
Wilderness Protocol #11

NEVER LEAVE HOME WITHOUT THEM

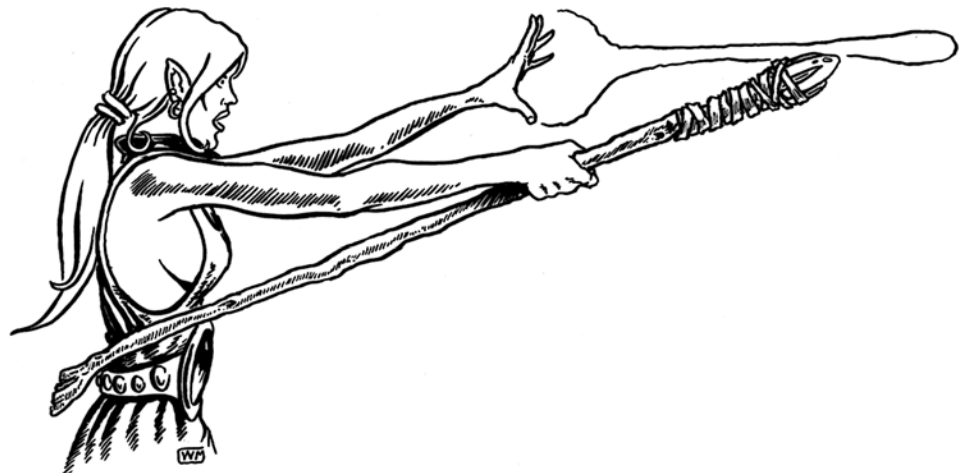
Even non-superheroes sometimes need a utility belt. In the dangerous, cutthroat world of adventuring, any edge could spell the difference between life and death. Sometimes this includes what many might consider too commonplace to warrant a mention. The items detailed below, while on the surface rather ordinary, could in the right situation, turn disaster into triumph.

BLINDFOLDS, EARPLUGS AND NOSE PLUGS

Anything that impairs the senses also reduces the effectiveness of monsters and others attempting to use sensory attacks. Anyone prudent enough to carry these sorts of things around likely also spends some time practicing with them in safe circumstances. This could reduce some of the drawbacks of using them. On a related note, prisoners and other hostiles often prove a lot more tractable and easy to deal with if suffering from impaired senses as well as restrained movement.

FLOUR

Almost nothing beats flour as a cheap way to identify or mark otherwise unseen foes. Whether scattering it in the air to coat an invisible creature, or throwing it on the ground to create something for footprints to track through, flour rarely disappoints. Of course, flour proves useful in other situations too, particularly for those with a bit of imagination and a flare for the dramatic. Gullible opponents might well pause or even flee if suddenly confronted with a pouch of 'death dust.' Expect any opponent falling for the ruse to beat a hasty retreat away from the "toxic" cloud. Similarly, coating a garment or object with flour sometimes works as a critical first step in creating a "ghost" or other spooky seeming situation.



GLOVES

Gloves serve as a barrier between their wearer's hands and the rest of the world. This makes contact poisons much less effective. One could also argue that gloves should wipe away some or all of the poison on needles before they actually manage to pierce the skin of a hand. Similarly, monsters that specifically need to touch the skin to deal their special attacks might find gloves quite frustrating.

GOODY BAG

Adventurers who make a point of carrying around a bag filled with minor trinkets and a variety of food items rarely regret it. When used as distractions, bribes, or tokens of esteem, trinkets can sometimes prove more valuable than gold.

GREASE

Grease works much like marbles, with the added advantage that it stays put, making it much easier for those aware of it to keep clear as enemies stumble and fall. Lubricants like grease also make it much easier to slide objects along. They take care of squeaky hinges, stuck windows, and similar nuisances. If lathered on weapons and other gear, grease creates a reliable barrier against corrosion and other threats, whether natural or due to monster attacks.

HOLLOW TUBE

If used as a snorkel, a hollow tube makes it possible to stay submerged almost indefinitely. Whether trying to escape archers patrolling a river's edge or hiding from a giant within his enormous gravy boat, this opportunity to keep breathing without raising the head could prove lifesaving. On the flipside, a hollow tube also makes it possible to turn a gust of breath into a minor, but still sometimes useful tool. Focused into a single stream by a hollow tube it scatters dust and other loose materials. This could hide dusty footprints or reveal potential threats beneath something without actually touching it. Taken to an extreme, hollow tubes can propel powder or similar substances into the air or faces of opponents.

MARBLES

Dropping a bag of marbles on a floor or any other surface almost instantly makes things much more difficult for those trying to move over it. If released at the top of stairs or on a slope, gravity becomes an ally that swiftly sends them away. When sent rolling down unexplored corridors, marbles might set off traps or reveal hazards without any risk to their owner.

PEPPER AND OTHER SPICES

For creatures that rely upon their sense of smell, strong spices prove even more disabling than a flash grenade. Since these materials tend to linger on surfaces, they act as excellent and low-tech ways to knock creatures that track by scent off a trail. Similarly, they also affect the taste of anything they come into contact with, including people in danger of being swallowed. With a little courage, and a steady throwing arm, spices could even affect creatures that use breath attacks by causing them to sneeze or choke at the worst possible moment.

WAX (CANDLES OR OTHERWISE)

A supply of candles, especially those made at the same time and with the same materials, make coordination between different groups possible since they should burn at the same speed. If mashed down, their wax works as a handy means of making impressions of runes, carvings, keys, and similar things encountered upon adventures. This makes it easier to get accurate information from experts later on. Wax also sometimes serves as a less obvious way to sabotage mechanisms than simply smashing them. This makes it much easier to sneak away before enemies figure out that someone has disabled a critical device. ♦

LUXURIES IN THE WILD

For many, "roughing it" is an undesirable part of the life of an adventurer. Many characters find ways to take a bit of easy living with them out in the wilds. Spells that create cozy cottages complete with bunk beds and a working hearth, or magic items that create fortified towers of magical metal that are nigh indestructible, are just a couple of examples of how characters try remove the "rough" elements of roughing it. But most characters don't have the money to buy such extravagant gadgets or the magical know-how to create humble shelters. At least, not until they've won a king's ransom in gold and jewels.

For characters still muddling through the early stages of their careers with enough coin to pool together, there's another option that, though not so glamorous as camping out in a portable magical tower, nonetheless allows for a bit of luxury out in the wilds. In any fantasy, modern or even in a sci-fi setting, there are those humble yet talented professionals willing to follow a group of well-paying adventurers into nearly any wild and remote area of the known world or universe. There, they provide a clean secure campsite, tasty and nourishing meals, and nearly any other service required to make their employers' lives, if not easier, at least a bit more comfortable.

Though your GM may provide a variety of different servants or professionals if asked, one such group is the Grennar family. They have made it their business to allow wealthy patrons to maintain their chosen lifestyle on the road. The Grennar family is a large extended clan of profit-minded individuals who seek to amass large amounts of wealth with little danger. Generations ago, they realized that adventurers and nobles must often brave the hazards of the wild without the benefit of the finer things in life. No man or woman with thousands of gold coins in his or her pocket should have to endure indignities while traveling, and the Grennar family has made it their calling in life to ensure that luxury — anytime, anywhere — may be possible for those who have the coin to pay for it.

Bennie Grennar always makes it clear that his family members are not guards. They will not help fight monsters and flee if attacked by enemies, returning only once it is safe. PCs who take the Grennars into the wilderness must either provide some security or allow the Grennars to set up their base camp far enough away from danger to give them a chance to avoid most problems of the wild. The Grennars recommend setting up a camp within a mile of the intended destination.



This allows them to pick a site that reduces the chance of random encounters, while still being close enough for the characters to gain the benefit and comforts of the Grennars' services. Characters hiring the Grennars must hire them for at least one month, payment in advance. Subsequent payment must be made at regular intervals. The cost for their services is 200 gp per month per character, but all food and drink, clothing, and services are provided by the Grennar family.

While in the wild, the Grennars follow their patron(s) with a large but terrain-worthy wagon, loaded with supplies. One family member plus one employee per patron are provided. Employees are usually laborers specialized in one specific area of expertise, such as masseuse, cook, and blacksmith (equivalent of 1st-level Experts). The Grennars provide the following services:

Fantastic meals made from most any ingredients.

Set up and preparation of secure campsite.

Prepare superb way rations, finely wrapped and preserved so that patrons need not eat poorly while facing their enemies.

Weapon, armor, and gear cleaning.

Massages.

Appraisal of looted treasure.

Mending and minor repairs to mundane equipment.

Breezy, cooling tents in hot weather.

Insulated tents warmed with small iron stoves in cold weather.

Luxuriously appointed tents with decadently soft bedrolls.

Excellent wine, snacks, and diversion games at the patrons' whim.

A modest library including bestiaries and gazetteers.

Stimulating conversation.

Negotiators for meetings with others.

Courteous service to guests of the patron (to help increase his or her prestige).

Skin and clean game animals or trophies taken by the patron.

Campsites are set up with an eye towards defensibility, shelter from the elements, and concealment from predators and enemies. When the patron is away, the Grennars do not remain idle. The campsite is turned into a base camp of sorts. Lanes of approach are cleared of brush, which are then used to create defensible spots and camouflage. The Grennars gather herbs and berries and hunt small game to have a tasty and exciting meal ready for their patrons' return. If more than two player characters have hired the Grennars, the Grennars start constructing a small log cabin at the campsite; especially if they are told that they might be there for more than a few days.

While the PCs are in town, the Grennars act as facilitators, messengers, formal representatives, and concierges. Having the Grennars do the legwork for finding the best inns, shops, and craftsmen grants the patron PC a modest bonus to actions that



require diplomacy on the part of the character when shopping, finding a room for the night, or gathering information. This bonus also applies to any checks made when dealing with local officials and gentry, as such a luxury implies a higher level of importance in civilized society. Having the Grennars working for you indicates that you are not a filthy mercenary who drags the severed heads of his trophies into town to barter for coins for wenching. Employing the Grennars says that you are a refined person of breeding — whether it's true or not.

The Grennars have access to a wide network of contacts, which family members meticulously memorize to ensure that their patrons appreciate and become reliant upon their unique talents. PCs who utilize the Grennars to help them make large-scale business transactions, such as hiring craftsmen to build a castle, also gain a modest bonus to any check related to the quality, time, or cost of such projects.

Once higher-level characters have settled down into a stronghold, the Grennars continue as personal concierges and assistants, although if the character wants to utilize one of the family as a seneschal or other castle staff, additional fees and renewed contractual agreements apply.

Grennar family members consist of cousins, nieces and many adopted children. They are humans ranging 20–50 years old (the average Grennar is the equivalent of a 2nd-level Expert). They dress as appropriate for the situation, as their wagons carry a large assortment of goods and clothing that they may choose from.

BENNIE GRENNAR

Bennie is bright-eyed elderly man with a ready smile and ingratiating ways. Small of stature and well dressed, his calloused hands shake, although his steady gaze is that of an experienced merchant or trader. Bennie cannot be hired personally, but is the point of contact the PCs encounter when hiring the Grennar family's services (equivalent to a 3rd-level expert/3rd-level rogue who can speak many languages). ♦

NOW I LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP

The dreaded Random Encounter Table... From time out of mind, it has been the bane of a peaceful night's rest for nearly every adventuring party that ever strapped on a sword and set out to explore the wilds. For decades, players have schemed and planned for the eventuality of a nighttime visit by whatever critters the GM has on his encounter table. However, with the following list of safeguards you need not devote that much time to devising the perfect campsite protective measures. Use these tips to ensure that even when the GM catches you with your pants down, you'll survive the experience and even look good doing it.

1. **Wilderness:** In the wilderness, plant alarms around your campsite. Have survivalists scout the perfect spot before the party beds down, and then string hidden cords with bells attached to provide an early warning system against intruders. Be careful, though, if you overdo it, small animals or even a stiff wind can keep you up all night. Unused divination spells are handy to double-check the suitability of a location. High ground increases your ability to spot enemies and provides an advantage in most fights. Create a *food hang* and place your food inside in a scent-proof bag to avoid attracting unwanted visitors with sensitive noses. Time permitting, the dummy camp is also a popular trick. Similarly, hang your armor in the right place to create the illusion of greater numbers.



2. **Dungeons:** When making camp in a dungeon, spiking the door shut is a good first step to keep enemies out, but make sure you have an alternate exit from the room to avoid trapping yourself. With a pot of paint and a brush or some colored chalk, you can create false wards on a door, walls, or the floor. An intruder who fears magic will think twice before crossing. Don't forget, magic items may still glow when you bunk down. That's a beacon for nocturnal creatures. Place them under your blanket or wrap them in a cloak and keep them close at hand.
3. **Guards within Guards:** No one should pull guard duty alone. It is too easy to be taken out by a sneaky opponent. If the party lacks the manpower to double the guard duty, buy trained guard dogs or other animals that can warn of danger. Anything with good senses that makes noise when startled could be the difference between a slit throat and enough early warning to mount an adequate defense.

4. **Noise Makers:** When indoors, scatter bits of broken glass (like empty potion bottles) in advance of your resting place. It creates a distinctive crunching sound when stepped on that will alert you of approaching enemies. If you fear invisible attackers, spread a layer of flour on the floor, which can reveal tracks and aid you in pinpointing unseen assailants.
5. **Dig In:** Dig a trench around your campsite, piling the dirt on the inside to form a low embankment. Even if it doesn't keep attackers out, it slows down their initial assault and offers you cover. If possible, spread caltrops or plant stakes around the trench to make it more treacherous to cross.
6. **Use Light Strategically:** Hang lanterns or magic lights in a wide circle around your campsite, and douse your campfire before the party turns in. Attackers will have to move into the light where you can see them, while in many cases you remain unseen in the darkness.
7. **Utility Vehicle:** When traveling long distances, bring a simple conveyance. Let one or two members of your party sleep in it during the day, so that they can stay awake at night for guard duty. At night, the rest of the party can sleep in or under it, providing them with some protection from the elements, as well as cover from attackers.
8. **Night Time Armor:** Bring an extra suit of light, comfortable armor to sleep in. There usually isn't time to put armor on during an attack, so having some protection you can sleep

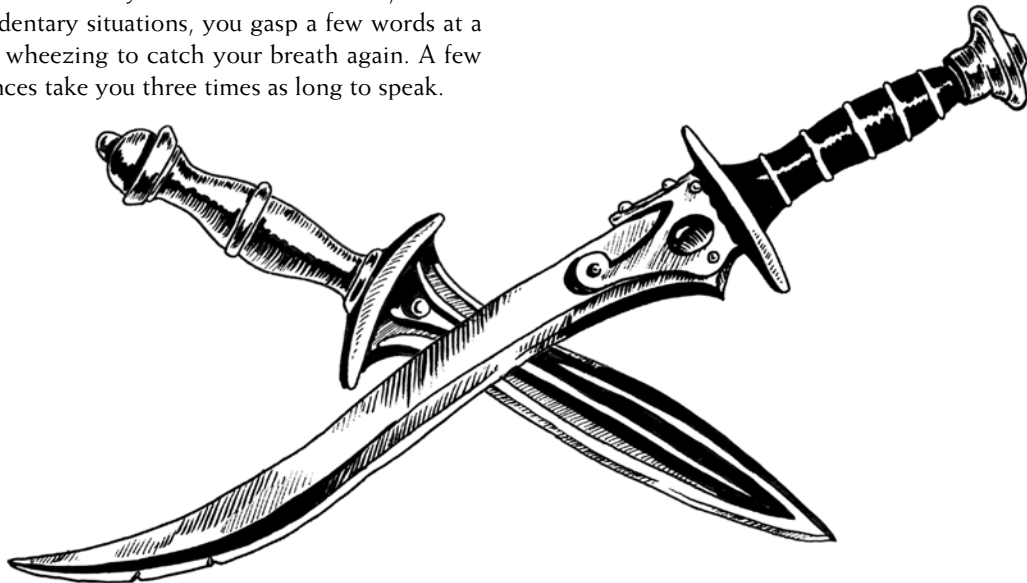
in is better than nothing, and it could save your life.

9. **Get 'em Up!** When there is trouble, waking sleeping party members should be a higher priority than engaging the enemy. Sleeping allies are vulnerable to extra damage or worse. Devise a buddy system for rousing sleeping party members. Familiars and small animal companions can also be very efficient "rousers."
10. **Nobody's Home:** Consider sleeping under the protection of invisibility, camouflage, or in one of the inter-dimensional spaces provided by spells and magic items. Are you able to safely sleep in the trees above your campsite instead? Perhaps the room found only by way of the secret door is the best spot to select for the night. ♦

TWENTY DISTINCT VOICES

How one speaks is as important as the words they say. A character's voice can elevate their place in the other players' minds. Everyone can remember the screeching ramblings of Cobra Commander, or the smooth drawl of Doc Holiday in *Tombstone*. Use these examples to create a unique voice for your next character.

1. Stuttering on hard consonants, you mastered the art of magic very carefully. Focusing only on methods and power words utilizing softer syllables facilitated your spellcasting, but in social situations, you fear that people might think you ignorant.
2. Using perfect tone and pronunciation, as taught in the Academy, you look down your nose at anyone who speaks in Common. When forced to communicate with those people, you wrench your face into a sneer, nearly talking through your nose as you choke out the words.
3. High pitched, and speaking with a cadence fast as a beetle skittering across foil, you blast through your sentences, completely unaware that your audience only caught a fraction of the information.
4. Your monotone droning has put more than a few parishioners to sleep in the pews. Never terribly interested in anything terrestrial, you speak to your audience as if bored with this plane altogether. In private, and engaged in a subject you prefer, you will run right over your companion in a barrage of theories about other worlds.
5. Your stutter slows conversation to a crawl. You cannot finish most sentences, yet, when blades are drawn and adrenaline frees your tongue, you sing and speak in a clear baritone voice of perfect pitch. You reserve these occasions to finish many conversations from the past few days, much to your opponents' surprise.
6. Trying to stand tall in loose-fitting armor, your voice breaks from time to time. It is even more embarrassing when your squeak singles you out during a battle cry.
7. Louder than anyone in any room, you whisper in a normal speaking voice. When called to your attention, you can be quiet for nearly fifteen seconds.
8. An asthmatic who always seems short of breath, even in the most sedentary situations, you gasp a few words at a time before wheezing to catch your breath again. A few short sentences take you three times as long to speak.
9. A nervous titter escapes your mouth between sentences.
10. You speak in a whining drawl except when excited, at which time your voice rises to a shrill, girlish pitch.
11. Your gurgling rasp makes you sound as if you are speaking underwater, a fitting legacy from years spent on the high seas.
12. Your lyrical voice rises and falls, oft' times covering an entire octave over the course of a single sentence.
13. As if possessed by another's spirit, listeners often swear that you speak with two voices at once, pitched in perfect harmony.
14. Ending every utterance with a question, you quickly continue with your next thought, leaving your audience confused.
15. Stroking a week-old dead cat, you constantly pause to scrunch your bulbous nose into the corpse's fur and whisper child-like affections.
16. You break into song at the slightest provocation, trying to match lyrics to the topic discussed.
17. Wheezing constantly because you are overweight and tired, you intermittently interrupt your sentences with a "Humph," a cough, or a wheezing-snort.
18. You emit a sibilant hissing beneath your breath whenever you are not talking. You begin all sentences by squinting and making a long humming noise in the back of your throat.
19. You speak in an affected condescending, high-pitched, and lofty accent. You punctuate every sentence with a set of common phrases, such as "My good man," "Run along now," or "Are you still here?" You coat each syllable of every word with blithe superiority and unthinking arrogance.
20. Your speech patterns are made up of nonsensical syllables, clicks, and strange sounds. Only translators can relay what you mean after babbling what sounds like gibberish. (This is best if you select a fellow player you trust to be your translator. Every so often, say something in a perfectly clear intelligible sentence for maximum effect.) ♦



CHAPTER THREE: THE MIDDLE LEVELS (PLAYING THE CAMPAIGN)

LORD BEDLAM HAVOK'S RULES OF SURVIVAL

Being the Protocols of the Red and the Black, a Chartered Adventuring Company (Franchises Available)

The thing about adventuring is you learn while doing it, but your GM doesn't always give you the benefit of the doubt. After a while, it just doesn't seem reasonable that you aren't always taking certain precautions, does it? And heavens forbid if you have to list out every last, little thing that everyone knows you do at every single doorway and hall junction. Before you know it, they'll be sighing on your turn and making you buy the pizza. It just won't do.

Instead, submit this list to your GM. These are the Protocols of Lord Bedlam Havok, and they constitute that which you tell the GM you *always* do, so you don't have to tell the GM you did it the *specific* time you really needed to have said you did.

"Um... oh, goodness. My apologies, my Lord, but... might I bother you a moment?"

The thin, impeccably dressed elf drew his gaze from the grime-coated tome he had been reading. His long, sleek hair caught the dim flicker of flames lighting the Mouldy Corvus. He looked over the youth before him, and his dark, sharp features took on a cold, pale smile. "Why, of course, young man. What may I do for you?"

"Well, sir, I... are you... are you Lord Bedlam Havok, sir?"

The elf glanced down at the thick, leather-bound volume, marked his place, sighed and locked eyes with the boy. "The Lord Bedlam Havok, actually."

A chill ran down the boy's spine.

Without a sound, Lord Havok sprung a dagger of exceptional size and wickedness from his cloak, spun it expertly in the air, and placed it, gently, into the crease of his grimoire as a bookmark.

The boy very nearly succeeded in not wetting himself.

The tome slammed shut. "Your name, boy?"

"Reginald, sir."

"I see." The elf paused, and then abruptly acquired a look of intense, almost preternatural, paranoia. "Not, then, Asmodeus or Orcus or Nyarlathotep or anything like that?"

The elf leaned forward, his eyes glittering with sharp-edged suspicion.

"... no, sir."

"Ah. And you do know that if you're a villainous deity of any kind, you're really required to tell me up front, right?"

"... I'm not, sir."

"Fantastic for both of us. Now what the hell do you want?"

"I understand that you're quite the legendary adventurer, sir. I was wondering if perhaps..."

"Of course! You want advice!"

"If you would be so kind, my lord."

"Pull up a chair then, Rupert."

"Reginald."

"Interesting, although I assure you, I do not in any way actually care. Now then, young man, I've been adventuring since before your great-grandfather knew a poop from a black pudding. Hell, I've been at this game longer than this piss-hole town has been on the map. And if you're thinking of taking up the trade, I have a few thoughts I might share — for a fee."

"A fee, sir?"

"Yeah. What have you got on you?"

"Not much, sir."

"We'll do this on credit, then. You remember, you owe me."

"Absolutely, sir!"

"Alright, let's get started..."

TWENTY PROTOCOLS FOR GENERAL EXPLORING, PILLAGING AND LOOTING

1. Don't be first.
2. Don't open anything.
3. The *continual light* stone is always the first thing in a room or around a corner.
4. Avert your eyes from mirrors, for they may suck your soul.
5. In fact, don't touch mirrors unless you want to travel through them.
6. Nothing, and I mean nothing, is more important than getting that tentacle out of your nose.
7. If you're certain you can sneak up on it — you can't.
8. Always throw a coin into the mysterious liquid, puddle, or pond.
9. Just because nothing happened to the coin doesn't mean you can drink it, search it, or bathe in that stuff!
10. Hotties in distress are luring you to your doom.
11. If it weighs less than a pound, take lots of it.
12. When something big swallows you, it is difficult to draw a talwar. Always wear spiky gloves or gauntlets on your fists.
13. If it is on fire, hit it with water. If it is made of metal, use adamantite. If it is bony, bludgeon it; if fleshy, poke it. If it lacks anatomy, blast it; and if it just turned into a monster, use silver — don't bother with cold iron. If you need cold iron, you will find it while adventuring.
14. Spread out. Only disaffected teenagers clump together, and standing in lines is for country-dances.
15. The front entrance to everything is guarded and or trapped.
16. The Dragon is never sleeping. The Necromancer is never sleeping. The Demon King is never sleeping.
17. The world only attacks adventurers at night while four out of five of them are naked and asleep. Don't ask me why, but it is so.
18. Don't dream. If you do dream — take notes.
19. Why take only one dagger when it is just as easy to take six?
20. When in doubt, get the hell out.

"...I see, sir. Well, but what I really need is some advice regarding..."

"What, something a bit less general?"

"Well, sir, my friends and I are pretty certain that we'll be heading into a certain, well...haunted crypt!"

"Ah, yes, I remember my first haunted crypt. Fine. Go get me a drink, and we'll start in on the really intense stuff."

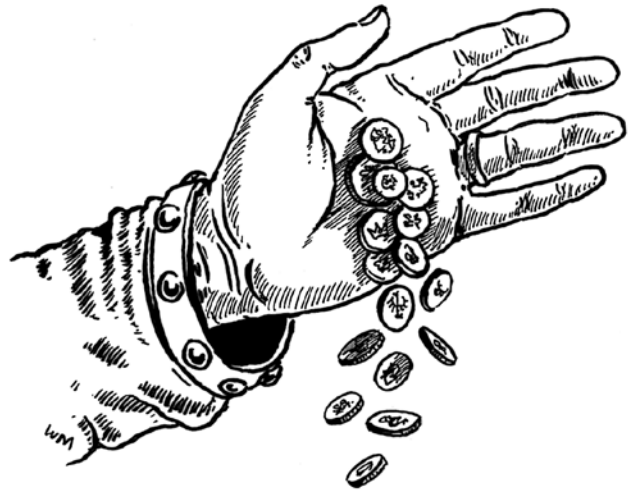
"Well, sir, I'm actually not allowed to drink here. Too young."

"Ye gods and trolls, boy, I didn't say buy yourself a drink! Now, get!"

"It's just that, umm, the barman knows my father, and..."

"Do you want to be an adventurer or not, you insignificant little pock on the ass of existence?"

"Be right back with your ale, sir."



TWELVE PROTOCOLS FOR DUNGEON CRAWLS

1. Never look down a well.
2. Repeat after me: "I will not press that red button on the wall..."
3. Leander's First Rule: never be the first to touch anything that looks valuable.
4. Always stay away from the underground fountain.
5. Don't bother bottling the wonder elixir in the continuously refilling underground fountain — it loses its potency outside the room.
6. Always examine the ceiling in every cavern before entering.
7. When fleeing, never run into an unexplored room. Whatever lives there also wants to kill you.
8. If you see a wall with mold on it, it is the kind of mold that kills you.
9. Entry Procedure: (1) go in the back door, (2) once you have gone in the back door, look for the first staircase and proceed down it, (3) once you are at the bottom of the staircase, look for secret doors.
10. Once through the secret door, the next room is the boss of the whole shebang.
11. Kill him (if the module was written before 1990) or kill her (if it was written after 1990) and take up residence in his or her lair. It is the perfect place from which to raid the entire dungeon, keep, tower, manor, spire, etc.
12. Archways should not glow or have runes on them. If they do, they are portals.

"...wow. That's very interesting, sir."

"Indeed it is! All of these Protocols, might I add, were painstakingly transcribed by Yours Truly after years of very dangerous experimentation on my associates. Honestly, you should probably be paying very good money for all of this."

"Yes, sir."

"And yet, all that the beneficent Lord Bedlam Havok requires is another ale! Fetch, son!"

"Sir, I..."

"Look, Renfield, I've been remarkably patient with you! Is this baby's-first-crypt-delve of yours here in town?"

"No, sir."

"Then you're going to have to traverse some wilderness, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you want to get amorously probed by forest goblins, Richard?"

"No, sir."

"FETCH! NOW! ALE!"

TEN PROTOCOLS FOR WILDERNESS ADVENTURING

1. Don't cross water unless you absolutely must.
2. Never touch a dead body you find on the road, as it might be undead.
3. I don't have to be faster than the dragon, just faster than you.
4. Always look under the bridge before crossing it.
5. Always look behind the waterfall, unless it is a "mercuryfall," those hurt.
6. When confronted with a rope bridge, it is better to go back to town than to try and go across it.
7. If it is icy, there is freezing cold water, and you are wearing plate mail or carrying treasure — you are going for a swim. Be ready.
8. Huts, especially lonely ones on the edge of swamps and or towns, always shelter a hermit.
9. Hermits are dangerous.
10. When you find massive, clawed, unrecognizable footprints along your trail of choice, change trails.

"...so, you have all of these memorized, sir?"

"Damn right, I do! And I suggest you start committing all of them to memory, yourself. Gods and trolls, each one of them is worth its weight in gold! Indeed, following the last Protocol of Wilderness Adventuring very, very nearly saved the life of our poor, beloved Draxynyr."

"Oh, my goodness! Really?"

"No, I suppose you're right. He was never all that beloved. He knew how to cook kobold. I'll give him that."

"It is good to see you honor his memory, my lord."

"I am a big softy, aren't I? Go get me another ale, you fetal snout, or I'll flatten your entire city with a wave of my Havok Staff."

SIX PROTOCOLS FOR URBAN ADVENTURING

1. Do not search the garbage.
2. Stay away from altars, and to the extent possible, stay out of churches, temples, mosques, and places of active worship altogether.
3. When walking through a crowd, always hold one hand on your money purse and the other on your weapon. Sure, this makes you look like a tourist, but the gigantic backpack and seven-day-smell already gave you away.
4. If it has high walls, and or a moat, and or a gatehouse — hide outside it for 24 hours and observe.
5. The Grand Vizier did it. This is the royal palace version of 'the butler did it.'
6. When the head of the local Thieves Guild demands a meeting, be polite.

"Not that you'd know anything about 'urban,' living in this one-horse excuse for a sewage pit."

"Lord Havok, I do believe that you are an insufferable drunk!"

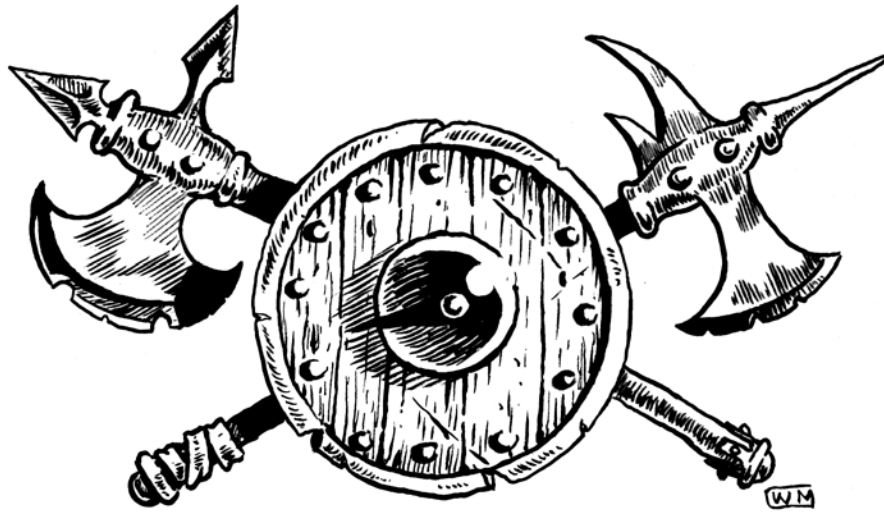
"And you're no doubt both sober as a judge and good-hearted enough to sugar puke. Yet I am the one who is famous and super-powerful, while you're just some hatchet-faced boy with a mother so fugly, incontinent bears wouldn't stop to dump on her. Just shows to go you, I suppose."

"...Lord Havok, I don't like you. I'm leaving."

"Ye gods and trolls! Don't take yourself so seriously! I'm just trying to toughen you up, son! Here, while you're up, get us some ale, and I'll let you in on the really secret stuff."

SIX PROTOCOLS FOR DOORS, TRAPPED AND OTHERWISE

1. The Door Protocol: I will always stand 20 feet (not 10 feet) away from the door when it is opened: preferably behind the party meat-shield, after the scout has checked for traps. Revised Door Protocol: I will stand 20 feet away from the door, at an angle, as I throw the halfling scout into it, and then the gnome illusionist through it.
2. Never open a second door until you have resolved what is behind the first door. This is a one-door-at-a-time profession.
3. Always close the door behind you, as you don't want to be surprised from that direction.
4. Unless you think you might have to run away, in which case always leave the door behind you open.
5. Use a quarterstaff or ten-foot pole to test the floor before the door. Preferably done by someone with enough strength to simulate a real person's weight, or why bother?
6. When you discover the mechanism behind a trapped door — leave it alone. Go through the wall or to another room. Disarming attempts lead to early retirement.



"...I'm sorry, sir — did you say 'meat-shield'?"

"It's a technical term, son. Learn it, live it, love it."

"I see."

"Just don't be it — no one respects a meat-shield."

"Hmm."

"Oh, come now, boy! Certainly, you have a corpulent friend or two! In a town like this? You've got to have fat people out the wazoo!"

"Well..."

"That's the spirit! In fact, now that I'm thinking of it, here are a few things that you can probably put into use right away!"

SEVEN PROTOCOLS FOR DEALING WITH NON-ESSENTIAL PEOPLE AND OTHER COMMONERS (NPCS)

1. When in doubt, save your own asses and to hell with the NPCs.
2. Never harass the bartender. She is a retired adventurer.
3. Stay away from peasants. They're given to attack in mobs.
4. Stay away from nobles. They're all high-level evil NPCs and/or monsters and/or undead.
5. Stay away from all children — the oldest ploy in the book.
6. Never leave your magic items with an NPC for 'safe keeping.' It's just an invitation for the gods to mess with you.
7. For that matter, the wizard that teleported you halfway around the world does not have six seconds to spare to cast a fireball on the three dozen lizardmen that are attacking the keep you are supposed to save at his behest. Be prepared.

"...what's an NPC, sir?"

"It stands for 'non-protocol competent,' Randy."

"Reginald."

"Whatever. The good news for you, son, is that after you get me another ale, I'll fill you in on the very last of the Protocols — then you'll never be an NPC ever again! You'll be... a PC!"

"A PC?"

"Protocol-competent, Rudolph. Protocol-competent."

SIX CRITICAL PROTOCOLS FOR DEALING WITH YOUR FELLOW PARTY MEMBERS

1. Since your party members might kill you for any reason, it's necessary to kill them first — or at least enough of them to tip the balance in you and your allies' favor.
2. If your body starts physically changing for no apparent reason, seek an ally in the party quickly. You will probably be killed by your "friends" unless you make some kind of deal. Be prepared at least to give up some stuff. Or you can try biting them — it never hurts to negotiate with the "like-conditioned."
3. No matter what anyone says, you have no allies.
4. Never fight over treasure when it's found. You can get more of it all at once when you kill them in your own time.
5. Leander's Second Rule: every night, without fail, rig something to wake you up if anyone touches your stuff.
6. Neither the front, nor the rear. Allow every party member to be your unaware meat shields.

"...that's horrible, sir!"

"Indeed."

"And so are you!"

"And so is life! A miserable march from womb to tomb, with nary a moment of safety in the interim! From the day the midwife slaps your butt to the day they lay you out on a marble slab, you're going to deal with bad people, bad situations, and bad luck! Be ready!"

"That's your lesson? That a list of cynical and self-obsessed 'Protocols' can keep you alive at the expense of your friends?"

"Yes — and that some people are jerks! Oh, hey there! Where do you think you're going!? Come back! Hey! YOU OWE ME!" ♦

TEN UNIQUE MOUNTS

For some players, the mount they choose for their characters needs to make a bold statement about them. For those types of players, a simple horse or pony is not enough to put a punctuation mark on who they are. With those players in mind, here are ten unique mounts. Chose one to make the statement you want or as inspiration for you own.

1. **Southern Plains Boar:** The large boars that live in the southern plains serve as highly prized mounts for the vulgar dwarves living there. The tusked beasts have twice the ferocity of their riders, and often ignore the frantic attempts to change their course as they charge into enemy formations even on death's door.
2. **War Giraffe:** Tribes in the Rudon Grasslands domesticate and train giraffes to serve as mounts. Breaking the creatures of their inherent timidity and learning how to ride one in combat takes time. A rider trained to ride a war giraffe is taught how to acrobatically cling to his mount's strong, armor-covered neck to gain a significant height advantage over other mounted combatants, and to rain arrows down over his enemy's protections.
3. **Dire Bat:** The secretive gnomes of the Illshine ride dire, long-nosed bats into battle, luring them into service when they're young with rotting Glurfruit, the favorite meal of their species. The bats' sense of smell is highly developed, making them great trackers and scouts.
4. **Swamp Iguana:** The bearded iguanas of the Bennid Swamp proudly bear their gnoll warriors into battle. These lizards fight ferociously for their riders. But in addition to their qualities as mounts, a chemical in their tear ducts provides an astringent that causes wounds to heal faster.
5. **Giant Eel:** The giant silver eels of the Spand River make excellent underwater mounts. Unusually intelligent, they are also amphibious, and can slowly make their way on dry land with the help of their unusually strong fins.
6. **Dire Vole:** The massive black voles of the Festering Forest are said to be a supernatural creation. These massive rodents possess necromantic power that strengthens undead somehow. They also have a taste for living human flesh. It is unsurprising that sentient undead often train them as mounts.
7. **War Trained Kangaroo:** The giant kangaroos of the Janga-Janga are superb mounts and fearsome combatants. Specially trained species have been taught to fight while bearing a rider, employing their front paws, clad in special gauntlets, and powerful legs in combat.
8. **Divine Touched War Pig:** These creatures look like ordinary oversized pigs. However, divine-touched war pigs have been awakened by a brushing pass with the gods. They typically hide in stables housing normal war pigs. A character that unknowingly acquires such a creature soon discovers a sarcastic observer with no qualms about telepathically critiquing its new owner (though this telepathy works only one way).

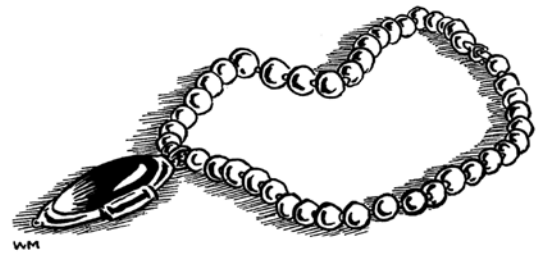
9. **Disappearing Horse:** These horses appear as sound, reliable, and loyal mounts. However, at the first sign of combat, a disappearing horse panics and turns itself invisible. Its rider, however, remains visible as does the horse's tack and barding. The initial moment of panic takes no combat time, but may surprise the rider and cause him to lose his seat (if you use the d20 system, it is a DC 12 Ride check to stay mounted). Once invisible, a disappearing horse feels better on the premise that what cannot see it cannot harm it. All subsequent riding is a little easier, even in situations that would panic a normal horse.
10. **Seethe of Worms:** This horrific mode of transportation is actually the magical effects of an ancient artifact that holds no other power than to create the seethe of worms. Three times per day, this tubular, slightly greasy copper amulet may be rubbed to create a gruesome phenomenon. When a character does so, the amulet causes the earth beneath its owner to bubble and froth, until it seethes with tens of thousands of worms, millipedes, and other creepy crawlies of the natural earth. The mass of writhing worms rises to a one-foot thickness, lifting the character on a platform of slimy earth insects. The mass rolls forward, carrying its rider at a moderate and tireless pace. The seethe sinks back into the earth when the amulet is rubbed a second time. Although, the seethe of worms may carry its owner across most terrain, it cannot cross running water. ♦

MOMMY? FIFTEEN FUN WAYS TO PROVIDE FOR HUMANOID YOUNG

Orphaned, abandoned, lost, found... there is a humanoid infant before you and it looks hungry. Now what?

1. The easiest thing after finding a clutch of goblin babies is to gather them into a sack and pitch them into a flowing river. It is what their paranoid fathers would have done.
2. Coming across an orc toddler, an adventuring party should be very cautious. More likely than not, he simply wandered away from his tribe. If the ankle biter sticks around, it prefers milk older than two days.
3. As long as enough grubs and rodents fill the trough, a kobold infant will imprint itself on the one feeding it. Unless you wish to have a yapping reptilian toddler wandering about, it is best to leave the creature in the caves where you found it.
4. Bugbear adoption is highly discouraged. When young, they may look fuzzy and clumsy. However, these babies have the reputation for eating their own parents.
5. Toss gnoll young in with a pack of dogs. A cub so treated will not develop its normal intelligence, and makes for a great household pets or hunting animal once it reaches maturity.

6. Take ogre young to the nearest flourmill. Their ability to stand upright and push a grist mill wheel all day deserves exploitation, and the local farmers will appreciate your thoughtful gift.
7. Goblin children make excellent servants and waiters. Manage their chaotic imprint with proper schooling and a set schedule of chores and cleaning. Curb their occasional bouts of destructiveness with a sound whipping.
8. Consider selling humanoid young to a circus. Dressed up in outfits, they make for excellent comedic interludes between show acts and many actually enjoy jumping through burning rings. Once they get too old to dress up, they can still sweep up sawdust or sell peanuts in the stands.



SERIOUSLY... WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT HUMANOID BABIES?

Every adventurer who has ventured into the goblin cave eventually comes face to face with the tribe's nursery."

. Seriously, what do we do with humanoid young?

MORAL RE-EDUCATION

Although many races have within them the inherent taint of evil, if captured young enough, shepherded to an understanding home or temple orphanage, and shown a strong but loving hand, there is always the chance for redemption.

ENSLAVEMENT

If you cannot kill them, raise them as workers for the quarry or even well dressed house servants. Best to enslave the brute races with an unsparing whip and bludgeon, as these severities are often the only way to gain their unstable respect and obedience.

FREEDOM

Setting the offspring of wicked beings free could easily result in their future acts of evil, but it is also the easiest way out of a tricky dilemma.

PERSONAL ADOPTION

Sometimes doing the right thing means more work. In the absence of foster parents, it falls upon the adventurer whose bloody sword created the orphan to make it right and adopt the child. With the proper nurturing, the young of some of the vilest creatures can break clean from their troublesome mold.

REFUGE

Just because you slew one group of humanoids does not mean you have to slay them all right now, right? Offer the child to a like-blooded tribe and be done with it.

RECRUITMENT

Train them as troops for your future stronghold. What better way to confuse the enemy than with a team of highly trained humanoid commandos? Drop the tykes off with a henchman or retainer to let them train for the day that you need them.

SACRIFICIAL TITHES

Many evil cults seek out sacrifices, and racially opposing deities might take considerable pleasure in receiving a blood offering of their hated foes. ♦

EPISODE VI

In which Bedlam Havok relates how he came to fear the vicissitudes of old age and revere the elderly.

"...In our defense, the man looked very, very frail. And elderly. Did I mention his elderliness?

"Yes, sir. I believe the term you used was 'decrepit', actually".

"Face like a worn saddle, repeatedly punched in the nose. Honestly, we had strong reason to believe he would more than likely keel over and die any moment, whether we mugged him or not. And so I learned that..."

"Always be polite to old people, for they are at least 20th level and quick to anger."

— The Protocols, NPC Protocol #8

14. Train your non-human to walk with a hunch, talk with a lisp, and constantly mutter "Yes, Master!" as he follows you around. This will make you feel smart, important, and powerful — all desirable qualities to imagine yourself having.
15. Test the little bugger for musical capability. A band of goblins with drums or kobolds with flutes following you around would make you the envy of all. ♦

13. If parental sadism is your bent, dress the pitiful beast in frilly dresses and puffy bonnets and raise it as your own. Always fault your humanoid child for not being more like other children.

9. Some believe the flesh of certain humanoid infants bears a deliciously distinct flavor and veal-like softness, and they are willing to pay a hefty sum for such delicacies.

10. Schools for archers, swordsmen, and pugilists are often desperately in need of cheap alternatives to replace worn-out wooden targets and straw punching-posts.

11. Train any number of smaller humanoid infants to sit very still and pretend to be a fancy hat. How many fancy hats do *you know* that can pass potions to you in combat?

12. If you have 'rescued' more than twenty humanoid children and have immediate access to a serviceable stronghold or dungeon, you might want to consider betraying your party and becoming evil.

13. If parental sadism is your bent, dress the pitiful beast in frilly dresses and puffy bonnets

QUESTIONING THE GODS

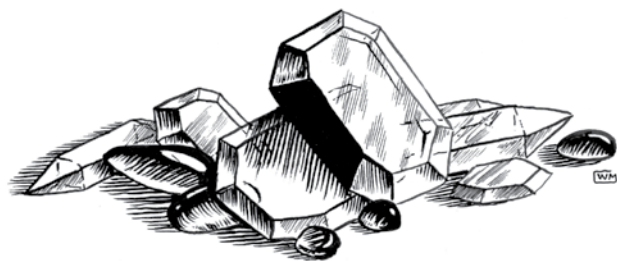
You're stuck! All of your leads have gone dry; the puzzle has eluded you; the archway is impossible to pass. So you turn your head skyward and plead for inspiration from the great beyond. The problem is: what do you ask? The gods have a well-earned reputation for cryptic answers. A properly phrased question may make all the difference between elucidation and bafflement. Here are some foolproof suggestions for getting the Powers to give you a straight answer.

YES/NO QUESTIONS

1. Will our current plan succeed?
2. Will it result in loss of life for any of us?
3. Will we get rich?
4. Should we consider any special precautions or protections before proceeding?
5. Is there a safer way to accomplish our goal?
6. Do we stand to gain fame from our exploits here?
7. Is all the information we used to form our current plan accurate?
8. Has someone manipulated us into forming our current plan?
9. Are all of our allies trustworthy?
10. Should we discard our current plan and make a new one?

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

1. Who is responsible for our current situation?
2. What special equipment or magic might we need to overcome the challenge?
3. Where can I go to get the special training I need?
4. What do I need to accomplish in order to please you?
5. Who is most likely to betray me at some point?
6. What skills does my enemy possess?
7. Where should I go to make the most money?
8. What is the safest way for us to travel to our destination?
9. Of our current objectives, which will be the easiest to accomplish?
10. Of our current objectives, which does the greatest amount of good for the world? ♦



KNOW YOUR ROLE: MULTITASKING

One of the keys to a successful adventuring party is knowing your role within the group. Each player can and should contribute something meaningful and important to the overall success of the party. Several of these roles are presented below. They cover most of the situations, challenges, and opportunities a typical adventuring group encounters. Since many of these responsibilities overlap, smaller groups should still find it relatively simple to assign them merely by blending some of these roles together.

Combat Leader: The combat leader takes the lead during battle. He develops strategies and ensures everyone understands their roles and carries them out. The combat leader keeps a cool head and a close eye on the overall situation. Often those focused on ranged attacks make the best combat leaders, enjoying a wider perspective in combat than duelists. The combat leader determines the targeting order, which opponent gets taken out and how, and if necessary, by whom. When the tide of battle turns, the combat leader decides when to retreat. If necessary, he also orders someone to hold the line while the rest get away. Often, the combat leader does it himself.

Escape Director: The escape director pays close attention to finding the fastest route away from trouble. He prepares for catastrophes the rest of the party believes will never happen, fusses over maps, works out lines of retreat, and notes good places to hide or make a last stand. Before the party actually goes into a risky environment, the escape director prepares a bolthole, some nearby place useful for concealment, defense, or recovery, ideally all three. The escape director also makes sure that the party sets aside some of its resources for desperate flights to safety, and never lets the others pressure him into using those assets for any other purpose.

Negotiator: The "face" of the group, the negotiator takes the lead when dealing with strangers. Before adventures, he haggles with potential patrons or employers to get the best possible deal. During the adventure, he steps forward whenever the situation demands diplomacy or a straight-faced bluff.

Information Officer: This role is best suited for players that pay close attention to the details the others overlook. His encyclopedic knowledge of monster vulnerabilities, and the weak spots of antagonists, usually keeps him shouting out critical pieces of advice during combat. Rumors and similar plot entanglements also keep the information officer busy. Treating them all as part of one giant puzzle, he frequently finds patterns, not to mention threats or opportunities, which slip by everybody else. When the information officer announces he has figured something out, a smart party pays close attention. The information officer also steps in when interrogating prisoners, though often, he and the negotiator share this responsibility.

Quartermaster: This player keeps the books and tracks the mundane but essential details that often make the difference between success and failure. He pays close attention to his equipment and talents, as well as those of every party member. If a situation demands some tricky

coordination between different party members, for instance, temporarily swapping gear to get the best result for a particular problem; likely the quartermaster comes up with the solution before anyone else. Similarly, if a party member actually forgets about a useful item or talent, the quartermaster does the reminding and makes sure the party gets full use of this asset. The quartermaster also keeps track of valuables acquired during adventures, and makes sure that it gets divided fairly once the party leaves for home. In keeping with this duty the quartermaster makes it his mission to ensure that the party squeezes every conceivable bit of wealth out of an adventure.

Security Coordinator: A player with this role plans for the safety and well being of the group. The security coordinator regards every stranger, even the most harmless or seemingly benign, as a potential threat and devotes time and energy to puzzling out ways the outsider might harm his friends; just in case he must prepare a countermeasure. Knowing that the party is the most vulnerable when it rests, he devotes particular attention to securing campsites. When in more settled areas, the security coordinator safeguards lodgings from potential threats and sets up watches to ensure that at least one person is awake at all times. ♦



HOW TO STAGE A SUCCESSFUL AMBUSH

Success or defeat in battle often rests upon the answer to two simple questions: when and where? An ambush gives you complete and total control over the answer to both. Unfortunately, despite all their advantages, groups staging ambushes still sometimes manage to bungle the attempt. To increase your chances of success, keep the following principles in mind and factor them into your plans.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Win before you strike the first blow. Learn as much as possible about your enemies prior to the ambush. Get an accurate count of their numbers. Consider their strengths and weaknesses and devise tactics to deal with both. Look for ways to neutralize their advantages and exploit their vulnerabilities. Make surprise *your* ally, not theirs.

Keep your plan simple. The more complex, the greater likelihood of failure. Similarly, work out some contingencies. Long discussions give enemies time to regroup and recover. Give your contingencies a short code word and make sure your allies know what to do when someone shouts one of them.

CHOOSE YOUR GROUND

Own the battle site. Exploit every advantage your control over the timing and location of the ambush gives you. Maximize the effectiveness of ranged attacks, anything that lets you hurt your enemy from a safe distance.

Start by creating safe pockets that provide cover and concealment. Dig trenches, lay down brush canopies, wear camouflaged clothing, anything to make yourself harder to see and hit. Make sure you spread these areas throughout the ambush site to cut down on the effectiveness of area attacks. Use whatever special advantages your game allows to safeguard you and your allies.

Create a "kill zone" to trap your opponents. Clear it of anything they might use as cover or concealment. Sprinkle it with things designed to incapacitate your targets once battle begins, such as bear traps, poisoned spikes, caltrops, and similar hazards. Avoid digging pits since this gives your enemies a place to take cover from your attacks. Mud, if deep enough to slow them down without giving them a place to hide, works far better. Use your game's equivalent of "land mines" to batter away at



your foes during the opening salvo. Whether magical runes that explode when read or canisters of nerve gas, never miss a chance to kill your foes before they realize the threat.

Do what you must to keep your enemies in the kill zone while you pound on them from safety. Anything that traps your targets helps shield your allies from harm. To avoid exposing your own people to risk, use "expendables," such as mindless undead, automatons, summoned creatures, or charmed enemies. Keep these expendables concealed before the fight. This not only protects them from the first attack, but also keeps your enemies from realizing the threat until too late.

GO FOR THE JUGULAR

Ideally, your opponents should fall to the first salvo. Your ultimate strategy depends upon whether you want to capture or kill, but in either case, finish the fight quickly. Use your best attacks first. The longer the battle goes, the greater the risk of your enemies using countermeasures to nullify your special attacks.

Identify, and then take out their "big guns" as soon as possible, preferably before they realize the danger. Regardless of the setting, expect some of the opposition to possess greater means to strike back at you than others. Whether enemy spellcasters or troops equipped with portable artillery, knock them out of commission before they gather their wits and mount a counterstrike.

Use an overlapping strategy. Harm as many opponents as possible with each action. Area attacks work wonderfully in ambushes. Similarly, anything that creates long-term problems for your targets gives you a decisive edge. Your victory and survival depends upon preventing counterattacks, so keep your opponents on the defensive.

Bolster your allies. In magical settings, spells and effects designed to enhance non-spellcasters sometimes prove more useful than those directed against the enemy. Employ this principle in other settings as well. If your game allows for chemicals designed to temporarily enhance the reflexes and concentration of troops, make sure they use them.

BREAK THEIR SPIRIT AS WELL AS THEIR BODY

Give your opponents an escape route, and then slit their throats when they use it. If your targets survive the first few moments of the ambush, expect them to eventually break out no matter how hard you contain them. Ensure they *run away* rather than charge your position. Assuming you laid the proper foundation for the ambush, and adequately defended your havens, this should prove relatively simple. As further encouragement, concentrate your fire on opponents who *do* move against you. Destroy the first few and expect the rest to give up trying.

As an added incentive, include an apparent escape route for your enemies to use. Of course, make sure you come up with lots of ways to make those who actually do choose to run regret it. Include lots of traps and obstacles along this path to safety. Once people make the decision to flee, losing their stomach for the fight, they almost never change their minds. Exploit this. Think of the threats you place along the escape route as the equivalent of giving them one final kick to the pants as they crawl away. Break them, and keep them broken by hurting them while they make their escape. This should prevent your enemies from staging any sort of a counterattack while you deal with those who choose to stay and fight.

KNOW WHEN (AND HOW) TO RUN

Always prepare an exit strategy just in case things go wrong, and don't let pride or overconfidence cause you to hesitate about using it. Set up a secondary ambush site, a place to rally and stage a counter attack, and use it against the opposition. If your enemy follows you, this should give you a chance to take out their fastest and most determined members. Think of it as a decapitation strike. Chop off the lead element of those pursuing you. This should give your enemies pause and increase your chances of escape.

If you have the time and resources, add a few obstacles to slow your enemies down, like covered pits and barbed nets. Destroy a bridge, create a barrier, and trigger a rock fall; anything that allows you to retreat in good order. Do whatever you must to get away clean. ♦

PAINT ME RIGHTEOUS TWENTY TATTOOS TO DIE FOR

Tattoos have found a home in tabletop roleplaying games. Players enjoy detailing their characters, and body adornment is just one more detail on top of hair, eyes, and skin color. From painfully stenciled savages to painted sailors, more and more characters are going under the needle. Even a few wizards get a discreet mark or rune tattooed onto their flesh where the robes cover it in polite company. These twenty suggestions make for a great *wall of flash* for your next character's tattoo.

1. An emerald serpent coils around your right arm, its gaping maw poised above the head of a beautiful sprite trapped in its crushing embrace.
2. A severed human hand clutches a battle-axe, while a mailed gauntlet holds a long sword. Among these images, the tattoo flows with elaborate script.
3. Your left shoulder carries a chaotic jumble of black and red runes. The tattoos seem to twist and swirl when you move.
4. Your upper face, from your nose to your forehead, is tattooed with a magnificent silver and black moth; the spots on the moth's wings are your own eyes.
5. The mighty tentacles of an enormous squid flow down your sword arm. Your cording veins make the beast seem alive as you hew through your enemies.
6. Looping, intricate script covers your legs and belly. Every month, a new phrase appears in tableau.
7. A lifelike portrayal of a pair of kings and a pair of eights decorate your left forearm.
8. A list of your family members, complete with a single death date, lies emblazoned over your heart.
9. The constellations of the zodiac play out across your body. The Dawn Moth lights on your right shoulder blade, while the Jackrabbit bounds down your left calf.
10. Perfect bands, one-inch thick and spaced evenly apart, ring both of your legs.
11. Beneath your eyes, a shadowy gray triangle drops to points on your chin, broken only by your blue-tinted lips.
12. Stenciled into your flesh is the story of a great hero — your great hero. You must emulate him at every turn.
13. Bound to one soul forever, the pair of tattoos on your forearms matches up to your mate's inkwork, completing a perfect symbol.
14. Conforming to local customs of a warrior, your left arm is completely inked black and your right arm an even shade of red.
15. Tattoos of starbursts surround your eyes, while a crescent moon lying on its side covers your mouth, giving you a strange zodiacally, clown-like look.
16. So dedicated to the business of dealing death, you have transformed your entire face into that of a grinning skull and your hands and forearms into bony appendages.
17. You bear an archaic symbol on your forehead, placed there by a long dead mystic at the time of your birth. In a long forgotten language, it simply means "54."
18. Curling, mirrored icons placed above each shoulder blade seek to protect you from night-death or possession by nightmares.
19. A scantily clad angel peers over your right shoulder, and its opposite devil looks over your left.
20. The rippling pattern of deep blue on your hands, which shifts to green, then yellow along your arms, upper body, and face, is actually the result of an alchemical explosion that embedded pigments in your skin.

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS

No one likes to lose, but a campaign where you never run away probably needs a better range of challenges. When you do find yourself forced to retreat, a group with a pre-existing strategy stands a much better chance of pulling it off. Remember, in the long run, if you survive, you win.

BOLTHOLES

Before you enter the adventuring area, prepare a bolthole, a place to hide if things go wrong. Stock it with food, medical supplies, firewood and anything else a badly beaten group might need. Boltholes exist to allow your party to recuperate safely. Make it well hidden or strongly fortified, ideally both. Expend some time and energy on it just in case. Use whatever resources your game allows to conceal your bolthole. Whether through magical illusions, scientific holograms, or just plain old camouflage netting, the ability to hide from your enemies could prove vital. Make misdirection your ally too. Set up some false trails or other red herrings to lead pursuers away from your true location. Ideally, you should try luring them into traps in hopes of killing them or least hurting them enough to make them think twice about continuing the chase.

Despite all your efforts, assume that your enemies might still manage to find your bolthole and prepare accordingly. Before you set off on your adventure, lay down some booby traps — whether landmines, leg snares, or magical runes that detonate when read. These not only incapacitate your enemies, but also give you critical moments to prepare for the attack or make your escape.

Ideally, you should also include some active defenses, creatures and allies ready to fight at your bolthole on your behalf. Even a few guard dogs kept back just in case could help turn the tide of battle. If your game allows access to sophisticated creatures such as robots or zombies, not to mention plain old mercenaries, use them. Only the living and the free get to spend their money, so devote some of your resources to keeping yourself alive when things go south.

RALLY POINTS

Once the adventure begins, designate rally points: pre-determined places to regroup should the party scatter or separate. Make your bolthole the first rally point, but set one within the adventuring area itself as soon as possible. Ideally, the rally point should prove easy to find, with few hostiles nearby. This cuts down the risk to stragglers.

Areas guarded by organized opposition also likely use search parties to check out abandoned storerooms and the like. This cuts down on your rally point options. In these situations, find an ally on the inside to help you hide or escape. If possible, prepare in advance through use of bribery, blackmail, and similar recruitment strategies. This not only gives you an agent to ease your getaway, but a shot at useful intelligence before you go in.

If that fails or proves impractical, use the tools your game allows to gain an agent as soon as possible once you start the adventure. Magical mind control transforms even the

most fanatical opponent into a loyal agent, at least for a time. Advanced science that manipulates personality and memory sometimes duplicates those sorts of enchantments. If you find it impossible to manufacture a willing turncoat, try to coerce someone into doing your bidding. Often, threats with a time delay or a remote control work quite well at turning opponents. Locking a bomb around potential agent's neck, or injecting them him a poison, gives him a solid reason to help you accomplish your mission in hopes of getting the timer removed or a dose of the antidote before it's too late.

DO YOU HAVE A RESERVATION?

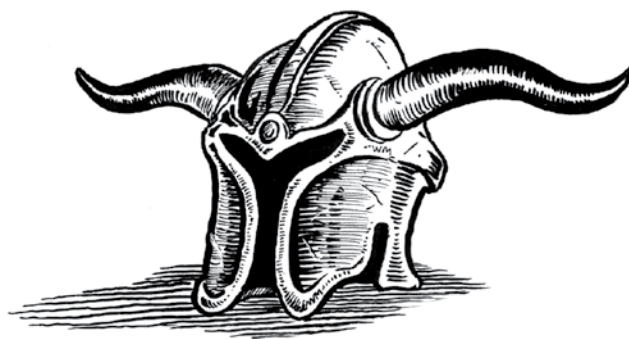
Always plan for "one last fight" and structure your adventure accordingly. If you keep a contingency reserve of resources specially allocated to assist in your escape, or to fend off threats as you retreat, your chances of surviving any setbacks within the adventure increase dramatically. As always, tailor to what your game allows. In a magical world, scrolls with useful spells and other 'one-shot' items give you a critical edge, and typically, games based upon other settings offer similar pieces of equipment.

When retreating through closed environments, such as most dungeons, your reserves should focus upon blocking or slowing pursuit. Closed environments only permit a few paths to the outside world and freedom. Whether orc filled tunnels, the corridors of a space ship, or a tyrant's nuclear bunker, closed environments restrict both you and your pursuers. However, since you lead the race, this gives you a strong advantage.

Assuming you have the means to do so safely, blocking pursuit usually works better than merely slowing it down. Use explosives to manufacture a cave-in or engineer a bridge collapse that might even kill your pursuers. Even if they survive, losing their best could cause them to give up, or at least offer you some badly needed time to make your getaway. If your game allows it, manufacturing barriers, like a magical wall or a force field, could also block pursuit, and, unlike explosives, there is no risk of harming you or your allies.

Though usually not as effective as blocking, slowing pursuit typically requires fewer resources and puts you at less risk. Leaving behind things designed to injure your pursuers offers two advantages. If it actually does harm them, it gives them a reason to give up, or at least slows them down a bit. Even if your pursuers manage to avoid injury, it still gives them an incentive to take a take a little extra caution while chasing you, and this should make it easier for you to build on your lead. Of course, sometimes distractions work just as well, if not better than actual threats. For some pursuers, food, poisoned or otherwise, could cause them to end the chase as soon as they come upon it. Others might respond more favorably to trinkets and other valuables. Curiosities, anything that might cause someone to pause, also prove useful. Whether it is a wrapped present, an apparently ticking time bomb, or a pentagram on the floor, they could all spark a moment's pause.

When retreating through an open environment, such as most outdoor settings, your reserve should focus upon enhancing movement, creating foils for your pursuers, and simply hiding. Due to the freedom of movement an open environment offers,



simply blocking pursuit rarely proves very effective. Instead, you must find ways to either actively get away or actively discourage pursuit.

If your pursuers cannot follow you, they must give up. Depending upon the nature of your game, this could involve employing magic or technology to take flight, disappear beneath the water, or something even more exotic. In some situations, simply hopping into a canoe or a glider could generate similar results. Similarly, anything that increases the speed at which you move might allow you to outdistance your pursuers and make escape a reality.

Since an open environment makes it relatively easy for pursuers to run around obstacles, most of the strategies useful in closed environments prove less than effective. However, anything designed to chase or harass your pursuers could easily serve just as well. Using magic to summon monsters, or technology to call in air strikes, fills the same basic niche. Preparing an ambush in advance, and then striking at your opponents before renewing your flight could also give them pause, and give you some badly needed moments.

If all else fails before you reach your bolthole, consider just hiding out. Sometimes, the simple practice of ducking down and letting your foes run past works quite well. Ideally, you should use deception and subterfuge to increase your chances of success. Even when short of magic and technology, your surroundings and natural cunning could do the trick. For instance, sacrifice your horses by roping them together and sending them off while you hide in the trees.

EVER BEEN TO GENEVA?

Finally, in the event of your capture, you have a ransom strategy in place. Start by extending the same courtesy to your defeated foes. If you slaughter helpless captives, do not expect any mercy when the tables are turned. Make sure to keep extra money and treasure hidden away since you forfeit anything in your possession once taken. Ideally, you should cultivate allies willing to purchase your freedom or mount rescue operations, probably by extending them the same courtesy. ♦



CHAPTER FOUR: THE HIGHER LEVELS (WRAPPING UP THE CAMPAIGN)

SPLINTER RELIGIONS

Many religions have splinter sects whose rituals differ from the orthodoxy. Often times, powerful and influential members of the religion create these sects. For a truly unique character, consider tailoring your worship with one of the practices below as you grow in your religion — make sure you give your GM a heads up; schisms in religions could make for a memorable end game to a long running campaign!

GOD OF ANIMALS

Through the gift of Nature, peoples have thrived beyond what they could do alone with the help of animals. As guardians and household companions, animals are the reason people have moved from hunters to civilized farmers and traders.

As a member of this sect: You are required to keep a minimum of four pets with you at all times. If harmed while under your care, this serious offense against your god demands increased tithing or the taking on of additional pets.

As a former member of this sect: After years of suffocating yourself with smelly, shedding animals, you avoid large groups of them at all costs. You never take a familiar, and you are critical to those who do. You avoid herds on the farm in favor of the crowds of the city.

GOD OF DEATH

Mortals may not determine the flow or direction of death's eternal river, for only the gods command such dominion.

As a member of this sect: When anyone dies, you forbid him or her from medical treatment for at least a day, assuming the recently deceased is in communion with the god of death. A healer of this sect freely offers healing spells to the living, but refuses to resurrect or raise the dead.

As a former member of this sect: You have watched too many people die while a healer was nearby, waiting for their 'judgment.' You defend life passionately, putting yourself in harm's way to protect an ally. Whenever a comrade falls in combat, you drop everything to bind their wounds to keep them from moving to their 'communion.'

GOD OF JUSTICE

Laws make the world a livable place, free from mad brutality and anarchy. However, laws themselves are merely man's flawed reflection of Heaven's Ordained Creed. Members of this sect attack the law to make it stronger. They continuously argue the merits and flaws of all governmental

regulations, championing simultaneously the absolute rule of the nobility and the freedoms of the poor.

As a member of this sect: You are the truest and most absolute of Devil's Advocates, for it is only by your constant challenging of rules that Law becomes worthy of the title, ever both strong and supple. You will argue, with righteous fervor, the morality of any regulation at any time. Your fellow party members may dread bringing you into contact with any civilization, where you will obsessively pursue loopholes in the law and argue loudly with constables in the streets.

As a former member of this sect: Yours was a life of constant, beleaguered harassment and imprisonment, aggressively fighting tooth and nail against every governing body you encountered. In places where free speech saw suppression, you wore a mask and vandalized temples. In places where free speech was encouraged, you stood in the streets and screamed obscenities against the king. Now, you want nothing more than simply to be left alone.

GOD OF LIFE AND HEALING

The beautiful majesty of mortal existence is defined by the knowledge that all life must end. Who better understands the wonder and grandeur of life than one who has seen death? The clergy of this splinter faith must personally perform one justifiable execution or mercy killing every year.

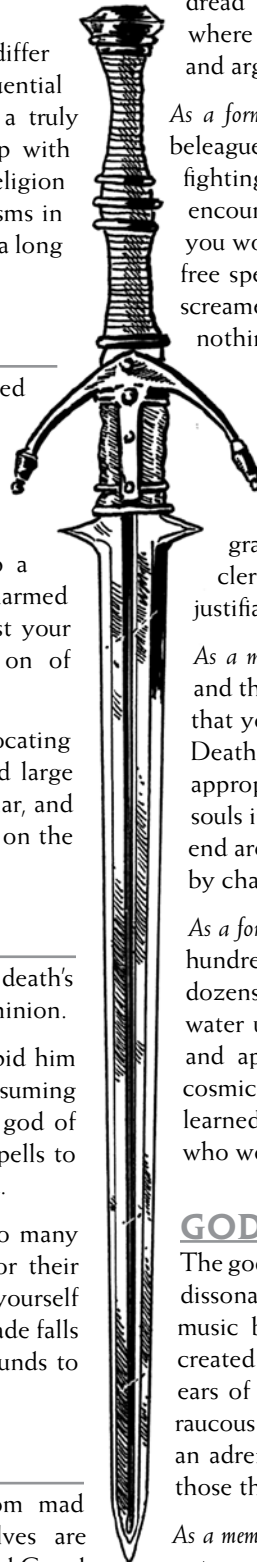
As a member of this sect: You care for the sick, the injured and the dying; as a Hospitaler, your faith demands always that you "first, do no harm." However, your enemy is not Death itself, as all lives softly fade into the dark in their appropriate time, and your holy duty is to guide dying souls into the embrace of life's end. Whether the lives you end are those ordained by the church, by time, by fate, or by chance, it only matters that you be there.

As a former member of this sect: Although you may have saved hundreds more, you have still snuffed out dozens upon dozens of lives, slitting throats and holding heads under water until the shaking stopped, all to better understand and appreciate the mystical connection between those cosmic opposites: Life and Death. Through it all, you learned only one thing — it is only a cruel and hateful god who would force you to kill.

GOD OF MUSIC

The god of music smiles upon those who practice clamorous dissonance, for only in wild surges of sonic madness will music be reborn ever vital. The chaotic, atonal sounds created by the devout of this sect ring harshly in the ears of those cultured in civilized modes of music. Loud, raucous noises bolster this sect's young followers, creating an adrenaline rush that better focuses their power against those that oppose them.

As a member of this sect: The risk of deafness runs high in this sect, as the practice of loud, chaotic music is necessary to augment your magic. You dislike all forms of subterfuge in combat, charging headlong at full volume into the fray.



You appreciate tones and melodies of traditional music, but give glory to your god with off-key, ambiguous chords and improbable harmonic inflections.

As a former member of this sect: Having spent so much time engaging in music bearing no rhyme or reason, you crave structure. You seek to create entirely new forms of music and institute schools of innovative musical theory. This sect reverently views members who depart to create new music as merely following a natural progression of worship, likened to a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly.

GOD OF SKY

The overreaching god of the sky sees and knows all things, but your mountain-haunting splinter sect seeks to reach the god physically and touch the clouds, his cloak, literally. They practice starvation to reach an extreme physical lightness, believing that in the holiest of states, it is possible to subsist on air alone. Some of the devout signify their willingness to attempt direct communication with their god by participating in a solemn festival where they submit to the holy catapult and shoot themselves directly at the clouds. None has yet succeeded in touching them, but the bones of the holy litter the valley below.

As a member of this sect: You preach to others against eating, and given a choice, always push for adventures in the mountains. Your companions are terrified to bring you to inns for fear you will harangue people at dinner, preaching that holiness is found in hunger. You claim you are "humbly, not yet light enough to reach for the god's cloak," but assure everyone that you will get there soon enough.

As a former member of this sect: You never want to go up a mountain again. Paranoid that rail-thin men planning to toss you over a cliff are never far behind, you eat yourself to distraction at every turn, spending much of your hard-earned money on food. You even hoard food on adventures. Nothing you do, however, seems to make you any fatter.

GOD OF THIEVES

Most gods and goddesses of the thieving arts extol the trickster, the clever ones, the pranksters, and the daring. This sect takes a darker path, for what could be a more complete theft than the theft of life?

As a member of this sect: Once a year, you sneak off from your party and burglarize a household, brutally slaying all its inhabitants in their sleep. Should you fail in your holy effort and wake one of the victims, the ceremony ends abruptly, and you must flee and then re-attempt the act at a different location forty days later, repeating the heinous crime until successful. Sect members wear a sash mark for each successful ceremony, and owe unquestioning obedience to any member with more sash marks than they, even if the cult brethren is younger or otherwise less senior than the thief in question. It is imperative that no member of your adventuring group learns of your activities, although you are always looking to recruit new devotees for the sect. Of course, you are also very proud of your decorative sash, but refuse to explain it—or your many odd contacts throughout the cities of the land.

As a former member of this sect: You deeply regret your many murders. Your sleepless nights are filled with memories of brutalities past, and you are convinced that lawmen throughout the lands yet seek you. Still, you keep your sash, unable to dispose of something so dark and so holy, but you fear the day a fellow sash holder recognizes you, almost as much as you fear that the children you spared will hunt you as adults and cut you down as you deserve.

GOD OF TRICKERY/FORTUNE

The Universe depends on randomness to grow; anything that stays the same for long is open to rot and decay. Members of this sect must stir up life around them to keep things fresh and interesting.

As a member of this sect: Your practice mandates you spread the word of randomness and chaos. Monthly, as part of your religion, you must attempt to steal something from a friend or loved one and hold onto it until they realize it is missing. Should they then approach you over the matter, you hand back the item, pronouncing, "My God takes and she gives. Know ye that life is as capricious!"

As a former member of this sect: You are generally trusting of people but highly suspicious of religious figures, as your former sect members have driven you crazy in the past by stealing your most precious items from you! Any religious folk, especially party members, who show you kindness, must be planning to 'teach' you.

GOD OF WAR

You must maintain a state of readiness for war at all times, for the act of war alone gives your god strength. If battles erupt in your area, you must find a way to participate on one side or the other, mustering as many armed and ready followers as can be convinced to participate in glorious battle. The cause need not be just, only bloody and thorough.

As a member of this sect: Upon entering a new area or city, you immediately begin searching for local conflicts. If you can find a way to push one of those conflicts over the brink so that open battle results, you will do so. You constantly train with weapons and in small unit tactics. Others may mistake your willingness to train them as devotion to a cause, only to be disappointed when you leave them with no instructions beyond "go bash some heads."

As a former member of this sect: You are a peace-loving person. You seek to mediate and reduce strife wherever you go, actively seeking chances to act as an ambassador or intermediary in order for warring sides to communicate safely. You realize that weakness can bring on conflict, so, in some situations, you may still train some locals in the art of self-defense, tempering your knowledge by extolling the virtues of peace and comparing the art of preparing for war to locking your doors and windows at night.

GOD OF THE WILD

Humans are animals, tied to the cycle of the seasons and the whirl of life and death in the same way as the trees, the stars, the rivers, or the beasts of the fields. Members of this sect view the creation of mines, cities, and fortresses as a natural extension of humanity's instincts. They encourage human fertility, crop production, hunting, and fishing.

As a member of this sect: You guide and tend to humans as a shepherd guides and tends to the sheep. You watch for monsters and signs of evil magic as a shepherd might watch for wolves. You care for children and the elderly, and help to provide for your flock as best you are able. However, you are not one of them. You must always remember that humans are merely animals, and as such, they are occasionally very foolish and dangerous.

There are two roads from this faith as a former member of this sect: the Humanist and the Universalist. The Humanist chooses to become part of his own flock, to give up his god-like overview of civilization and to dwell among the people. Conversely, the Universalist seeks a greater balance with the Endless Scream of the Wild, abandoning his delicately balanced position of observation and authority over the affairs of humans to seek better understanding of some other species, or perhaps even the weave of the universe itself. ♦

BECAUSE A LITTLE META-GAMING NEVER HURT ANYONE

Here's what you need to remember on those occasions when you're sucking fumes on spells and the dice are against you.

12 META-GAME PROTOCOLS

1. Don't eat or drink. The ref won't make you say you eat and drink to stay alive so there's no real reason to do it "in-game." You're just asking for trouble.
2. Stay away from all good-looking people — an obvious trap of the GM's.
3. Take a pizza break and offer to buy the pizza if the GM will consider the break "resting" for game purposes.
4. Never plan so long that the other players start throwing things at you. You'll wind up paying for pizza.
5. Always break the plan as soon as the encounter starts — this will save you "planning time" in the future — remember you don't get rewards or experience for "planning."

6. If you know the adventure hook, and realize you may die at your current levels, lack of magic items, or the like, ignore the hook and go sack a town, assassinate an NPC, or destroy a temple the GM really likes. Trust us; you'll get your new hook.
7. Always kill the most innocuous NPC along for the ride immediately, even if you haven't any 'in-game' reason to do so. They are probably your eventual betrayer, and the body can be used for trap detection.
8. Don't strut or brag where the GM can hear you. GMs always punish vanity with humiliating deaths. It's a rule.
9. Never have your character sleep with another PC, even if you think it will be funny. It's not. It's weird.
10. Always play a character that is the same sex you are. If your character is transformed into a member of the opposite sex, carry on like it never happened. Otherwise it's weird.
11. A firm knowledge of the movies and books your GM has been reading is probably better information than, for example, the rules of the game. If your GM recently gushed about a book filled with pirates, don't bother buying heavy armor.
12. Never engage in sex between PC and NPC, unless it is clearly part of the necessary plot. It's akin to having sex in a slasher flick — suicide. ♦

OFF INTO THE SUNSET: RETIRING PRODUCTIVELY

Not every adventure ends with a glorious total-party kill. Some characters reach a point in their careers when they consider retirement. How to retire is the question. Rich philanthropist, glory hound barfly, ancient sensei, insane wanderer, quiet shopkeeper... the options are endless.

ADVISOR

Ruling is a tough business, and not every adventurer wants to run a country. Instead, the character becomes an advisor to the ruler of the realm—troubleshooting problems, hiring other advisors and adventuring parties, and giving advice about matters arcane and mundane. He travels the realm in a stylish carriage, guarded by a squad of royal guards and his personal chef. Feared by the lesser nobility, for the character is an outsider to the intrigues of the Courts, yet he has the king's ear in matters of great importance.



ARCH-VILLAIN

"Saving the world" — what did you change, really? A small tyrant is deposed, and shortly thereafter, another springs to take his place; a horde of monsters are slain, and their lairs become the macabre home of more terrible beasts. For all your sacrifice, what were your thanks? Monuments and titles, while you sat alone, ignored and left to grow old and rot? When pampered noblemen took credit for your deeds, it became too much. Your skill in battle was unmatched before you bargained with the dark forces, and now you are feared once again.

ARTIST

Blessed with a natural gift for rendering the unique images you have taken in during your adventuring, you take up painting or sculpture, deftly recreating memories as beautiful as the coral castles of the merfolk to those as horrid as the Aceldamas on the plains of Hell.

"BLAZE OF GLORY"

Who wants to retire? Retirement is for tutors, advisors, and accountants. That is not for you. Oh sure, you might try to convince yourself you are retired, but eventually, the call of adventure will ring in your ear and you'll go; because somebody has to save the world. Of course, you know from the start you will not be coming back. But that is acceptable, for bards will sing of your deeds for generations, write poems about your bravery and sacrifice, and compose stories about your life. Your retirement is in the afterlife.

FAMILY MAN

Why did you ever wait so long to live the good life? All those years of battle, toil, and pain seem almost like a dream now. Your loving family beside you in the sunset of your days makes the blood-drenched glory of your younger years almost laughable. Still, you saved the world. You changed the course of rivers, toppled mountains, and defeated pure villainy. Now is the time to tend the hearth, bounce grandchildren on your knee and sip the sweet wine of your vineyards — though your blade still hangs above the fireplace.

LEGENDARY SHOPKEEPER

Though your hands and eyes may have grown soft with age, what living being could claim to know more than you about the best balance for a blade, the most efficient size for a backpack, or where to obtain the finest quality rope? You have a sharp eye for fine craftsmanship and an almost supernatural aptitude for the game of trade. Your prices are fair, your products come guaranteed, and you often have just the thing for an adventurer in need of something... special.

HAUNTED WANDERER

You are death's plaything. Your life was tested in battle more times than stars in the sky. So much dueling, so much fear, so many desperate moments, so many killings, sorrows, and screams. Innumerable foes and friends have perished weeping before your eyes, snatched away in a blink, or crippled, bleeding, and mercifully silenced by the final flutter of death's

soft wings. How could you settle anywhere, take a home or a soft bed, knowing that your very presence sounds the first stirrings of the Song that Unmakes Hope?

INNOVATOR

There were certain things that might have made your old job easier, for lack of a better term. For a start, you might have benefited from tools that were more efficient; tools to provide light, or a less complex way to prepare food or transport treasure. Of course, spending years exploring the overgrown ruins of fallen civilizations have given you some interesting ideas on every topic from new methods of crop irrigation to experimental ways to douse a long-range target with potent alchemical agents. The next generation of heroes needs equipment — yours!

GHOST

A foe to be forever feared, an ally to be forever treasured, you lived ten lifetimes in your days. More than any other man or woman who has ever walked the world, you hoped, feared, wept, and rejoiced with the clarity of a tragic hero. Your final hours are upon you now, though they seem to drag through years of aching joints, shaded parlors, and watery wine. Life holds no joy anymore. No one looks you in the eye. No one raises a glass when you enter a room. It is almost as if you are already dead.

GOD-CHIEFTAIN

In some lands, the strong humble themselves, allowing lesser men of 'noble breeding' to rule, while the giants of the world merely bow and obey. Not here. In this harsh place, those with strength of arm, speed of thought, and the secrets of magic earn the respect of the masses. Breeding counts for nothing. Only the worthiest here may claim the Throne of Thrones, and all people of the land now bow before your might — including your many wives, your dozens of children, and legions of the finest warriors the world has ever known. It's good to be the king.

GUILD-HEAD

No one could have united the Five Unspoken Guilds — the poison-brewers, the dice-kings, the moneychangers, the harlot-masters, and the pickpockets — except you. The capitol's underbelly exists by your command, now. Those with a talent for larceny, for vice, for all of those subtle things kept out of the sight of the lawman, they answer to you. You watch the dance of the cross-trade as it turns, spinning coin into your pockets, and you will be there to set things back on course if truly sinister elements once again begin to take root.

"I'VE NOT YET BEGUN TO FIGHT"

Your world owes a great measure of its enduring safety to your talent, skills, and bravery. However, there are worlds beyond this one, and all have a dire need for a savior. The way is perilous. And you will not stand by while the tormented citizens of other realms cry for help.



MASTERMIND

It is all a game, is it not? The rise and fall of fortunes, kingdoms, gods, and even worlds are nothing but a great play for the entertainment of some unknown forces beyond your ken. Nevertheless, you have learned the tricks of the game, the tricks that teach how to manipulate men and gods, and how to play the many cultures and their peoples against one another. This is the shape of the universe: there is no strength but the strength you make, no power but the power you can hold, no ending but the ending you command.

OBSESSIVE

EPISODE VI

Wherein Bedlam Havok takes solace in his lack of progeny.

"...Well, I've never particularly trusted anything, as you can probably imagine, but something about these children gave me pause."

"Sir, you've been sitting in a well-respected restaurant, drinking out of your own hip flask, and eating trail rations from a bag for the better part of an hour. I would find it hard to believe if you told me that you had ever found anyone or anything 'not suspicious'."

"Gods and trolls, you simpleton, any one of these so-called 'waiters' could be an assassin. Honestly, this is why I'm still alive and most of the people I've known are not! Anyway, these little rug rats were almost suspiciously unsuspicious, if you catch my drift."

"Common street urchins, then?"

"Yes. It was only after we woke up, naked and chained in the Lair of the Octomorphous Hierophant, that the rest of my party would listen to my warnings. Idiots. And so I learned to..."

"Never forget that small street urchins are neither human nor urchins. Guard thy purse!"

— The Protocols, Urban Protocol #6

He got away, there at the end. You are sure of it. Oh, certainly, his cursed body looked destroyed and his soul forever unwoven, but in that final death-scream you heard a laugh that your companions missed. Now your life must be devoted to preventing his return. Though your body has begun to sag and fail, although your thoughts have begun to wander and stray, your will is as resolute as it ever was in the days of your youth. By any means necessary, the monster must remain imprisoned beyond death.

PARSON

When there was such desperate need of it, in the days of trouble, your words alone could call forth holy fire from the clear sky, bring fresh water from the barren earth, and even return the breath of life to the fallen. However, that power, like an eclipse, departed as swiftly as it came — for one moment

bright enough to blind, then suddenly gone, as if it had never been. Now, with lightning no longer in your veins, you live a life of quiet service, offering sermons, weddings, funerals, and counseling to those who seek your guidance.

POLITICIAN

Politics can be hell, but at least you are a hard target for the assassins continually dispatched to silence you. You sometimes wonder if that was the reason you were asked to serve on the ruling council. In the meantime, you spend dreary hours poring over handwritten reports, trying desperately to figure out how to bring people together. You miss the days before the necessity of diplomacy, when you could just inform everyone it was time for you to save the world, and to heed your words and stand aside, lest they perish. Somehow, negotiations always seemed easier when you were adventuring. Perhaps it was the small arsenal at your side.

SERIAL KILLER

You faded away to your comfortable mansion in the city, entertaining nobles and the wealthy. They hung on your every word; your tales of daring exploits sending shivers and delighted giggles through your guests. They could not know those years of adventuring and facing down the darkest foes left a wound in your psyche no healer could mend. Now you roam the city's underbelly and high society alike, striking in darkness, your victims falling before your vengeful sword while you secretly hope to be found out. Perhaps discovery and condemnation will still the darkness in your soul.

TAVERN LEGEND

Your career exploits so precede your entry into any room that you have taken to spending every evening of your twilight years in the local drinkeries, allowing adoring fans, incapable of hearing the same story too many times, to buy you pints of ale as you regale them with the litany of your derring-do.

TUTOR

The character tutors others in his craft, setting up a school or college with a large chunk of his adventuring funds. To ensure the maximization of leisure time, the character teaches a cadre of his best students to become instructors in his art and run the daily affairs of the school. The students thrill to the occasional appearance of the character, as she gives a few minutes of advice and tips to the eager and well-paying few able to afford tutoring.

VILLAGE IDIOT

The village children may stare, and occasionally poke fun at your filthy countenance, but they throw no stones at you. Your grim visage bears too striking a resemblance to that of the great iron statue in the city's central square. Once, you were a hero, but the ghosts of your blood-soaked past have driven you mad, wrapping you in a constant, spiritual ache that only the strongest whiskey can dull. You live on handouts, sleeping in doorways and damp barns, followed ever by the dull, echoing screams of battle that only you can hear. ♦

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*"I don't have to be faster than the dragon,
just faster than you."*

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2

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