DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

WORLDS AND MONSTERS

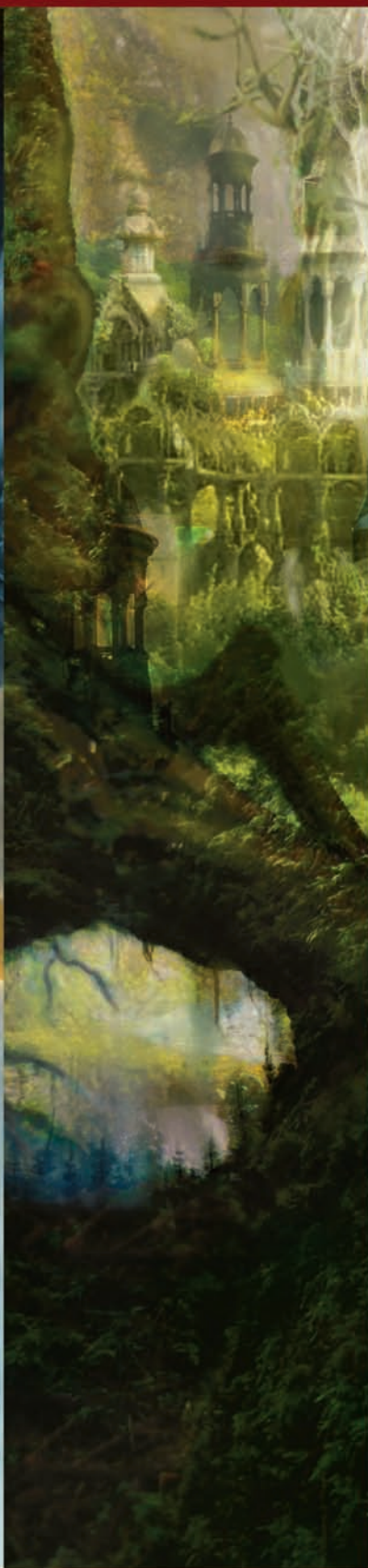Compiled and Edited by Jennifer Clarke Wilkes

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®

WIZARDS PRESENTS™
WORLDS AND MONSTERS

Compiled and Edited by Jennifer Clarke Wilkes

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D&D and the Birth of a New Edition

—Bill Slavicsek

New editions of games come at the most unexpected times. Sure, people have been predicting the arrival of the 4th Edition of the Dungeons & Dragons game, incorrectly, for years now. The reality is that my R&D team didn't start seriously discussing the notion of the next edition of D&D until sometime in early 2005. That's when we began to examine different scenarios for how we might approach the process.

We came up with all kinds of possibilities, from minor tweaks to complete make-overs using a totally different game system. For the most part, these were simply thought experiments, the kind of exploratory design that we undertake in R&D all the time. The true impetus for change was you, the D&D players, who provided all kinds of invaluable feedback through message boards, community forums, surveys, and personal interaction at events, whether during seminars, tournament play, or impromptu discussions that broke out wherever we traveled. The 3rd Edition game mechanics—what we call the d20 Game System—is perhaps the most robust and fun roleplaying game system ever designed. But it's not perfect, and as we get deeper into the edition, its flaws and fun-ending complexities become more pronounced, more obvious to players and Dungeon Masters alike.

We knew we could improve the game. We could make the game faster, more intuitive. We could greatly reduce and perhaps even eliminate completely the parts of the game that get in the way of the fun. So, starting in May, 2005, that's what we began to do.

Along the way, we also came up with the idea for Dungeons & Dragons Insider. This exciting suite of digital tools for players and Dungeon Masters was just too powerful a concept to try to shoehorn the existing d20 Game System around it. Instead, we knew we had to rebuild the game to take full advantage of this amazing new initiative. When the two concepts merged—a new edition and a new digital initiative—we knew it was time to start planning the 4th Edition of D&D.

4th Edition D&D

Yes, the 4th Edition of D&D is coming. It debuts in May 2008 with the release of the new *Player's Handbook* and the premiere of *D&D Insider*. This book is a preview of the new edition of the game, as well as a look behind the scenes so that you can get a sense of what went into the making of the new edition. This volume covers world elements and monsters and other things of interest to Dungeon Masters and players who like to know how the world of D&D works. Its companion volume (*Wizards Presents: Classes and Races*) deals with character races and classes, as well as other things of interest to all players of the game.

Bear in mind that as I write this, 4th Edition is still a work in progress. We're still hip-deep in playtesting and fine tuning, and many of the specifics are still in flux. So, take this book as what it is—a snapshot of the 4th Edition design and development process at this point in time (September 2007). We still have months of work before we send the core rules to the printers, and things will change between now and then.

Also, we're not going out of our way to explain everything in these two volumes. We're showing some of the cool stuff. We're discussing some of our thought processes and design goals. And we're revealing a number of secrets behind the newest parts of 4th Edition. But we're not showing you everything, and we're not spoiling the surprises waiting for you in the new *Player's Handbook, Monster Manual,* and *Dungeon Master's Guide.*

Instead, we're inviting you into the Wizards of the Coast R&D department to get a sneak preview of the monsters, cosmology, environment, and other world-related elements of the 4th Edition of D&D. We're very excited about how the new edition is shaping up, and we're having a terrific time playtesting the new rules. We can't imagine ever playing D&D in any other way, and once you see the full scope of the new edition of the game, we believe you're going to feel that way, too. For now, flip through this book, read the essays written by my staff, and look at the amazing artwork. Every time I gaze at the concept art, I start thinking about the first 4th Edition campaign I plan to run.

And that makes me smile.

Born of Fire, Born of Ice

No, not really. We had no mandate or specific timeline for 4th Edition. What we did have was the commitment of the company to allow us to explore options and make a recommendation. We had the design tenets document that I prepared to guide us in our explorations. And we had the tenacity to see if we could make the game and play experience better than it is under 3rd Edition. If we could honestly come to the table with a better game, then I was going to recommend placing 4th Edition on the schedule.

You helped us plan the new design. You showed us what was working and what wasn't. You (the collective D&D fan) were the honorary fourth member of the design team, and you helped us make D&D better, faster, and stronger.

Thanks for your help. Enjoy this preview of 4th Edition. Check out www.dndinsider.com for more information and up-to-the-minute details on 4E.

And keep playing D&D!

THE PROCESS OF RE-CREATION

—Richard Baker

In the spring of 2006, the RPG R&D group organized two teams to begin the next step of 4th Edition design: a mechanics team and a world concept team. Rob Heinsoo headed up the mechanics team. I headed up the world concept team, which included Stacy Longstreet, D&D senior art director; Chris Perkins, D&D design manager; and game designers Matt Sernett, James Wyatt, Ed Stark, and myself. The mechanics team adopted the code name Flywheel. Well, as soon as I found out that Rob's team had a super-secret code name, I knew that I wanted one too—so I put the initials of team members together, and the first word I thought of that featured all of 'em was "scramjet." (That's a hypersonic ramjet engine in case you didn't know, easily three times cooler than a flywheel.)

> **Hey, we need a cool code word too!**
>
> **S is for Stacy, a big baseball fan
> C is for Chris, that Canadian man
> R is for Rich, who lives in Pacific
> M is for Matt, who's sometimes terrific
> J is for James, whose back is defective
> Together they form a team of detectives!**
>
> **Rob: Awwwwwww.
> Matt: "Sometimes"?
> Ed: And I don't count?**

With the important task of finding a good code name attended to, we sat down to figure out exactly what we needed to do. The mechanics team had a pretty clear objective: improve game play while preserving the depth of experience the D&D game has always offered. Scramjet's mandate was to do something similar for D&D's story elements, look, feel, and content mix. If Flywheel's job was to design elf racial traits, for example, Scramjet's job was to figure out what broad story role elves ought to play in the world, what sort of play experience elf characters ought to offer, and what sort of core identity those racial traits ought to reflect. It was our job to closely examine what elves have done historically in the game, ask whether that was satisfactory, think about how they should appear in art, and look for new opportunities to make elves a uniquely compelling part of the D&D world.

And we had to do that for *everything*. Character races, monsters, magic, gods, planes, dungeons, artifacts, famous personalities and places . . . everything. So we built a discussion schedule that allotted time to a variety of specific topics, then dove in. We started off by thinking about the key conceits we held about the game world, moved on to brainstorming about character races, crawled through monsters, and wrestled with topic after topic through the summer of 2006.

REASSESSING MONSTERS

Monsters are a good illustration of the sort of work we did. First, we wanted to know which monsters deserved serious work in the Scramjet process. We started with the *Monster Manual* and then canvassed all of our 3rd Edition sourcebooks, looking for important or noteworthy monsters that deserved to be promoted to the "A-list"—those appearing in the first *Monster Manual*. We divvied that up: I went in search of fey, devils, and mastermind creatures; Ed looked for giants, monstrous humanoids, and "artillery" monsters; James sought out demons and magical beasts; and so on. Then we crawled though the *Monster Manual* page by page, looking at each creature and debating it. Was it cool? Was it playable? Was it important to the world? What *should* it be?

For example, we looked hard at the achaierai (we ran into it pretty early on, as you might expect) and observed some of the following points. No one knows how to say the name, and many players think it's a silly-looking monster, although it is mechanically interesting as a natural skirmisher with high speed and Spring Attack. We decided that the achaierai is not really all that important and doesn't need to take up real estate in our first *Monster Manual*. End of discussion—we spent 10 minutes on the topic and moved on. That happened with a fair number of monsters: We greeted them with a collective "Kill it!", struck them from consideration for early appearance in 4th Edition, and moved on. So if you happen to like the delver and plan to use it frequently in your first 4E game, well, we're sorry.

On the other hand, many much more important monsters consumed hours of discussion. Thinking about how to untangle our confusing, competing savage humanoids and different varieties of reptile-folk took a lot of time and blue-sky brainstorming. As an example, we have an art hang-up over troglodytes and lizardfolk—they look enough alike that sometimes you can't tell whether a particular illustration or miniature is meant to depict one or the other. We decided to leave lizardfolk's appearance in their 3rd Edition look,

but we reconcepted the trog's look so you can tell the difference at a glance. In the same way, we found that orcs, goblins, hobgoblins, bugbears, and gnolls all occupy very similar space in both backstory and mechanics. We decided to distinguish them more. We played up gnolls as cravenly, demon-worshiping bullies who favor hit-and-run tactics. They're happy to hack down folks who don't fight back well, but they've got no stomach for fights against foes they can't intimidate. On the other hand, orcs are bloodthirsty and tenacious—they get mad and only redouble their efforts when things aren't going their way. We're supporting those interpretations with both mechanics and story elements. Now fights with gnolls should feel significantly different from fights with orcs, and that's good for the game.

"I'd Like Some Flavor with My Rules"
—Ed Stark

The Dungeons & Dragons game is more than a set of rules; it's a game with an identity. If you say "D&D" to anyone who knows anything about the hobby, the phrase conjures up images of wizards, dragons, epic adventures, magical treasures, and all sorts of fantastic things. But in presenting the rules of the D&D game, we have to remain cognizant of the fact that not everyone thinks of fantasy in the same way or creates adventures in the same sort of world. Our earlier 3rd Edition rulebooks tended to be "rules heavy, flavor light" for that reason. As a result, some resemble textbooks with nice artwork rather than evoking excitement and anticipation in the reader.

The world team recognized this problem and, after some discussion, decided that the best solution lay in fleshing out specific game elements. Over the game's 35-year history, D&D has incorporated iconic features recognizable to players in any campaign. Artifacts such as the *Hand* and *Eye of Vecna*, legendary locations such as the Tomb of Horrors, and unique deities such as the dwarven god Moradin—all remain in the collective identity of the game, edition after edition and year after year. Some originated in the original *Greyhawk* campaign, while others arose in various campaign settings or in supplements not affiliated with any game world, but they all resonate with fans as representative of the Dungeons & Dragons game as a whole. Individual Dungeon Masters pick and choose which of them to place in their own adventures, alongside wonders of their own invention that are important to their worlds' mythologies.

We decided to build on that, creating specific stories and flavor elements to complement the basic rules text. Elves, for example, aren't just a set of numbers and abilities as a race; they originated in the Feywild, a magical place that borders the "real" world, overlapping it in a strange, mystical way. Telling the history of the elves defines them in the reader's mind and lets a player make an elf character more alive.

The atropal

–Continued

Instead of listing the planes and their game effects, we describe the origin of the universe and the war between primordial beings and the gods, calling out particular battles as they become important to the development of the game. When possible, we drop in well-known names of locations such as the exotic City of the Spider Queen to explain the origins of monsters, magic, and artifacts.

By creating these stories, we help build the shared mythology of the game. We will never tie down every detail of the universe to such elements, however. We want to leave the joy of creativity and imagination to Dungeon Masters and players.

How Many Monsters?
–James Wyatt

From quite early stages of 4th Edition design, we agreed on a base assumption for encounters: The player characters will usually face more than one monster at a time.

By contrast, 3rd Edition encounter building assumed that the baseline encounter for a group of four PCs of level X is a single monster of CR X. If you want more monsters, they have to be of lower level. If you want to use higher-level monsters, it has to be a tougher encounter. This model has turned out to be pretty unsatisfying, for several reasons.

Not Enough or Too Many
Individual monsters in a large group have to be so much weaker than the PCs that they often can't hit except on a roll of a natural 20. That's fun once in a while—the adventurers get to hew through mobs of minions with little actual risk—but it gets old fast.

Individual monsters often don't make interesting opponents either. Most go down in just a few rounds, there's not a huge threat to the party, and the combat is usually very static. In a four-on-one fight, a round of combat goes like this: Character one attacks the monster. Character two attacks the monster. Character three attacks the monster. The monster attacks one character. Character four attacks the monster. The monster takes four heaps of damage every round, and usually deals damage to one PC. Not very exciting. In fact, the rules state that the PCs are supposed to be able to wade through three such fights before running low on resources.

The fact is that a fight against a group of monsters is often just more fun than a fight against a single monster. And by

"more fun" I mean a lot of things—more dangerous, more tense, more dramatic, more exciting, more dynamic.

Just Right
It took a few years to see the light. For me, it was the D&D *Miniatures Game* that flicked the switch. Armed with a variety of miniatures—and, more importantly, their stat cards—I started building encounters that looked a little like miniatures-game warbands. A troll, a couple of high-level drow, maybe an Abyssal eviscerator thrown in the mix. I used monsters closer to the player characters' level, making for a tough fight, but a really exciting one. Monsters acted on different initiative counts, creating more of a back-and-forth between the actions of the PCs and those of the monsters. I was having a lot more fun, and so were my players.

When we started designing 4th Edition, we quickly discovered that we all shared the same experience. Encounters with multiple monsters are just more fun. So we began with a new assumption: The baseline encounter for a group of five PCs of level X is four monsters of level X. They can be four of the same monster, but it's much more interesting if at least two different kinds of monster are represented.

This new system offers a much wider variety of options for building encounters in different and interesting ways. For a fight with more monsters, they can each be lower-level, or they can be hordes of minions (with simple stats and abilities) of the same level. For fewer monsters, they can higher-level or elite versions, or a single solo creature crafted to deal with an entire party of adventurers.

In concert with this idea, 4th Edition monster design helps keep the range of options interesting. Monsters whose level is lower than that of the PCs don't become ineffectual as quickly: Their attack and defense numbers don't scale up and down as much, so they're not looking to roll 20s quite so soon. The addition of elite, solo, and minion monsters means that not all monsters of a given level are created equal.

Monster Roles
When putting together a group of monsters, mixing and matching a variety of different combat roles presents a more dynamic and challenging encounter for the player characters.

Pretty early on, the 4th Edition design team started talking about what roles monsters fill as opponents. There was a remarkable synergy with the other designers in the department. For example, as Dave Noonan was planning the contents of the *Monster Manual V* book, he sketched out a variety of roles to make sure that each would be well represented.

The designers of *Dungeonscape* picked up on the same vibe, resulting in the extensive catalog of monster roles appearing in that book.

Some monsters stand in the front line, battling toe to toe against the player character fighters and paladins. Others rely primarily on ranged attacks—though not many pure "artillery" creatures are among the D&D classics. Skirmishers like to run in and out of melee range, using feats such Spring Attack, Flyby Attack, or Shot on the Run. Masterminds are controllers that like to stay behind a wall of minions, hampering the PCs and aiding their own allies. And lurkers do their thing by hiding until a PC is within reach, then jumping out and wreaking holy havoc.

At least, that's how the roles *ought* to work. In practice, the 3rd Edition baseline assumption of one monster for four PCs sometimes made them difficult to fulfill. Artillery and mastermind monsters, in particular, have a hard time doing their jobs without a protective wall of more melee-focused allies to hide behind, or at least some terrain they can use to best advantage. A lurker encountered alone can't repeat the effectiveness of that first surprise attack. As a result, most 3rd Edition encounters eventually devolve into a head-to-head beatdown between the PCs and monsters that have varying effectiveness in melee.

But if you design an encounter aiming for four monsters, it's a lot easier to use all the roles. A mind flayer might have a bodyguard of advanced grimlocks—controller plus melee. A thug in an alley is supported by backstabbers lurking in the shadows—melee plus lurkers. A pair of ogres shield an orc archer and a shaman—melee, artillery, mastermind. Highly mobile drow control a giant spider that emerges from the shadows to pick off isolated PCs—skirmishers with a lurker. The possibilities are endless, varied, and extremely fascinating.

Our definitions of monster roles evolved a great deal over the course of two years of design. Melee specialists split into two categories: brutes (heavy hitters whose best defense is a ton of hit points) and soldiers (well-armored and disciplined creatures that exercise more battlefield control). We also developed the ideas of solo and minion monsters to account for enemies that break the standard encounter mold. We added a leader sub-role that encompasses some of what we thought the mastermind should do, and more carefully crafted a controller role that covered the rest. A lot of leaders are controllers, but we have leaders in other roles as well.

The result is a robust set of encounter-building guidelines that also takes terrain and traps into consideration. Armed with these guidelines, and a plethora of examples within the *Monster Manual* itself, Dungeon Masters have everything they need to ensure that every combat encounter is a memorable one.

Building a New Monster Manual
—James Wyatt

As lead designer for the first 4th Edition *Monster Manual*, I had the job of deciding what monsters to put in the book. Obviously, I didn't do this in isolation—I got input at every stage of the process from managers, developers, editors, writers, and other designers. But at the end of the day (for many, many days), I was the one sitting down with a big spreadsheet, looking at the big list, cutting away pages here and adding new monsters there. The result is a representation of monsters across the entire range of 30 levels—more at the low levels, of course, where we expect most people to start their campaigns, and fewer as you go up.

We decided early on that we wanted every monster entry to fill a page or a two-page spread. No starting monsters in the middle of a page. We've gradually moved toward that approach over the lifespan of 3rd Edition, and it makes *Monster Manuals* much easier to refer to and use at the table. But it also presented some design constraints—most important, it limited the sheer number of monsters we could put in the book.

One way we compensated for that was by putting variations of a monster on the same page. The umber hulk is a cool monster and an iconic part of the D&D experience, but it's not clear it deserves a page all to itself. Adding a Huge umber hulk, though, makes a much more interesting entry. DMs get monsters at two different levels, and the entry provides an example of a monster amped up to a greater power level—decked out with a new power that makes it a more interesting and challenging threat.

In a two-page monster entry, or the occasional entries that go even longer, we have a lot more room to play. Orcs, for example, get two pages in the book, which include five stat blocks to represent orcs in a variety of roles, from minion to controller. The orc minion, orc berserker, orc archer, orc mystic, and orc bloodrager are five important orc archetypes, covering everything from the grunts that form the bulk of an orc horde to its most battle-scarred veteran.

Ultimately, though, I had to keep reminding myself that this is only the first *Monster Manual*. I couldn't fit everything I wanted to into this book—there are just too many cool monsters from the history of this game to cram between the covers. I had no less than twenty dragon varieties I wanted to put in the book, but I couldn't justify spending forty pages on dragons, even for a game called Dungeons & Dragons. The chromatic dragons get the star treatment this time around, but keep your eyes peeled for the return of old favorites as well as some surprises in future *Monster Manuals*.

Over the next couple of pages, the game designers and art director discuss how we went about concepting the assumed setting for any basic D&D world.

Key Conceits
—Matthew Sernett

The design of the world of 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons operated under certain shared assumptions about what is cool about D&D and what would make the game more fun. These key conceits do not apply to a specific setting; rather, they should be true for anyone creating a D&D world, leaving as much of the fine detail as possible to the individual Dungeon Master.

As the game developed, some of these ideas shifted as well, but they remain the basic guidelines for world design.

The World Is More Fantastic: D&D cultures should blend real-world cultures and fantastic elements, not merely elements of medieval and Renaissance Europe. It's okay for D&D environments to have no realistic analog.

The World Is Ancient: Empires rise and empires crumble, leaving few places that have not been touched by their grandeur. Ruin, time, and natural forces eventually claim all, leaving the D&D world rich with places of adventure and mystery. Ancient civilizations and their knowledge survive in legends, magic items, and the ruins they left behind, but chaos and darkness inevitably follow an empire's collapse. Each new realm must carve its own place out of the world rather than build on the efforts of past civilizations.

The World Is Mysterious: Wild, uncontrolled regions abound and cover most of the world. City-states of various races dot the darkness, bastions in the wilderness and amid the ruins of the past. Some of these settlements are "points of light" where adventurers can expect peaceful relations, but many more are dangerous. No one race lords over the world, and vast kingdoms are rare. People know the area they live in well, and they've heard stories of other places from merchants and travelers, but few really understand what's beyond the mountains or in the depth of the great forest unless they've been there personally.

Monsters Exist All Over: Most monsters of the world are as natural as bears or horses are on Earth, and monsters are everywhere, both in civilized sections and in the wilderness. Griffon riders patrol the skies over dwarf cities, behemoth beasts carry merchants' goods long distances, yuan-ti have an empire a few hundred miles from a human kingdom, and efreet in their City of Brass appear in the mountains suddenly like Brigadoon emerging from the mists.

Creatures Need a Place in the World: Creatures shouldn't be introduced into a vacuum. Any monster or player character race we make in the game should occupy a unique space in the D&D world. We need to make sure that new creatures have a new and compelling role in the world, in addition to an interesting mechanical purpose.

Adventurers are Exceptional: The adventurers created by the players are the pioneers, explorers, trailblazers, thrill seekers, and heroes of the D&D world. Although some non-player characters might have a class and gain power, they do not necessarily advance as the PCs do, and they exist for a different purpose. Not everyone in the world gains levels like PCs. An NPC might be a veteran of many battles and still not become a 3rd-level fighter; an army of elves is largely made up of nonclassed soldiers.

Magic Is not Everyday, but it Is Natural: No one is superstitious about magic, but neither is the use of magic trivial. Practitioners of magic are as rare as classed fighters. Magic should never cross over into the silly or replicate modern conveniences: We don't want "magitech" such as arcane elevators and air conditioners, or flying sea serpents to put out fires. At the same time, we don't want a real-world medieval fear of magic that gets wizards burned at the stake. There might be minor magic that is relatively commonplace; for example, a wealthy farmer might have a magically sharpened plow, but not an animated combine. People might see evidence of magic almost every day, but it's usually quite minor—a fantastic monster, a visibly answered prayer, a wizard flying by on a griffon—but powerful and experienced practitioners of magic are far from everyday.

"Good" and "Evil" Mean More: Being aligned toward good means being a champion who actively fights for what is right, not merely someone who supports such ideals. Being good is a defense against evil, never a vulnerability to evil. Likewise, evil is more than just bad thoughts. Most average people aren't aligned one way or the other. You can't use magic to know whether or not a creature is evil or good: You must judge it by its actions or know its nature (demons, for example, are always evil).

Remote Gods: Gods are largely distant and detached from the world (with some exceptions, particularly evil gods). Most don't take an active part in worldly affairs, but they have exarchs and angels who act on their behalf. Gods can be encountered, fought, and killed (although some might be too powerful to challenge). They aren't omniscient or omnipotent, but they do grant spells to clerics and hear the prayers of their faithful.

One Sun, One Moon: The world assumes what will be most easily accepted by players without imposing unfamiliar calendars and phenomena.

—Continued

No Forced Race Relations: The settlements of the PC races are usually points of light but aren't necessarily good-aligned. They are places where people can share shelter from the dangers of the wild wide world. There is no inherent racial enmity between PC races, and hostile attitudes do not generally go beyond fear or lack of respect.

Death Matters Differently: It's generally harder to die than in previous editions, particularly at low level. When a heroic-tier player character dies, the player creates a new character. A paragon PC can come back from the dead at a significant cost. For epic-tier characters, death is a speed bump. Being raised from the dead is available only to heroes, and it's more than just a spell and a financial transaction. NPCs, both good and evil, don't normally come back to life unless the DM has a good reason.

Monsters and NPCs shouldn't use the same rules for death as PCs. When they're down, they're out—PCs don't have to slit every monster's throat after the battle and burn the corpses (except maybe for trolls).

Fantastic Locations: D&D adventures should take place in fantastic settings—no more 10-by-10 rooms with two orcs. Encounters should occur in areas with interesting threats—from encounter traps that activate every round to hazards that were formerly considered monsters, such as assassin vines or gray ooze.

Less Evil Fighting Evil: Too much in previous editions deals with evil fighting itself: Demon lords and archdevils war on each other rather than threatening the PCs. We don't want to waste space on things players can't use. Make sure conflicts are important and useful to making the game fun.

Points of Light in a Big, Dark World
—Richard Baker

One of the first things we tackled in the Scramjet team was the creation of a set of "key conceits"—things we knew we wanted to be true about the game world and the characters' role in it.

During those discussions we found ourselves wandering into a debate about campaign world design and the "typical" D&D game. Many of the campaign settings we created in previous editions look a lot like the map of the modern world—neat borders are drawn around countries, implying that the world is more or less carved up between a number of political entities or civilizations. We weren't very happy with that, to tell the truth. It works against the sense of mystery, wonder, and dread you'd like to see in most D&D settings.

In kicking around this particular key conceit, we hit upon the idea of a different core assumption about the world: Most of it is monster-haunted wilderness, and the centers of civilization are few and far between. Common people don't venture into strange parts, and travel between towns or kingdoms sticks to a small number of lightly used roads. Commoners are scared of what's in the old forest or beyond the barren hills at the end of the valley, because *anything* might be out there, and the vast majority of anything is probably hungry or hostile. Venturing away from the "base town" is something adventurers do.

I came up with the phrase "points of light in a dark world" to capture this concept. A point of light might be a border town, a remote village, a dwarf stronghold, the tribal lands of human barbarians, or a powerful city-state. But if you're more than a few miles from that point of light, things get dark and dangerous quickly. The city-state might keep monsters and marauders at bay for a day's ride in all directions, but at some point the law doesn't stretch any farther. And the darkness might include brigands and bandits, orc tribes, goblin cities, vampire-haunted ruins, a dragon's hunting grounds—anything you can imagine. Some "points of darkness" might not be so dangerous, if you know what you're doing; an eladrin citadel hidden in a remote valley certainly isn't a safe place for common people of the nearby human lands to visit, and therefore it's a place of mystery to them. But it takes the steely nerves of real adventurers to venture from the light into the dark places of the world.

A More Fantastic World
—Matthew Sernett

When the world team started discussions about the D&D world, we began by talking about some basic goals for the design. We identified our shared expectations about what the game should be like, calling these "key conceits."

The first key conceit was this: The world should be more fantastic and less representative of real-world history and nature. We want D&D cultures to blend real-world civilizations and fantastic elements, not merely rehash medieval France and Renaissance England. We proposed D&D environments containing highly fantastic elements alongside more mundane features. These could include an island of rock perched atop a constant waterspout of titanic size, a river of

lava that never cools or stops flowing, a grassy plane dotted with monolithic pillars that seemingly dropped from the skies, or a city of floating towers borne up by ancient magic.

The Burden of History

The D&D game has always been influenced by European history and culture. If you look back at the game's roots, it's easy to see why. Gary Gygax's *Chainmail* game, D&D's precursor, added fantastic elements to a medieval battle game he had already developed.

The various editions of D&D continued this trend of drawing source material from the real world. Supplements and magazine articles delved into minutiae—everything from the myriad blades used on polearms by various cultures to how monstrous inhabitants of dungeons get clean air and remove waste. Although interesting from a historical and scientific standpoint, such details have very little effect on how the game is played. They add verisimilitude but rarely increase the fun of playing.

The 3rd Edition of the game took a first step away from reliance on the real world by designing new and unique appearances for armor and weapons, but the urge to make fantasy reflect reality remained. The setting was still a historic, medieval world onto which fantasy elements were grafted. The two concepts don't blend well. A largely human society, surrounded by an environment filled with magic and monsters, places the fantasy on the outside. It's foreign.

Getting Strange

After over thirty years of this approach to game design, the real-world well is getting pretty dry. Also, focusing on the realistic without accounting for the fantastic creates a tension between the two. For example, the *Player's Handbook* allows PCs to purchase mules and horses, but not griffons (even though the *Monster Manual* states they can be trained as mounts). The division also results in different treatment of standard or useful equipment: A 1,500 gp suit of plate armor is in the *Player's Handbook,* but a 50 gp *potion of cure light wounds* (often more useful and more available to most people) is in the *Dungeon Master's Guide,* along with rare and esoteric magic items. Ironically, the result has been to *reduce* the fantasy element of D&D.

So we thought about how much more wondrous and unique the D&D world would be if we shook free of the constraints of simulating reality and history. If we blur the distinctions between real-world cultures, historical periods, and fantastic societies, we can offer players a brighter and more colorful palette with which to create their worlds and characters.

This line of thinking can offer vast opportunities, but it could easily become too much of a good thing. We don't want everyone in the D&D world to cast spells, or merchants to talk on magic cell phones. Rather than simulating the effect of fantastic elements on a real medieval world, we set about creating a believable fantasy setting, one that old and new players alike can relate to and find exciting.

Art Direction for the New World
—Stacy Longstreet

There were so many decisions to be made, so many things to consider. The team discussed the possibilities, options, pros and cons of what the 4th Edition D&D setting should be: Greyhawk, Forgotten Realms, Eberron, or something completely new. There was no easy answer, and we knew no matter what our choice, there would be those who would be disappointed. In the end, what we wanted was a world that would offer the most versatility to players and Dungeon Masters, giving them the flexibility to create the types of adventures they like most.

The world needed to feel magical, and it needed to include some of the great D&D locations that had already been created and embraced. But it also needed to have room for new things. It had to give our audience what they expect as well as allow some surprises. So we aren't providing a 4th Edition world map that shows you where everything is. Instead, we describe some locations that exist in various places within the world, leaving the rest to you.

The Scramjet team looked at all of the D&D monsters and attempted to create a world where all of these monsters could live. We reorganized some of them and assigned them new back stories to explain their locations, their alliances, and their enemies. In some cases, these revisions meant that physical traits would need to change. In other cases we found it necessary to redesign a monster completely, taking mechanics we liked from creatures that we did not. As a result, some of the monsters in this edition will look familiar, some will be new, and some will remind you of monsters that no longer exist but have exciting abilities borrowed from something else.

Another observation about 3rd Edition art was the overall lack of world imagery—what the world actually looked like. So many pieces of art showed items or adventurers, but with little to no visible surroundings. One of our goals this time around is to add more flavor and to include art that shows off the world, with its vast range of environments and locations. I believe that part of what made the *Lord of the Rings* movies so powerful was that director Peter Jackson took the time to include all the details: The world of Middle-Earth was so well thought-out and visually executed. We plan to provide this level of detail as well as to create a playing space that gives more creative room for Dungeon Masters to create exactly the worlds and campaigns they want to play.

It has been a fun though sometimes difficult task, and in the end, we hope that the changes and improvements will be well received.

The New Cosmology

To determine the physical and magical laws of the Dungeons & Dragons world, we needed to take a step back and imagine the entire cosmology. Where does magic come from? What about the other sources of power that we wanted to clarify in the game? These discussions and more led to a re-imagining of the D&D cosmology, as described below.

A Grand Tour of the Universe
–James Wyatt

At the center of the universe is the **world.** It has no proper name, but a wide variety of prosaic and poetic names exist among people who need to call it anything but "the world" or "here." It's known variously as the Creation, the Middle World, the natural world, the created world, or sometimes the First Work. It is populated by all manner of mortal creatures, but it's also the middle ground where the conflicts between gods and primordials, and among the gods themselves, play out through their mortal and immortal servants.

The Shadowfell
The **Shadowfell** is a dark echo of the world. It touches the world in places of deep shadow, sometimes spilling out, and other times drawing hapless travelers into its dark embrace. It is not wholly evil, but everything in the Shadowfell has a dark and sinister side. The energies of this plane fuel the powers of necromancers and shadowcasters, create illusions and shadow constructs, and animate some undead. When mortal creatures die, their spirits travel first to the Shadowfell before moving on to some other fate.

The Feywild
The **Feywild** is an enchanted reflection of the world. Arcane energies flow through it like streams of crystal water. It is a place of unparalleled beauty and majesty, and every creature of the Feywild is imbued with some measure of fantastic power. This realm is the easiest source of arcane magic for mortal casters to tap into.

The Elemental Chaos
Beneath the world lie the churning forces of the **Elemental Chaos**. Elemental substance and energy crash together in an unending cycle of creation and destruction. This is the stuff the world was made from, and if the primordials had their way, they would tear creation down and return it to its original state.

The landscape of the Elemental Chaos is broken up by rivers of lightning, seas of fire, floating earthbergs, ice mountains, and other fantastic terrain features. At its bottom lies the **Abyss**, the home of demons. The origins of the Abyss are shrouded in mystery, though some whisper of a forgotten god who formed it in the heart of the primordials' domain.

The Astral Sea
Above the world is the **Astral Sea**, a shallow ocean of silvery liquid with the stars visible beneath the shimmering surface. Sheets of starlight like gossamer veils part to reveal the **Dominions**, the homes of the gods. These divine realms are much like islands floating in the Astral Sea.

The Dominions include the **Nine Hells** (home of Asmodeus and the devils), **Mount Celestia**, and the **Bright City**. Upon parting the veil to Mount Celestia, travelers find themselves on the lower reaches of a great mountain. Behind them, the slope disappears into silvery mist far below. Conversely, the Nine Hells resemble a vast continent divided into nations ruled by warring princelings, though all are ultimately under the iron fist of Asmodeus.

That said, the Astral Sea is not the usual means of travel to the Dominions. Instead, portals to specific Dominions appear from time to time in the world, taking different forms depending on where the portal opens. Portals to the Bright City, for example, appear as brilliant columns of sunlight, while rainbows might lead to Mount Celestia.

No creatures are native to the Astral Sea; any being found there is an exile from another plane. The githyanki, for example, came from the world in ancient times (and still subsist primarily by raiding into the world), while astral stalkers are thought to be devils that escaped from the Nine Hells.

Those who inhabit the Dominions (primarily angels, devils, and gods) are immortal creatures.

The Far Realm
Also called Outside, the Far Realm is a plane—or perhaps a space beyond the planes—that is terrifyingly remote and incomprehensible. The creatures that abide in the Far Realm are weird and too alien for a normal mind to accept without damage. Where stray illuminations from the Far Realm leak onto the world, matter stirs at the beck of inexplicable urges before burning to ash, or taking on monstrous new life.

Where the Far Realm touches life, monstrosities called aberrants form. Some, such as aboleths and mind flayers, are native to that place. Most, however, are strange transmutations of existing life forms.

Adventuring on the Planes

How do you get to these wonderful new planes? In 3rd Edition D&D, spells such as *plane shift* and the complicated *astral projection* live at the top end of the wizard and cleric spell lists. Thus, planar travel has been the province of the highest-level characters.

Not anymore. Just as we designed three adventuring tiers, we thought about the planes in three "layers." We expect heroic-tier PCs to stick pretty close to the middle layer: the Feywild, the Shadowfell, and of course the world. Simple rituals available at relatively low level can shift them to these mirror planes.

At the paragon tier, plenty of adventures are still to be had in the middle layer, but characters also start exploring the bottom layer—the Elemental Chaos and perhaps the Abyss. Each plane has a specific ritual, as well as portals linked to specific places within it. Another way to get to the Elemental Chaos is to find rifts where it spills into the world—for example, the oldest and hottest volcanoes sometimes link directly to fiery parts of the Chaos (and sometimes fire titans come through into the world there).

Epic-tier adventurers are ready to take on the challenges of the top layer: the Astral Sea and the Dominions within (including the Nine Hells). High-level rituals or special portals are the usual access to the realm of the gods. The depths of the Abyss and its demon lords also threaten powerful characters.

The End of the Great Wheel

The Great Wheel is dead.

One of my mantras throughout the design of 4th Edition has been, "Down with needless symmetry!" The cosmology that has defined the planes of the D&D multiverse for thirty years is a good example of symmetry that ultimately creates more problems than it solves. Not only is there a plane for every alignment, there's a plane *between* each alignment—seventeen Outer Planes that are supposed to reflect the characteristics of fine shades of alignment. There's not only a plane for each of the four classic elements, there's a Positive Energy Plane, a Negative Energy Plane, and a plane where each other plane meets—an unfortunate circumstance that has resulted in creatures such as ooze mephits.

The planes were there, so we had to invent creatures to fill them. Worse than the needless symmetry of it all, though, is the fact that many of those planes are virtually impossible to adventure in. Traversing a plane that's supposed to be an infinite three-dimensional space completely filled with elemental fire takes a lot of magical protection and fundamentally just doesn't sound fun. How do you reconcile that with the idea of the City of Brass, legendary home of the efreet? Why is there air in that city?

So our goals in defining a new cosmology were pretty straightforward.

- Don't bow to needless symmetry!
- Make the planes fun for adventure!

Astral dominion

The World

—Chris Sims

The world is a place in the center of the cosmos—a created place, a primary place, a place between. In the beginning, primordials used the energy of pure creation to shape the world, spontaneously generating its counterparts in the Feywild and the Shadowfell. Gods added to this creation, sparking a war that they eventually won. And as the fires of creation and celestial warfare dwindled, the gods divided authority over the world among themselves.

What they had was a world of stark contrasts and wild beauty. The bright eye of the sun lights the world for a time, eventually giving way to a star-filled sky and the soft face of the moon. Mountains pass into plains, the land flowing eventually into the sea. Great forests blanket some territories horizon to horizon. The touch of untamed creation lingers in hills that float in the sky, great deserts flowing with lava, and savage storms that appear in an instant only to be gone moments later.

Some of these bizarre occurrences exist due to the world's permeable nature. Other planes touch the world here and there, influencing everything from the flora and fauna to the weather and the cycle of day and night. Where the veil between planes is thin, creatures can pass into or out of the world.

Numerous races were born and continue to live in this wondrous and riotous place. In the early days, the mightiest among them ruled. Empires based on the power of giants, dragons, and even devils rose, warred, and eventually fell, leaving ruin and a changed world in their wake. Later, kingdoms carved by mortals appeared like the glimmer of stars, only to be swallowed as if by clouds on a black night. The ebb and flow of progress left its mark on the world, along with scattered peoples and settlements.

Where civilization failed, traces of it remain. Ruins dot the world, hidden by the ever-encroaching wilderness, sheltering unnamed horrors. Lost knowledge lingers in these places. Ancient magic set in motion by forgotten hands still flows in them. Ordinary folk shun these locations, fearing what might lie within.

Such people live in the other remnants of fallen realms. Cities and towns still stand, where inhabitants live and work and seek shelter from the dangers of the wider world. New communities spring up where the bold have seized territory from rough country. Few common folk ever wander far afield, though. Trade and travel do occur, but these are the purview of plucky merchants, brave souls, and the desperate. The wilds are fraught with peril—monsters and strange events, frequent enough in places near settlements, are all too usual outside them. Even the members of the smallest villages, fortunately for them, have a few capable individuals and a bit of magic at their disposal.

Magic permeates the planes and the world in the same way that air fills the sky. Normal people believe in magic and accept its power. They benefit from their hedge mage's ability to ward off evil spirits, their wise woman's talent for making effective herbal cures, and their priest's capacity to bless crops.

Like these minor magicians, warriors are widespread enough that most villages enjoy adequate protection from day-to-day threats. Many such soldierly types trace their skills back to the armies of long-gone kingdoms, while others carry on the martial tradition of their people that dates to ancient times. Still others combine the old and the new, or simply learn to fight as necessity dictates, creating a unique path.

Truly special individuals, however, are fewer than these others. An extraordinary few master their arts in ways beyond what is required for survival or mere protection. For good or ill, such people rise up to take on more than any mundane person dares. Some even become legends.

Living in the Light

Communities are where peace prevails and people can go about their daily lives safe from the dangers of the world, and thus such places have common traits. Many such towns are integrated, with a wide array of races sharing the same space. Others are less cosmopolitan, whether because of isolationism or the fact that only one race inhabits the region. Not all settled areas are civilized in the literal sense, and other locales are influenced by the proximity of another plane. Conflict between points of light might be as common as outside threats.

Social order is the name of the game in any cohesive settlement. Citizens agree, to one degree or another, on rules that allow them to get along, and they empower certain individuals among them to enforce these rules. Even outsiders are expected to obey the laws and acknowledge the customs of the community.

Whatever the law, the social order requires a form of leadership. Every settlement has a ruler, whether that ruling body takes the form of a council of elders or a local monarch. Custom takes precedence here, issuing from local wisdom or ancient practices, or both. Sometimes leadership is given only to the worthy, on occasion the strong take priority over the weak, and at other times the unworthy come to power through deceit or inheritance traditions.

Within the power structure of many towns is a built-in tolerance for disparate races. Those who carved out the empires of old conquered many different peoples, bringing together numerous races under one banner. During such times of unification, travel was more common, and people

Dwarf settlement

learned to accept and even become fond of those different from themselves. This enlightened ideal is still widely maintained, even in areas where members of one race out-number others.

A few races, having no homeland at all, must integrate with others to survive. Tieflings, the fallen descendants of the terrible empire of Bael Turath, have for centuries relied on communities created by other races to get along in the world. The dragonborn find themselves in much the same situation since their draconic empire was cast down. Half-elves are unlike these others in that they are born among and welcomed by humans and elves anywhere that either of these two races can be found. Gnomes, though not of mixed blood, found refuge long ago among dissimilar folk.

Other races, though also found in multiracial settings, commonly gather in homogeneous communities. Elves main-tain elegant towns incorporated into their forest homes. Dwarf cities rise formidably among hills and mountains. Halfling families travel in unified bands along major waterways, fre-quenting the villages of other races. Humans also gather into groups that include only humans, though such communities are likely to be remote and even uncivilized.

Lack of civilization isn't a solely human trait. Many isolated settlements fall into this category, and other groups choose a lifestyle outside the norms for civilized folk. Although life among such people can be harsh, it isn't without comfort or order, and it usually offers greater freedom. Uncivilized doesn't mean savage when it comes to many primitive peoples, and a friendly tribe of primitives can be as welcome as a roadside inn in the right circumstances.

Similarly, otherworldly creatures might provide respite along a dangerous road. Most commonly, eladrins offer strangers such support. Where the barrier between the Fey-wild and the world is thin, eladrin settlements can sometimes be found, but timing is important in locating many such towns, since they're not always present in the world.

All the preceding mustn't lead anyone to believe that the world of humans, elves, dwarves, and other common races is without internal conflict. People compete for resources. They go to war for just as many, if not more, poor reasons than good ones. Enmity between neighboring settlements, justified or not, can create hardship for all involved.

Living in the light isn't always easy. It isn't always good or even comfortable. But points of light exist as beacons of safety in a world rife with danger. They represent a glimmer of hope, a reality that could be more widespread if the right heroes choose to push the darkness back.

THE WORLD

—Continued

BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARK

Some places aren't really havens for regular travelers, but they aren't overtly dangerous either. The inhabitants of such locales might even welcome strangers that have a compatible philosophy or purpose, but not just anyone who happens to wander in off the road. Normal folk could see such sites as perilous, without having any accurate idea about what's there.

BEHIND THE SCENES: IS THE LIGHT SAFE?
—Chris Sims

In the expression "points of light," "light" shouldn't be taken to mean "good" or even "safe." A point of light in the D&D world is just a place where travelers can anticipate a nonhostile welcome without doing anything special to ensure that lack of hostility. Travelers can also expect somebody to provide at least a measure of protection, allowing for relative peace. This doesn't mean that everything about a point of light is nonthreatening.

Most of the citizens in a hamlet could be suspicious of travelers, treating them rudely or avoiding them altogether. A greedy or evil lord, who is a villain in the eyes of his subjects, might rule a town. Within cities, criminal gangs certainly run protection rackets and thieving rings, among other illegal activities. Monsters could infiltrate anything from the sewers to the power structure of a settlement. None of these particulars changes the fact that travelers can go to the point of light, rest, and depart without being any the wiser about or becoming involved in local unpleasantness.

If an adventure calls for the characters to become involved in the nasty goings-on, though, all bets are off. In the best "the guards have better things to do than get killed" fashion, the local constabulary likely has its hands full with daily defense and law enforcement within the town—it can't just assign personnel to find mysterious raiders that have been attacking outlying farms. That evil lord could be the leader of a dark cult that also includes all the prominent townsfolk. And what adventurer worthy of the name turns to the city guards when faced with strong-arming from the local thieves' guild?

A dragon might allow travelers to approach to offer it tribute and seek advice. The residents of a fortified wilderness temple could take in those in need or those that share the same faith. Hobgoblins might tax a stretch of road, and actually maintain and patrol that road as well. Supposed brigands could reveal that they are rebelling against a nearby tyrant and provide shelter to potential allies. On a hidden forest path, fey creatures might play practical jokes on or demand tribute from passersby, reacting violently only if threatened.

Between light and dark—relative safety and certain danger—are plenty of gray areas. Those who give ignorant rumors too much credence, those who let their swords and spells speak for them, are bound to find only enemies in these uncertain regions. But those wise enough to explore with an eye toward finding unlikely allies or aid might discover one of those instead.

FALLEN EMPIRES
—Bruce R. Cordell

Civilization persists only within widely separated "points of light" in a world of untamed, mysterious darkness. The darkness shrouds a ruin-littered landscape, a world built on the foundations of lost empires of unimaginable antiquity. Some of these were human; many were not. A few spanned all the world and more, such as the primeval illithid empire, but most were less expansive. All left tell-tale signs of their previous majesty: scattered bits of crumbling structures, half-collapsed complexes, buried cities, and mysterious temples at the inaccessible hearts of deserts and forests. These ruins tell a tale of heights achieved, then long falls.

Knowledge of these past empires is preserved in the present through tattered scrolls, oral histories, long-abandoned ruins, and the relics and treasures that daring explorers sometimes unearth in such places.

BAEL TURATH

The once-human empire of Bael Turath swore pacts to terrible creatures in return for great power, thus birthing the tiefling race. Flush with its newfound might, Bael Turath recklessly expanded its lands. The nobility called down hellfire, curses, and eldritch power to scour those who resisted them, those who angered them, and in the end, those who made amusing victims.

The empire finally met its match in the rival dragonborn empire of Arkhosia. Some of the most appalling battles in history were fought between the two empires and, ultimately, both fell into ruin. No stone was left standing atop another in Bael Turath's grand capital. Its few surviving noble houses scattered, weeping and cursing, their power lost and their dreams turned to ash.

The ruins of the tiefling empire generally take the form of slender, rounded structures of black stone, with winding stairs and spikelike steeples.

Tiefling ruins

Arkhosia

The dragonborn race once forged the powerful empire of Arkhosia in arid lands. Ruled by royal lines of mighty dragons, proud Arkhosian warriors subjugated vast territories across the world. Their empire was famous for carving its most important structures directly into the sides of cliffs, hills, and mountains. Wondrous stone facades, carved with pillars, arches, and spires, were wound through with dragon iconography. In the deep, cool caves behind them, dragonborn and dragons alike conducted the affairs of their empire.

Many centuries ago, Arkhosia came into conflict with the growing shadow of Bael Turath, the infernal empire of the tieflings. Dragonborn and tieflings fought several terrible wars, ultimately destroying both empires. The cities of Arkhosia became devil-haunted ruins peeking from lone cliff-faces and along the sides of lost valleys.

Nerath

Humans claim many lost empires. Only a hundred years ago, the last human empire finally collapsed. King Elidyr took up arms against an infestation of rabid gnolls marching beneath the Ruler of Ruin's banner. More than half of Nerath's castles and other fortifications were razed in that conflict, and the denizens of the remaining fortresses fled in terror for their lives. The gnoll uprising was finally quelled—at the cost of King

Elidyr's life, as well as those of all his heirs and most trusted nobles and champions. Trade roads fell into disuse, and the empire became just another name picked out in gold leaf on old scrolls.

Today, the discovery of a half-buried, life-sized brass statue of a knight might indicate a nearby Nerath stronghold: a half-collapsed castle on a hilltop or ridge-line. Most such ruins are empty of all but ghosts, opportunistic monsters or bandits, and still-deadly traps guarding the deepest, unlooted levels beneath.

Many of the remaining points of light are the last vestiges of mighty Nerath. In these places, humans and other races still live, as they did when Nerath was whole and strong. The roads that still wind through the darkness are Nerath roads. The outposts that protect farms and towns are Nerath outposts. The difference is that the grandeur is gone, and no overarching government or military body remains to connect them one to another. Only half-remembered traditions and occupied locations keep the remnants in place, thus maintaining some semblance of safety in a dark world.

THE WORLD

—Continued

CENDRIANE

The Feywild is an enchanted reflection of the world, where every native creature is imbued with some measure of fantastic power. Humanoids inhabit the Feywild, including elves and eladrins, and they sometimes walk the world and even colonize it. Eladrins, who love to build cities and civilizations, founded several worldly realms, including the Anauli Empire, the Realm of the Twin Queens, and the empire of Cendriane. As with the human empires that came before and after them, these kingdoms have all but disappeared, leaving ruins behind in the wake of their passing.

Cendriane, called the Ruined Realm, is notable for the violent and quick manner of its destruction. Legends speak of the mighty works of the eladrin empire that thrived before Bael Turath fell into shadow. The Cendriane eladrins pushed back boundaries of every sort, be they magical or planar. As the story goes, they carved an unsurpassed complex into the heart of a lost mountain. Here, they "opened a door" on something so awful that within mere days, Cendriane was gone. Every citizen simply disappeared without a trace, leaving behind echoing, untended crystal cities that slowly fell into ruin.

ZANNAD

The yuan-ti of the current age descend from an older progenitor race of serpentfolk who numbered among the eldest of mortal races. This vigorous people founded the empire of Zannad, using impressive arcane powers at their commanded. In time, they perfected flesh-contorting magic to improve themselves, becoming the race known today. But those magics distorted more than serpent flesh—the minds of the yuan-ti, too, were warped and corrupted. Their society rotted from within until it died.

The vanished empire of Zannad is mostly forgotten. Today, yuan-ti are usually found in crumbling, jungle-obscured ruins, where they give obeisance to Zehir, a brutish god of poison and snakes.

LOCATIONS OF NOTE

—David Noonan

In 4th Edition, we're deliberately enhancing the shared experience of D&D. Previous editions have supplied classic adventure locations (the Tomb of Horrors, Undermountain, and so forth) that can be dropped into any campaign. Here's a glimpse of some future adventuring locales.

BAEL TURATH

The ruined capital of the ancient tiefling empire, the grand metropolis of Bael Turath was cast down in flame and earthquake during the last great Arkhosian invasion. Most of its slender spires have been toppled, but some mad tieflings still wander its rubble-strewn streets, seeking treasures from a bygone age and hiding from the escaped horrors that crawled from the city's prisons in those last days.

Some seek a greater—and far more dangerous—prize: the Athanaeum of Bael Turath. Within this buried temple lie the original pacts that transformed the devil-conspiring humans into tieflings and gave rise to the rapacious empire of Bael Turath. Mad prophets claim that a new emperor will arise among the tieflings, claim the ancient magic, and restore Bael Turath's glory and splendor.

RAZORTEAR

This looming fortress on Arkhosia's border with Bael Turath withstood a decade-long siege from the tieflings and their devil allies—a siege broken only when a hundred thousand Turathi slave-warriors emerged from an immense tunnel excavated over the course of years. Today, its crumbling ramparts still stand watch atop the cliffs, looking toward an enemy that has likewise fallen into ruin. Both Razortear and the tunnel beneath it still house ghosts, rampaging elementals, and (it is rumored) powerful magic never used in the chaotic last days of Razortear.

SERPENTUS RIFT

This city was one of the seven "Jewels of the South"—the pride of the draconic empire of Arkhosia. Built on and in the sides of a winding canyon, Serpentus Rift was known for the glittering hues of its sun-dappled walls and the translucent bridges that let the sun illuminate even the lowest reaches of the canyon. A warren of passageways and vast chambers stretched underground for nearly a mile beneath the rift's walls.

Such beauty proved fragile, though, and a massive earthquake dragon destroyed much of the city in a great rampage that took an entire dragonborn army to end. (Some say the tieflings of Bael Turath unleashed the dragon as part of the assault that began the War of Teeth.) The deepest, most remote chambers survived the destruction and subsequent wars. To this day, dragonborn congregate there from time to time, attempting excavations to recover some of the city's lost treasures. But devils haunt the ruins as well, still seeking to finally destroy Serpentus Rift.

AMETHYSTRA

Once part of Cendriane, the Ruined Realm of the eladrins, Amethystra is a city of crystal and alabaster that floats atop a cloud. It spends most of its time drifting above the Feywild but sometimes appears in the calm after a violent storm thunders across the world. Those who brave its wonders often find themselves compelled to contemplate its unearthly beauty forever.

Misty Isle

This island in the Marrilach River delta, ever shrouded in blinding fog, provides a safe harbor for halfling corsairs who ply their bloody trade, alternately raiding and smuggling to upriver communities while leaving no ship safe along the trade routes. The best pirate navigators can negotiate the sharp-reefed harbor entrances by the sound of crashing waves alone.

Tower of the Impossible Staircase

More than five hundred steps, held aloft through ancient magic, trace a winding path to a sinister black tower that was wrested from the earth below in a final, desperate act by the Nerathi archmage who once ruled the surrounding countryside. But the rapacious gnolls who served the Ruler of Ruin were already in the tower when it ascended to the skies, and they slew the archmage and her apprentices. The archmage exacted a measure of revenge, and now the ghosts of the gnoll raiders serve as unwilling guardians of the castle they sought to raze.

The Temple of Elemental Evil

The Temple of Elemental Evil is a haunted, hideous place. The huge, charcoal-gray building, with its arched buttresses and obscene designs, presents a mute testament to the darker side of the world. Every surface of the structure teems with leering faces and twisted forms of demons and monstrosities. The massive main doors are crowned with winged beasts and disgusting figures that chill one to the soul.

The temple grounds are no less unsettling. Wild plants, covered in dark thorns, twist amid rubble from what was once a high curtain wall. Shadows dance along the blackened trees whose branches claw at the air like desperate, dying men.

The Temple of Elemental Evil was built to serve as a bastion for armies of gnolls, bugbears, ogres, trolls, and giants—not to mention evil humans and the demons and other foul creatures that served them. Dedicated to the darkest powers of the Elemental Chaos, it is a place of evil. It always has been, and it always will be.

The nearby kingdoms and countless heroes have rallied their forces, destroyed these evil armies, and sacked the temple time and time again. And yet, despite countless assaults, the temple continues to harbor evil, and monsters continue to be drawn to its location like moths to a black flame.

Temple of Elemental Evil

The World

What "World" Meant to the World Team
−Matthew Sernett

To the World design team, the "world" of the Dungeons & Dragons game doesn't refer to a specific setting, such as Eberron, nor does it refer to a particular planet, such as Toril. For our purposes, the concept encompasses a huge set of shared assumptions for play that Dungeon Masters use when designing adventures or a campaign. The world of D&D is, in business terms, its product identity—how people perceive the game distinguishes it from other fantasy-themed hobbies.

The decision to focus on D&D as a product wasn't made lightly. We had to agree on what that entailed, and what basic assumptions should or should not be altered. For example, dictating that only elves could become vampires would be a jarring change to players' expectations. It might be a fine decision for an individual campaign, but it's not something we'd want to impose on the general D&D audience.

Many times throughout the design process we discussed a "core world" for D&D, a default setting much as the world of Greyhawk was used for the 3rd Edition rules. Very early on, we seriously considered the Forgotten Realms setting for this role. In the end, though, we realized that any choice of an existing setting would alienate some of the audience, and all carried years of history, some of which conflicted with how we wanted to improve and change D&D's identity.

We ultimately decided that D&D's world doesn't require a named, well-defined planet to come alive in the minds of its players. We want players like you to use the elements of D&D's product identity to create your own world, crafting your own characters and stories that explore it. That's the advantage that Dungeons & Dragons has over every other game out there, and we do not intend to squander such a treasure.

The End of Human Dominion
−Matthew Sernett

If you examine all the campaign settings produced for the D&D game, each is unique and interesting, but all share a key feature: The world is divided into realms, and is largely dominated by humans. From its beginning as a medieval wargame, D&D has always assumed that humans rule the world.

Even if humans don't control all of it, the majority of any previously published campaign setting is divided into kingdoms as clearly as a modern globe delineates real-world countries. This assumption has the side effect of civilizing a world. Things seem safer when you put borders around them. Farms should dot the landscape, and army patrols should pass through on some regular schedule.

These two characteristics combine to make a typical D&D setting a simulation of the real world. As a result, the world becomes less fantastic. A human-populated empire that resembles ancient Egypt, but with mummies in control, is less interesting than a realm ruled by salamanders, lizardfolk, or even dwarves.

For 4th Edition D&D, we wanted to break away from a civilized, human-dominated world as the default setting. More of the world should be mysterious and dangerous—offering more places for adventures and providing players with a sense of wonder.

To that end, we established two key conceits to guide our design and the work of future writers.

The World Is Ancient
Empires rise and empires crumble, leaving few places untouched by their grandeur. Ruin, time, and natural forces eventually claim all, leaving the world rich with places of adventure and mystery. The ancient civilizations and their knowledge survive in legends, magic items, and the ruins they left behind. Inevitably, chaos and darkness follow an empire's collapse. Each new civilization must carve its own place out of the world rather than build on the remnants of the past.

The World Is Mysterious
Wild, uncontrolled regions spread over most of the world. City-states dot this vast darkness. Some of these settlements are "points of light" where adventurers can expect relative stability and peace, but many more are dangerous. People know the area they live in well, and they've heard stories of other places from merchants and travelers, but few really understand what's beyond the mountains or in the depths of the great forest.

A New Freedom
These assumptions about the D&D world leave more room for exploration and adventure. They also make it easier for DMs to create worlds of their own, exercising their imaginations and focusing on aspects of the game they love. Instead of having to fill in every inch of the world map, a DM can design key features and leave the rest open for later development. D&D becomes less about the politics of nations and more about a group of friends discovering a dangerous world through exciting adventures.

Of course, none of this precludes campaigns driven by the politics of nations. These key conceits are not intended to place restrictions on the game, but rather to offer more freedom for players to devise their own campaign styles.

Dragons

It's not just the name of the game—dragons are the iconic creatures of fantasy. The 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons game makes them cooler, more frightening, and more mythic than ever before. We worked really hard to better differentiate the various dragon types, as well as the age categories of dragons. We worked to create more compelling families of dragons to better add to the ever-growing lore of monsters central to the game. And we worked to create a system where these most iconic of monsters could appear more often in your ongoing D&D campaign. Here's how we went about achieving these various goals for dragons in the D&D game.

The Dragon Gods

—James Wyatt

One story told about the creation of the universe concerns the dragon-god Io. The dragons, this legend says, were his particular creation, lovingly crafted to represent the pinnacle of mortal form. Though they were creatures of the world, the power of the Elemental Chaos flowed in their veins and spewed forth from their mouths in gouts of flame or waves of paralyzing cold. But they also possessed the keen minds and lofty spirits of the other mortal races, linking them to the gods of the Astral Sea—and Io in particular, of course.

Io's arrogance was his downfall. While the other gods banded together to combat the primordials, Io spurned their help. He was so confident in his own might that he faced a terrible primordial called Erek-Hus, the King of Terror, alone. With a rough-hewn axe of adamantine, the King of Terror split Io from head to tail, cleaving the dragon-god into two halves.

Erek-Hus did not have the chance to celebrate his victory, however. No sooner did Io's sundered corpse fall to the ground than each half rose up as a new god—Bahamut from the right and Tiamat from the left. Together the two gods fought and killed the King of Terror.

Io's qualities were split between the two gods who rose from his death. His hubris, arrogance, and covetous nature were embodied in Tiamat, who is still revered as a goddess of greed and envy. But Io's desire to protect creation and his sense of fairness took root in Bahamut, now worshiped as a god of justice, honor, and protection.

The two dragon gods both shared one of Io's worst qualities, however—his preference for working alone. After they defeated Erek-Hus, they locked in battle with each other, ignoring the pressing threat of the primordials. Only when Tiamat fled the battle did the two gods turn their attention back to the larger war, though each still preferred to work alone.

Thematic Differences Among Dragons

In 3rd Edition D&D, telling one dragon from another was sometimes hard. Every dragon, whatever its color or age, had a Dexterity score of 10. A white dragon was just as likely to cast a *fireball* spell at you as a red dragon was. All dragons of the same size had the same physical attacks. Considering all the variety of dragons—ten dragon colors in the *Monster Manual,* each with twelve age categories for a bewildering 120 possibilities—there was actually very little differentiation.

When designing 4th Edition D&D, we took the same categories we used to describe the roles of monsters in groups, and applied them (carefully) to dragons. Just as a magma hurler or goblin archer hides behind the front ranks of its allies to pepper you with ranged attacks, blue dragons prefer to stay back and blast you with lightning.

Orcs and hobgoblins are happy forming that front line, orcs dishing out tons of damage before you whittle away their hit points, and hobgoblin soldiers soaking up your attacks. White and red dragons act in similar ways—the whites are more like orcs, the reds more like hobgoblins. In the same way that a mind flayer can bend you to its will, green dragons control the battlefield and can even control your mind, like Cyan Bloodbane in the *Dragonlance Chronicles.*

Wraiths hide in the safety of solid stone walls before springing out to attack you, and likewise black dragons hide in water or in darkness before leaping out to breathe (as in the *Forge of Fury* adventure).

Solo Monsters

Even before 4th Edition D&D design officially began, the whole staff of designers had recognized that encounters with multiple monsters were just more interesting than four-on-one fights. We observed a tendency among experienced DMs to build encounters with a higher Encounter Level than the party level, throwing together sometimes large numbers of monsters with CRs pretty close to the PCs' level. We also observed that those fights were a lot of fun, even if our characters couldn't easily get through more than one such fight in a day.

Even as we moved to a standard of multiple monsters in every encounter, though, one exception always stuck in our minds—dragons. Somehow, we thought all along, we'd have to figure out a way to design dragons so that a fight with a single dragon was just as fun as a fight against four or five other monsters.

Once again, the D&D *Miniatures Game* showed us the way—this time, the stat cards that come with D&D *Icons* miniatures. (They actually evolved from the design of the AT-AT Imperial Walker for the *Star Wars™ Miniatures Game!*)

Silver dragon

Because the *Miniatures Game* is fundamentally about taking turns, it was pretty straightforward to design dragons so that they got to take multiple turns in each round. I activate two creatures, then your dragon goes. I activate two more, then your dragon goes again. Each time the dragon takes a turn, it does something different.

It doesn't work that simply in the D&D *Roleplaying Game*. Because initiative is random and fluid—delaying and readying mix up the order all the time—combat would too often end up back to all the PCs acting, then the dragon doing its stuff, end of round.

The solution we found incorporated some of the *Miniatures Game* model: Dragons just get to do more on their turn than most monsters do. But they also get to do a lot when it's not their turn. A whole suite of immediate actions makes a dragon a dynamic foe: Depending on what the PCs do on their turns, it might reply with any of a number of surprising and deadly things. Immediate breath blasts and tail slaps make it dangerous to engage a dragon in melee. A green dragon can poison you simply for coming too close.

With these improvements, fighting a dragon in the 4th Edition D&D game has become the epic conflict you always hoped it would be. And just like the dragon gods, it doesn't need any help.

A Tighter Focus

Dragons in 3rd Edition D&D have a lot going on. In addition to having a breath weapon and a wide array of melee attacks (which just gets wider as the dragon gets older), they are spell-casters from an early age and have weird spell-like abilities as well. Each turn, a dragon has a zillion options. Worse, you have to do a lot of design work before adding a dragon to an encounter, picking its skills, feats, and spells, and assembling its whole stat block. As a result, dragons don't appear in 3rd Edition combats as much as they should.

We had to make some tough choices in designing dragons for 4th Edition. What are they really all about? The breath weapon is clearly the iconic dragon attack—a dragon without a breath weapon wouldn't feel like a dragon. But you don't want it to breathe every round. What should it do when it's not spewing acid or blasting fire?

All dragons still have options, and the older the dragon, the more options it has—but not the overwhelming variety of options it had before. The oldest black dragon has five possible standard actions, not dozens. Its breath and its bite are two, and the rest try to capture the magical feel of dragons without resorting to a laundry list of spells that any PC could cast. They're unique abilities that enhance the dragon's preferred modes of attack, making each kind of dragon different in play.

DRAGONS

—Continued

METALLIC DRAGONS
—James Wyatt

In the same way that we've differentiated individual dragons more, we've also made sure that chromatic dragons and metallic dragons are no longer mirror images of each other. Metallic dragons have a lot more going for them in 4th Edition D&D than just an extra breath weapon option.

The place of metallic dragons in the world has been refined. They aren't necessarily good (see the sidebar), but they're less destructive and cruel than the chromatic dragons. They are just as avaricious as the chromatic dragons, and they can be power-hungry as well. Metallic dragons like being in control: A gold dragon might rule a city-state as a benevolent dictator, while a copper dragon is more likely to scheme and manipulate a government from behind the scenes. Thus, player characters are now more likely to encounter metallic dragons as opponents.

In addition, we've introduced two new metallic dragons—adamantine and iron dragons—and eliminated two "alloys" that weren't well defined. These two fundamental changes go a long way toward making metallic dragons more fun and more interesting D&D monsters—just as they've always been meant to be.

WHY IRON AND ADAMANTINE?
—Matthew Sernett

When the world team started talking about metallic dragons, we all came to the discussion with the idea that some changes were needed. Someone mentioned how brass, bronze, and copper dragons can't be easily distinguished, which drew groans of annoyed agreement.

To illustrate, here's a test. See if you can answer the following questions about copper, bronze, and brass dragons without opening a sourcebook.

- Which one breathes *slow* gas?
- Which one has wing flaps that run all the way to the tip of its tail?
- Which one can cast *control weather*?

If you got all the right answers, kudos! You have mad dragon skills. Most people might get one right by simply guessing. But if we'd asked which of the chromatic dragons has forward-pointing horns, which breathes fire, and which can cast *wall of ice*, most players would answer every question correctly.

The truth of the matter is that the metallic dragons, other than silver and gold, just don't stand out enough from one another. For one thing, their colors are too similar. They're also good-aligned monsters, so they're less likely to be opponents of the PCs. Combat has a way of leaving clear impressions on players.

So when we redesigned the metallic dragons for 4th Edition D&D, we decided to set aside two of the most easily confused

Adamantine dragon

dragons. As an important metal in 3rd Edition, adamantine was a natural addition to the metallic family. Finally, we chose iron to fill out the group because we wanted a metallic dragon that filled roughly the same role as the chromatics' white dragon (a not-too-bright, savage killer). The two new metallic dragons are also easy to distinguish by color. All that remained was to give them appropriate abilities, personalities, and roles in the world to further define them.

The doesn't mean we've killed off two metallic dragons for good. You'll see them appear in a future *Monster Manual* or *Draconomicon*, but they're no longer part of the "big five."

Chromatic Dragons
–James Wyatt

Red, blue, green, black, white–the five colors of chromatic dragons haven't changed since 1977, though their appearance and their mechanics have changed dramatically over the years. Another thing that hasn't changed (much) is their disposition: Chromatic dragons are, by and large, avaricious, cruel, and evil. Even those who aren't evil at best could be compared to wild hunting cats that get a sadistic delight out of playing with their food.

Red dragon

DRAGONS

—Continued

That's what chromatic dragons are—predators. Their primary motivation is to kill and eat, and a monster the size of a house needs to eat a lot. A chromatic dragon's secondary motivation, of course, is to collect as many shiny things as it can, to form a nice bed of treasure it can rest on.

That's not to say chromatic dragons are stupid, although you shouldn't expect to find many super-geniuses among them. As predators go, they're cunning, capable of careful and sophisticated reasoning, and often very knowledgeable about the world and its history. But at heart, they're wild animals—with terrible teeth and claws, mighty wings, armored plates, and a raw elemental power that can level cities.

That elemental power, by the way, isn't limited to their breath weapons. Every dragon has a breath weapon, of course—it wouldn't be a dragon without one. But the older a dragon gets, the more it can do with that energy. A Huge red dragon can breathe its big cone of fire, but it can also drop a smaller ball of fire on a single foe, igniting him and sapping his strength. By the time it's Gargantuan, it erupts in an inferno of flame every round, searing every nearby creature.

"No problem," player characters might think. "We'll just stock up on fire resistance and cold spells."

No and no. The ancient red's breath weapon can scour the fire resistance right off you. And cold attacks? They don't work any better than acid or lightning. Just because a creature uses fire, it's not necessarily susceptible to freezing.

A WHOLE NEW GREEN

The one chromatic dragon that had a significant facelift for the new edition was the green dragon. Visually, we felt that its 3rd Edition look was a little too generic. You can tell our other dragons apart even in black-and-white: the skull-like head and curving horns of the black, the nose horn of the blue, the back-swept horns of the red, and the crest of the white. The green looked like "a dragon"—much like any dragon you might see in any book about dragons. We wanted a new look that was distinctive to the D&D game and that makes it very clear you're looking at a D&D green dragon.

To develop the green dragon's new face, we took a good look at its game mechanics. Way back in the day, a green dragon's breath weapon was "a cloud of poisonous chlorine gas" that did the same thing as every other dragon's breath weapon: a lot of damage. In 3rd Edition, that became "a cone of corrosive gas," dealing a lot of acid damage. There was no such thing as poison damage; poison dealt ability score damage. But poison is

a damage type in 4th Edition, so the green dragon has a breath weapon of poison gas again, and it deals poison damage. So does its bite, for that matter.

When we were designing the green dragon's mechanics, we also thought a lot about Cyan Bloodbane, the mind-poisoning dragon of Silvanesti in the DRAGONLANCE *Campaign Setting.* Using that well-known dragon as a model, even the youngest green dragons now have some minor charm abilities to control their foes, while the oldest have a full-fledged "mind toxin" that piggybacks on the poison in their breath weapon and bite.

All that poison suggested a snake's fangs and an assassin's dagger. So we adopted a spiky look for the green dragon—a ring of sharp points around its head, a line of spikes down its back, and a sharply pointed horn at the end of its snout. The new green's look is all about toxicity. Don't touch that dragon—it's poison.

CHROMATIC DRAGONS AREN'T ALL EVIL
—James Wyatt

Dragons come in all alignments; it is as common to encounter a good red dragon as it is an evil gold dragon.
 —EBERRON Campaign Setting, page 304

Historically, dragons have been tightly linked to alignments, and the 3rd Edition *Monster Manual* specifies that dragons always have the indicated alignment. The EBERRON setting mixed that up, allowing for the possibility of evil metallics and good chromatics. When characters in EBERRON encounter a dragon, they need to figure out what its goals are, whose side it's on, what it can do for them or what it wants them to do for it—they can't necessarily judge it by the color of its scales.

We liked the idea that dragons could vary from their stated alignment at least as much as most other monsters. Orcs in 3rd Edition are often chaotic evil, but at least there's room for the occasional nonevil orc. We wanted the same possibility for nonevil chromatic dragons.

Some chromatic dragons have neutral leanings, but they're still mean, sometimes cruel, and always predatory. They're as neutral as a belligerent dire bear—not usually the kind of neutral you try to negotiate with. For the most part, it's safe to assume that any chromatic dragon you see is fair game for your best attacks. But if a dragon calls for parley, claiming its good intentions, it might be worth listening to.

GIANTS

—Chris Sims

Servants to the primordials during the shaping of the world, giants have lived in creation since time immemorial. First created among the giants were the titans, and their younger kin are smaller creatures (although "smaller" is a relative term). In the reflections of the world that are the Feywild and the Shadowfell, similar creatures arose. Giants, as the preferred creations of the primordials, had great empires in ancient times. Those domains didn't survive the war between the gods and the primordials.

When the primordials first called forth servants in the world, the huge beings known as titans were roughly shaped and bore the marks of their elemental origin. Humanoid in form only, the titans had asymmetrical and exaggerated bodies. Their appearances drew from the elements they came from, meaning the titans of earth had stony and mounded shapes, while the titans of fire blazed within charred, rocky flesh.

The titans of old created lesser giants to serve them. None of them would now admit it, but the titans took inspiration from the smoother and more symmetrical forms created by the immortals. They shaped their creations more in keeping with humanlike forms, though the aesthetics of the titans still led to exaggerated features and prominent elemental ties.

It was sometime during this age of creation that Moradin called the dwarves forth from the elements of the world. After seeing these tiny yet ingenious beings, the giants overwhelmed and enslaved all dwarves. Moradin could do little to protect his creations without facing the wrath of many other beings, so he waited and whispered his support to the dwarves in their darkest time.

Echoes of the creation of titans and giants rippled into the Feywild and the Shadowfell. Fomorians rose as the Feywild's twisted and magical answer to the titans of the world. Death giants coalesced out of the gloom of the Shadowfell as the world began to know mortality. Fomorians created the cyclopes to serve them, while the death giants simply fashioned lesser copies of themselves. To carve their magical halls, the fomorians took gnomes and other fey as slaves. Dark creepers, sinister gnomelike creatures of the Shadowfell, formed cabals that revered and served the death giants.

When the clash between the primordials and the immortals ignited, the giants joined in on the side of their creators. They fought the mortal servants of the gods, and the cost was heavy. Giant holdings began to fall to the armies of the more numerous smaller creatures.

As the tide turned against the primordials, disaster struck the giants from an unexpected angle. The dwarves, bolstered by their faith in Moradin, made their bid for freedom, turning on their larger masters. Beset on all sides, the empires of giants fell into chaos, their edifices thrown down and their citizens scattered by war and fear—or by newfound freedom.

Broken and bereft of their former glory, the giants further fell to infighting and viciousness. Cut off from the heritage and knowledge that had been collected and stored in their kingdoms, most giants became ignorant brutes. At best, bands of giants formed supportive communities, and with a little luck, managed to hold onto something resembling civilization. At worst, they became cannibalistic monsters that were as much a danger to others of their kind as to non-giants.

Today, giants are scattered across the world, living in various levels of barbarism. Fire giants and stone giants come the closest to being civilized creatures. These form strong if small clans, and they still have servants descended from dwarves. Of all giants, the hill giants have fallen furthest into savagery. Unfortunately for others, they are the most numerous and the most likely to ally with other loutish humanoids.

Giants can pose a dire threat to communities inhabited by the common races. The most powerful among these behemoths could lay waste to a town with ease. Only the mighty dare face giants, and defeating them is a task that could make mere adventurers into true heroes.
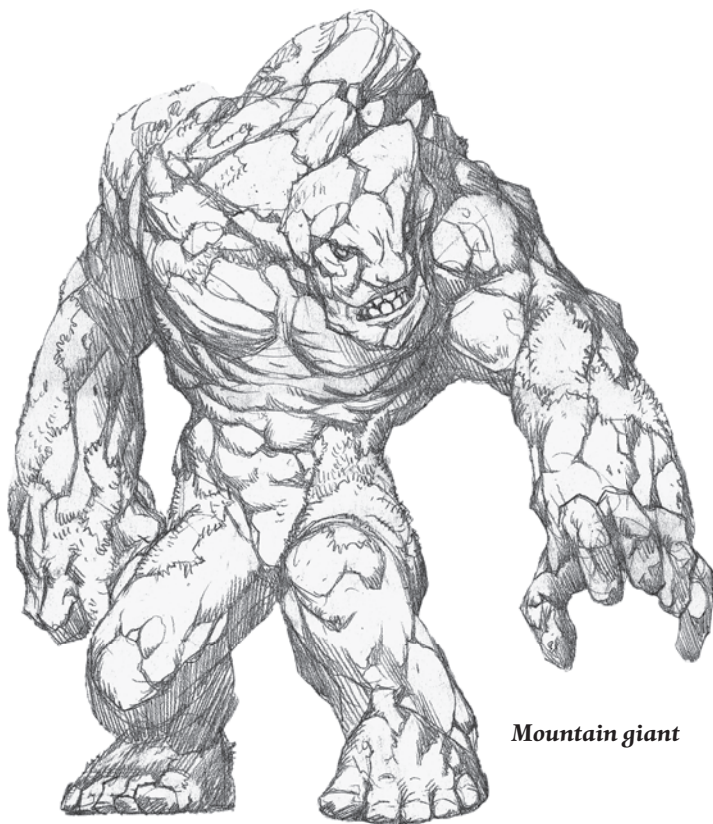
Mountain giant

Working Giants Over

Despite their firmly set place in the new edition's world story, giants haven't changed much. They're still big, scary foes. Their position in the narrative and their new features just make them more integral to the game and in keeping with their intended role.

All giants are now more elemental in nature. One round in combat with a storm giant explains what that giant is without the DM ever having to utter "storm" or "giant." Winds shriek around it, and lightning and thunder are its weapons. Giants' reverence for the primordials means they have a bone to pick with gods-fearing races—so they'll be fighting PCs more.

Behind the Scenes: Giants Reconcepted

—Matthew Sernett

Giants are cornerstone monsters of fantasy. They rank among the top ten iconic creatures of the D&D game. The 3rd Edition *Monster Manual* even made them a creature type: Large or bigger human-looking creatures of great strength and ferocity.

In the 4th Edition of the game, though, we took a different approach to classifying creatures. "Giant" is no longer a broad type but refers to a specific group of creatures that share certain qualities. We're establishing and maintaining this distinction through thematic links and mechanical similarities. Being big and humanoid in shape does not make a monster a giant. Trolls, ogres, ettins, and the like aren't necessarily giants anymore.

A major design directive was to have more variety among giants, so they are not just things that look like big humans. And there had to be a better thematic link than skill at throwing and catching rocks. This led to a fusion of thoughts: making giants' appearance more supernatural, linking each kind more closely with the energy or element in its name, and giving them more of a legendary feel.

I championed the idea that all giants should be Huge. Giants in mythology and popular fiction are nearly always enormous, not just a few feet taller than a human as a troll or an ogre is. Yet we couldn't simply discard Large giants, both for practicality of play (Huge creatures are harder to maneuver in combat than Large ones) and because we've made a bunch of really cool Large giant miniatures. So we came to an inspired compromise: All giants would have both Large and Huge versions. The larger Huge versions—now known as titans—would be more closely tied to the Elemental Chaos and thus have more awesome powers. Now we have both traditional D&D giants with improved mechanics alongside more fantastic beings that embody the legendary history of the new edition.

Cyclops

The Underdark

—Matthew Sernett

Beneath the surface lurks another world. Strange landscapes slither through the dark, and eerie vistas emerge from the shadows like islands from the mist. This always-night realm of tunnels and caves wends below the world like veins beneath skin and is known as the Underdark.

When surface-dwellers speak of it, they whisper of unending darkness, crushing stone, deadly poison, horrible monsters, and interminable war between terrible evils. They see a place of hopeless suffering at the hands of merciless masters and of sudden death from the claws of savage beasts or the treacherous environment. The Underdark is all this—and more.

Although few on the surface know it, the Underdark is more than pitch-black caves inhabited by monsters. Forests, mountains, cities, and seas lie underground, although they would not be familiar to the people who live so complacently above them. In sprawling fungal forests, towering mushrooms take the place of trees, and giant insects, bats, and stranger creatures form the fauna. Spikes of rock soar hundreds and even thousands of feet into the air, sometimes joining similarly massive stalactites from above. Rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and even seas flow through the Underdark, often producing spectacular falls as they descend from one cavern to the next, but such bodies need not
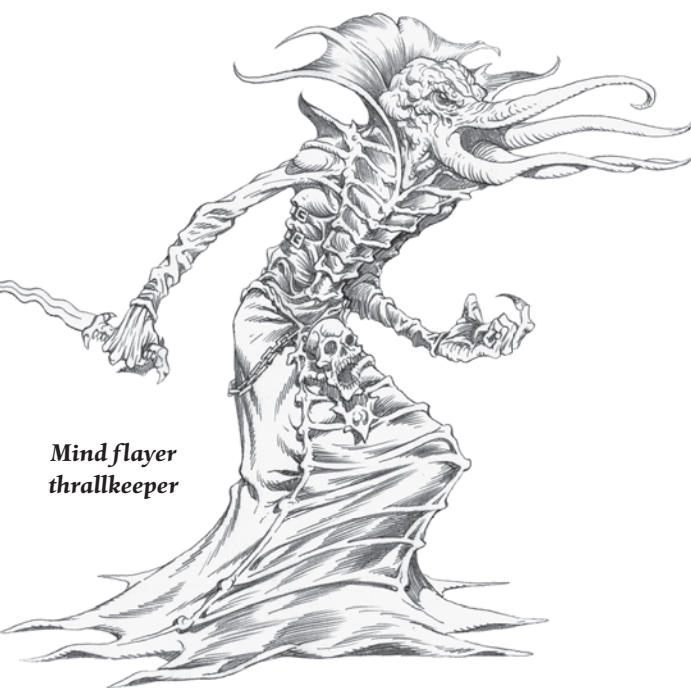
Mind flayer thrallkeeper

be made of water. Magma, acid, and even stranger substances such as churning earth and coruscating energy flow underground. And though no star or sun shines from above, crystal growths gleam with an inner radiance, light-limned lichen clings to rocks, blazing rivers of lava flow through chambers, and jets of weirdly colored fire explode from the ground.

Just as the surface holds hot deserts, muggy marshlands, and freezing glaciers, so too are parts of the Underdark touched by environmental extremes. Caves in the Underdark wend through solid ice, open into volcanic wastelands, and
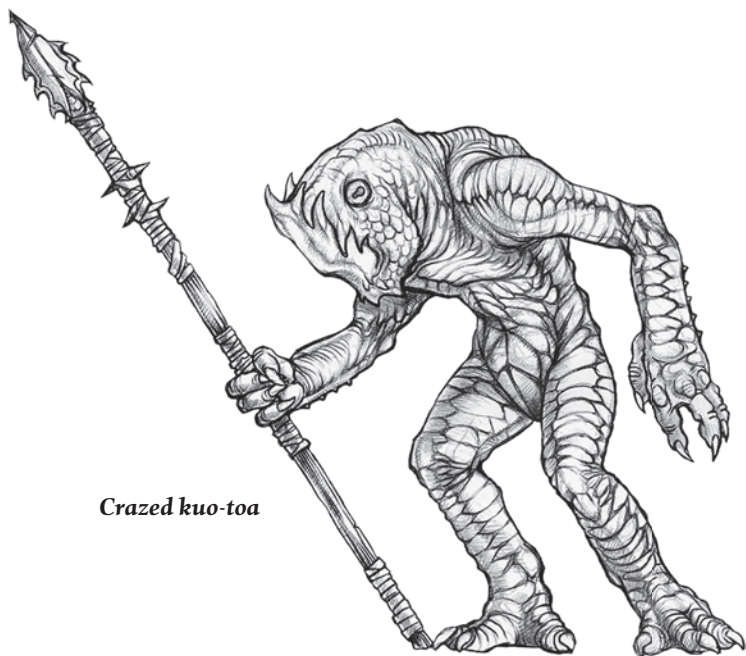
Crazed kuo-toa

Troglodyte bonecrusher
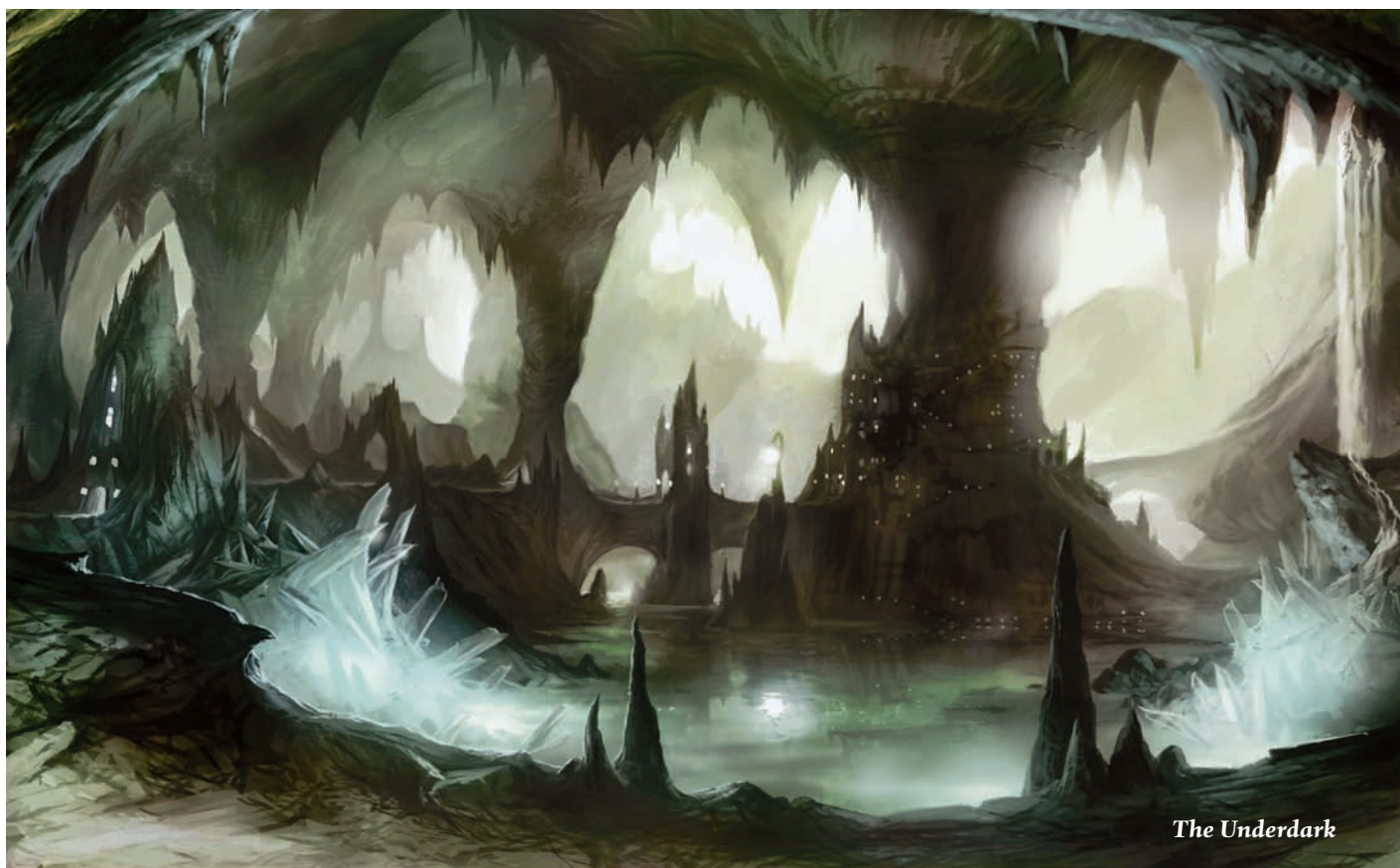
The Underdark

are soaked by dripping water that flows from the ceilings and walls onto swampy floors profuse with the weird flora of the world below. In such environments live a multitude of creatures, and as on the surface, some are predators and others are prey; some live in roving tribes, while others build settlements and even nations.

Underdark Denizens

Just as the surface world serves as home to a variety of beings, the Underdark teems with life. Some creatures rarely show themselves aboveground and dwell in the perpetual gloom of the caverns below. Hook horrors, ropers, purple worms, and grells seem to prefer dwelling in the dark, where others such as trolls, giants, and dragons often emerge into the sun as well.

Drow

When by the light of dying fires surface-dwellers whisper tales of the realm below, their horror stories nearly all involve the dark elves that creep from caves at night to slay and take slaves. Yet drow are much more than fairy-tale villains and far more dangerous than most realize. The dark elves worship Lolth the Spider Queen and have developed the use of poison to an art form.

Troglodytes

The savage, reptilian troglodytes claw at the edges of Underdark civilizations, scouring the wilds for unwary meat and for weapons they can scavenge from those they kill. Brutish and tribal,

they often serve as soldiers for more powerful races that can command them through use of force. No encounter with troglodytes ends peacefully unless you have already shown yourself to be their master, and even then, each succeeding generation of the lizardlike humanoids is sure to challenge you.

Mind Flayers

In an age long past, the tentacled horrors known as mind flayers once ruled an empire on the surface of the world, and if their schemes succeed, they shall do so again. True parasites that prey on the humanoid races of the world, mind flayers feed on the brains of the living. They create more of their kind by implanting their squirming, tadpolelike bodies into victims' heads and transforming their hosts into the infamous octopoids feared by all. Few threats in the Underdark are as malignant, insidious, and frightful as the mind flayers.

Kuo-Toas

The pallid, fish-eyed kuo-toas offer frenzied worship to aboleths, believing them to be living incarnations of alien deities. Insanity is the birthright of the kuo-toas, and their society seems always on the brink of ruin. Kept in line by their awe of aboleths, the blood-mad masses of kuo-toas are little more than mobs of crazed killers. Despite the curse of madness that besets them, kuo-toas have managed through the ages to build strange cities in the deep, and they act faithfully at the behest of their aboleth masters in whatever manner is required of them.

The Underdark

Aboleths

In a place distant and unknown lurks the Far Realm, a nightmarish plane of madness and distortion from which the dread aboleths arrived. Strange multiple-eyed, fishlike creatures, the slime-tentacled aboleths possess astonishing powers of the mind that they use to slay or control. Although their motives remain a mystery, aboleths seem bent on spreading the influence of the Far Realm across the entire cosmos.

Myconids

Little is known about the mysterious myconids. These fungal beings emigrated from the Feywild long ago, and now it's thought that more of them live in the Underdark than in the caves of their home plane. Encounters with members of this fiercely secretive race typically end with interlopers left helpless and poisoned by the strange spore clouds that the various kinds of myconids produce. While this fate is no doubt better treatment than what one might get from other prominent Underdark races, few helpless creatures can survive for long in the dangerous realms below.

Ghoul

Under Where?

The Underdark is a worldwide network of tunnels and titanic underground spaces, not just the kinds of natural caves present in the real world. Think of it as another world layered beneath the surface. It can be as expansive or constricted as you like. In one area the adventurers might explore a warren of labyrinthine tunnels, while in another they might enter a cavern that contains a lake too large to swim across.

The Underdark doesn't have to be limited by real-world geology. If you want a continent-sized cave filled with nations of Underdark denizens, go for it. If you want a rift on the surface so deep that it reaches the Underdark, let her rip. D&D is a fantasy game. Don't let the pursuit of "realism" make your game less fantastic and less fun.

In previous D&D editions, we assumed that the Underdark was distant and difficult to reach. You couldn't just find a cave and wander in. You needed to find the secret entrance hidden under a trap-filled dungeon and then travel through miles of sometimes-dangerous-but-mostly-boring tunnels until you reached the true Underdark. If you found your way there, it was assumed that its caverns presented death at every turn, and that low-level characters couldn't possibly survive for long.

At some point in our discussions about 4th Edition, we wondered why this was the case. The Underdark is such an interesting place–why hide it? Why make it difficult to use a rich setting for adventures? So we shifted philosophies.

Just like the land beneath the sky, the Underdark's caves have different elevations beneath the surface. Some areas are shallow, scraping against the land above and even breaking through to it. Other caverns lie deep in the earth, hidden under miles of solid rock. Not every cave on the surface connects to the Underdark, but many do. Where can you find the Underdark? Anywhere the Dungeon Master wants to place it. How hard is it to get there? However hard the DM needs it to be. How deadly is the Underdark? However deadly it needs to be to make the adventure scary and fun.

How Dark?

Certainly much of the Underdark can remain dark until someone brings in a light, but when you set an adventure there, consider lightening things up a bit. Glowing fungus, crystals that glimmer with an inner light, rivers of lava, naturally occurring cascades of radiant energy, multicolored flames above gas vents, or even magma glowing behind crystal veins that run in the ceiling overhead–use whatever fantastic light sources serve your purpose. The grand vistas, intriguing architecture, and

fantastic scenes you imagine will be more magical for the players if you can describe them and allow the players to envision what their characters see. Of course, the drow can still take advantage of their darkvision in a fight, but fumbling about in the dark all the time is frustrating for players, and the darkness might conceal some cool features you have developed and that the adventurers deserve to see.

Underdark Locations

The Underdark holds vast, dripping caverns and fantastic cities, wild "forests," and sunless seas. Its geography and its civilizations are as varied as those of the surface world.

Vault of the Drow

Doubtless the greatest city of the drow is Erelhei-Cinlu, known as the Vault of the Drow. This massive cavern metropolis has all the activity and commerce of a surface city, but here green-cloaked mind flayers rub shoulders with dark elves, ghouls roam freely, and an occasional wraith or vampire can be seen walking in the open as brazenly as any noble. The denizens of Erelhei-Cinlu are depraved but well-organized, and any assault on their fortress is met by stiff resistance from all the evils that dwell within.

Gar Morra, the City in the Deep

Deep beneath the world lies the Spire Sea, a vast expanse of crashing black waves that swirl in eternal turmoil about the bases of stalagmite spires. These projections jut up toward a forest of stone spikes thrusting downward from a cavern ceiling thousands of feet above the water. At the center of this benighted ocean, a stalactite the size of a mountain plunges from the ceiling to stab its point into the wild sea. This is the site of Gar Morra, the City in the Deep. Once, dwarves lived in the great inverted mountain, building their fortresses on its exterior and tunneling within, but they abandoned Gar Morra ages ago. Even so, lights can be seen glimmering in its heights. What lives in the mammoth complex now remains a mystery.

Hrak Azuul, the Fungal Fortress

Set deep within a verdant fungal forest, Hrak Azuul is the deadly bastion of an enormous tribe of troglodytes. Although most troglodyte groups rove the wilds of the Underdark and only occasionally settle in one place for more than a few weeks, the troglodytes of Hrak Azuul have held the Fungal Fortress for over a hundred years. Hrak Azuul is a complex of hollowed-out mushroom towers and hidden lookouts connected by a web of disguised bridges. Invaders, distracted by dangerous traps, are regularly outflanked and surprised by camouflaged troglodytes that seem to simply peel away from the vegetation. Hrak Azuul is so well hidden that interlopers' first evidence of having trespassed within the fortress is often the stench of the troglodytes that are secretly surrounding them.


Drow city

The Feywild

—Gwendolyn F. M. Kestrel

The Feywild is the magical, fantastic reflection of the world. It is home to fey, eladrins, wondrous animals and beasts, some elves, and many other unearthly beings.

The Feywild came into being at the same time as the world, an unintended echo that somehow sustained itself. It resembles a "canted" version of the world, not a completely faithful reflection. Significant terrain features, such as mountains and seas, give the impression of a similar landscape, but they are far from identical to their worldly counterparts. Locations close to each other in the world might be much farther apart in the Feywild, while conversely, the distant might be near. Buildings within the world might not have a Feywild equivalent; indeed, that wild landscape is largely unfettered by civilization. On the other hand, castles of the eladrin nobles raise their gleaming spires where no one dares tread in the world's darkness.

Perhaps you're thinking that the Feywild is a happy, magical woodland paradise. If so, you couldn't be more wrong.
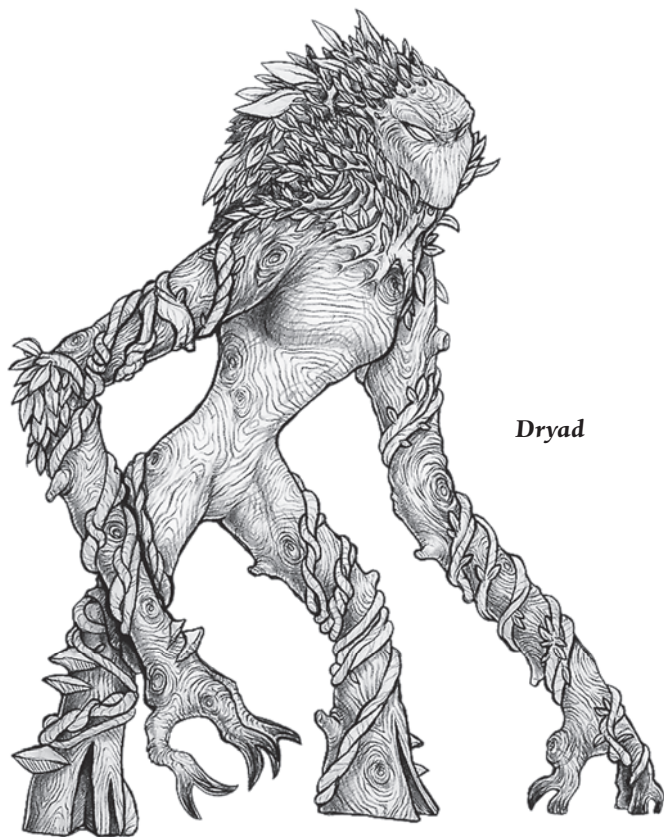
This is a dangerous, twilight realm of natural beauty heightened beyond mortal experience, charged with raw arcane essence. Such beauty can indeed be welcoming and cheerful. Much more commonly, though, it is dark, frightening, mysterious, or hostile.

Denizens include hags, yeth hounds, centaurs, treants, fomorians (fey reflections of giants), unicorns, elves, firbolgs, the Wild Hunt, and more. These fey aren't good or sweet. Some are wild; others are downright savage. Even fey creatures that were represented in earlier editions as good and kind now have a sharper, darker edge. The prospect of meeting or interacting with a fey is apt to produce shivers of dread.

Dryad

The Underdark and the Feywild
—Richard Baker

Since most places in the world have a fey echo, we realized that the Underdark was no different. After all, if seas and mountains in the Feywild lie more or less where they lie in the daylight world, why not caverns and subterranean gulfs? Shouldn't the Feywild have an Underdark too?

At first blush the idea seemed pretty odd—after all, most people think of faerie-land as a realm of primeval forests and eldritch beauty. But then we found ourselves imagining crystalline caves, weird subterranean mushroom forests, sunless seas illuminated by glowing mists, ancient gnome mines filled with glittering gemstones, a hidden world of living rock and magical halls beneath the hills and mountains—and suddenly it seemed perfectly natural that the Feywild would have an Underdark to correspond with the buried kingdoms and labyrinths of the world.

That naturally led us to a *really* interesting question: Who lives there? What sorts of adventures would you have in the fey Underdark? After all, many faerie stories refer to realms said to lie underground; the Sidhe of Ireland were thought to live "beneath the hills," as were the Alfar of Scandinavian myth. We briefly kicked around the idea of making the Feywild Underdark the home of the drow, since eladrins are associated with the Feywild too, but ultimately we decided that it would be a shame to make drow an essentially extraplanar threat. Instead, we settled on the fomorians—a race of wicked giants whose role in the Dungeons & Dragons game had never quite lived up to the stories told about them in Irish mythology. So not only will you find diamond caves and sunless forests within the Feywild's subterranean portions, but also the iron towers and brooding keeps of fomorian lords.

The Feywild

Locations of Note

The following example locations in the Feywild showcase the diversity, beauty, and danger of the realm.

The Fortress of Mag Tureah

The many huge pillars of Mag Tureah rise up out of the dark hills like old, cracked teeth in a giant's skull. No visible roof connects them, but stone slabs and low walls cover the ground. Despite its ruined appearance, the fortress of Mag Tureah is still inhabited by the lord of the fomorians. Its true nature is revealed only to those who reach the fortress's heart.

The Court of Stars

At the center of the Feywild lies the beautiful city known as the Court of Stars. Silver and gray trees reach up to perpetually twilight skies. The residents make their homes among these great trees, growing their branches into high walkways, shaping their boughs into halls, and extending their leaves into beautiful roofs.

Ancient, wise, and puissant in magical skill, King Oran and Queen Tiandra rule the Court on behalf of the fey.

Isle of Dread

The Isle of Dread is a vast tropical island of volcanic origin, set amid stormy seas filled with deadly reefs and sharp pillars of rock. It periodically appears in the Feywild, among other places. In this savage place, wild creatures engage in a primitive, kill-or-be-killed struggle for survival.

Adding the Feywild to Your Game

The Feywild is very easily integrated into an adventure or a campaign. It's a dangerous, flavorful place that's sure to make a strong impression. Adventurers of all levels can find appropriate challenges of combat or intrigue there. The journey into the Feywild can be an exciting adventure in itself. Adventurers might face even more challenges as they try to find a way home.

A feature of many real-world tales of Faerie is how easily a person can step into the land of the fey. The Feywild of D&D is much the same. For instance, the fortress of Mag Tureah exists both in the world and in the Feywild. In the world, it seems an abandoned, gigantic ruin. An unwary traveler wandering at night between the great stones might not even notice as the walls rise up to form a high, sloping ceiling. The roof is studded with gemstones that reflect light, looking like so many stars, so that by the time an adventurer notices the difference, he or she is trapped in the hall of the fomorian king.

The Feywild

Elven Gods

Lolth and her twin sister Sehanine were both lunar goddesses. Lolth represented the dark of the moon, with skin the rich black of a moonless night and hair the color of starshine. Sehanine was her mirror image, with skin the luminous white of a full moon and hair the black velvet tapestry of the night sky. Alongside these two stood Corellon, originally the partner of Lolth, and later the lover of Sehanine after Lolth's fall.

Each of these deities now focuses on one of the diverse branches of elvenkind. Corellon is the god of the eladrins, presiding over arcane power and the Feywild. Sehanine is the patron of the eladrins' worldly kin, the elves. Lolth cares for the drow, now a disfavored people exiled to the Underdark.

Eladrins

—Matthew Sernett and James Wyatt

In 3rd Edition D&D, eladrins were a kind of celestial being designed by dividing up the alignment "pie" among divine servants. The warrior archons were lawful good, the animal-headed guardinals were neutral good, and eladrins got the chaotic good slice of the pie.

We knew that we no longer wanted to design monsters according to that rubric. Good-aligned creatures can be useful, but D&D simply doesn't need that many of them. As with the reconcepting of angels, we wanted opponents that the player characters could actually fight, not just mouthpieces of the gods or occasional allies. Also, since our cosmology no longer hinged upon the alignment-based concept of the Great Wheel, we didn't need to create planar inhabitants for every conceivable alignment combination.

Some of the existing good-aligned monsters did incorporate neat designs that we wanted to preserve and improve upon. Most of the eladrins fell into that category. As we discussed what to do with them, we noted their generally fey appearance, and this led to a natural association with the Feywild.

In 3rd Edition D&D, many fey are mischievous but intrinsically good, although they began to move away from that trend in *Monster Manual III* and later books. For the new edition, we discarded that notion in favor of one more in synch with the

Eladrin city
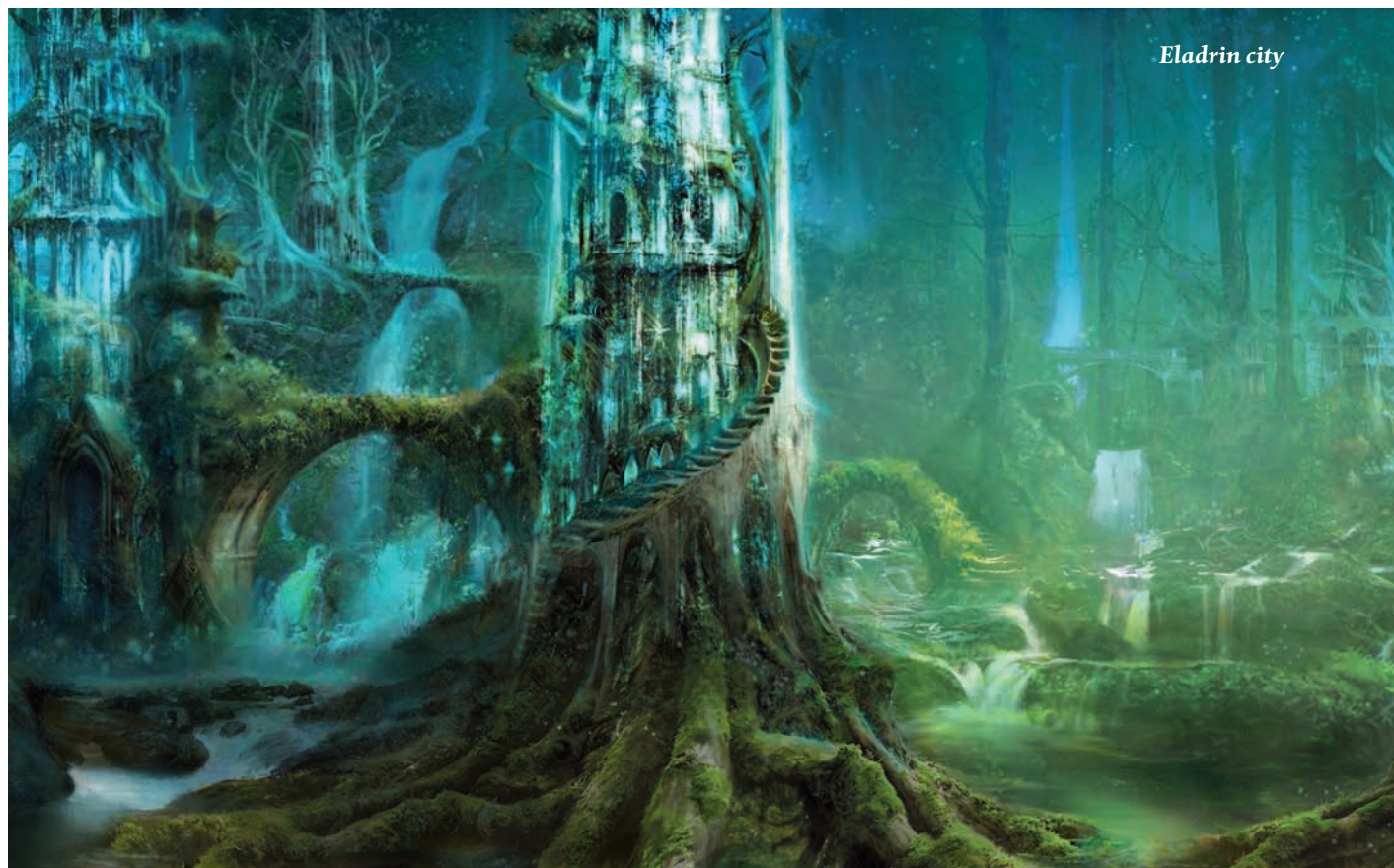
role of fairy beings in myth and literature, as well as with our design needs.

These fey can be beautiful, happy, and kind, but they are just as often capricious, vindictive, and cold, following their own mysterious codes of conduct. People of the world see fey and the Feywild as mysterious and unpredictable, and the common folk fear them as much as they do orc raiders. Dealing with the fairy folk is always a gamble.

Eladrins were already powerful magical beings in previous editions of the game. Now they have a very similar role, but as mysterious lords and ladies of the Feywild. The noble eladrins of the *Monster Manual*—as distinct from the race presented in the *Player's Handbook*—include the ghaele of winter and the bralani of autumn winds. They are high-level monsters that present both deadly challenges and interesting interactions for paragon-level PCs venturing into the Feywild. They are also, we hope, inspiring examples of what eladrin PCs can aspire to become.

Fomorians
—Richard Baker

Ancient, giantlike creatures that arose in the deep places of the Feywild, fomorians are cruel tyrants who hunger for wealth, power, and dominion over lesser creatures. They are sometimes mistaken for true giants, but fomorians resemble giants only in their prodigious size. They are creatures of dark, fey magic, not elemental power or nature. They are the largest and most powerful of the fomors, a group of related races of dark fey.

A fomorian is a huge, deformed, giantlike humanoid with light purple-gray skin. Each has a unique combination of ugly aspects: humped backs, lumpy heads, crooked limbs, and faces with features out of place. Most are completely bald, even the females. One eye is always larger and mismatched; this is the fomorian's "evil eye." Although a fomorian's other eye is more or less normal in appearance, the evil eye is large and dark with a bright iris like that of a cat's eye. Despite their deformities, fomorians are immensely strong—and, perhaps more surprisingly given their size and strength, quite intelligent and cunning. They wield lavishly decorated weapons and tools of exceptional craftsmanship, often featuring the motif of a single staring, catlike eye. Their clothing, consisting mainly of kilts and loose tabards, is equally well crafted.

The fomorians' evil eyes are things of power, a curse both on the fomorians and their enemies. They cause the fomorians constant pain, and sometimes have another special curse. Some fomorians see terrible visions of the future, some can see only the flaws and ugliness of what is around them, and some see nightmares during their waking hours. When the fomorian race was young, their evil eyes were so terrible that the creatures could not sleep. Many went mad. Finally they resolved to put out their evil eyes despite the power they gained from them. Yet the fomorians' relief from their curse did not last. Their evil eyes regrew.

Fomorian

Fomorians live in titanic and eerily beautiful underground kingdoms in the Feywild, lit by enormous glowing crystals, will-o'-wisps, luminous fungi, and rock formations that spit balls of blue flame. They build castlelike structures of rock with crystal doors. Fomorians command the fealty of redcaps, dark ones, quicklings, and other evil fey, using them as servants, spies, slaves, and messengers. They have unchallenged power in the Underdark of the Feywild, and their empires sometimes extend onto the surface, although the fomorians themselves rarely set foot aboveground. They often make war against eladrins and other good fey, seeking to conquer new dominions and subjugate new slaves.

—Continued

Fomorians Reconcepted

Ever since its inception, the D&D game has offered its own unique take on the world's mythological creatures. The fomorians of Irish myth have been a part of the game since 1st Edition, depicted as huge, wicked, deformed giants not that much different from hill giants or stone giants. As "plain old giants," fomorians work well enough in the game—big strong beaters never go out of style. But the new vision for the game's cosmology and the role of giants in it suggested that fomorians might be something different entirely, since they lacked the elemental nature of the other "true" giants.

At the same time that we were thinking about giants, we were also thinking about fey and how they should be updated for the game. The collision of these two problems inspired me with a wild idea during one Scramjet meeting: What if fomorians were *fey,* not giants? After all, the fomorians of Irish legend certainly possessed supernatural powers. And if the fey type included a huge, strong, evil beater, it might be a monster category worth paying attention to. Snicker at the unicorns and nymphs if you want to, but a fomorian is no joke.

So we penciled in fomorians as some of the most powerful evil creatures characters might run into in the Feywild. When we figured out that the Feywild ought to have an Underdark to echo the Underdark of the world, we realized that fomorians would be perfect for it. Now, instead of being just one more group of big hulking smashers distinguished only by their ugliness, fomorians were shaping up as the powerful lords of subterranean faerie kingdoms, ruling over other dark fey.

In Irish myth, fomorians possessed potent magical powers. For example, the fomorian king Balor had an evil eye so potent that he could kill his enemies just by looking at them. Other fomorians had the power to change their form, vanish, or do all sorts of other magical things. Since our fomorians were now moving much closer to the fomorians of legend, we created special abilities to support the theme—all fomorians now have an evil eye (not lethal, but still dangerous), and fomorian nobles might easily wield even more magical and powerful abilities.

We gave fomorians evil fey to lord over, including quicklings, dark ones, red caps, and maybe even gnomes (we're still working out where and how gnomes fit into the world of D&D). Now fomorians have a story. They have a compelling place in the world. And they have a purpose that makes them much more formidable and usable in a D&D campaign.

The Fey
—Bill Slavicsek

I've been working with my team of designers, developers, and editors over the past few years to strengthen and re-define some of the weaker aspects of the D&D mythology. Two of the monster types on my hit list were giants and fey.

For giants, I wanted to make sure we didn't just keep treating them as nothing more than large humans. I wanted to make sure that we added more magic, more fantasy into these monsters. The art needed to be more compelling, so that the miniatures we made were more exciting and fantastic. There's no reason that any giant should just appear as a larger version of a human fighter. With the advent of 4th Edition, I set the team to take some of the things we accomplished with giants in recent years and apply that to the whole family of monsters. (Wayne Reynolds's rendition of the fire giant from the cover of *Secrets of Xen'drik* was the direction I wanted all of our giants to take into the new edition.)

For fey, the goal was similar. Scantily clad human females set in the woods, to me, aren't nymphs or dryads—they're scantily clad human females with a couple of extra powers. Where's the imagination? Where's the fantasy? Moreover, I wanted fey that were alien, scary, and strange. No more blink dogs sitting beside the fire as though they were old country hounds. We can do better than that. We will do better than that!

For the new edition, I didn't want players to snicker or sneer when Dungeon Masters set fey creatures before them. I wanted to convey the terror of the Wild Hunt in every encounter, the hopelessness of getting lost in a faerie mound, the terrible horror that lurks in the original versions of almost every Grimm's fairy tale.

So, the game designers and developers went to work on the story and mechanical elements. Stacy Longstreet and her artists went to work on the visual look of these creatures. And, together, we've created the arcane vistas of the Feywild. It's a place of magic and mystery, of awesome beauty and wondrous terror. It has its places of light, but it also has its dark side—just like everything in D&D should have.

In a 4th Edition D&D game, when your Dungeon Master presents you with a swarm of pixies, you'll probably giggle or even laugh out loud. Initially. Then you'll discover that the miniature winged elves with tiny spears and cherubic smiles are a distant memory. The new pixies are swarming, flying, tearing teeth, like flying piranhas, that can quickly reduce a hapless adventurer to a pile of picked-clean bones.

Now that's a fey encounter!
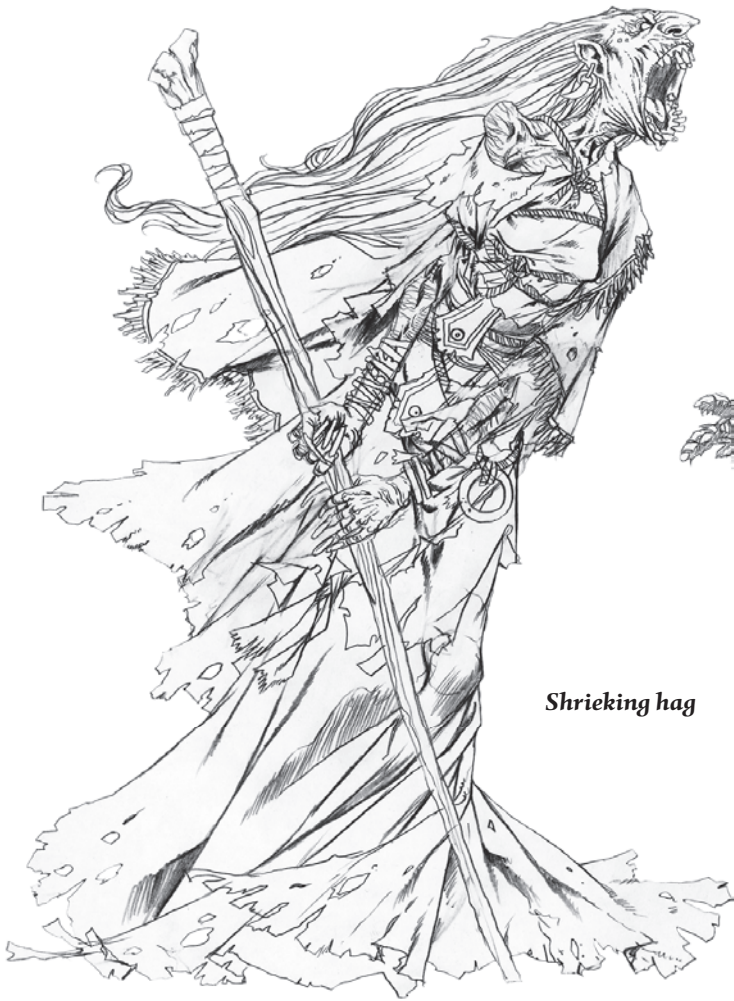
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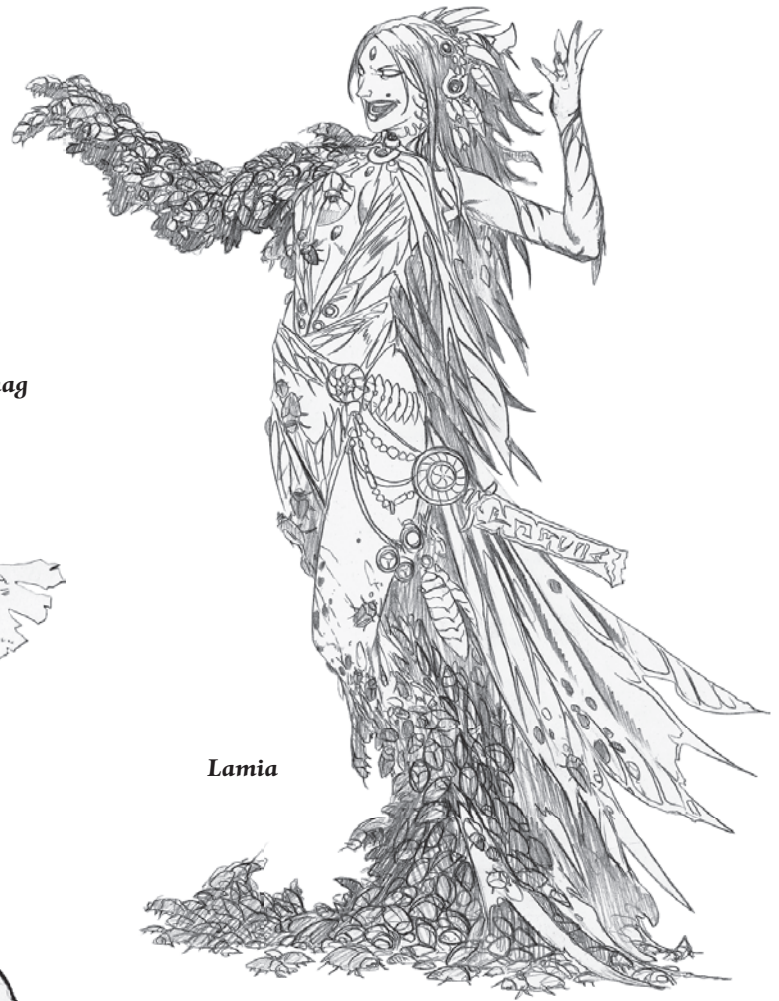
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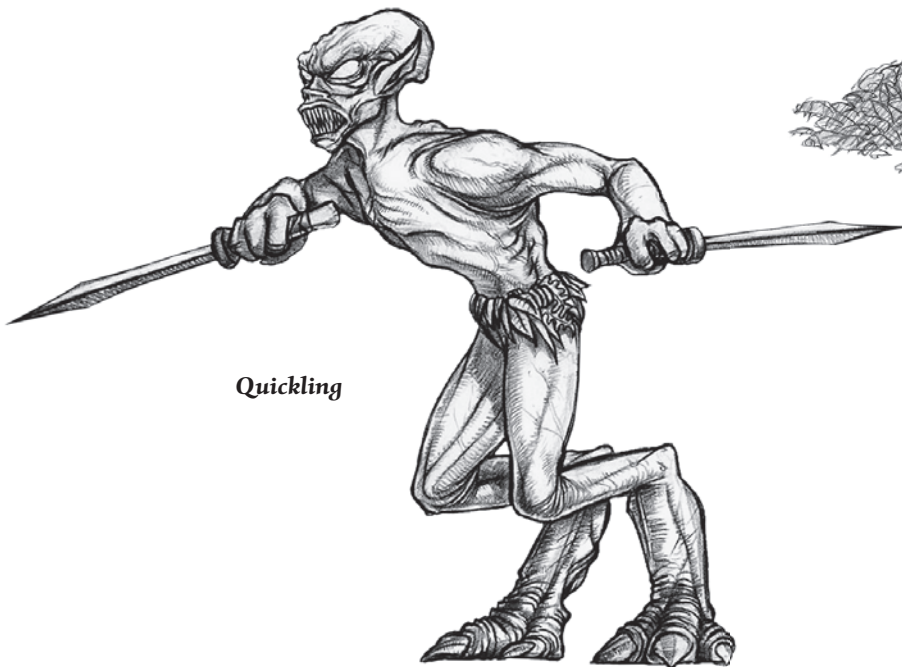
Quickling

The Shadowfell

—Jennifer Clarke Wilkes and Chris Sims

The Shadowfell is the twisted reflection of the world, formed of dark creation-stuff hurled aside by the primordials as they created existence. It encompasses the realm of the dead, and its necrotic energy animates the undead. Gone is the Plane of Shadow, along with the other transitive planes of earlier editions of Dungeons & Dragons. (Traveling to other planes is simpler now.) Gone too is the soul-draining Negative Energy Plane that was nearly impossible to adventure on.

Instead, the Shadowfell is an unintended echo, much like its brighter counterpart the Feywild. Familiar locations of the world exist there, but they are eerie, deformed, and disturbing. A bustling city of mortals in a worldly land is reflected in the Shadowfell as a crumbling ruin or a ghost-haunted complex of twisted buildings. Familiar terrain features seem more insubstantial, darker, or ineffably frightening. Amid these analogs of the world sprawl the strangely quiet cities of the shadar-kai, bound to this darkling realm through an ancient pact. And *things* flutter, whisper, and creep at the edges of awareness, waiting to pounce on the unwary.

The Shadowfell is a place of constant twilight, darkness, and gloom. It isn't completely evil, but it is a place of melancholy and the macabre. Adventurers can find safe havens here, as they can almost everywhere they go, but even these points of light are dim at best in the mists of the Shadowfell.

The mysterious deity known only as the Raven Queen has abandoned the Astral Sea and inhabits a grim fortress in the Shadowfell. Hers is a realm of constant winter. Obscure legends claim that she knows where the souls of the departed go when they leave creation, and that she can call a soul back even from beyond. She sometimes keeps unaligned souls for her own inscrutable purposes.

Orcus, Demon Lord of Undead, and Vecna, the God of Secrets, have interests in the Shadowfell and compete with the Raven Queen for power over the dead. Vecna must have secret holdings there, where he builds up power for that moment when the dark goddess shows any sign of weakness. Orcus is less subtle, flooding the Shadowfell with ghouls and other servants. Zehir, the serpentine god of darkness, poison, and lies, has ties to the plane as well. Some of his followers live there, doing who knows what in the all-encompassing shadows.

Although it might seem that the Raven Queen could clear the Shadowfell of these unwelcome guests, she does little against Vecna, Orcus, and Zehir. Maybe the fact

that adventurers who wish to thwart evil can travel to the Shadowfell is enough for her. Possibly she even reveals her enemies to such scrutiny. And perhaps she knows something her enemies don't.

Not a Perfect Reflection
—Matthew Sernett

The 3rd Edition Plane of Shadow was a nightmarish reflection of the Material Plane that behaved in unpredictable ways. It seemed possible for individual features, perhaps even people, to be mirrored in that lightless, colorless realm. For the new edition, we wanted to keep the concept of the Shadowfell as a dark reflection of the world, but without the troublesome implications of reflection that was perfect and constantly changing. Also, fascinating landscapes are invisible in a plane that's completely dark, and even when seen, they aren't as interesting without color.

Thus, the 4th Edition Shadowfell is shadowy, not completely dark, and its colors are muted, not missing. It reflects the world in broad strokes. A mountain in the world exists in the Shadowfell, but it might bear little resemblance: It might be taller, different in shape, or made of razor-sharp rock or some more bizarre material. If there's a castle on the mountain in the world, there might be a corresponding structure on the Shadowfell mountain, or perhaps a ruin, a mausoleum, a mine, an encampment of monsters, or a gateway to a fortress in some other part of the plane.

The exciting thing about this concept is that you can recast the map of your campaign in endless ways in the Shadowfell, according to your taste. You can do it all at once, getting two campaign worlds for the price of one, or you can fill in the details as needed whenever you're feeling inspired. Either way, the Shadowfell will be an easier place to run adventures and a more interesting destination for your player characters than the old Plane of Shadow.

Death and the Afterlife
–Jennifer Clarke Wilkes and James Wyatt

Along with the new concept of the Shadowfell in 4th Edition, the world team revisited the traditional myths of death and dying that had persisted along with the old Great Wheel cosmology. Since there were no longer alignment-based planes for souls to migrate to after death, we needed a new explanation for the afterlife that grew from the new planar order. The Shadowfell seemed the most natural place to fill that role, supplanting as it did the old Plane of Shadow and the Negative Energy Plane.

When a mortal dies, its soul first travels to the Shadowfell. Most souls depart the Shadowfell very quickly, either called to service by some deity or passing to a place beyond the cosmos. The mystery of death is that most souls don't have an afterlife in a god's Dominion—they seem to go somewhere beyond the knowledge of even the gods (and maybe dead gods go to the same place). Once it has moved on in this way, a soul can't be called back to the mortal world.

While a soul remains in the Shadowfell, it's easy to recall, and the dead creature can be resurrected. The "window of opportunity" is short, though. A soul can exert its will to stay in the Shadowfell longer, but this is a dangerous gambit. The strongest might return to the world as ghosts or revenants. The weak or lost are eventually consumed by shadow. Destiny can also keep a soul in the Shadowfell, so that a fated person can return to life to fulfill a great purpose.

Some souls do, in fact, serve gods after death. They pass through the Shadowfell as if it were a veil, shooting stars moving through its gloomy skies, as they speed to their deity's side. How a god calls on a soul is unknown, and why a god does this varies from instance to instance and from god to god. A saint of Pelor might be so favored, for example, or perhaps a given soul's destiny lies beyond death at Pelor's side. An afterlife in a god's Dominion is neither reward nor punishment, but it is often what the deceased prefers; for example, the souls of orcs fight in Gruumsh's armies.

Clerics preach of possible glory in the afterlife, as well as the guidance of the gods, but even they don't know what happens to the majority of souls after death. Good churches teach people that death needn't be feared, but mortals dread the end of life, and some seek any means to prolong existence.

Wight concept art

Why a Place for the Dead?

For 4th Edition, we wanted a system that is much more powerful, open, and sophisticated than D&D's official cosmology has ever allowed before, one that DMs can easily use, customize, or even ignore, depending on their campaign's needs. It has to support the idea of souls, and adventures built around them, but it also must provide a solid reason for why most people are not resurrected (when was the last time you read a fantasy novel that featured heroes continually returning from the dead?). Such a condition allows for the classic storylines revolving around the search for immortality, soul bargaining, and the quest for a lost soul.

Our new vision of the gods as remote beings unconcerned with day-to-day affairs meant that our new afterlife did not have to depend on a system of divine reward and punishment. Divine reality doesn't give any guarantees of a certain condition after death. Yet adventures could still be built around finding a soul, or resurrecting or contacting a soul within a god's Dominion. The DM decides if a particular soul is still hanging around somewhere—and where that might be.

The Shadowfell

—Continued

Soul snatching should be rare but possible. It should be an adventure avenue, but the bad guys who do it have to plan it carefully and execute it perfectly—or be at the right place at the right time with the right spell or ritual. Then the chase is on! A mortal can sell its soul, but it can't be compelled to do so. Once you make a pact with a supernatural entity, though, that pact is binding unless you can find a loophole. Only a very few creatures, if any, can actually corrupt a soul. Most "create spawn" abilities don't trap the soul.

Souls that are not otherwise held pass beyond known creation, but the cosmos doesn't diminish in energy or scope (as it would if souls actually left it or were consumed). This mystery allows for the possibility of reincarnation—a powerful story tool that we didn't want to exclude from the D&D afterlife. It also allows for the idea that dead gods are replaced if no other creature steps forward to take over their portfolios.

Undead
—Chris Sims

Death isn't always the end, even for creatures that have no great destiny. Aspects that make up living creatures interact to create many possibilities for continued existence, or at least the appearance of it. Through various machinations of fate or intent, a creature can remain in the world after its death as a plague on the living—or something more.

Sentient living creatures have a body and a soul, which is the consciousness that exists in and departs from the body when it perishes. A third element also exists: the animus, an intangible bridge between body and soul that is born and that exists with the physical form. It provides vitality and mobility for the creature, and unlike the soul, it usually remains with the body after death.

If given enough power, the animus can rouse the body in the absence of a soul. It might even be able to function without the body. Such power can come from necromantic magic, another corrupting supernatural influence at the place of death or interment, or the connection of the Shadowfell to a locale. Strong desires, beliefs, or emotions on the part of the deceased can also tap the magic of the world to give the animus power.

Most undead, even those that seem intelligent, are this sort of creature—driven to inhuman behavior by lack of governance of a soul and a hunger for life that can't be sated. Nearly mindless undead have been infused with just enough power to give the remains mobility but little else. Sentient undead have a stronger animus that might even have access to the memories of the deceased, but such monstrosities have few or none of the capabilities they had in life. A wight has a body and a feral awareness granted by the animus, but no soul. A shadow is the animus of some unfortunate creature, without a body but continuing to hunt and hunger even after death. Even the dreaded wraith is simply an animus, deeply corrupted and infused with strong necrotic energy.

The source of this necrotic energy is most often the Shadowfell. Its shadowstuff can "leak" into a dying creature as that being passes away. It can be introduced by necromancy. Or it can be siphoned into areas strongly associated with death, pooling there. Since shadow is the source of undead vitality, radiant energy is often more harmful to such creatures than it is to other entities.

Undead with Souls

Like living beings, some undead still have their souls. Rituals allow this sort of transformation. A potent destiny or a mighty will sometimes enables (or forces) a creature to transcend death. Undead that retain their souls are more powerful and more dangerous than their soulless counterparts, having at least some access to the powers they had in life. Such undead are autonomous and as unpredictable as any other free-willed beings, though evil or selfish individuals are the most likely to seek immortality through rituals that lead to undeath.

Sentient ghosts are the most common of the undead that manage to retain their souls without resorting to necromantic rituals. They have a purpose that fetters them to the world, even if it's only to spread misery or wreak vengeance. Death knights, liches, mummies, and vampires are all created by rituals that tie the soul to an unliving form. Similar creatures could be created in different circumstances. Such diversity among undead reflects the fact that death touches every part of existence.

All the deities have some influence over death and dying, but three overshadow all others in the area of undeath.

The Raven Queen controls death and destiny and so has some authority over undeath, though like so much about her, her purpose in allowing some to linger while others pass on is inscrutable.

Vecna, the master of dark magic, necromancy, and lichcraft, would like nothing more than to seize the Raven Queen's power, but his power can only maintain a dead form, not manipulate death itself.

Early in the history of the world, Orcus learned to create undead, including the first ghouls, exercising his desire to devour life in the vilest ways.

Orcus

—Continued

Thus, it's no wonder that a largest portion of the undead population is evil. It's no wonder that common folk fear the undead, with their fireside tales of undead more often filled with horror and gory death than with redemption or wrongs put right. But the bold need to understand that death is not in itself evil, and that undeath takes as many forms as the dying that precedes it.

Burying Dead Ideas

From shambling corpses to life-stealing spirits, undead are as much a part of the fantasy genre as dragons and goblins. In earlier editions of the D&D game, undead relied on the Negative Energy Plane, a place antithetical to life. The Positive Energy

Death knight

Plane was the Negative's counterpart in the balancing act that was the older editions' Great Wheel cosmology. Although this structure seemed philosophically sound, it created a number of conceptual problems that made undead harder to work with. Enter the Shadowfell, radiant energy, necrotic energy, and new and simpler possibilities.

The problems of the negative energy connection become clear on a close examination of its use in the older editions. Most undead are evil, and the reason they're evil is because they're infused with negative energy, so they hunger for life force. Evil clerics wield negative energy. But exceptions, such as the ghost, make this "negative energy as evil" idea problematic. In a slight nod to this problem, the Negative Energy Plane is described as unaligned. We even acknowledged the need for good and unaligned undead with the deathless monster type in the *Book of Exalted Deeds* supplement. But these solutions were simply kludges.

For the new edition, instead of working around these problems, however minor, we rethought undead. By formulating them to work in various ways from the beginning, we allowed them to maintain their prominent position as horrifying monsters. Cosmological elements—the Shadowfell, the Raven Queen, Vecna, and Orcus—allowed us to come at undead from many angles. Metaphysical facets—body, soul, and animus—allowed us to explain how undead tick, with several possible variations. Making "undead" a keyword instead of a type completed the picture by delineating how undead work while leaving open the possibility of undead creatures that vary from the norm.

In the end, undead still fit what we wanted and what veteran D&D players expect. Only the little inconsistencies got left behind, making way for undead that range from the noble ghost to the soul-sucking wraith. Now we can all use undead as we wish, without sweating over inconsistencies.

Undead Everywhere

Death touches every corner of the D&D cosmos. Even the so-called immortals aren't immune to its icy grasp. Where death can reach, so too can undeath.

This state of affairs is intentional. Not only does it allow us to have cool creatures such as atropals and immoliths, but it also allows us to create more monsters in any part of the D&D world. Unique creatures, such as Doresain, the King of Ghouls, and even Vecna, the lich turned deity, don't just resemble undead, they *are* undead.

But the possibilities aren't just for us. They're yours too. Bizarre twists and unmitigated horror brought by undead can

be part of your campaign at any level. Undead are just another example of how we're giving you ways to tell any story you want to without having to work around the rules.

Soul and Animus

To explain how undead come to exist without having any of the power they had in life (essentially no soul), I created a third aspect to the body–soul arrangement. I based this concept on the Egyptian *ka* (life force), among other myths, and the widespread idea on Earth of an animating spirit in the body that is separate from the human soul. I called this third aspect the animus—the spirit that is born into and usually stays with the body even in death. Sentient creatures have an animus and a soul, while nonsentient ones have just an animus. The animus is the seat of animalistic desires and survival instincts, and when coupled with shadow power in the body, it can engage in inhuman behavior.

Shadow, necromancy, strong desires, and corruption can empower the animus to rouse a corpse. But an animus can never exceed the consciousness level of the living creature it was once a part of. An animal raised as an undead creature can never be more than an animal. The animus of a sentient creature, given enough power, can recall the memories of the living creature it once was, and even act in an intelligent manner. However, its urge-driven behavior is often bestial or evil, despite morals that the now-absent soul might have imposed on the body during life.

In this worldview, most undead are soulless, with a corrupted animus controlling the body. The animus is what answers a *speak with dead* spell, at least in 3rd Edition. It can even be separated from the body to become a wraith or a shadow (hence the wraith's strong connection to the place where its body is interred). A few undead retain their souls, but this is a rare occurrence usually accomplished through rituals. Even more rarely, a creature has a strong enough will or destiny to maintain its soul after death, spontaneously becoming a sentient ghost or revenant.

The animus concept was useful in solidifying our cosmology with respect to undead. It doesn't restrict; it explains. It's a jumping-off point for many cool game elements that make sense relative to one another.

Shadar-Kai

—Chris Sims

When the world was young, an extended tribe of humans known as the Shadar-Kai came to fear old age, lingering death, and the final mystery of the afterlife. The slow decay imposed by time was too much for them to bear, and they couldn't abide the mystery of what waited beyond their life's journey. Led by their rulers, they made a pact with the Raven Queen. In return for a place as her willing servants in the Shadowfell, the shadar-kai were granted a form of agelessness, becoming deeply infused with shadow. Their tribal name eventually became the general name of their race.

Shadar-kai

Shadar-kai are now willowy creatures, slightly taller than an average human. As supple as the darkness with which they are infused, they cover their pale gray skin with loose black and gray clothing that seems to creep with gloom. Their hair, which comes in a variety of faded, humanlike colors, is worn long—sometimes loose, sometimes styled or braided. Murkiness follows shadar-kai wherever they go, and in the world, shadows reach for them as they move.

Walking the Shadowfell as living creatures, shadar-kai are profoundly affected by the lifelessness that is part of their home and their nature. Apathy and dissolution permeate many regions of their plane. Although the Raven Queen granted the shadar-kai freedom from age and infirmity, she didn't make them truly immortal. Every shadar-kai knows that to give in to the ennui of the Shadowfell is to face physical disintegration and nothingness. Those who succumb fade permanently into darkness, their soul taken by the Raven Queen while their animus remains as an undead shadow.

Dread of this fate forces the shadar-kai to combat it by keeping themselves in continuous pain, thereby anchoring themselves to reality. They wear bracers of shadow iron that perforates their flesh, and they adorn themselves by piercing and branding their skin in gruesome and painful ways.

—Continued

But pain isn't the only tool to combat oblivion, just the easiest to come by. Shadar-kai also seek dark perfection in everything they do, as well as stimuli from other sources. Death by any method other than fading away prevents the body from passing into shadow. This fact and their veneration of the Raven Queen have led the shadar-kai to hedonism and sinister plotting. Although none of them want to die, they hope that death, if it must come, occurs in battle or during some other spectacular act.

As creatures sworn and bound to the Raven Queen, shadar-kai built their civilization within the Shadowfell, where they work with and use other shadow creatures. Their settlements are sprawling, sparsely populated, and bounded by overwhelming silence. Inside short, open-floored buildings, shadar-kai practice ceremonial magic, ritual combat, and self-indulgent rites. They domesticate shadow mastiffs, shadowhunter bats, and spectral panthers, which they use for hunting and raiding. Powerful shadar-kai sometimes capture nightmares to use as mounts.

Power is important to shadar-kai, because in their culture merit outweighs rank and heredity. Their predatory society serves the Raven Queen by bringing death to the unfit. Warriors master difficult and exotic weapons, along with esoteric techniques that rely on a connection to the Shadowfell. They

Nightmare

SHADAR-KAI RECONCEPTED

First appearing in the 3rd Edition *Fiend Folio,* the shadar-kai cut a creepy silhouette. They were intended to have the same sort of place in the game as githyanki. Sadly, that concept never got a lot of traction, simply because the shadar-kai didn't receive much further attention during that edition's life span. The new edition gave us a chance to change all that.

Shadar-kai are a perfect fit for the Shadowfell, and a connection to the Raven Queen is obvious and cool. From these initial concepts, some questions immediately arose. Are the shadar-kai still fey? Did the Raven Queen create them? Were they echoes of the world like the eladrins of the Feywild, or were they something else entirely?

In order to separate the shadar-kai from the drow, they couldn't be fey. We also needed to make sure their look was distinct from the obsidian skin and white hair of the drow. So shadar-kai have pale gray skin and faded hair colors. The scarification and piercings, from the original *Fiend Folio* entry, also separate the shadar-kai from the drow, with the added bonus of giving the race an edge all its own. Shadar-kai culture is rapacious, but it isn't entirely evil. It also isn't a matriarchal theocracy like the drow have. Instead, it's a largely classless society where the worthy rise to prominence.

Further differentiation comes from the fact that the shadar-kai chose to become what they now are. That also answered the question of whether the shadar-kai were an echo of the world's creation. Nope.

A fine monster concept from their creation, the shadar-kai now have a solid footing in the new D&D cosmology. From this place, they'll get the attention they've always deserved.

hunt worthy foes relentlessly, searching for new conquests and exciting diversions. Shadar-kai witches command shadow magic, infusing the stuff of the Shadowfell with elemental essence or using it to cloud minds. Few shadar-kai are mere craftworkers or simple folk.

Other people who know of the shadar-kai invariably fear them. To face the shadar-kai is to face the agents of death herself. Fortunately for most folk, only those who crave an exciting challenge, those who meddle in affairs not their own, or those brazen enough to defy the Raven Queen need worry about the shadar-kai.

Art Gallery

Gargoyle strangler
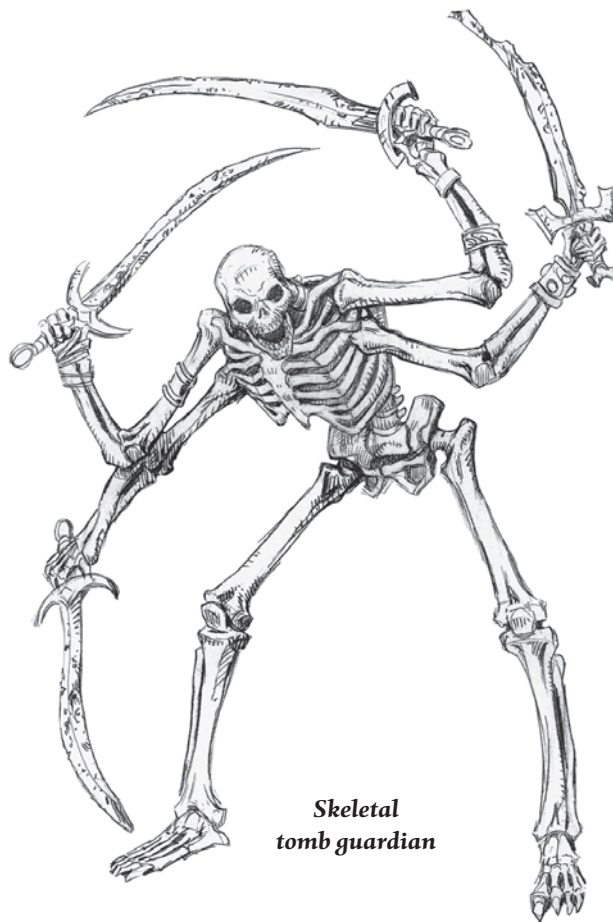
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tomb guardian
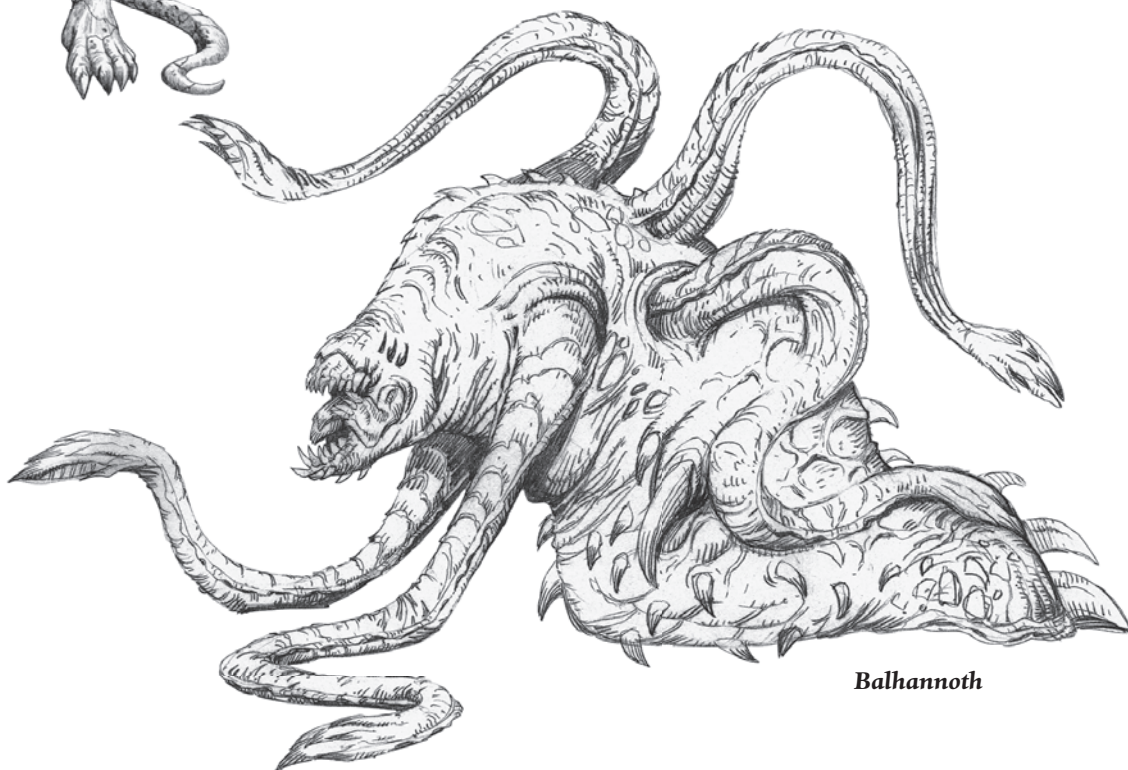
Balhannoth

The Elemental Chaos

—Bruce R. Cordell

A place of elemental fury and churning chaos, of constant creation and destruction. This is the Elemental Chaos.

The Birth of the Universe

There are many stories of creation, and many traditions surrounding these myths and legends. This one might be true.

In the beginning was a point of infinite potential. In the time before time, it was the epitome of perfection. Changeless, serene, and complete, it contained all. But it was also susceptible. When a tiny disturbance touched this nameless, too-perfect entity, nothing could damp the influence. The disturbance propagated and grew ever more tumultuous, becoming first confusion, then convulsion, and finally, eruption.

Existence split asunder. From the detritus coalesced the Astral Sea and the Elemental Chaos. The gods, beings of divine power, appeared in the Astral Sea, while in the Elemental Chaos arose the primordials, incarnations of tremendous elemental might. And between the two new realms, torrents of creation-stuff spilled and eddied in the nothingness.

The primordials, themselves composed partially of creation-stuff, were inspired to mold it, shape it, and use it. In a chaotic frenzy, they set forth to create the world. As the world took shape, the primordials found some created pieces too vivid and bright, and hurled them away. They found other pieces too murky and dark, and flung them away too. These discarded bits of protomatter clustered and merged, and formed together in echoes of the shaping of the world. Thus the world was born with two reflective siblings: the bright Feywild and the dark Shadowfell.

As they worked, the primordials reached into the Elemental Chaos to form helpers, and the titans were born—huge giants of fire and frost, storm and stone. The titans worked alongside the primordials to shape the details of the newborn world, though it remained a place of elemental fury and spectacular destruction. Had the primordials been left to their own desires, the world would have remained that way—ever-changing, destroying and rebuilding itself in an endless cycle. But they weren't left alone.

Looking down from the Astral Sea, the gods were fascinated with the world and the beings the primordials had made. Creatures of thought and ideal, the gods saw endless room for improvement in the primordials' work, and their imaginings took form and substance from the abundance of creation-stuff still drifting in the cosmos. Life spread across the face of the world, the churning elements resolved into oceans and landmasses, diffuse light became a sun and moon and stars. The gods drew Astral essence and mixed it with the tiniest bits of creation-stuff to form servants for themselves, and these angels helped the gods create mortals to populate the world and worship them. Elves, dwarves, humans, and others appeared in this period of spontaneous creation. Ripples spread out from this act of creation into the Feywild and the Shadowfell as well, bringing creatures to life there as echoes of the world's mortals.

The gods' interference enraged the primordials, and soon the two sides of creation were at war. The primordials set out to destroy the world rather than let it become the gods' plaything, while the gods fought to save it and the mortals they had made to inhabit it. Each god selected a different aspect of creation to champion and care for over the course of the war, so the portfolios of the gods began to take shape.

The tactics of the gods were extremely effective. The gods banded together in small groups, and each group set out to destroy one of the mighty primordials. Working together as a team, setting aside their differences in pursuit of a common goal, the gods prevailed over their foes. The mightiest primordials were slain, their more powerful spawn were cast back into the Elemental Chaos or imprisoned in the world, and the titans and other monstrous beings scattered across the world or retreated to the Chaos.

The gods, too, retreated to the Astral Sea. Stung by the hardships of the war and no longer able to set aside their differences, they turned their creative desires to the formation of Dominions within the Astral Sea, places where they could live alone or with like-minded allies, surrounded by angelic servants and removed from the world. They left their mortal followers to pursue their own destinies with only the subtlest guidance and interference from on high. The gods still enjoy the worship of mortals, of course, and reward it with shards of their divine power, but the days when the gods walked the earth are now far in the past—at least until another force emerges to threaten the whole of creation.

The Chaos Today

Epochs after the creation of existence, the Elemental Chaos yet boils beneath the world. Elemental substance and energy crash together in an unending cycle of creation and destruction. It is a plane of possibilities made reality, of imagination without the reins of morality or reason. Here, raw disorder cavorts. Here, everything—and nothing—is possible. Elements are born in mighty detonations and die just as spectacularly.

In some areas, the Chaos resembles a level plain on which natives and visitors can stand and travel, but within its wilds, the only constant is change. Maelstroms churn the earth as if it were a turbulent sea, chunks of rock breaking off and floating into the sky, where some collide and fall again as stony rain. Rivers of magma or fire flow across the landscape with no obvious source. The air lights up with cloudless displays of dazzling lightning, hot and cold blazes, and simple radiance. Dust and flames drop from passing clouds as often as common precipitation, and those clouds are as likely to be smoke or sand as mere ice or water. Balls of sentient fire, vengeful thunderheads, animate chunks of earth, and waves of water battle for superiority until they are, in turn, overcome by yet another chaotic surge.

A traveler from the world can survive here, though. Danger isn't constant—Chaos also includes refuges of quietude. Many denizens of the Chaos must eat as mortals do, so game and forage exist. The mightiest can even solidify a territory for themselves in the entropy of the plane. Thus, landscapes similar to those encountered in the world can be found amid the elemental clamor, including bits of forest, patches of meadow, ruined castles, and small islands.

Denizens of the Elemental Chaos

Many different creatures call the Elemental Chaos home. They vary widely in form and appearance, but they share the unpredictable, passionate, and oft-destructive nature of the plane itself.

Primordials

Some of the great primordials who shaped the world from the building blocks of creation yet remain, though chained and raging. Entombed in divinely crafted prisons and hidden within the cosmos, the ancient beings look forward to the hour of their release. When that moment finally comes, they will unleash elemental retaliation upon all of creation.

Elementals

By far, elementals form the largest category of creatures in the Chaos. They are limitless in shape, size, composition, and temperament—as quickly as one can be classified, two completely new elemental variants arise from the base matter of the plane itself. Whipfire infernos, thunderblast cyclones, magma brutes, archons, fire bats, magma hurlers, quickfire conflagrations, rimefire gryphs, salamanders, flame snakes, and more populate the Elemental Chaos.
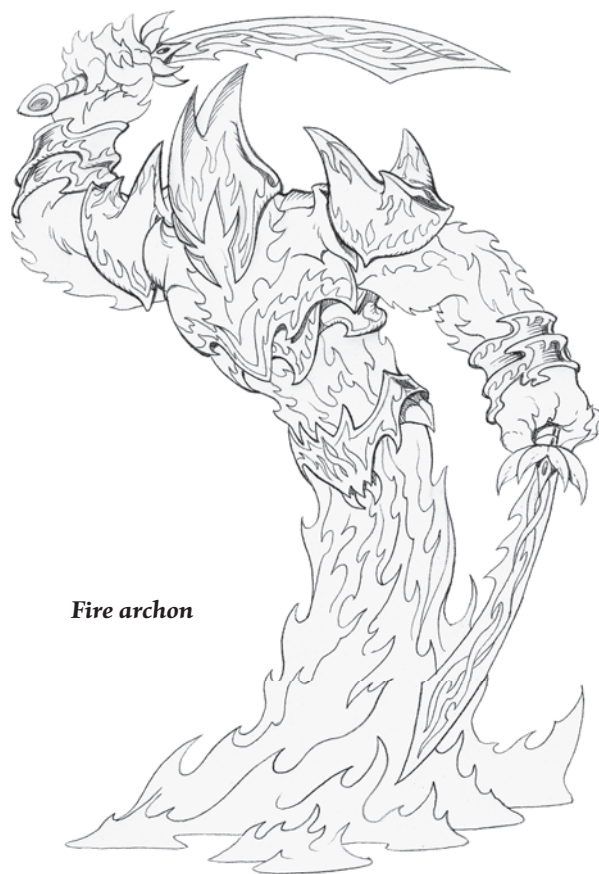
Fire archon
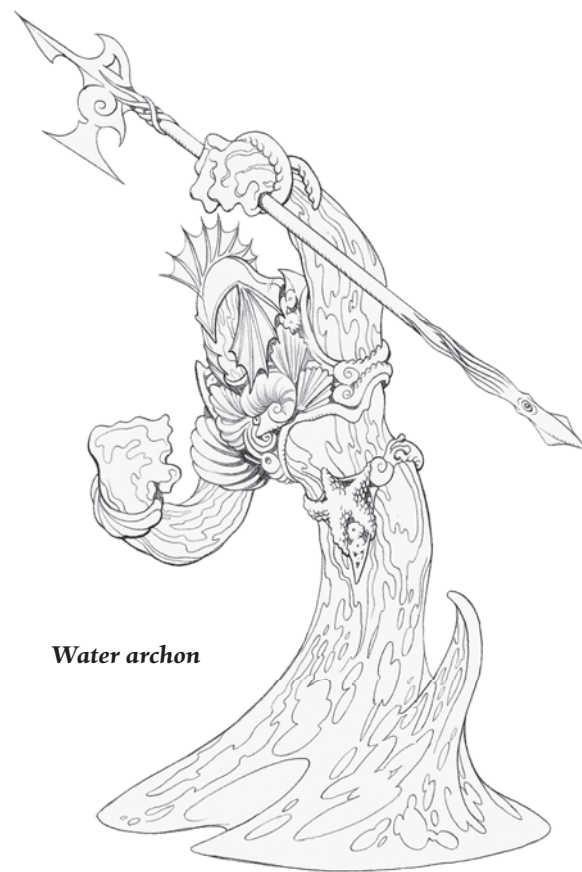
Water archon

The Elemental Chaos

The Elemental Chaos

–Continued

Efreet

Efreet are the fiery princes of the Elemental Chaos, the strongest force of order in that tumultuous plane. They rule over vast armies and households full of elemental slaves in the City of Brass, a permanent still point in the Chaos, unchanging and eternal.

Djinn

Djinn are spirits of the air, inhabiting the empyrean heights of the Elemental Chaos, where no ground can be seen. They are flighty and tempestuous, not at all concerned with rulership or even participation in the schemes of others.

Demons

Rumors speak of a forgotten god who twisted the Chaos from within, or of evil taking root like a foul seed of corruption. Whatever its origin, the corruption burrowed deep into the unshaped matter of the Chaos and spread unholy tendrils throughout. The Abyss, a yawning chasm of infinite darkness, opened up at the lowest pit of creation, swallowing all matter and light, defiling anything that drew near. Demons swarm and breed there, beings of pure fury and destruction.

Slaads

The toadlike slaads croak and hop amid the Chaos. Entropy personified, they thrive in the plane's ever-changing nature but do not serve its elemental forces. Their movements and aims seem random, their sole purpose to bring more chaos into existence.

Titans

Titans are the largest of the giants, and their vast kingdoms encompass large regions of the plane. They might even bridge the planes, making their homes in places where the Elemental Chaos breaks into the world.

Locations of Note

–Chris Sims

Here and there, specific locales in the Elemental Chaos resemble just another part of the world. But a few days or even moments of travel can take an explorer into otherworldly realms where even the weather defies all sense. Lords of giants, efreet, and other elemental forces inhabit the Chaos. Some lie quiescent within its earth, hurled there after their defeat at the hands of the gods, while others govern in domains they've carved for themselves and their followers. Plenty of lesser creatures also inhabit the plane, often attracted to stable areas within it.

Within its changeable landscape, the Elemental Chaos holds strange places and hidden treasures. Courageous explorers have a host of locales to visit there, and they have even more reasons to go. In the domain of the elemental forces, enemies of the gods and all creation yet abide, and the fate of the world might yet be determined.

Titan Realms

The titans, great primordial giant lords, rule many of regions of the Elemental Chaos. Thrym, Lord of the Frost Giants, commands Nyfel, a vast tundra lit by glittering icefalls and populated with all sorts of fell frost creatures. From his fortress, Nyfholl, he directs his followers to bring eternal winter to the world.

In mountains not far from Nyfel is the kingdom of Muspel. Here rules Surtur, Lord of the Fire Giants, from his throne in Jarnfell, the Iron Mountain. Fiery monsters flock to Surtur's banner, ready to bring cleansing flame to the cosmos.

Efreeti emir

Floating within an eternal storm in the Chaos's skies is Vedraeholl, the castle of the Storm Queen, Hrydd. The greatest of the storm titans, Hrydd is the high queen of all giantkind and worshiped by some as a power of nature. Her great strength allows her influence over even other titans, such as Thrym.

City of Brass

Lord of the Efreet, Bashamgurda relies more on guile than sheer elemental power. He has his throne in the City of Brass, a fiery metropolis built on a basalt plate in an immense volcanic field. Magma flows in rivers through and around the city, whose gates are fortified and streets policed like those of any major settlement in the world. By Bashamgurda's decree, the heat in and around the city is merely uncomfortable rather than deadly to those not inured to fire. At the center of it all stands the Burning Palace, its towers taller than any other structure in the City of Brass. Within the stronghold, from his obsidian seat, Bashamgurda treats with invited guests and plots against his enemies, primordial or otherwise.

The oldest and largest city in all creation, the City of Brass is a nexus for planar travelers—If you look long and hard enough, you can find anything you have ever imagined somewhere in its labyrinthine avenues.

Githzerai Monasteries

The githzerai are humanlike creatures said to have once been slaves in a great mind flayer empire in the world. Now they congregate in monasteries across the Chaos. Greatest among these is Zerthadlun, an austere walled settlement with many open malls, fields, and markets. There, the githzerai contemplate order, destiny, entropy, and destruction. They perfect their bodies and minds, testing themselves against the dangers of their chaotic surroundings.

Yrnsvellar, the Steel Glacier

This moving citadel is a city-sized piece of supernatural ice, implacably grinding across the Elemental Chaos or floating through unfathomable seas like a great iceberg. Within its walls, a small number of independent archons, powerful elemental humanoids created as soldiers for the primordials' war against the gods, train other elemental creatures for war. From the Steel Glacier, these forces deploy for an unexplained purpose to bring ruin to Chaos inhabitants.

The Pandemonium Stone

Although the machinations of the slaads are inscrutable, one key aspect of their existence seems to be consistent at least in its name—the Pandemonium Stone. This feature isn't always present within the Elemental Chaos. It appears at random intervals and in unpredictable places, looking different every time. By following eerie currents in the Chaos, slaads can find the Pandemonium Stone easily when it does manifest. They gather near it to bathe in its chaotic energy. Some radical scholars suggest that destroying the stone would be a decisive blow against the slaads, but others say that the stone is itself a sleeping slaad lord—a primordial of great power.

City of Brass

The Elemental Chaos

The Keening Delve

Parts of the Elemental Chaos are the remnants of ancient primordial lords. One such place is the Keening Delve. This labyrinthine maze of tunnels was once filled with the black blood of Haemnathuun, the Blood Lord, whose corpse now floats in the Astral Sea. The gaping tunnels he left behind intermittently howl with wind, making a maddening sound like a death shriek. Horrible monsters prowl the sticky passageways, and a crystal heart is buried somewhere within, holding untold eldritch energy.

Efreet, Elementals, and Evil, Oh My!
—Mike Mearls

Since the days of 1st Edition, the Temple of Elemental Evil has held a prominent place in D&D lore. Both the original adventure and its 3rd Edition sequel, *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil,* are defining moments for their respective editions. Although the elemental entries in each edition of the *Monster Manual* made no reference to it, the classic adventure was an important part of the D&D mythos.

Early on in the development of the new *Monster Manual,* we knew that we wanted to emphasize many of the popular and interesting monsters in the game. With the idea of the Elemental Chaos and the war between gods and primordials, we saw an opportunity to finally embrace elemental evil as a core concept. Why not take the storyline of the temple, the Princes of Elemental Evil, and their attachment to the world-shattering evil of the Elder Elemental Eye, and set it front and center? The four factions of elemental evil clearly deserved a place in the new edition, one on par with the Nine Hells and the Abyss.

With that in mind, we redesigned elementals into a group along the lines of demons and devils: four factions with their own power hierarchies, goals, and rivalries. At the same time, we moved away from the four classic elements (fire, air, earth, water) to create more colorful, specific varieties of elementals, such as the magma brute and the thunderblast cyclone.

By the same token, the design for elementals themselves had to change. Just as we wouldn't create four versions of a generic "demon," one each for sizes Small through Huge, to cover the endless legions of the Abyss, we could no longer have virtually uniform elementals differentiated only by size. Instead, we treated the categories of elementals as families of monsters, each with a number of defining traits. Using this design template, we went back and looked at all our fire-, air-, earth-, and water-themed creatures. We redesigned some classic monsters and created new ones to round out the list.

Efreet, for example, became the most powerful beings of elemental fire. Intelligent, greedy, and scheming, they strike a fine balance between service to elemental evil and to their own avarice. They are too old and too powerful for other elemental beings to bully them around, but they see value in striking bargains with their fellows and even with mortals. Beings from across the planes come to the City of Brass to buy and sell magical goods, track down forgotten lore, and venture deep in the wilds of the Elemental Chaos. The efreet find many willing buyers for their goods and information.

The elemental archons are a good example of a new creature born of this design approach. They were created by the primordials to be elite soldiers, living fragments of fire or ice that wield elemental weapons and wear heavy armor. In the elemental hierarchy, they form the basis of world-scouring armies.

In short, "fire elemental" now means a lot more than a living bundle of flame. It could be a burning humanoid armed with a sword of fire, a serpentine trail of flame that spits magma, a hill giant–sized humanoid of burning cinders who breathes gouts of fire, or a fire-skinned master of the arcane arts.

No More Genies?

Genies have been in the D&D game since its earliest days, but for the first time, the *Monster Manual* does not include them. As noted earlier, efreet are now elementals. Does a similar fate await other venerable genies such as djinn, dao, and marids?

Not necessarily. One of the goals of 4th Edition monster design is to move away from bogus parallelism. Monsters of parallel origin can be interesting and unique, but too often, this approach encourages laziness. If you make a fire lizard, for example, it's tempting to want a frost lizard too. But if the frost lizard is just a fire lizard with "cold" substituted for "fire," the result hardly qualifies as professional game design. Even a rookie Dungeon Master can make that change.

The design and development teams were concerned that four types of genies existed in earlier editions only because they are tied to the four classic elements. DMs preferred efreet to the others as adversaries, while djinn took the role closest to the classic genie. That doesn't leave much for dao and marids to do.

Genies are incredibly powerful beings who become beholden to whoever releases them from their prison. Do we really need three or four different creatures with that schtick? We want genies to be interesting and fun. Simply translating

Behind the Scenes: Origins of the Elemental Chaos

—Bruce R. Cordell

With the new edition came an opportunity to revitalize D&D's traditional planar cosmology. The Great Wheel cosmology, while wondrous in its novelty thirty years ago, had become less satisfying. The Inner Planes included many places that were downright lethal to adventurers; worse, all were infinite tracts of a single element that offered nothing to the imagination. Only the borders, where other elements were allowed to intrude (such as air and earth), could be settings for meaningful adventures.

The Elemental Chaos is an evolution of the Inner Planes, one that is better suited to adventure and exploration. The Inner Plane cosmology treated mixing elements as an exception, but in the Elemental Chaos it is the rule. With all the elements in flux, the plane is never boring. Because air and earth are always part of the mix, visitors to the plane do not automatically burn, suffocate, or explode with positive energy. That said, the Chaos remains a volatile place: A visitor could easily stray into lethal conditions, or run across a territorial magma brute or rimefire gryph. It also gave us the opportunity to draw in features of the old cosmology that seemed more at home in such a chaotic region—most notably, Limbo and the Abyss.

As it happens, the Elemental Chaos did not originate in the design of the core game, but as part of the work of the new Forgotten Realms setting "brain trust" that included Phil Athans, Rich Baker, and me. Even before the most basic D&D 4th Edition rules had been hammered out, we needed to project the future timeline of the Realms so that novel authors could get to work ahead of the edition change. We were charged with devising a cosmology that would work both for core D&D and Faerûn. The idea of two separate planar structures wasn't serving the needs of the overall D&D experience. Thus, the essential structure of our "Future of Faerûn" project became the 4th Edition cosmology. This plane was originally called the Primordial Chaos, but after additional development incorporating good new ideas, this restless realm of continual creation became the Elemental Chaos.

Air archon

3rd Edition creatures would not fulfill that goal, particularly as the game changes.

This sort of analysis and questioning went into the design of all monsters for 4th Edition. We encountered problems in 3rd Edition when we translated monsters and abilities from earlier editions without accounting for their utility in the game and conceptual value. We never want to simply create an earth genie because we have ones for fire, water, and air. If marids and dao return to the D&D game, we'll create an interesting mechanical and story concept that makes them unique and exciting.

Earth archon

THE ELEMENTAL CHAOS

THE ABYSS

–Christopher Perkins

If the gods are the exemplars of creation within the D&D cosmology, then the Abyss is their opposite. The Abyss is no longer a separate plane, but part of the roiling pandemonium that is the Elemental Chaos. The Abyss represents entropy and annihilation, and consequently the demons that inhabit the Abyss are extensions of this cosmological niche. Demons are what the Abyss uses to destroy things beyond its reach. They are, in their many forms, living engines of destruction, beings fundamentally opposed to the gods, their immortal servants, and all their mortal worshipers. The greatest of the demons, the demon lords, believe that annihilation of the universe begins with the destruction of the gods and their greatest creations–the world. Since destroying gods is beyond the capability of your average demon horde, the first and foremost agenda of demonkind is to ravage and destroy the world.

One theory holds that the Abyss was created (by the gods or by something even older) to consume excess elemental material spewed forth by the Elemental Chaos, drawing endless amounts of unused primordial matter into oblivion. Another theory claims that the Abyss came into existence on its own as a natural countermeasure to creation. Some

Vrock demon

believe that the Abyss is a sentient force, and that demons are merely extensions of its unfathomable caprice for life and the existence of anything aside from itself. The D&D 4th Edition *Monster Manual* spins the following tale of the birth of the Abyss, which tells of an evil god who planted a shard of pure evil in the heart of the Elemental Chaos, only to be devoured by it.

BIRTH OF THE ABYSS

In the earliest days of creation, even before the gods and primordials began their terrible war, one god was not content with sharing power–he wanted absolute control over the nascent universe. This god, whose name is spoken only in panicked whispers, sought a source of power he could use to gain total dominion over the unfolding realms of creation. Somewhere in the infinite expanse of space, he found the weapon he sought in the form of a tiny shard of utter evil.

The touch of the shard drove this god to madness, corrupting him so completely that he was no longer recognizable as his former self. Nevertheless, he carried the crystalline fragment into the depths of the universe, the lowest reaches of the Elemental Chaos–the heart of the primordials' fastness–and planted it there.

The evil shard took root, burrowing deep into the unshaped matter of the Chaos and spreading unholy tendrils far and wide. A yawning chasm of infinite darkness opened up at the lowest pit of creation, swallowing all matter and light, defiling anything that drew near.

The Abyss was born.

The evil of the Abyss corrupted even some of the mighty primordials–Demogorgon, Baphomet, Orcus–and reshaped them into the likeness of pure destructive evil. The mad god hoped to wield these demonic princes as weapons in his war of conquest, but they would not bend to his will–or to any will but their own.

So he left the Abyss and marshaled other elemental forces in his bid for domination. But the other gods overcame him, chaining him forever in a secret place known only to them. Now he is called the Chained God or, by his demented followers, the Elder Elemental Eye. His only desire is to escape his prison, and he rarely spares a thought for the realm he inadvertently created.

But the Abyss remains, a festering cyst beneath the Elemental Chaos. Within its lightless depths, demons erupt into birth, live out their short and violent lives, and are reabsorbed into the darkness. Demon lords rule their petty Abyssal domains, scheming to destroy the gods and all their works. The goddess

Lolth hides in the Demonweb Pits, corrupted and perhaps driven mad by the same power that shattered the Chained God and made the first demon lords.

And somewhere far beneath all imagining, the crystalline Heart of the Abyss still beats its unceasing cadence of evil.

Demons

The notion of demons as primordial and destructive creatures isn't new, but it's reinforced more strongly in the new edition so that demons feel distinctly different from devils and other evil planar beings. As denizens of the Abyss, they share their home's tireless thirst for annihilation and can't rightly comprehend the gods or their desire to *create.* The gods reside in their respective demesnes on the Astral Sea, and consequently they are well beyond the reach of most demons. The demons deal with this source of frustration by attacking the gods' creations and worshipers. Thus, demons live to torment mortals. A handful of mortal races—most notably the drow—are willing to truck with demons, but these partnerships only work if the demons' appetite for destruction can be satisfied.

The nature of demons is reflected in their appearance and their game statistics. Unlike devils, most of which have humanoid proportions, demons are clearly monstrous beings with few, if any, humanlike features. No single physical trait unites them. However, demons have game mechanics that reflect their destructive nature; for example, they are more concerned with offense than defense, and thus damage-dealing is more important to a demon than armor. They also have little concern for their own well-being and become more fearsome and reckless when hurt.

Demon lords are the most powerful, depraved, and cunning of the demons, but they are still demons. They can be fought at epic levels and even defeated, and at least one demon lord makes an appearance as an epic-level adversary in the *Monster Manual.* Demon lords are not divine beings and have many of the same faults of all other demons.

The legions of weaker demons that follow these demon lords are rife with disobedience and disorder—a stark contrast to the regimented legions of devils that populate the Nine Hells. Demons do have the advantage of numbers, however, which makes the gods think twice about leaving their comfortable realms on the Astral Sea to take up arms against the hordes of the Abyss. This fact, coupled with the divine awareness that there's enough evil within the Abyss itself to spawn countless demon lords, supports the belief that demons are an annihilating force that can be contained but never eradicated.

Dretch

Demon Lords

Orcus, one of the D&D game's most iconic demon lords, appears prominently on the cover of the 4th Edition *Monster Manual.* This is appropriate for two reasons. First, it hearkens back to 1st Edition, when Orcus and several other demon lords made their first appearance in the original *Monster Manual.* Second, "Orcus" was the secret codename for 4th Edition, so it seemed only fitting that he should get more time in the spotlight.

Orcus belongs to an elite group of "named" monsters that somehow captured the imaginations of D&D fans from the very start; quite simply, the game would not be D&D without them. What's interesting is the sheer number of demon lords who fill out the ranks of this elite group. Demogorgon, Juiblex, Graz'zt, Zuggtmoy—the list goes on. In fact, no other category of monster is as cherished or well developed as this madcap collection of demon lords, several of whom have had entire adventures and campaigns built around them. Demon lords were "boss monsters" long before electronic games coined the term. "Demon lord" as a monster class also benefits from the virtue of diversity; the fact that the game can support a near-infinite number of demon lords and that no two look alike gives Dungeon Masters and game designers free rein to create new ones as needs arise.

—Continued

What's new about demon lords in 4th Edition is that they're playable monsters, high-level to be sure, but not so complicated that you need to be an expert Dungeon Master to run them effectively. Like all demons, demon lords have a handful of trademark powers that define them. Orcus, for example, would not be Orcus without his terrible skull-tipped rod or his power to control undead. The goal with 4th Edition is to encourage the use of these boss monsters, make them part of the core D&D experience, and wrap thrilling adventures around them so that years from now, players can regale each other with tales of heroism and woe and count on their fingers and toes the number of demon lord heads mounted on castle walls.

DEMONS RECONCEPTED
—Christopher Perkins

When work began in earnest on the new *Monster Manual,* the world team set aside several hours to define the role of demons (not to mention other key monsters) in the new edition. Ultimately, these formative discussions led to the creation of a list of demon traits, which is reproduced below. The game developers tried to keep these characteristics in mind when the time came to generate the demons' game statistics and abilities.

Bar-lgura

BEHIND THE SCENES: WHO SWITCHED SIDES
—Christopher Perkins

In previous editions, demons and devils were mechanically interchangeable, and attempts to differentiate their roles and game statistics didn't live up to the promise of either creature type. Consider the succubus and the erinyes. Both creatures take the form of a captivating woman; granted, one has leathery wings and the other has feathered wings. Their function in the game is nearly identical, yet one is called a "demon" and the other a "devil." Consider also the pit fiend and the balor, whose physical appearances, roles, and power levels are similar enough to confuse players and DMs alike. Superficial or arbitrary rules distinctions, such as the demons' immunity to electricity or the devils' ability to see in darkness, didn't make them any easier to separate. The confusion was further compounded by the fact that some combat traits were applied inconsistently; for example, a handful of demons (such as the dretch and the marilith) were susceptible to cold iron weapons, while other demons were not.

To create a clear line of distinction between devils and demons, an effort was made to identify the physical characteristics, roles, and behaviors that separate them. In the experiment of doing so, it became clear that some creatures formerly called "demons" would fit better in the camp of devils, and vice versa. The succubus, for example, is the D&D game's iconic seductress, and seduction is very much in keeping with the behavior of devils. The succubus also hews closely to the general description put forward for devils, which is to say that she's humanoid with some monstrous features (horns, tail, and leathery wings), and not a monstrous creature with some or no humanoid features (which is the barest physical definition of a demon).

Demons and devils are iconic D&D adversaries, and change for change's sake is never a good thing. It's one thing to make the pit fiend and the balor look different from one another, but we believe the new D&D game can withstand the succubus becoming a devil and leaving behind the rampaging hordes of demonkind.

Rift to the Elemental Chaos

Demons are . . .

    merciless, savage, hateful destroyers
    varied but universally monstrous in appearance
    fearless
    eager to destroy the creations of the gods
    difficult to enslave
    disorganized
    self-destructive
    prone to gathering in hordes
    not empire builders
    not interested in negotiation
    not interested in personal power, wealth, or prestige
    more inclined to use melee attacks than ranged attacks
    more dangerous when injured

Efforts were made at the tail end of 3rd Edition to heighten the differences between demons and devils, as evidenced by the *Fiendish Codex I* and *II* supplements. In the new D&D cosmology, demons and devils could not be further apart. The Nine Hells, under the rulership of the god-tyrant Asmodeus, now reside in the Astral Sea, whereas the Abyss has become a lawless oubliette in the depths of the Elemental Chaos.

The designers and developers also worked toward the goal of making combat with demons feel very different from combat with devils. In essence, the more hurt a demon is, the more vicious and frenzied it becomes. At the time this essay was written, we were also exploring a "variable threshold" mechanic for demons that allows them to immediately gain resistance to damage of a chosen type, a limited number of times per day. This ability reflects demons' ties to the Elemental Chaos and lets them adapt to different elemental conditions without making them perpetually immune to any particular damage type. This makes combats with demons more interesting tactically as well as giving them a mercurial feel.

Yugoloths Reconcepted
–James Wyatt

The demons have welcomed their wayward cousins back into the fold. Once neutral evil mercenaries in the endless Blood War, these fiends are now true demons. They have dropped the schismatic -loth from their surnames: Mezzoloths and nycaloths are now mezzodemons and nycademons. (The mezzodemon is in the 4th Edition *Monster Manual*.)

There is some speculation that these beings form a particular strain of demonkind, servitors of a yet-to-be-named demon prince, and that they have more nuanced goals than most of their kin. One thing that's clear is that they're surprisingly willing to work with mortals–mezzodemons have been sighted patrolling the streets of the great drow metropolis Erelhei-Cinlu. They still have a mercenary streak that is uncommon among other denizens of the Abyss, who are usually content with destruction for its own sake. Perhaps as a result, they're more disciplined than most demons, more able to coordinate their attacks, and more likely to be soldiers rather than brutes.

This is an intentional step backward to the origins of these creatures, first introduced back in 1978 in the *Vault of the Drow* adventure. Their names were always pronounced as if they were demons, and they had close ties to the drow from the first. In the absence of a neutral evil plane in the new cosmology, folding yugoloths in with either demons or devils seemed the logical solution. Their nature is more demonic than devilish, and so they ended up in the Abyss–though they are perhaps the most devil-like of the demons.

The Astral Sea

–James Wyatt

In the earliest days, the universe split into two distinct realms. The Elemental Chaos was a churning storm of physical matter and elemental energy, in constant motion, always building itself into new forms and tearing those forms apart. The Astral Sea, on the other hand, was a placid ocean of smooth silver, unchanging and eternal.

The gods appeared above the Astral Sea like stars in the firmament, beings of pure thought and spirit, utterly alien to the raw physicality of the Elemental Chaos. As they began to work their will on the creation of the world, they made angels to be their helpers and envoys.

Only after the gods' war with the primordials did they begin to extend the work of creation into the Astral Sea. They shaped their Dominions much as they had created the angels, by mingling the tiniest bits of physical matter with the pure astral essence of thought and ideal to form domains that reflected their nature. It is in these Dominions that the gods, angels, devils, and the vast majority of other immortal creatures reside, set apart from the world but still drawn to the affairs of mortals.

Adventuring in the Astral Sea

Travel to the Astral Plane has been one of the weirdest elements of the D&D game since an early and influential article appeared in *Dragon Magazine* that described how characters move by thought, determine speed by Intelligence score, and so on. It has always been a place where the normal rules don't apply—and, frankly, it's less fun because of that. About the only thing the Astral Plane had going for it in past editions was the githyanki, who remain the pirates of the Astral Sea in the new edition.

There is a place for astral adventuring, and our design tried to make sure that a scenario like the one described in the *War of the Spider Queen* series of Forgotten Realms novels was still possible: Unable to reach a divine realm through portals or some other means of direct travel, the adventurers had to travel to the Astral Plane and force their way in. But that's about the only situation in which characters will be forced to venture into the Astral to get where they want to go—if all other means are exhausted.

That's because the Dominions are where the adventure is. Why spend hours or days traversing a featureless silver sea

Harbinger angel

Astral Sea

when you can climb Mount Celestia or explore the vast ruins of Kalandarren? We expect Dominions to be a relatively common destination for epic-tier characters, whether they're challenging one of the Dukes of Hell to free an imprisoned servant of their deity or seeking the forgotten name of the Raven Queen in what might once have been her Dominion.

Abandoned Dominions are the dungeons of the Astral Sea. Created by gods who have died or moved elsewhere (just as the Raven Queen has established her residence in the Shadowfell), these Dominions are no longer maintained by divine power, though a great deal of godly residue might remain to empower strange magical effects or even sustain horrible guardians. These are adventure sites custom-made for epic characters, designed to account for all the capabilities of such powerful adventurers.

Characters who explore these Dominions had best be careful, however, for Vecna—god of secrets—has a particular interest in the artifacts and tomes that lie in their depths. Vecna himself rarely appears in these places, but his exarchs and other servants scour them on his behalf. Those minions are certain to prove a significant threat to adventurers who delve too deeply into the secrets of dead gods.

Of course, active Dominions are exciting adventure sites as well. First, we've designed them to be much easier to survive and play in than the Outer Planes of earlier editions. Characters might still need some magical precautions to venture into the lightless depths of the Endless Night, the Dominion

of the serpent-god Zehir, or to enter the fiery halls of the Iron Fortress of Dis in the Nine Hells. But for epic-level characters, those precautions will be readily available, and these planar locations are just as (in)hospitable as adventure sites in the world—full of deadly traps, dangerous terrain effects, and implacable opponents!

THE GODS

One of the features that will leap out of the new *Player's Handbook* to surprise veteran D&D players is the pantheon of gods. Familiar names such as Bahamut and Vecna stand alongside newcomers such as Avandra and Zehir to form an all-new group of gods to claim the loyalty of player characters and their enemies.

Why a new pantheon? The answer to that question occupied a great deal of the first world team's design time, and hammering out the details provided a lot of work for the new D&D story team.

The first question was whether we should provide a core pantheon at all. For a while, we thought the answer was no. We imagined a *Player's Handbook* that gave player character clerics the mechanics they needed to customize their abilities based on the kind of deity they worshiped, then presented a couple of sample pantheons that made use of those mechanics—including the gods of the FORGOTTEN REALMS and EBERRON campaign settings alongside the core pantheon of 3rd Edition and perhaps some historical pantheons from *Deities and Demigods.*

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The Astral Sea

Here's the problem we identified with that approach: When we have a cleric in a piece of art, what holy symbol do we put around her neck? When we make a paladin miniature, what symbol goes on his shield? When we write an adventure, what evil underground temple do the player characters raid?

With a single core pantheon, the answers to those questions are easy to come by. We can paint a cleric of Ioun, sculpt a paladin of Pelor, and write about a temple of Tiamat. Then, it's easy enough for players and Dungeon Masters who don't use the core pantheon to translate names and accoutrements to fit the pantheon they are using.

What's more, D&D has always had something like a "core" pantheon—meaning a small number of gods who appear in just about every pantheon. Drow without Lolth? Orcs without Gruumsh? Dragons without Bahamut and Tiamat? We could do it, certainly, but in doing so we would be deliberately straying from something almost essential to the definition of certain races. (The Lolth-less drow of the EBERRON campaign setting are a fine example—without the Spider Queen, they are very different.) That realization helped us settle on the idea of presenting a pantheon for the whole world of D&D.

Once we decided to have a core pantheon, we set to work creating it. After identifying the most important deities—Lolth, Bahamut, and so on—we made a list of the divine roles we wanted to fill. It was a long list, covering everything from storm and sea to agriculture, community, and love. The next step was to identify which roles we thought were most important—and which gods made good choices for adventurers to follow or fight. A god of agriculture helps make a realistic pantheon, but isn't a figure that many adventurers will decide to worship. I played a cleric of Chauntea in a FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign once, and found that my god gave me very little guidance that was important to my adventuring career. Thus, the less dynamic elements got folded into the portfolios of more interesting gods, so Pelor absorbed agriculture and Corellon got music.

Another important decision we made along the way was to separate race from deity more. Traditionally, dwarves have worshiped either Moradin or some other deity of a dwarven mini-pantheon. We still wanted some dwarves to worship Moradin, but we also wanted some dwarf paladins to revere Bahamut, some dwarf athletes to follow Kord, and some dwarf wizards to worship Corellon. Likewise, human smiths and miners should worship Moradin. This decision helped us kill off a lot of minor gods—the racial mini-pantheons that have always grown to fill the available space, as well as important but uninteresting racial gods such as Yondalla and Garl Glittergold. Actually, we didn't so much kill them off as demote many of them to the status of exarchs—godlings in the service of more important deities.

Naming the gods and shaping the character of the pantheon took a long, long time. We had debates about whether to include the names of real-world historical deities (such as Set; we ultimately decided no) or gods from the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting (such as Bane; he's the only one, but he got in, shoving Hextor, Ares, and Maglubiyet aside in the process).

Finally, we arrived at a pantheon of twenty deities (plus one), and it's a pantheon we're really happy with. Every god is one that will either appeal to adventurers or inspire evil cultists to evil deeds. Sometimes both—Bane is a martial god revered by many soldiers, but also an evil god respected by hobgoblins. An adventuring cleric of Bane could find himself trading blows with a hobgoblin cleric of Bane, and their shared faith won't diminish their enmity.

In Focus: Bahamut

When it came time to choose a god of honor and justice, a god that could inspire paladins and champion the cause of good, we pretty quickly settled on an established god with a long D&D history, and we don't mean Heironeous. The Platinum Dragon, the god of all that is noble, pure, and just—Bahamut— filled that role perfectly. We loved the idea of paladins charging into battle with the symbol of the Platinum Dragon on their shields.

We didn't want gods identified exclusively with any given race, and the dragon gods were no exception. Bahamut is often depicted as a dragon with shining platinum scales, his symbol is the head of a dragon, and the Platinum Dragon is his most common honorific. But he's also depicted as a human paladin in shining platinum armor, an armored dwarf with a platinum beard, or even a graceful eladrin in gleaming chainmail. Bahamut champions honor and justice wherever they're found, and he calls upon his worshipers to protect the weak among all races.

It's true that many metallic dragons revere Bahamut. One of the myths of creation explains that Bahamut created the metallic dragons to protect the young races of the world from the rampages of the primordials. Many dragons hold to that myth and at least pay lip service to Bahamut, even if they've strayed far from the morality that myth promotes. Other metallic dragons worship Tiamat, though, or the luck god, or the god of knowledge, or the god of storms. As with humans, a dragon's choice of deities has more to do with its beliefs and ideals than with its race.

In Focus: The Raven Queen

Somewhere deep in the Shadowfell, in a palace formed of black ice, lives the god of fate, death, and winter, a grim figure of brooding cold. For untold centuries, speaking her name was taboo, believed to result in instant death for the offender. Now her name is forgotten and she is known only by her epithet, the Raven Queen. Though she is not evil, she is certainly not good. Her most common worshipers are evil denizens of the Shadowfell and mortals who have an unhealthy obsession with death.

The people of the world superstitiously view crows and ravens as her heralds and spies. They pray to her at funerals and carve her symbol into grave markers and mausoleums, not out of reverence but from fear, hoping to prevent the dead from falling into the clutches of Vecna or Orcus and the curse of undeath.

The demon prince Orcus would like nothing more than to learn the true name of the Raven Queen, for he believes it would give him the power to destroy her and claim lordship over death. Cultists of Orcus scour the abandoned Dominions of the Astral Sea in search of clues to her past, even as they work against the worshipers of the Raven Queen in the world at every opportunity.

Angels

—Mike Mearls

Until the version 3.5 edition of the *Monster Manual*, the D&D game had never included angels by name, though it had plenty of things that looked and acted like them. Why haven't angels been a big part of D&D since the beginning? Perhaps designers were afraid to offend followers of real-world religions, or maybe they weren't sure how to use innately good creatures in interesting ways. After all, with plenty of demons and devils to smite, adventurers aren't short on enemies.

A number of monsters filled a role similar to that of angels. Archons, for instance, were the good equivalent of devils, heroic servants of good deities who destroyed evil wherever they found it. But the player characters could fight them only under the most extreme conditions, in which a servant of good turns to evil. Such storylines quickly become hackneyed if they keep coming up, especially if they always involve an archon or a deva.

One of the goals of *Monster Manual* development for the new edition was to create clearer distinctions between the various existing monster groups, and to create new groups to fill a gap in the game's setting. We needed a group to be servants of the gods, a group that made sense for all deities (not just specific deities or subsets), and one that made for good, old-fashioned monsters.

Angel

—Continued

We began to redesign angels by converting several of the archons and devas of D&D 3rd Edition into servants of any deity. Gods both good and evil had angelic servitors, which followed the basic model of the existing monsters. In development, though, angels went in a new direction. Turning archons and devas into angels could muddy their role because of the legacy they carried—and what to do with the planetars and solars? Rather than rebuild existing creatures to fit the new mold, we opted to create new angels to suit our design goals.

The first step in this process was to come up with a creature that didn't immediately scream "good" or "evil." Angels are the servants of all gods: We wanted each to fill a specific role, but those roles had to be flexible. An angel of murder doesn't make much sense for the typical good deity. An angel of snuggles is a bad match for evil gods. There are a lot of concepts that most deities need in servants, such as battle, vengeance, protection, and so on. We focused on those basic roles, with

Angel

a few other iconic examples working their way into the game. For example, the idea of an angel of death is pretty cool, and D&D has never really had one before, so we added one to the game. Every god has enemies to be slain, so an angel of death makes sense.

Defining angels as servants of the gods also allowed us to free up demons and devils to serve demon princes and dukes of Hell, respectively. A DM can still throw any of those monsters together with evil clerics, but with redesigned angels we can draw a clearer divide between divine servants and servants of other powers, including lords of elemental evil.

A well-designed angel is a scary opponent and an unsettling ally. Its flavor should evoke a power older than mortals, one that is utterly inhuman—even if it is concerned with human affairs. Thus an angel of battle leads mortals to war, but it cares little for their hurts, fears, and desires. It exists only to serve its master and embody its ideals.

The look we created for angels follows this design concept. Their forms suggest a humanoid shape, but they lack faces and have other, subtle features that mark them as immortals. The servants of good who are cheery, humanlike, and loving are still possible within the game, but they are never angels. Angels are the cold, clinical expression of a deity's plans. They are the frontline warriors in the wars among the gods, and generals and champions for mortal followers. An angel has more in common with an artificial intelligence than a true living creature.

If we've done our jobs, then angels will become an important fixture of most D&D campaigns. The adventure to raid and destroy an evil temple features them as terrifying guardians at the heroic tier, rank-and-file defenders at the paragon tier, and mighty champions of the gods at the epic tier. At the highest levels, when the player characters interact with the gods themselves, angels are menacing figures that drive home the divide between mortals and the divine.

Why Aren't Angels Good?
—Matthew Sernett and Mike Mearls

In earlier editions of the D&D game, evil deities were served by demons, devils, or yugoloths, based on their alignment. Similarly, archons, eladrins, or guardinals served different good-aligned deities, with angels as all-purpose servants of good gods. For 4th Edition, we consciously turned away from such alignment-based design. The world team was laying the groundwork for the cosmology and monsters, but we didn't even know what kind of alignment system the new edition would present. So rather than repeating old concepts, we sought new places for these fiends and celestials.

Two factors influenced our choices about angels: making D&D's named fiends more important to the game, and making angels opponents that player characters would want to fight. In order to promote demon lords and the archdevils to more iconic roles, we gave them authority over demon and devil servants. An evil deity might still employ devils

and demons in its machinations, but it has no claim on them. Taking this step left evil gods without servants, and since we wanted angels to be interesting opponents, the simple conclusion was to have them serve all deities.

A number of monsters had filled a role similar to that of angels. Archons, for instance, were the good equivalent of devils, heroic servants of good deities who destroy evil wherever they find it. But the heroes are supposed to be the primary butt-kickers of evil in the world. If a sword archon could show up and skewer a wicked necromancer, where does that leave the heroes? Obviously, an individual Dungeon Master can do whatever he or she wants, but why have archons in the game if their role is limited to reminding players that good deities also have a load of minions? As it stood, these powerful creatures with their signature abilities hardly ever saw combat. Now, different angels have alignments that suit the gods they serve.

Having evil angels that serve evil gods just makes sense. Player characters opposing an evil deity's plans will have opportunities to fight angels, so the monsters' exciting powers will see more use in play. In turn, we can produce cool miniatures of angels that will be welcome additions to all players' collections.

How Devils Changed
—Mike Mearls

When it comes to classic Dungeons & Dragons opponents, only dragons and giants outshine the denizens of Hell and the Abyss. During the design and development of 4th Edition, the world design team focused on how to make those two groups of planar bad guys more distinct. They had a lot of flavor differences and were on opposite sides in a colossal, endless war, but when it came to the details, the gap between them faded. Fighting a devil was rarely a different experience compared to fighting a demon. One of the goals of monster development in the new edition was to change that.

Demons Are Chaotic, Devils Are Organized
This principle draws directly from their flavor, but we wanted more mechanics to back it up. Demons are generally tough brutes who fight alone or in disorganized mobs. Devils are cunning tricksters and tacticians who use coordinated tactics. Their powers are usually subtle tricks and tactical stratagems that catch an opponent by surprise or ruin the best laid plans. The succubus became a devil in 4th Edition because of this emphasis, since the succubus is synonymous with temptation, trickery, and deceit.

Demons Kill, Devils Subvert
A demon overcomes an obstacle through the application of force and overwhelming strength. A devil uses trickery and subtle powers that control or frustrate his enemies. A devil might use poison to deliver a deadly attack that slowly

Malebranche devil

saps a victim's mental and physical strength, while a demon simply draws on its mighty claws or a searing blast of fire. Owing to their strict caste system and strong, centralized organization, many devils emphasize teamwork and combination attacks. Powerful devils command legions of their lesser minions, forming small armies and groups that work in concert to overwhelm even the mightiest foes. Compared to demons and dragons, devils are individually weaker and less skilled. However, when they are encountered in numbers, their tactical cunning and teamwork make them fearsome opponents.

Demons Are Tough, Devils Are Slippery
In battle, a demon absorbs attack after attack. Its sheer toughness and shifting, chaotic nature allow it to soak up an enormous amount of damage. Devils are more fragile, but landing a telling blow is difficult at best.

Although devils' powers have changed, their basic look, the types of devils, and their hierarchy remain intact. Chain devils menace their enemies with long, spiked chains. Ice devils use frigid cold to slay their foes. Pit fiends are truly the generals of Hell. Not only do they slay their enemies with powerful physical attacks, but they are never encountered without a small coterie of lieutenants who throw themselves into battle with fanatic devotion.

—Continued

Asmodeus as Deity
—Mike Mearls

Since the publication of the 1st Edition *Monster Manual*, Asmodeus has stood out as one of the greatest villains in the D&D game. He leads the devils and rules the very depths of Hell itself. Yet, when's the last time you saw an adventure that pitted the heroes against his machinations?

In 4th Edition, we took a long look at the assumed cosmology of D&D and the place of devils, demons, and gods within it. We wanted each major faction of enemies to have a different feel and to provide almost a full campaign's worth of opponents. One campaign might focus on evil clerics of Torog as the main enemy, while another features an impending demonic invasion. To help further differentiate evil gods from demons and devils, we added angels to the game to serve as divine servants. Although demons and devils still work with evil gods, they focus on their own plans and goals rather than serving exclusively as foot soldiers for other factions.

The 3rd Edition supplement *Fiendish Codex II: Tyrants of the Nine Hells* solidified Asmodeus's position with respect to the gods. In 4th Edition, we went ahead and promoted him to a full deity. Asmodeus's ascension allows the story team to treat him as a major, active entity for evil in the world. Previously, the evil gods overshadowed him in terms of power and scope. Making him a god clearly establishes him as one of the most powerful evil divine beings while shining a bright spotlight on him.

Throughout the history of D&D, plenty of adventures have featured Orcus, Demogorgon, and any number of evil gods. Devils seem to have been lost in the shuffle. We've never seen the definitive adventure that pits the heroes against Asmodeus and his followers. We'd like to see that change, and we'd also like to give DMs a broader spectrum of campaign-long opponents.

Obviously, a DM can do anything he or she wants with D&D and the setting material we provide. However, we hope that Asmodeus's promotion makes DMs think about using him and his diabolic legions as major campaign villains.

Archdevils in 4th Edition:
The Saga of Levistus
Asmodeus is now a god. The devils have been given a makeover and new mechanics to make them their own, unique faction.

The background and history for them has changed slightly, but their role in the game and their particular spin on evil remain the same. What does this mean for the archdevils?

Now that Asmodeus is a god, you can think of the archdevils as his mightiest lieutenants. They are near-divine beings who enjoy great power due to their position in Hell's rigid caste system. So great is their power that some mortals venerate specific archdevils rather than Asmodeus himself. One of the most popular focuses for such worship is Levistus, lord of the fifth layer of Hell.

Levistus was one of the most handsome, cunning, and charismatic of all devils until he made the mistake of slaying Asmodeus's consort, Bensozia, in a fit of anger. Sealed within a massive iceberg on Hell's fifth layer, Levistus seethed and plotted within his prison for centuries. He would have remained there for all eternity, but Asmodeus has other plans for him.

Hell is rife with internal fighting, politicking, and treachery. Misdirection is perhaps the greatest weapon in these struggles, and Levistus proved to be a crucial distraction in one of Asmodeus's many schemes. Seemingly on a whim, Asmodeus deposed the previous ruler of the fifth layer, Geryon, and elevated Levistus in his place. Yet, Levistus remained trapped within his icy prison. He can use magic to communicate with his followers, but he is significantly weaker than the other archdevils. Still, he is quite powerful, and he immediately set to plotting against Asmodeus and his allies. This sudden shift provided enough confusion, tension, and fear that Asmodeus was able to successfully elevate his daughter, Glasya, to the status of an archdevil without any real opposition.

Levistus is bitter, angry, and above all else deceitful. He sees every other creature, from the simplest mortal peasant to the mightiest devil, as a pawn in his personal war against Asmodeus. Although he dares not openly rebel against the lord of Hell, he does everything he can to harass and weaken Asmodeus's followers. The world and the mortals whose souls he can harvest for power are chief among his targets.

Levistus focuses all his efforts on suborning mortals and increasing his power in the world. He is too weak to face his enemies in Hell, but outside it he is on a more even footing. His minions are tireless recruiters, luring mortals into pacts and claiming their souls at a rate that far outstrips his rivals' efforts. While the other archdevils jockey for position in Hell, Levistus has embarked on a plan to acquire as much power as possible while remaining beneath Asmodeus's notice.

Mortal wizards and others who deal with Hell mistake Levistus's position at the bottom of the archdevil food chain as an indication of his weakness. They forget that even the weakest archdevil is one of the mightiest beings in the cosmos, and time after time these mortal fools fall prey to the twisted, deceitful bargains that Levistus strikes with them. To Levistus, sacrificing a few devils or some amount of power to aid a rebellion in a human kingdom, turn a failed merchant into the richest man in his city, or aid a conquering tyrant in a few battles is nothing compared to his long-term goal to topple Asmodeus.

Asmodeus

The Astral Sea

–Continued

Working with mortal allies fits perfectly with Levistus's goals. As he collects souls, the schemes and struggles he engages in remain far beneath the notice of his enemies. The other archdevils remain fixated on planar-level threats. A few imps who serve an ambitious kobold tribe that wants to destroy a nearby human town are of no significance to even the least powerful devils. By deploying dozens, perhaps even hundreds, of such small groups across the material world, Levistus now claims hundreds more souls per year than his closest rival.

Levistus's scheme makes him the first archdevil whose plans adventurers must defeat. The dungeon outside town might seem as though it holds only a few warlike goblins, but in truth Levistus and his imp agents are behind the goblin tribe's latest round of attacks. If the adventurers defeat and question the imps, they uncover more schemes driven by Levistus's followers. What started as a simple mission to halt a raid turns into an epic quest to uncover a grand, diabolic scheme. As the characters gain levels, they slowly work their way deeper and deeper into Levistus's machinations. Perhaps, in the end, they must face the archdevil himself.

Spined devil

Levistus is a great example of everything that makes devils intriguing and challenging enemies. He rests within an elaborate power structure, but seeks to twist, destroy, and control it at every turn. He dares not stand openly against his rivals, but he continually spawns subtle plots to undermine them. Fighting devils is like peeling open a mysterious box, only to find another, smaller box inside. Perhaps in the end, Levistus is another pawn of Asmodeus, or his plans strike in a completely unexpected direction. Only the Dungeon Master knows for sure!

Devils and Hell

Scheming, malicious, and possessing a cruel intellect, devils are the most dangerous enemies adventurers can face because they combine force with careful planning and direction. A howling demon batters down a castle's walls and tears its guardians to bloody pieces. A scheming devil turns the guard captain against the king, inciting a rebellion that tears the kingdom apart while leaving the castle and its treasures intact.

Once, the devils were divine servants of the gods. Unhappy with serving a greater power, they rebelled against their masters. Asmodeus, ruler of all devils, led this uprising. After slaying a god and stealing his divine power, Asmodeus and the other devils faced the wrath of the surviving gods. Asmodeus had grown too strong for his enemies to overcome without causing destruction on a planar scale. Instead, the gods transformed the devils into their monstrous forms and cast them into the depths of the slain god's once-beautiful domain. Unable to destroy the rebellious devils, the gods had to content themselves with imprisoning and containing them.

Alas, the gods succeeded only in delaying the spread of the devils' evil. Asmodeus claimed dominion over the Nine Hells and created a rigid hierarchy of power among his new followers. Those devils who rebelled, along with the few, strange creatures already present within his new domain, were destroyed or forced into hiding. From among his followers, Asmodeus selected eight of the mightiest and most loyal to serve as rulers of Hell's layers. A sprawling, jumbled, but ultimately comprehensive system of laws, pacts, and codes unified the devils and allowed them to work together despite their selfish, evil natures. From the mightiest down to the lowliest spined devil, every resident of Hell (including Asmodeus) understands its place in the infernal order. Once Asmodeus had his realm under his control, his baleful eyes turned outward in search of an instrument of revenge.

Over the centuries, the threat posed by the devils subsided within the minds of the gods. Evil deities, most notably Bane and Torog, were eager to listen to the devils' offers of alliances and aid. The devils' complex system of laws extended to their pacts with outsiders, making the devils useful and even reliable allies so long as the evil gods paid close attention to the terms of those alliances. In time, devils came to enter into similar pacts with powerful mortals. A wizard who exhibits

more ambition than caution can call a devil and strike a bargain with it, offering some payment or service in return for a favor. Most devils found in the world arrive there due to such pacts.

While devils serve others, above all else they serve themselves. Devils cannot easily leave Hell. When the gods created the Nine Hells, they sought to seal the devils within there forever. Part of the cost of contacting and binding a devil goes toward using divine, arcane, or other power to breaching the bindings that keep Hell separate from the rest of the multiverse. Devils work for others to expand their influence outside Hell and pursue their goals. More than anything, they desire to corrupt and claim the souls of mortal creatures.

When Asmodeus claimed a god's power, he also gained the ability to harvest and extract power from mortal souls. Most mortals ascend to a god's domain when they die. Asmodeus and the devils have devised a way to subvert this process. As part of the bargains they strike, the devils offer their service in return for a mortal's soul. Regardless of the mortal's chosen god, his soul travels to Hell when he dies. The devils torment and torture these poor unfortunates, extracting energy from such captive souls and channeling it into a variety of strange schemes, devices, and rituals.

Sages believe that the devils' efforts to harvest mortal souls tie into some grand, eons-long scheme concocted by Asmodeus. From the very structure of the Nine Hells, to the elaborate caste system of devils, to the relentless efforts to corrupt and capture mortal souls, everything the devils do drives forward this diabolic plan. Whether Asmodeus plans to gain some final vengeance against the gods, or whether he aims for some other goal, none can say.

Githyanki
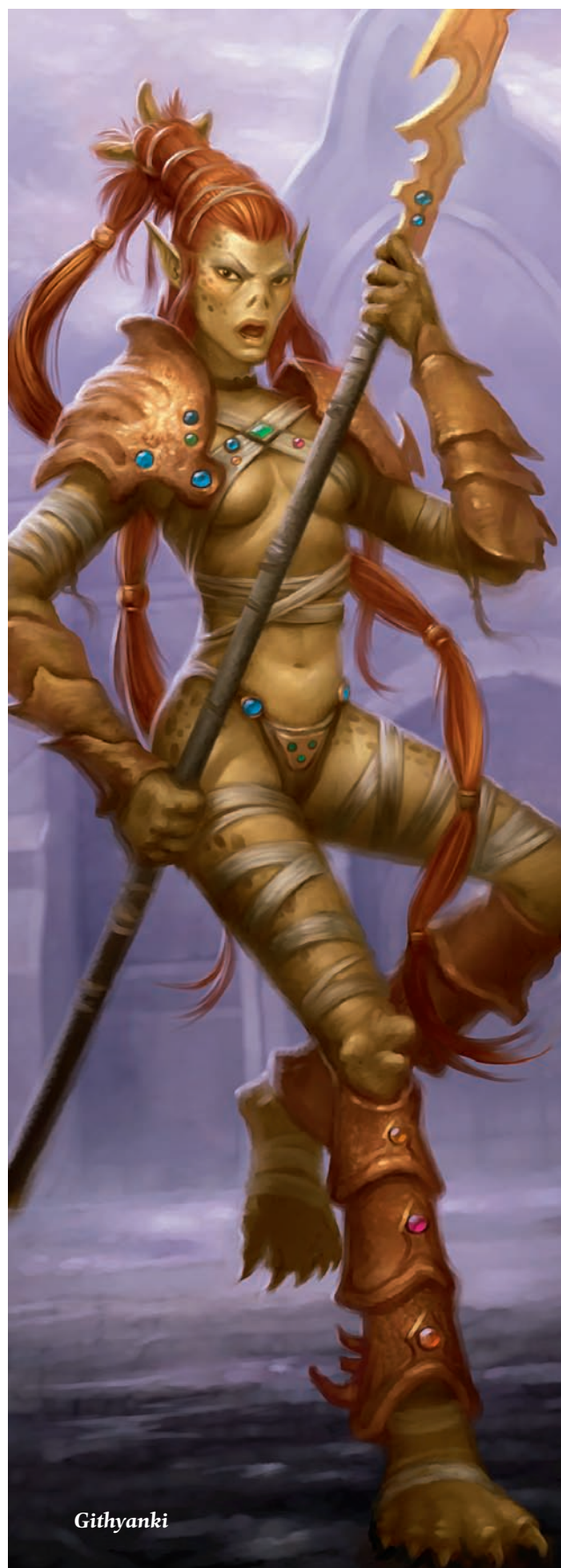
THE FAR REALM

—Bruce R. Cordell

The Far Realm, or Outside, is terrifyingly different from the structure of the other planes, defying easy categorization in any cosmology. Its history is one of controversy and question, which is well suited to its nature. It is literally "far away," lying beyond the cosmos that encompasses the world of mortals, primordials, and gods.

The Far Realm is truly outside the world and the familiar (if complex) cosmos of the Astral Sea, the Elemental Chaos, the Feywild, and the Shadowfell; it lies in the theoretical realm of timeless infinity that exists beyond what we know. Understanding it is a triumph of mind over the rude boundaries of matter, space, and even sanity. Every being, mortal or immortal, who has attempted to grasp the truth of the Far Realm eventually concludes that endeavor with, at best, a shattered mind. At worst, such scholars are subsumed and corrupted, becoming monsters themselves.

Those who only lightly value the cohesion of their own minds sometimes seek to gaze Outside in stained locations where the Far Realm has touched (or currently touches) the world. While many such attempts reveal little more than incoherent swirls and atonal audible distortions, sometimes sense can be made from the cacophony.

One account speaks of a space inhabited by vast entities immersed in contemplations so alien that reality itself warps and changes in their presence. Lethal contradictions and toxic systems are born at whim, only to dissolve like vapor to make way for newer, more insane dreams. Another tale describes a semisolid mass of translucent, onion-thin layers pierced by bone-white rivers of foul fluid. Blue acidic slime dissolves all it touches, and viscous worms wend through writhing cilia and lichen-like encrustations.

There is no air or atmosphere in the Far Realm. It is one immeasurable sea of amoebic matter, described by various gibbering lunatics as "organically folded time." Vast shapes drift at the edge of sight, reminiscent of creatures from the deepest sea trenches of the mortal world. Many of the indistinct forms are as large as cities—and those are the small ones!

Fortunately, this horrifying space only rarely touches the rest of the universe, and it is not usually visited. But its terrible, insane influences intrude into existence to produce corruptions and disruptions. Sometimes, squiggling monstrosities arise when the warping pressure of the Far Realm transmutes previously inert substances. Other such aberrant creatures come directly from Outside.

BEHIND THE SCENES: THE FAR REALM COMES OF AGE

I introduced the uncanny, Lovecraftian, and inexplicable Far Realm to the D&D game with the 2nd Edition adventure *Gates of Firestorm Peak*. Since then, glimpses of that alien, extradimensional haven have appeared in various D&D adventures and sourcebooks, including *Manual of the Planes*, the *Speaker in Dreams* adventure, the *Complete Arcane* supplement, and in the realm of Xoriat in the EBERRON *Campaign Setting*.

Its occasional mention in various products gave the Far Realm a definite, but splintered, existence within the game. Because it was never embraced in the core books, even the 3.5 update of the rules (which added all the standard planes of the cosmology to the *Dungeon Master's Guide*), the Far Realm remained a sort of add-on. Though many D&D players knew of it and included aspects of it in their games, many more had never even heard of it. With the launch of 4th Edition, we acknowledge that the Far Realm does exist, and indeed that it is responsible for monstrosities that haunt the universe.

The Far Realm is popular among those who do know about it. We'd like expand on that. Because of its unexplainable character, the Far Realm can be all things horrible to all Dungeon Masters. Every DM has a slightly different sense of what will terrify players, and an incomprehensible place "beyond" that is invested with alien qualities is a ready source of home-brewed mysteries to keep players wondering. Now that all aberrant creatures are linked to the Far Realm, lesser-used aberrations of earlier editions get another chance to shine. Their shared origins grace these creatures with a richer, more storied background even if they otherwise function much as they did before.

Consider aboleths. Although they have long been part of the D&D game, they've never enjoyed the prominence of mind flayers or beholders—they've long been just weird aquatic monsters. But make them Far Realm intruders in the world, and a whole new vista of story and game possibilities opens up. Imagine that the aboleths of today represent a remnant population of a failed colonization attempt during the dawn of the universe, even before the gods and primordials entered into their bitter conflict. Some are degraded monsters that creep through the dark, watery places of the world, but some yet recall why and whence they came, and one day they will try again to make the world a breeding haven for all their immeasurably large clan in the Far Realm. Indeed, they still resemble their relatives in that amoebic domain.

Aberrant Creatures

A few aberrant creatures retain strong ties to the Far Realm, such as aboleths. Others, such as beholders, recall little of their origins and care less that they owe their existence to that which lies Outside. Even when they share origins, different aberrant creatures rarely get on well—each pursues its own unique goals. Especially virulent are the conflicts between mind flayers and aboleths: The illithids wish to rule the cosmos, while the aboleths seem to want the Far Realm to consume, or at least wholly corrupt, all existence. Thus mind flayers oppose aboleth uprisings, and aboleths kill mind flayers on sight.

In places where cosmological boundaries have become too thin, Far Realm influence sometimes seeps in, staining reality in terrible ways. At the edges of such contact, a subtle influence pervades the area, overlaying the landscape with an unnerving sense of dread, and foisting nightmares upon those unlucky enough to rest within or nearby. At its heart, the landscape is distorted, with flora and fauna dramatically tainted. Strange new creatures, equal parts nature and madness, fester and hunt. Most such aberrants immediately perish when they move beyond the polluted reality that generated them, but some survive and might even become founding members of new monstrous races.

Insane practitioners, steeped in the lore inspired by the Far Realm, sometimes willfully merge the natural and the obscene to create that which should not walk the world. Although terrible monsters can have a variety of origins, those called into being with Far Realm influence are particularly nightmarish, and, well . . . aberrant.

Aberration Is Not a Type

The new edition of the D&D game separates a creature's type from its origin. Creatures that share a type possess similar qualities; for example, those with the humanoid type have recognizably humanlike bodies. However, a monster's origin can wholly shift its character. A humanoid creature could be natural (such as a human), fey (an eladrin), or even elemental (an archon). Now imagine a creature with the aberrant origin and humanoid type, which hails in some fashion from the sanity-dissolving Far Realm. If you're like me, perhaps you've just imagined a human-shaped bulk with translucent, jellylike flesh that constantly pulses and flows, etching acidic footprints into the ground behind its passage. Or maybe a mind flayer springs to mind.

Many of the monsters that had the aberration type in 3rd Edition D&D now have the aberrant origin instead, acquiring all the meaning implicit in that name. The Far Realm is an ideal origin for bizarre D&D monsters, such as mind flayers, aboleths, beholders, and carrion crawlers. Some are actual "immigrants" from the Far Realm, such as beholders—though most beholders care not in the least which of their monstrous lineage first stepped forth from insanity. Many others exist as the result of strange emanations that deranged the natural

Beholder

processes of the world to produce truly monstrous things. Gricks are an example of the latter. They are sometimes encountered with other creatures originally native to the Far Realm, such as mind flayers, but they are too dull to be trained or made docile without the use of dominating effects.

Mind Flayers

With the 4th Edition comes a new concept for mind flayers, one that emphasizes their connection to the Far Realm while retaining those features that have made them iconic D&D villains for decades. They originate from the Far Realm, but their current shape is an evolution of their original life cycle, which has allowed them to adopt humanoid form.

The Far Realm

—Continued

Illithids, as mind flayers call themselves, are insidious, diabolical creatures that dwell in the darkest recesses below ground. They bend others to their will and shatter the minds of foes. They are sadistic, highly intelligent, and wholly evil, since they subsist on the devoured brains of intelligent creatures. They are coldly self-serving, and think nothing of abandoning their companions or servitors should fortune turn against them.

Mind flayers have a long and storied history in the D&D game. Lore has it the race once held a substantial empire that reached even to other planes and distant places visible in the world only as twinkling stars. The resources commanded by such a race staggers the imagination. Entire humanoid populations were exterminated to feed illithid appetites, the energy of suns was rechanneled to fuel ambitions of inter-planar conquest, and whole continents were set aside for slave races to serve as beasts of burden, military fodder, and livestock feed. The illithids considered such power to be their natural due. But their empire fared no better than any other; a massive and coordinated slave revolt broke their strangle-hold. Today, despite the grandeur and power of their hidden

Behind the Scenes: Mind Flayer Mechanics

Mind flayers of past editions could be overly complex in combat. Their wealth of disparate psionic abilities, combined with the mechanics of holding a foe and eating its brain, often made even the most seasoned Dungeon Master pause, or fall back on the favorite standby: *mind blast*! Thus, we have fine-tuned illithid game mechanics, winnowing them down to those that ultimately define mind flayers.

Now that monsters, much like characters, have pools of at-will and limited powers, the DM knows exactly how often a mind flayer can call on a particular ability. Some devastating, freely repeatable abilities have become more restricted. For instance, *mind blast* is now a renewable power, usable once per encounter to daze all creatures caught in its area. Likewise, the mind flayer's ability to *dominate* a foe is usable just once per encounter.

An illithid's at-will powers are also easier to run, listed in a cascading, intuitive style. One at the top of the list is available each round, while those farther down require no attention until successful attacks make them available. The basic illithid attack is a tentacle lash and grab. Only if the mind flayer succeeds in grabbing its victim does the *bore into brain* power come into play. The next entry, *thrall*, matters only if *bore into brain* succeeded but the illithid decides to fashion a thrall instead of eating the victim's brain. Only once it has made the choice to create a thrall does the *interpose thrall* power matter, forcing its new-made ally to stand in the way of danger.

Mind flayer thrallkeeper

Alexander © 2007
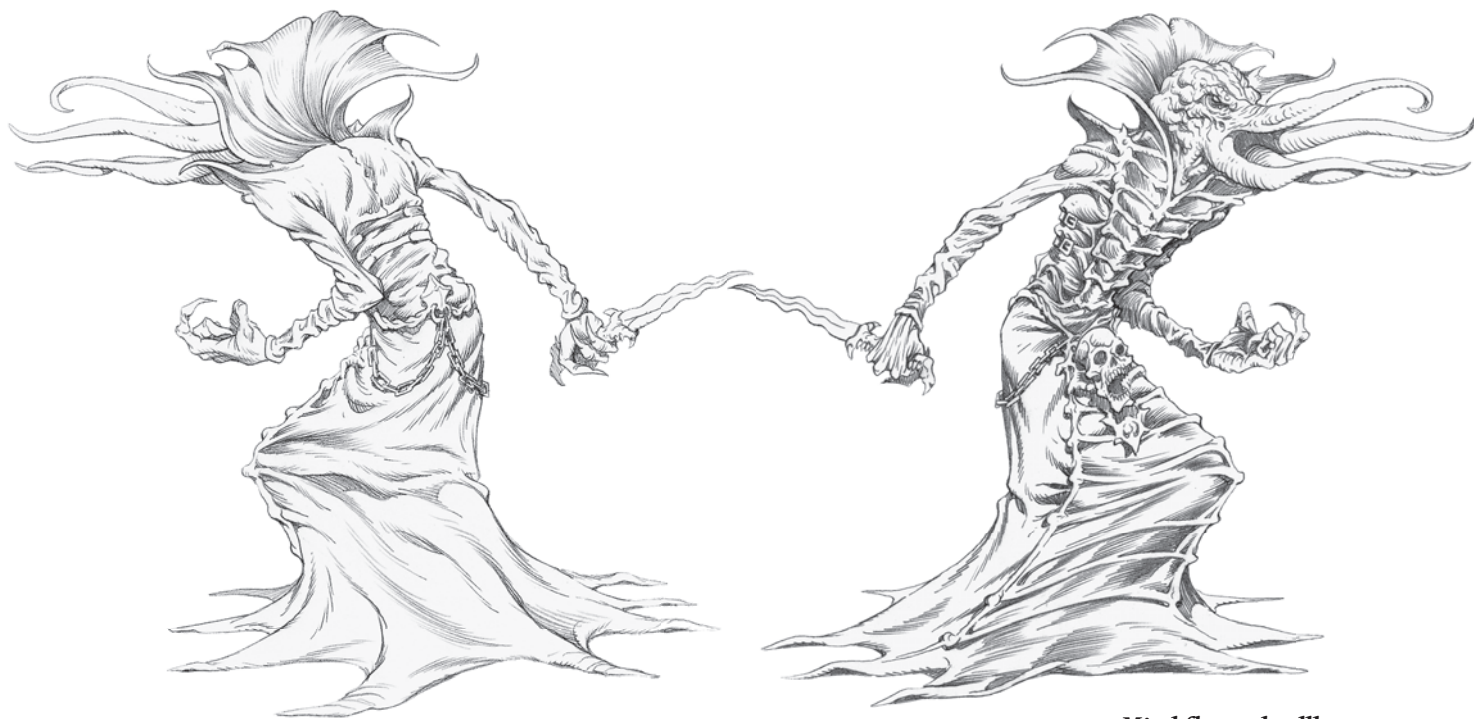
subterranean cities, the mind flayers possess hardly a fraction of the authority they once wielded. Not a day has passed since that fall many eons ago without some illithid pausing in the midst of a cranial meal to brood over how to regain its race's past glory.

The mind flayers' connection to the Far Realm has long been suspected. The Sargonne Prophecies (introduced in the *Illithiad* adventure series) are the best evidence of this linkage, though the text is sometimes misinterpreted to suggest that mind flayers come from the future. More scholarly reexamination of the crumbling stone tablets suggests a "breaching" event in which the illithids' antecedents entered reality from Outside.

Does the revelation that illithids immigrated from the Far Realm change them, or history's interpretation of them, in any serious way? In practice, not that much. Like beholders, mind flayers are opportunistic creatures–the wide realms of reality offer much. If anything, illithids seem violently disinclined to renew their distant connection to Outside. On the other hand, this recognition of their heritage sheds new light on their mutual hostility with aboleths. Each races believes it is the rightful inheritor of reality, and each has its own plans for it once all mortals, primordials, and gods have been finally dealt with.

BEHIND THE SCENES: IF IT AIN'T BROKE…

The new edition incorporates many changes to the D&D game, all with the goal of making every aspect of the game more fun, more playable, and more compelling. Admittedly, what one person sees as furthering this ideal might be objectionable to another, something we recognized and remained cognizant of throughout the design process. We understood how foolish it would be to change elements merely for change's sake that are already fun, playable, and compelling. Mind flayers, for example.

Illithids remain exactly as they were during all the previous editions of the game. Other than unavoidable rule adaptations to work with the new D&D mechanics, we did not want to mess with success. They still look the same: rubbery, grayish-purple humanoids with octopoid heads in gothic robes. They remain powerful telepaths, solitary masterminds who manipulate hosts of weak-willed thralls to do their bidding. The deepest portions of the Underdark still shelter horrible cities and kingdoms of mind flayers, organized around mighty disembodied intellects known as elder brains. Mind flayers still plot evil schemes to overthrow surface dwellers and, in the darkness, devour their consciousness.

In other words, mind flayers are still tentacle-faced horrors that eat your brain.

Staff Thoughts on 4th Edition

The following musings by the D&D game designers, developers, and editors reflect their thoughts and feelings during the process of creating the 4th Edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. These essays originally appeared, in whole or in part, on DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *Insider*.

The Announcement

We announced that D&D 4th Edition was coming at the GenCon Game Fair on August 16, 2007. Here are a few of the reactions noted by the D&D R&D staff.

Blog: Bill Slavicsek

I meant to write my first blog Thursday night, right after Chris Perkins and I made the 4th Edition announcement. But I've been busy. There have been interviews with all kinds of press people. There have been seminars to attend, and fans to talk to. And I had to eat and sleep a few times along the way as well. But here I am, in the WotC booth, standing at one of the *D&D Insider* kiosks about a half hour before the hall opens and I have to run to participate in the D&D Minis seminar. So I thought I'd take a few moments to break the ice and write a blog.

Wow. It's been an exciting and busy couple of days. I can't tell you how good it feels to finally be able to talk about the coming of 4th Edition D&D. It's been fun to see the excitement, the curiosity, and even the few moments of hostility associated with the announcement. It happens. We can't please everybody. But I hope that everyone will at least check in on *D&D Insider* a few times between now and next May to see what we're doing, to find out about the new edition, and to honestly evaluate the work we're doing. I'm proud of the plans we have and the work my team is doing, and I think you'll all be pleased with the final results.

Blog: Chris Perkins

Bill (Slavicsek) and I hosted the BIG ANNOUNCEMENT on Thursday evening, under the watchful eyes of a massive beholder and troll. Yes, that was me playing the DM in the introductory video, and I still laugh when I see the now-famous grapple-the-troll scene! I want to thank Sara Girard on the D&D Brand Team for overseeing the production of the big announcement, as well as Toby Maheras on our Events team for making sure everything was just right. It was awesome. The enthusiasm of the crowd made it especially worthwhile. Following the big announcement, I was greeted by a large group of fellow gamers who wanted to hear details. It was a relief to be able to TALK about the new

game, even a little, without spoiling the seminars happening later in the show.

Blog: Andy Collins

Wow, what a weekend!

It's been a wild four days, from the breathless anticipation on Thursday preceding the Big Announcement right on through to the last frenzied moments of shopping (gotta get one more handful of dice, one more T-shirt . . .).

But as exhausting as this show is, it's also amazingly invigorating. The opportunity to interact with fans of the game on a personal level is wonderfully rewarding, and gives all of us a huge lift heading back into the office. As anyone who interacted with us here at the show found, we love talking about D&D, so when you give us the chance to expound on what's coming up for this game, it's often difficult to shut us up!

To everyone who attending our presentations and seminars, to all who took my "Ask Me About 4th Edition D&D" button seriously, and those who've been following the convention here online, thanks for participating in a great event. I wish there had been more of me to go around—I'm sure there are folks who didn't get as much time to chat as they'd have liked, and for that I apologize. I look forward to more opportunities to share my thoughts (and enthusiasm) about the new game in the coming months, so stay tuned!

Blog: James Wyatt

Just came from the Big Announcement. It was awesome. I've been so excited about this game for so long, and finally I can talk about it. A little bit.

Yes, I was one of the lead designers for Fourth Edition. That's pretty freakin' awesome.

More later. Going out to celebrate now.

* * *

Like, perhaps, many of you, I greeted the first news that we'd be doing 4E with some trepidation. 3.5 is a great game. I didn't want to invalidate all the books I owned—and all the books I'd worked on!

It was Bill Rose, the VP of R&D at Wizards, who swayed me, by talking about pretty much the same thing that article did. It's our job to continually make D&D better. We do that month after month, with each new product we release—and *D&D Insider* is going to give us even more opportunity to do that, as we (meaning R&D) take tighter reins over the content

coming out in Dragon and Dungeon and our web site in general. But once in a while, the evolution of the game needs to rise to another plateau.

And it is a rise, let me tell you. I'm so excited about 4th Edition I can barely contain myself. Running the Delve in our booth yesterday was awkward—I saw so many of the things I have grown to dislike about 3E come into play. Oh, the poor rogue's useless against all these plants and elementals. Oh, the poor dwarf didn't confirm his crit. Oh, look at all the people forgetting about attacks of opportunity (especially at reach) and getting pummeled as a result. I can't say too much about it, but you can be sure it's not just grapple that got an overhaul.

I'm playing a ranger in Bill Slavicsek's weekly game. I'm not sure I've played a ranger since the one who stood on top of a pile of gnoll bodies while my magic-user friend killed Yeenoghu in the early days of AD&D. I'm having a blast.

I'm playing a paladin in Andy Collins' monthly game. I love paladins—I seem to keep writing about them in my fiction. (Check out "Blade of the Flame" in the *Tales of the Last War* anthology for a concise example, or read my other novels!) But I've never liked playing a paladin. At one point during the design of this game, I made a paladin for a game where we were testing out *Dungeon Tiles*, and it made me so sad. I could smite evil once. Then I was done—down to swinging my sword once per round. I wasn't sad when I died. I love my new paladin.

Blog: Mike Mearls

So, the cat is finally out of the bag. It's been hard for the past two years sitting on top of this big old secret. The big announcement on Thursday night was, well, tense. We didn't spark a riot, but it seemed that the audience was a bit nervous.

Frankly, I would've been tense had I been a non-WotCite in the room. People love 3E. They play the game, they buy sourcebooks and miniatures, they shepherd *Living Greyhawk* characters from level 1 on up. There's a lot of passion for D&D out there, and it comes as no surprise to anyone that announcing a new edition might put people on edge.

Over the next few months, I'm looking forward to seeing today's D&D Q&A panel play itself out for D&D gamers everywhere. At the panel today, you could feel the tension and expectation in the air. As we rolled through our presentation and answered questions, you could feel everyone relax.

The truth is, we love D&D. We love to play it, we love to talk about it, and we love to work on it. Everything going into this project, from the time it started to the next few months as we finish things off and incorporate your playtest feedback, is driven by our love of D&D.

3E got a lot of things right, but anyone who has played it for a time knows that it gets things wrong. There are also legacy issues with the game that have persisted unquestioned for years. 4E is all about taking the things that work in D&D, keeping them in the game, and fixing everything else.

That's the goal, and I think we're heading there.

Blog: Rodney Thompson

Wow, big day, and even bigger evening. I just came back from "the event" and it was a wild experience. See, unlike all my other fellows at the office, this was also my first chance to see the presentation and the videos. I have been on vacation for a while, so while I knew what information was going to be presented, this is the first time I'd seen it in action.

Yes, the announcement was big. The audience didn't seem to know how to take it, though there was a lot of cheering in some parts. Bill and Chris seemed to do a very admirable job, though I know most people are left wanting more. Fortunately, that's what seminars are for.

Let me just say it right now: I've played 4th Edition. I've even worked on it a bit. I love it, and I think that it's going to be very hard for me to continue playing 3.5 over the next few months, just as it is hard for me to go back and play 2nd Edition now. The player in me has fun with it, but the DM with me loves how easy it's going to be to DM. I know there's going to be a lot of trepidation out there, and that's understandable; people love 3.X, me included, so it's wild to think about a new edition in some ways. I can say that, after tonight's announcement, people are going to bubble over with questions, and I just hope everyone comes to the seminars this weekend to get them answered.
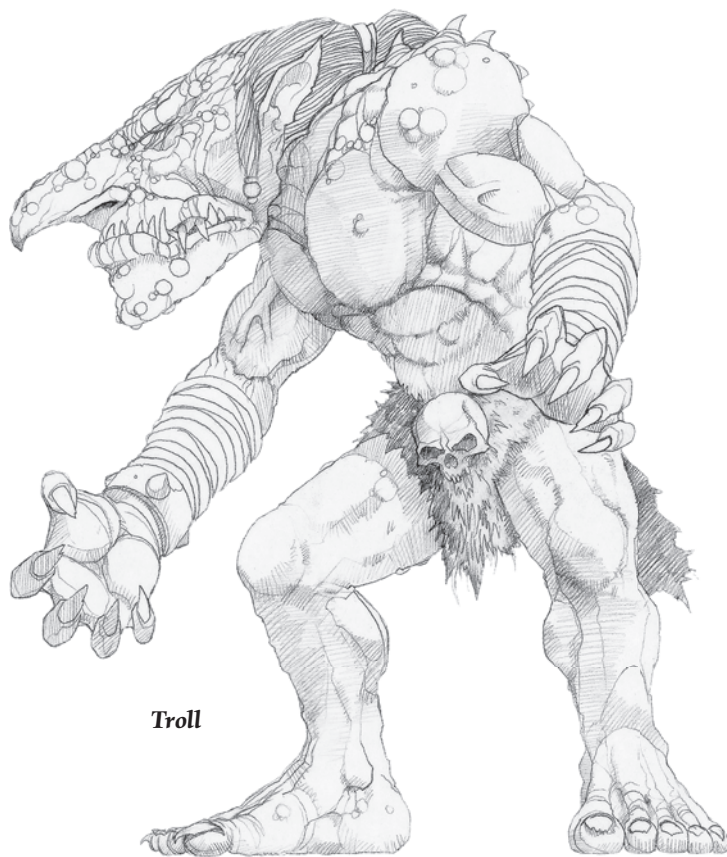
Troll

STAFF THOUGHTS ON 4TH EDITION

WRITING MONSTERS
—Bruce R. Cordell

We're closing in on the last few *Monster Manual* monster entries, at least on the writing side of things. In our new, I-live-in-the-Jetsons'-future way of handling individual monsters, multiple people can work on the same files nearly simultaneously; some of us polishing the story, others of us the mechanics, and so on. I'm working on story right now.

It is particularly satisfying to take a monster that really didn't have anything going for it in the previous edition of the game and give it some piece of interesting history or place in the D&D world to call its own. A previously dull, "this monster is scary and lives in a dungeon" entry can suddenly come alive with just a little added depth or story.

Is the monster potentially part of some larger secret cabal intent on achieving its own mysterious ends? Is the creature a descendant of an ancient lineage more noble than brutal, come to its current mean circumstance through the malice of others?

Hobgoblin

Is it some monstrosity that's slipped through a weak point in the fabric of the cosmos, its very presence a threat to natural laws? Does it eat the dead to steal their identities, or their memories?

You get the idea. This is the fun stuff.

But don't get me wrong. Monsters that already have good stories retain them, and yes, we still need some monsters that are simply scary and live in a deep, dark dungeon.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT 4E?
—Chris Perkins

A few things . . .

D&D 4th Edition gives characters interesting things to do and interesting choices to make during each round of combat. For example, characters always have some cool at-will powers they can use even after they've used up their "heavy artillery."

The game makes the DM's life easier in many ways. For one thing, monsters are more fun to play. A monster doesn't need thirty spell-like abilities to be cool. Given that the typical monster has a lifespan of 3 to 5 rounds, it really only needs one or two "signature" abilities in addition to its normal attacks. The new game also makes it a lot easier for the DM to determine appropriate challenges for the party with an encounter-building system that's much more intuitive than the current EL/CR system. It also doesn't hurt that we'll have a data-driven, plug-n-play encounter builder tool on *D&D Insider*.

The 4E game system also speeds up round-by-round combat by smoothing out some of the clunky or less intuitive mechanics. For example, we've made attacks of opportunity dirt-simple by reducing the number of things that provoke AoOs and keeping the list short, intuitive, and free of exceptions. We've also made it so that no single player's turn takes a lot longer than any other player's turn by eliminating things that cause players to stall on their turns (the *shapechange* spell as currently written is a fine example).

Do you feel you may face backlash from players who enjoy 3.0 and 3.5 and don't want to upgrade their rules or campaigns?

We faced a similar situation with the change from 2nd Edition to 3rd Edition, so we assume that not every 3rd-Edition player will switch over to the new game overnight. All in all, 4th Edition offers a much better gaming experience for players and Dungeon Masters. Even though 3rd Edition is an excellent

game, 4th Edition gives players better character options at every level, makes DMing less of a chore, and (as mentioned above) speeds up round-by-round combat. I expect that the improvements in game play will convince even reluctant players to switch over to 4th Edition. I also anticipate that the majority of d20 publishers will support 4th Edition going forward.

We've been reading a lot about talent trees in 4th Edition. Will 4th Edition characters progress similarly to those in an MMORPG and was this sort of play dynamic the inspiration for the new 4th Edition rules?

Talent trees aren't unique to MMORPGs. Wizards has produced other games that use talent trees, such as the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game* and the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game Saga Edition*. The theory of game design, regardless of platform, is constantly evolving. We've taken our gaming experiences over the past decade, as well as player feedback on the games and supplements we've produced in that time period, to build a system for character creation and advancement in 4th Edition that draws inspiration from numerous sources, but isn't exactly like anything that's been done before.

It seems as though many of the changes and new rules in 4th Edition were inspired or emulate the ease-of-use of the current generation of MMO. How has the popularity of such systems affected D&D and how has it contributed to creation of 4th Edition's game systems?

Just as MMOs have looked to the D&D game for inspiration, so too have we learned a few things from MMOs. (And not just MMOs, but games of all kinds.) However, the D&D game is not an MMO, nor are we turning it into one. As it happens, certain things that work well in MMOs also work well in tabletop RPGs. For example, we like the idea of being able to create different "builds" within a single character class, so that one player's 5th-level fighter can look and feel different from another player's 5th-level fighter. This is something we experimented with in various other game products produced by Wizards in recent years.

We've been reading a lot about class roles and how creating clearly defined roles (and different ways of approaching those roles) are a large part of what will differentiate 4th Edition.

Party roles existed in 3rd Edition, but they were never discussed openly in the core rules. We simply assumed that a typical group of players would know enough to make sure their party included a frontline fighter-type character, a cleric or other healer-type character, a wizard or other artillery-type character, and so forth. In the interest of helping less-experienced players build stronger parties, we've addressed the issue of party composition more openly and directly in 4th Edition by explaining party roles and the importance of having characters who can fill these roles. Each base class in 4th Edition has been designed to fill a specific role, but that's not all the class aims to do, and every base class has things that it can do outside of its primary role.

Hobgoblin fortress

STAFF THOUGHTS ON 4TH EDITION

CRUNCH TIME
—Logan Bonner

We're in a crunch trying to get classes spiffed up and entered into a database. We need to get our playtest packets together, and we're developing the classes rapidly. I've been in the rogue, ranger, and cleric meetings this week, and I think they're all on pretty solid ground.

One thing a player in Dave Noonan's game mentioned was that he wanted more nonviolent options for his cleric. We'd gone pretty military for the cleric, but in the dev meeting, I made sure we put in some options for the other guy. "What would Steve Wolbrecht do?" led us to some pretty cool powers that everybody—not just pacifists—will want.

Now I'm spending my days typing in monster numbers. I hadn't worked on monsters much, so it's cool to see what they're doing. I did wolves most recently, and gnomes are up next. (Gnomes rock, I don't care what anyone says.)

MULTICLASSING
—David Noonan

Gish lovers (and those who are, um, gish-curious), I've got your back.

Terminology Note: When I say "gish," I'm not referring specifically to githyanki fighter/wizards. Nor am I talking about a really good Smashing Pumpkins album, *Gish*. I'm talking more generally about characters who are capable melee combatants and reasonably good arcane spellcasters, too.

One of the things I'm working on is some character-building pieces to support the archetype. And as I write, I wonder, "I'm not sure the gish needs the help. He might be okay with just our crazy new multiclassing rules."

Multiclassing: New multiclassing rules, you ask. Yep, we've got 'em. Multiclass characters are running at a couple of our internal playtest tables right now. Early results are promising, but we're talking about only a couple of characters, so we haven't seen broad proof of concept yet.

It's easy to critique 3E multiclassing rules, but it's also important to remember that they represent a massive, double-quantum leap from multiclass/dual-class rules in 1E/2E. We really like the configurability and freedom of 3E multiclassing, the way it's extensible even when you add new classes to the mix, and how it respects (to a degree, anyway) the changing whimsy of players as their characters evolve.

But it's got some problems—and in particular, it doesn't tackle the gish very well. There's the arcane spell failure problem, which takes some levels of the spellsword PrC, a little mithral, and some twilight enhancement to take care of. But beyond that, the low caster level can be just crippling for the fighter/wizard who wants to blast the bad guys into oblivion, rather than use his spellbook as a really good utility belt.

So that's one big problem—the caster level situation. In 3E, we've cemented over that with some prestige classes and feats. But there's another problem: Your journey through the "Valley of Multi-Ineffectiveness." For the gish, it's hard to truly be, well, gishy at low levels before you've figured out a reasonable answer to the armor problem. You can't really wade into melee like a fighter, because you're gonna get creamed. So you have to take an "I'm basically a wizard for now" or "I'm basically a fighter for now" approach. That works, but you're just biding your time until you get to play the character you want to play.

So the improvement we're seeking from the multiclass system is something that solves some specific math problems (the caster level thing) and some specific career-path problems (letting you feel like a blend of classes from the get-go).

The Gish, Today: So what does this mean for our gish PC at the playtest table? Well, from very early levels, he's wearing armor, stabbing dudes, and casting spells. He's not as good at stabbing as the fighter, nor as good at casting as the wizard. But he's viable at both. In theory.

In theory? Well, like I said, the gish characters don't have a lot of mileage on them yet. And creating hybrid characters involves a careful balancing act. Multiclass characters can't be optimal at a focused task (because that horns in on the turf for the single-class character) and they can't be weaksauce (because then you've sold the multiclass character a false bill of goods and he doesn't actually get to use the breadth of his abilities). There's a middle ground between "optimal" and "weaksauce" that I'll call "viable." But it's not exactly a wide spot of ground.

Finding that viable middle ground isn't a problem unique to 4E. The 3E designers (myself included) took lots of shots at it; the bard, the mystic theurge, and the eldritch knight are all somewhere on the optimal-viable-weaksauce continuum.

I really want to get the gish right. I owe it to Dar, the very first D&D character I ever made up. If you see him on the Isle of Dread, tell him I'm still looking out for him.

Astral rift

—Continued

High Five Moment
—Mike Mearls

My favorite parts of 4E work are the times when I have a huge desire to high five a coworker. Some ideas are so cool that I need to do the Ickey Shuffle to celebrate.

I just had one come across my desk. Here I am, sitting at my desk after lunch, thinking about which of my shiny new comics I'm going to read first, when Matt Sernett comes over to my desk. Matt drops an awesome idea on my head involving skills. This is a cool idea, something that in nine months will be loved by everyone who feels that the skill system in 3E didn't do enough.

I open the relevant files that touch on Matt's idea, type in his idea in 22-point font so I don't miss it when I go back to work on that bit, and then carry on.

Oni

Now, I have to be coy about the exact nature of the concept. It isn't the kind of thing that will revolutionize D&D, but it's a good, cool, solid idea that makes skills more interesting, more important in combat encounters, and more fun. I can't wait to use it in playtest.

Fun Things
—Mike Mearls

One of the fun things about working at WotC is that you get to work with a bunch of cool people who like what you like. As should come as no surprise, you quickly become friends with your coworkers. This leads to a more informal environment in the workplace than you might normally encounter.

Thus, we spend at least part of every meeting making joke suggestions and joke development passes on those suggestions, such as:

* Balancing a spell by making it reverse the caster's gender in addition to its other effects (not a good balancing mechanic, since you can just cast the spell again and change back).

* Expressing a bonus a PC grants to allies' Jump checks as a sonic trampoline a character creates by yelling really, really loud. (What happens to the trampoline? Does it take up space? Does it float in the air? Can you bounce attacks off it?)

* Would making every attack in the game automatically and automatically kill balance things perfectly? (No, now having a high initiative bonus is broken. We'd have to equalize that, too.)

Here's a bet: Someone will start a thread claiming that sonic trampolines are a big part of 4E. And they will not be joking.

The first two were from a meeting today. The last one is a good example of the kind of stuff we talk about when we're punchy.

Goblin family lineup

Good Intentions

—Mike Mearls

The days are really starting to blur by, as each week brings a new micro-deadline. We're doing a development pass on the *Player's Handbook* for the next month or so, cleaning up bits that didn't work in the last playtest and making sure everything fits together. It's a little daunting.

The best comment I think we can get over a change is something like, "But that's how I've always been doing it." That's a good sign that we're on the right track. I think people have a natural tendency to use games in the most fun and interesting way possible. Games that push back, that drive the player away from fun or interesting possibilities, either get a dose of house rules or end up gathering dust in the back of the ole game closet.

There's nothing more frustrating than reading a game that is so close to being fun, but in the end shoots itself in the foot with a bad rule or some other misstep. We've been developing feats this week, and there's a lot of that going on. Few people like the Dodge feat in 3E, and it's development's goal to avoid creating feats that fall into that category in 4E.

No one ever sets out to design bad rules. Most of the time, mistakes happen for a few different reasons:

1. The designers fail to see the full impact of the rules they've made. A rule in isolation might look fine, but combine it with other aspects of the game and it falls apart. It sounds fine that a PC who tries to stand up provokes, but it falls apart when you add in Improved Trip and spiked chains. D&D falls victim to this all the time.

2. Fun loses out to some other concern. This one is hard to design, but it's pretty common in all sorts of games. For instance, I hate games where it's common for one player to lose a turn. It's a clumsy, un-fun penalty. At least with a negative modifier or restriction the player still gets to do something.

The trickiest factor here is challenge vs. fun. The best games make losing fun. The last time I played *Car Wars*, my vehicle was the first one shredded, but I didn't mind because it gave me an excuse to floor it and ram one of the other cars head-on.

3. Consistency trumps common sense. People like to throw around the word "elegant" to describe rules, but elegance doesn't necessarily equate with good or fun rules. Is chess inelegant because all the pieces move different ways? Too often, we equate elegance with consistency. To me, elegance is using the minimum amount of effort to achieve the maximum amount of fun.

—Continued

Building Better Monsters

—Matthew Sernett

Today I'm working on monsters (specifically on plugging in numbers), and I wanted to take a moment to share my excitement about how monsters are now being designed.

I said "plugging in numbers" because the monsters are fully designed except for all their associated game statistics. We have some placeholders from a previous version of the math, but playtesting revealed that our old monster numbers (the key ones being attack bonus, AC, and damage) provided a slightly lackluster experience at the table. We rejiggered player character numbers and monster numbers to better achieve the desired result—fun—and now we're going back in and fixing the monsters for the next round of playtesting.

Doesn't that sound exciting?

Okay, well, it's not that exciting. Hence my taking this break.

In the future we will know the appropriate range for the numbers of monsters at every level and for every role in combat (big brute in the front, the skirmisher that runs in and out of a fight, the artillery that stands in the back, and more). I'm excited for that day because that's when monster design will become really fun.

Osyluth

It might sound crazy, but most of the monsters designed for 3rd Edition D&D are designed with only a hazy understanding of what numbers are appropriate. Monster design is dictated by the math and rules of design, rather than the math and rules serving a fun play experience.

In 3rd Edition, if I want to design a monster, one of the first decisions I must make is creature type. Creature type has tremendous ramifications. If I choose fey, the monster might have half the hit points and miss three times as often as the dragon I create that has the same number of Hit Dice.

One of the next things to do is pick ability scores, and this is done based largely on a comparative basis. Strong as a cockatrice? Wise as a phantom fungus?

Monster abilities are often a seemingly logical collection of elements already designed for the game. Is it big with tentacles? Well then, it must have improved grab and constrict foes. Is a magical beast that stalks prey? Then it probably has scent and a camouflage power. Is it a demon or devil? Don't forget to give it a dozen spell-like abilities it will almost never use. . . .

Then, after making a bunch of decisions and completing the design, you attempt to discover the creature's CR (Challenge Rating). Maybe it's about as strong in a fight as a manticore but has twice the hit points. Maybe it's as fragile as a pixie, but deals twice the damage. Maybe it looks a lot like three different monsters, each with a different CR.

Thankfully, we use a tool here at Wizards of the Coast that provides target numbers based on type and CR, and we can build a 3rd Edition monster in it to get close to those numbers. Yet even that process is crazy. We end up jumping through dozens of hoops set up by the rules of monster design. If I don't use all the monster's skill points, it's "wrong." If I give it more than the "correct" number of feats, I have to explain that it has a bonus feat. And don't even think about putting that ogre in full plate without advancing it enough to gain the Armor Proficiency (heavy) feat.

Good grief. I want to design a cool monster, not wrestle with the game system for hours.

Thankfully, 4th Edition is doing it completely differently. Monsters are being designed for their intended use—as monsters. We're not shoehorning them into the character system and hoping what comes out works in the game. Of course, they look alike in many ways and use the same game system, but now the results matter, not the rules for minutiae.

When I designed monsters for the 4th Edition *Monster Manual*, I thought first about what level the PCs should generally be to fight the monster and the role in the combat the
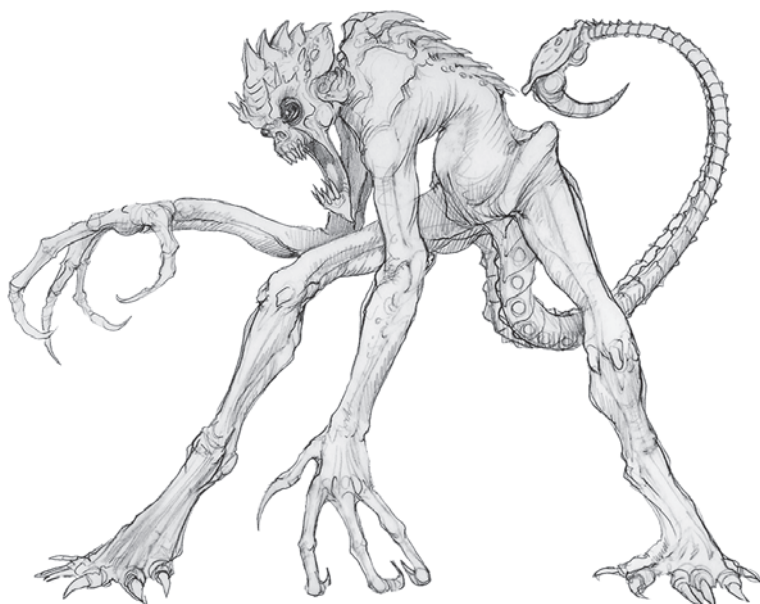
monster would occupy. Then I devised the cool new attack mechanic the monster should have, given its flavor and role. Then maybe I thought of a unique defense power, and maybe another attack power. And then I was pretty much done. The numbers and exactly how it gets there, or varies from the standards, are the last step.

Before we had all the system math worked out, I just ignored that last step. But when we have that math finished—and it's verified by playtesting—it'll take a matter of a few minutes to work them out for a monster. All the complex and time-consuming details of feats, skills, creature type, and so on are now simply details and swiftly decided upon.

And that's what's so exciting. Monster design is better than it was before. . . . Stronger. Faster.

Better Monsters, Easier to DM
—Matthew Sernett

Today I'm back to work on monster numbers. It's exciting to see the mechanics for the monsters. I designed scads of them, but powers have been developed and there are many more that I didn't design. Seeing each one is like opening a present. Gone are the days when every monster dully walks up and hits you. Each one has its own simple but fun mechanic that will make facing and running the monster interesting. Of course, some monsters are more complex and have a number of cool abilities, but even these monsters are dramatically easier to run than the complex monsters of 3rd Edition.

It's going to be a lot easier and more fun to be a Dungeon Master in 4th Edition. You'll have to do less work to put together and run great adventures. The time that you used to spend on math can be spent on coming up with cool ideas for encounters and adventure plots instead. During early playtests, when player characters were too complex, it was actually a relief to get behind the DM screen, and since then we've made the job of the DM even more fun.

That's going to be great for D&D and the roleplaying hobby in general. Making being a DM easier (and making it easier to be a good DM) is going to get more people to try running a game, and DMs will recruit players. More players = healthier hobby.
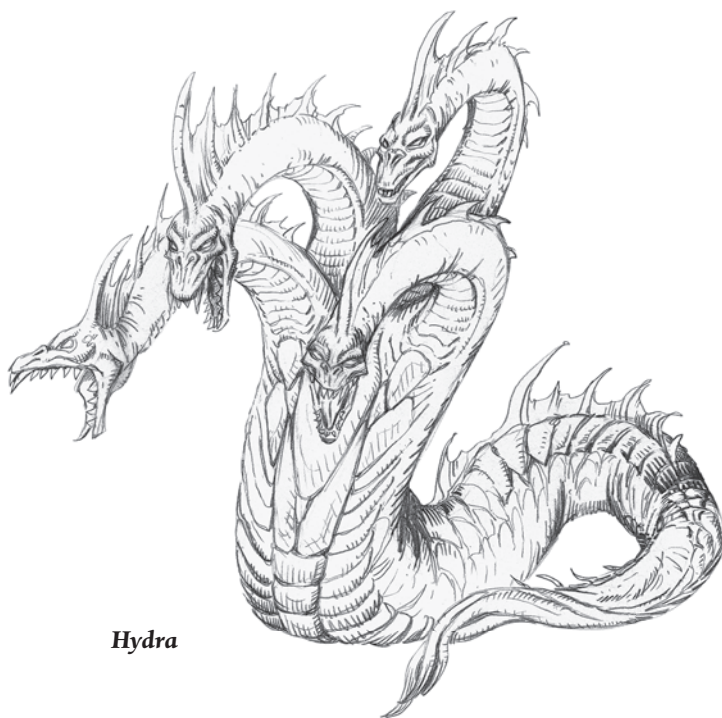
Hydra

Designing Dragons
—James Wyatt

Today I've been writing the dragons for the *Monster Manual*. (Don't tell the rest of my team, but I have indeed claimed the juiciest bits for myself.) It reminds me how much I love our new dragons, and so many other things about the new game.

Incidentally, in case it has not been made abundantly clear, the round of combat described in my article about dragons is not the first round of combat. The fighter didn't do 500 damage with one swing.

But he didn't do 1d10+20, either.

Anyway, dragons. Ready-to-play dragons, right in the *Monster Manual*! What a concept! I just pulled the 1977 *Monster Manual* and the 1993 *Monstrous Manual* off my shelf and realized that this is, in fact, the first *Monster Manual* in the history of the D&D game to give you complete, ready-to-play dragons right there in the book! (To be fair, you didn't have to do much to the dragons in the 1977 book, but you did have to contend with a range of possible Hit Dice, hit points per die that depended on the dragon's age, and a fair bit of text at the start of the dragon entry you had to refer back to in play. Plus, there was a random chance that a dragon might use magic, and its spells were determined randomly.)

In the 1993 book, you had to consult two different tables, checking the dragon's age against the various columns, to determine its Hit Dice (let's see, page 79 tells me the silver dragon has 15 base Hit Dice, but it's adult, so page 64 tells me to add 2), AC, damage (1-8/1-8/5-30 on page 79, +6 from page 64), and so on. What fun!

−Continued

And then, of course, there's 3E, with the whole stat block construction process. Choose skills and feats and spells for every dragon, and modify all the stats accordingly. Nuts!

So here we are, neck-deep in writing the 4th Edition *Monster Manual*, and I have the happy task of filling in a 14-page dragon section. (A waste of space? In a Dungeons & Dragons *Monster Manual*? I don't think so.) Each dragon has all the information you need to run it, self-contained in its stat block. Each spread gives you tactics, descriptions, encounters, and lore for the dragon at hand. The start of the section talks about the families of dragons, a legend of the birth of dragons, advice for building and running a dragon encounter—lots of great information, but nothing you're going to have to flip back to in the middle of any encounter.

Every attack, every statistic, every magic power each dragon has is contained right there in its stat block. Self-contained. As easy to run as you could ask a solo monster to be. Ready to go. Ready to kill your characters. Awesome.

Have I mentioned that I love my job?

My 4E Character
−James Wyatt

Can I tell you about my character?

I'm playing Travic—a dragonborn paladin. He is not your run-of-the-mill goody-goody paladin. He swings a greatsword and lays the smite down on whoever he happens to be fighting against—demons are good, but any creepy monster will do in a pinch.

A couple of relevant issues dovetail in this character: character role and character conversion.

So this is a game Andy Collins has been running for, oh, nine levels now, playing once a month. Last month we finally took the plunge and converted over to 4E. So each of us took a look at our 8th-level characters and decided whether to attempt a conversion or create a new character from scratch.

Most of us converted. Now, I think Rob Heinsoo talked about this in his video interview, and we said it several times at Gen Con: You can't really just convert a character directly from 3E to 4E. We pretended you could do that from 2E to 3E, but that conversion book was pretty well bogus. The fact is, as I explained it a lot at Gen Con, that your character isn't what's on your character sheet: your character is the guy in your head. The character sheet is how the guy in your head interacts with the rules of the game. The rules of the game are different, so you'll be creating a new implementation of that character, but the character needn't change much. In fact, I propose that in 4E your character might actually be truer to your vision of him than in 3E. You might finally see him or her doing all the cool things you imagined doing but that never quite came out on the 3E table.

So Corwyn, our human knight, became a human fighter. His player said yesterday that the character was informed by some of the features of the knight class, but that as a 4E fighter he was a better expression of what he'd wanted the character to be. (The fighter and the paladin pretty well ganged up on the poor knight and divvied his stuff between them.)

Zurio, the illumian spellthief, became a multiclass half-elf rogue/wizard. His player, too, felt strongly that this multiclass combination was a better expression of what he'd wanted out of the spellthief class than anything in 3E, which actually was a huge relief to me—I'd been a little concerned about whether our multiclassing system was going to work.

That left Larissa and Aash. Larissa was a catfolk druid who was more of an archer than a spellcaster (thanks to that level adjustment thing). Her player decided to start from scratch with a dwarf cleric. Aash was my xeph swordsage. That wasn't a concept that would be easy to translate at this point in the game's design.

And here's where we get into roles. In 4E terms, our previous party consisted of:

The knight, a front-line kind of guy.

A ranger, a spellthief, a warlock, a swordsage, and an archer druid, all sort of doing the single-target, high-damage job.

A couple wands of *cure X wounds*, which served as the party healer.

Now we have this:

Fighter and paladin holding the front line.

Ranger and rogue/wizard in the high-damage role, with the ex-spellthief doing some AoE stuff mixed in.

Cleric doing the clericky thing.

The interesting thing is that both the fighter and the paladin are greatsword wielders, giving up some AC in exchange for more damage, and thus leaning a bit toward the higher-damage role. All of which is to say, again, that the roles aren't there as straitjackets, but to help you build a party that works well together. We were still playing the fighter and paladin we wanted to play, filling our role in different ways while kickin' monster butt with our greatswords.

The Next Word

–Bill Slavicsek

Thanks for joining us on this exploration of the making of the 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons *Roleplaying Game*. This book and its companion volume offer as much of a preview of the new game as a look into the minds of the people working to create the new edition. We're proud of the work we're doing, and we're having a lot of fun doing it.

Remember that what you've seen and read about in these two preview books is the current state of the process. We still have a few more months of development, editing, and fine-tuning to do before we send the 4th Edition *Player's Handbook, Monster Manual,* and *Dungeon Master's Guide* off to the printers. That means that some details may be different by the time the core rule books hit the shelves, but the overall theory and general direction discussed herein remains the same.

What's next? Over the next couple of months, you can see more previews and gather more information about the upcoming edition by checking out www.dndinsider.com. At *D&D Insider,* you'll find the new digital home of *Dragon Magazine* and *Dungeon Magazine,* as well as a host of tools to help you play D&D–around a kitchen table or via the Internet. Between now and the launch of the new edition in May 2008, that's the best place to get all the news and inside information on the new edition.

It's been an exciting couple of years of research, design, and development. We've been having fun, and we truly believe that we're building a better D&D experience for everyone. Come along for the ride. I don't think you'll be disappointed.
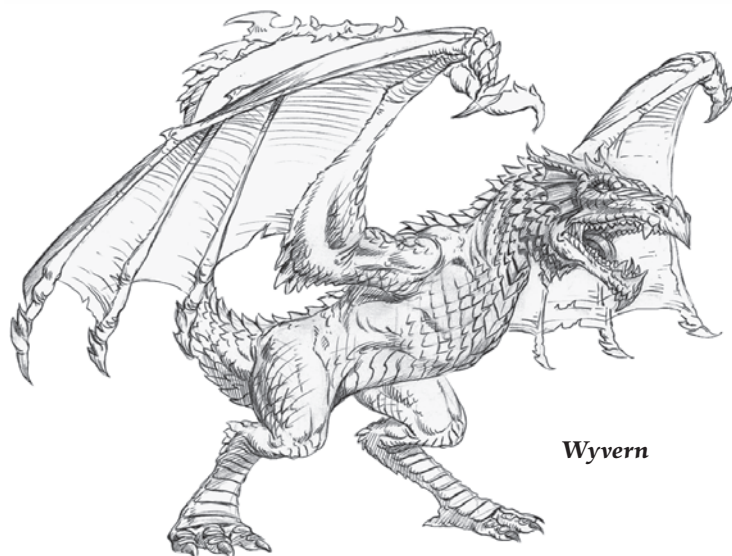
What's next? It's time to start winding down your 3rd Edition campaigns. You can end them in many ways; just make sure the endings are exciting and memorable–they deserve to be!

What's next? Start thinking about your 4th Edition games. If you're a Dungeon Master (or if you aspire to be one), start imagining the kind of campaign you want to run. It's never too early to think about your story and making preliminary plans. If you're a player, start imagining the kind of character you want to play. It's never too early to create a character concept–later you can use the rules to turn your concept into reality.

In the meantime, keep playing! D&D is fun, and you don't need to put your fun on hold while you're waiting for the next edition.
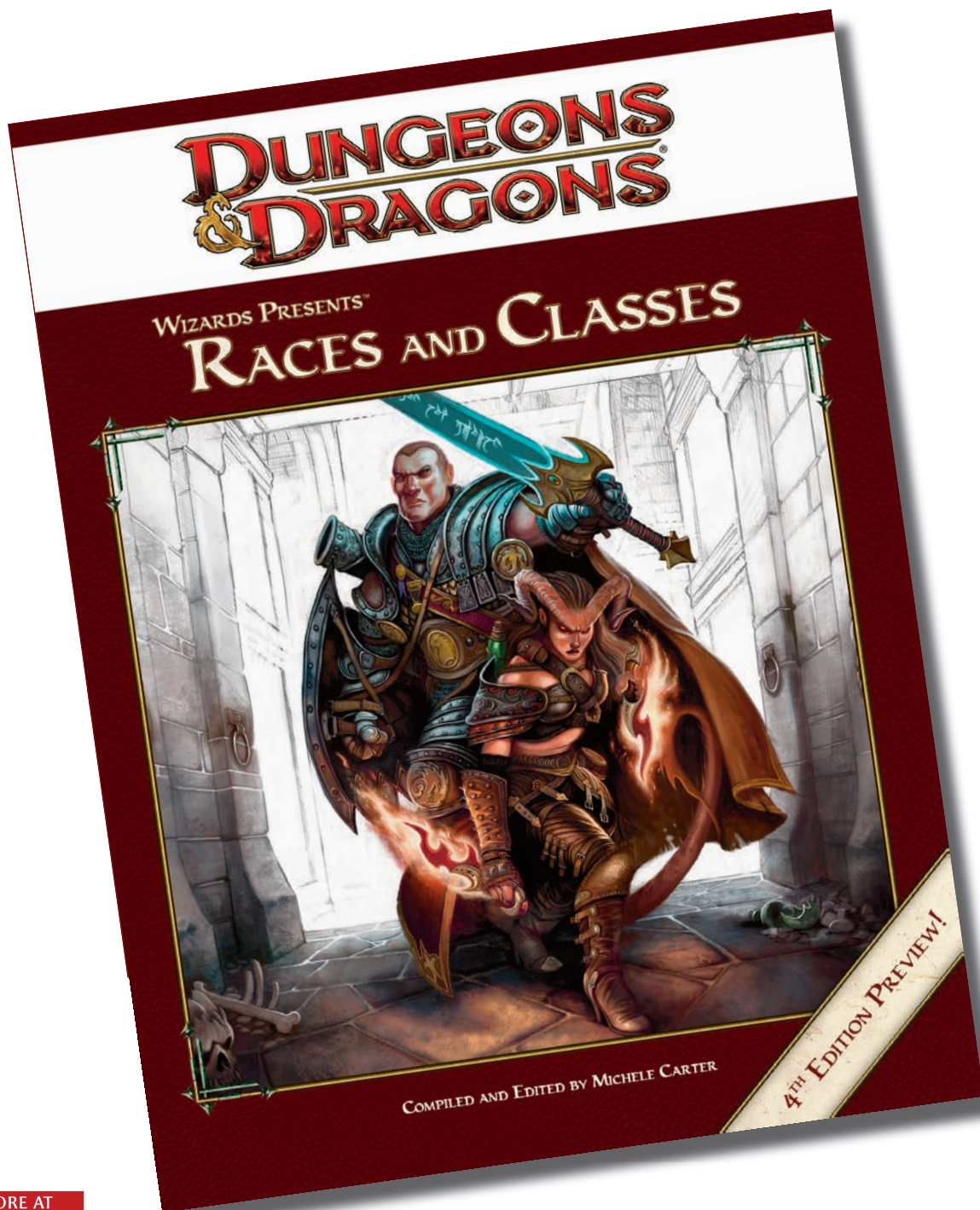

Troll

Wyvern

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