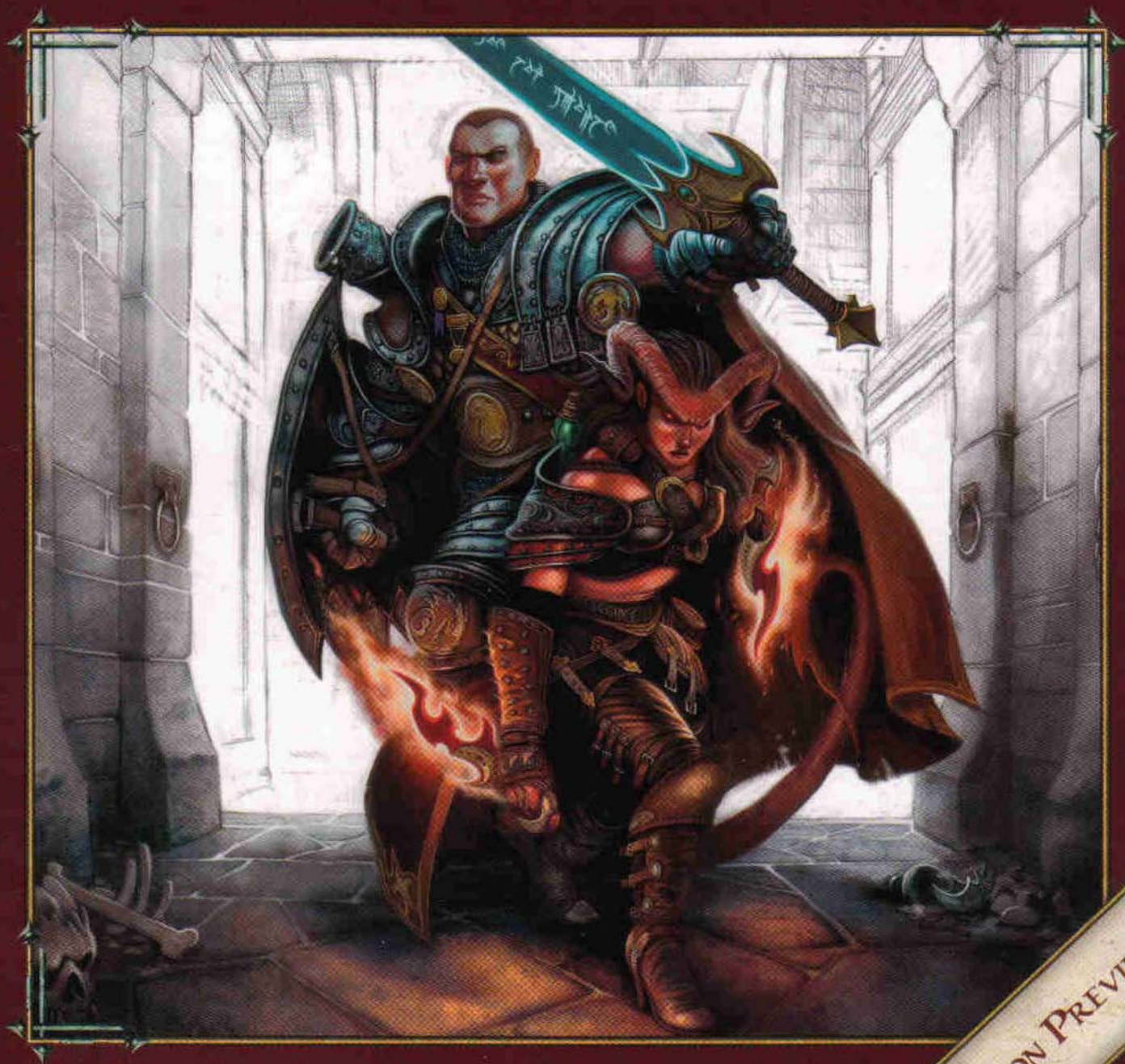


# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS<sup>®</sup>

WIZARDS PRESENTS™

## RACES AND CLASSES



COMPILED AND EDITED BY MICHELE CARTER

4<sup>TH</sup> EDITION PREVIEW!

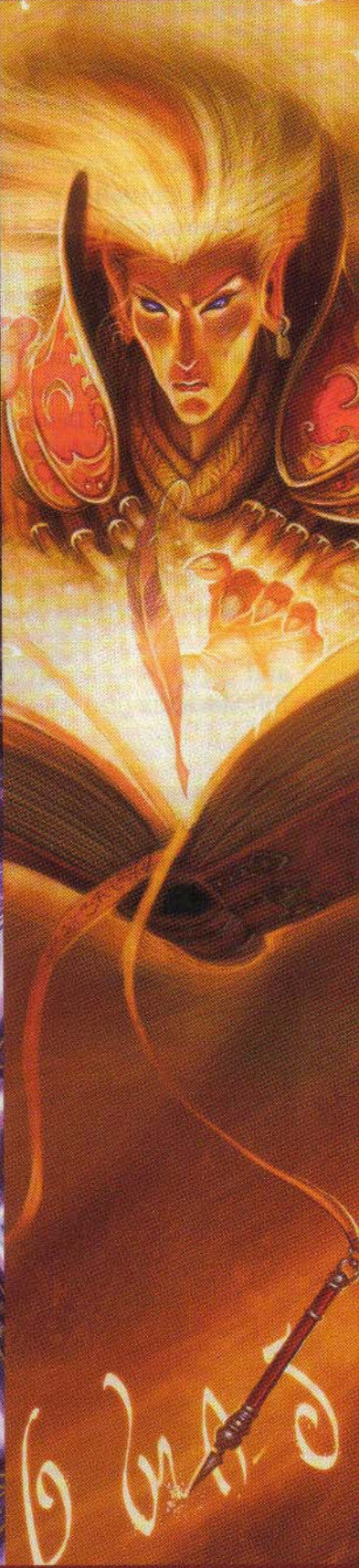
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WIZARDS PRESENTS™

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**Dragonborn fighter**

# 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 move 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 classes and races and other things of interest to all players of the game. Its companion volume (*Wizards Presents: Worlds and Monsters*) deals with creatures, story and background,

world dynamics, and things of interest to Dungeon Masters and players who like to know how the world of D&D works.

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 (August 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 all of the wonder and surprises waiting for you in the new *Player's Handbook*.

Instead, we're inviting you into the Wizards of the Coast R&D department for a sneak preview of the classes, races, and other player-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. In the meantime, flip through this preview book, read the "making of" essays written by my staff, and look at the amazing artwork. Every time I gaze at the new concept art, I start thinking about the first campaign I plan to run using the new rules.

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 extra 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](http://www.dndinsider.com) for more information and up-to-the-minute details on 4E.

And keep playing D&D!



**Dwarf warlock,  
concept art and final**





# 4TH EDITION DESIGN TIMELINE

—Rob Heinsoo

I got to level up as the Lead Designer on the 4th Edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS roleplaying game. Here's the timeline of events as I experienced it.

## PRE-DESIGN: EARLY 2005

Bill Slavicsek (Director of R&D for D&D), Chris Perkins (Design Manager), and Jesse Decker (Development Manager) interview R&D staff to form a 4th Edition design team possessing complementary strengths and a high probability of working together in harmony. They settle on Andy Collins as the bassist, James Wyatt on vocals, and me on lead guitar.

## DESIGN WORKSHOP: MAY 2005

I didn't want to tackle serious design work until Andy, James, and I understood each other. We spiraled through conversations about games we loved, game mechanics that worked or flopped,



Tiefling rogue

and the pivot points of D&D. I stoked our brainstorming by referring to all good ideas as "D&D the way they play it on some alternate world." We weren't looking for the one true path from the start—we took the time to imagine D&D games that took a different slant than any of us would have expected.

Good stuff from this phase included the importance of each player character's role in the party, the potential for three tiers of play taking us up to level 30, and a shared conviction that we wanted to create a system that provided powers for all classes.

## DESIGN WORK, ORCUS I: JUNE THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2005

**Team:** James Wyatt, Andy Collins, and Rob Heinsoo.

**Mission:** Our instructions were to push the mechanics down interesting avenues, not to stick too close to the safe home base of D&D v.3.5. As an R&D department, we understood 3.5; our mission was to experiment with something new.

**Outcome:** We delivered a document that included eight classes we thought might appear in the first *Player's Handbook* or other early supplements, powers for all the classes, monsters, and rules.

## FIRST DEVELOPMENT TEAM: OCTOBER 2005 THROUGH FEBRUARY 2006

**Team:** Robert Gutschera (lead), Mike Donais, Rich Baker, Mike Mearls, and Rob Heinsoo.

**Mission:** Determine whether the Orcus I design (as we named it) was headed in the right direction. Make recommendations for the next step.

**Outcome:** The first development team tore everything down and then rebuilt it. In the end, it recommended that we continue in the new direction Orcus I had established.

This recommendation accompanied a rather difficult stunt accomplished in the middle of the development process: Baker, Donais, and Mearls translated current versions of the Orcus I mechanics into a last-minute revision of *Tome of Battle: Book of Nine Swords*. It was a natural fit, since Rich Baker had already been treating the *Book of Nine Swords* as a "powers for fighters" project. The effort required to splice the mechanics into 3rd Edition were a bit extreme, but the experiment was worth it.

## SECOND ORCUS (ORCUS II) DESIGN PHASE: FEBRUARY TO MARCH 2006

**Team:** Rob Heinsoo (lead), Bruce Cordell, James Wyatt.

**Mission:** Finish monsters and other areas that were weak in the first draft. Follow some new design directions suggested by the development team.

**Outcome:** After the design phase ended, several weeks of playtesting left most of us unconvinced with where we were going. The system wasn't working the way we wanted it to work.

### ONE DEVELOPMENT WEEK: MID-APRIL 2006

**Team:** Robert Gutschera, Mike Donais, Rich Baker, Mike Mearls, and Rob Heinsoo.

**Mission:** Recommend a way forward.

**Outcome:** In what I'd judge as the most productive week of the process to date, not that anyone would have guessed that beforehand, Mearls and Baker figured out what was going wrong with the design. We'd concentrated too much on the new approach without properly accounting for what 3.5 handled well. We'd provided player characters with constantly renewing powers, but hadn't successfully parsed the necessary distinctions between powers that were always available and powers that had limited uses.

### FLYWHEEL TEAM: MAY 2006 TO SEPTEMBER 2006

**Team:** Rob Heinsoo (lead), Andy Collins, Mike Mearls, David Noonan, and Jesse Decker.

**Mission:** Move closer to 3.5 by dealing properly with powers and resources that could be used at-will, once per encounter, or once per day.

**Outcome:** A playable draft that went over to the teams that would actually write the *Player's Handbook* and the *Monster Manual*.

### SCRAMJET TEAM; SAME TIMING AS FLYWHEEL

**Team:** Rich Baker (lead), James Wyatt, Matt Sernett, Ed Stark, Michele Carter, Stacy Longstreet, and Chris Perkins.

**Mission:** Draft a new vision for the world and the story behind the D&D game.

**Outcome:** A first draft of the story bible, notable for its new understanding of civilized portions of the D&D world as points of light threatened by enveloping darkness filled with monsters and other threats.

### PLAYER'S HANDBOOK CREATION: OCTOBER 2006 TO APRIL 2007

**Designers:** Rich Baker (lead), Logan Bonner, and David Noonan.

**Developers:** Andy Collins (lead), Mike Mearls, Steve Schubert, and Jesse Decker.

**Mission:** Achieve design and development consensus on the direction each role and class should take; make good on the goals with playable mechanics.

**Outcome:** Oodles of powers. Semisolid rules set.

### MONSTER MANUAL CREATION: SAME TIMING AS ABOVE

**Designers:** James Wyatt (lead), Matt Sernett, and Bruce Cordell.

**Developers:** Mike Mearls (lead), Steve Schubert, and Stephen Radney-McFarland.

**Mission:** Design all monsters.



**Human wizard**

**Happy New Things:** Understandings of monster roles, elite monsters, and solo monsters.

### WRITING PHASE: APRIL 2 TO MAY 11, 2007

**Story Team:** James Wyatt (lead), Rich Baker, Bruce Cordell, and Chris Sims (with advice and general nosiness from Bill Slavicsek).

**Mission:** Write prose manuscripts in the style we want to use for the finished products.

**Outcome:** The team turned over a 600-plus-page working rules set on deadline and to specifications.

### MAGIC ITEM REVISION: MAY 2007

**Mechanics Design:** Rob Heinsoo, Mike Mearls, David Noonan, and Matt Sernett.

**Mission:** Re-create the vision for what magic items accomplish in the new design, carve separate space for each type of item, and design them all.

**Outcome:** More magic items than our initial publications can use!

### FULL-ON PLAYTESTING: JUNE 2007

**Mission:** With Dave Noonan handling the reins, all designers and developers and many other WotC employees do nothing but playtest D&D 4E for three solid weeks. This led to ongoing playtesting using in-house groups and the personal game groups of most of the R&D staff that continues to the end of the year.

# THE PROCESS OF RE-CREATION

—Rob Heinsoo

Flywheel was the code name for the mechanical design team phase that followed *Orcus II*. Flywheel operated at the same time as Rich Baker's world-story team, which Rich dubbed "Scramjet" after hearing me toss around the Flywheel moniker.

## OVERVIEW

The one-week ORCUS development team realized that *Orcus II*, as well as earlier drafts, had failed to properly account for attrition powers. Earlier designs had been working too hard on our newfangled renewable powers and hadn't properly addressed D&D's legacy of attrition-style powers, powers that went away after you used them once or twice.

So the Flywheel team's main job was to nudge the eight player character classes away from the flamboyant precipices they'd occupied in *Orcus II* toward expressions that would look more familiar to players of 3rd Edition D&D.

I say "eight classes," but they weren't always the same eight classes. Discussions during Flywheel design eventually led us to put the swashbuckler aside, gifting his cool moves to the ranger and the rogue. We drafted the warlock in his place, a decision we all soon realized was very much for the best, especially when the *Player's Handbook* team later sunk their teeth into making the warlock cool.

Flywheel's end product was a skeletal version of the rules, classes, and monsters that we handed over to the teams that were actually designing the *Player's Handbook* and the *Monster Manual*.

## GLIMPSES OF PERSONNEL

Flywheel was a five-person team: Andy Collins, Jesse Decker, Rob Heinsoo, Mike Mearls, and Dave Noonan.

Dave Noonan tackled many of the strategic vision questions, such as the debate concerning the number of competing powers a player character could choose from at the table. Months later, after we had veered away from the guidelines Dave had helped establish, playtesting indicated we should have stuck with the Flywheel consensus, which Dave rather gleefully produced from his notebook as we made the fateful call. I tell this story as shorthand for a number of other such instances—the fact is that the Flywheel design aimed at a simplicity that we lost sight of for awhile later on. But when I say "aimed at," I also confess that Flywheel didn't always phrase its attempt at simplicity in ways that were easy to follow.

But Mike Mearls sure tried to get us there. Mike was fresh from adapting *Orcus II* ideas for *Tome of Battle: The Book of Nine Swords*. He contributed many innovative class concepts and designs during this stage. Mike probably shook things up the most when he designed a few classes that will be appearing in the 4th Edition *Player's Handbook II*. I looked at Mike's designs of the barbarian and the druid and thought, "Oh, geez, this is the cool we need to be getting from all our classes."

At moments like that, Jesse Decker usually said something like, "You're right. Think smarter." He could afford to say things like that because his day job was leading the D&D development team while he was slumming in our designer world. That unfortunately explained why Jesse ended up too busy helping run the department to contribute a lot of design work outside meetings. Inside meetings, he had a knack for keeping us loose while criticizing ideas we thought were okay. Then we realized we could do better.

Jesse's other big contribution was mentoring Andy Collins, who functioned in a lead-developer-style role during much of the Flywheel phase. When I did new design work systems like death and dying and healing, Andy worked with me to get it right. Andy worked tirelessly to either get everything right or understand all the angles on each problem. Andy was consciously setting himself up to run development during the game's final phases.

## LEVELING UP

Here's an odd thing about the team. I ran Flywheel. But as I write this, a bit more than a year later, both Mike and Andy have emerged as leaders. It's strange to remember that during the Flywheel phase, I was organizing the work process. At the moment, mid-2007, Mike and Andy both arguably organize workflows smoother than I do. Thinking back to Flywheel days is a bit like remembering the early days of a long-running campaign, back when Mike couldn't cast *fireball* and Andy's healing spells only worked at short range.

We've gained a few levels during the 4th Edition process. It's going to help us in the years of D&D to come.

## AN EMAIL EXCHANGE ABOUT THE FLYWHEEL NAME:

Jonathan Tweet: *A heavy thing that spins in circles and slows the engine down?*

Rob Heinsoo: *In your case, a little mechanical knowledge is a dangerous thing.*

Bruce Cordell: *Not wanting to be left behind, I've decided that MY new codename is Moonbeam.*

## DESIGN GUIDEPOSTS

—Rob Heinsoo

Here are a couple of examples of how the philosophies of encouraging player choice and providing more information have shaped the 4th Edition design.

### GUIDEPOST 1: ENCOURAGE PLAYER CHOICE

**Between Sessions:** Every time a character advances in level, the player should have an interesting choice to make about how the character gets better.

**During Play, Round by Round:** Every round of combat, each character should have an interesting choice to make concerning their actions.

**During Play, Encounter by Encounter:** Each encounter, every character should have an interesting choice about how much of their resources they'd like to spend, assuming harsher decisions aren't forced on them by the monsters or the situation.

### GUIDEPOST 2: PROVIDE INFORMATION TO HELP PLAYERS AND DUNGEON MASTERS CHOOSE BETWEEN COMPELLING ALTERNATIVES

**Examples Between Sessions:** Provide every player character class with a set of powers that helps them fill at least one valuable role in an adventuring party. Tell players what those roles are so that the composition of adventuring party is a conscious choice. Likewise, structure the *Monster Manual* and *Dungeon Master's Guide* to help DMs exercise their creativity instead of their math skills.

**Example During Play:** Rather than forcing players to guess how well they are doing in a combat encounter, 4th Edition instructs the DM to let players know when a monster is "bloodied" (below half its starting hit points). Many PC

*Not only are you wrong, but I even created an Excel spreadsheet to show how wrong you are.*

—James Wyatt, May 2006

and monster abilities key off of whether an enemy or ally is bloodied, so players need to understand their options.

## RE-IMAGING THE LOOK OF D&D

—Stacy Longstreet

When I joined Wizards of the Coast four years ago, I had no idea that I would wind up with this amazing task. On the surface, the idea of being responsible for the look of the new edition of D&D was very exciting and yet very daunting. But once you begin to give it some real thought, it is quite complex and there are so many things that needed to be considered. I consider it to be an honor, a challenge, and a great responsibility to be heading up the art for 4th Edition. It should be noted that I alone am not responsible for the end result. I work closely with a group of very talented creative people who helped me to create what would become the look of the next edition.

I started by looking at what I thought to be the strongest and best art of 3rd Edition. Art Director Dawn Murin deserves tremendous credit for all that she accomplished when she set up the look of 3rd Edition. She left some pretty big shoes to fill. I paged through all of the books, I combed the web for discussions and postings from our fans regarding art, and I looked at what our competitors were producing.

Art is a remarkable thing. Unlike the mechanics of the game where something either works or it doesn't, art is subjective. What one person likes may not be the same as what someone else likes. Everyone has different tastes. So the idea is to present a broad enough range of art to appeal to our audience, and still have a consistent enough look to the art that it feels cohesive as an intellectual property.

So much has changed in the world of art, too. In the beginning, the art of D&D was black and white illustrations—hand drawn by a relatively small population of artists. Now there is a vast pool of fantasy artists all over the world. Additionally, technological advances have taken art to new heights. Computer generated art has opened the door to a new world of possibilities.

One of the many challenges I was faced with was thinking about our audience. What do you want to see? If we want to grow our audience and keep D&D going for another 30 years, what do the 13-year-olds of today want to see in a game? It's my job to try to create a look that will appeal to current gamers as well as to new gamers we hope to acquire. That means that there may be some art that you really like and some that you may not be as crazy about.

In the end, it is my hope that the look of D&D will not be that drastically different from what we all have come to know and love. By continuing to work with some of the best artists in the fantasy genre, by adding more flavor and introducing new artists from around the world, we hope to make it even better.

# CREATING A NEW LOGO

—Stacy Longstreet

The creation of a new edition includes deciding what changes and what remains the same. The logo seemed like a good place to start. At the time that the art process began (summer 2006) we did not yet have a clear picture of what the new game would be. There were many discussions about whether this new edition was going to be a completely new game, or just a cohesive update to the 3rd Edition, or something in between.

Based on this, the thoughts about the logo were quite similar. Should we create a brand-new logo or just a refresh of the current logo? Since we had the time and no real answers, we explored the possibilities and came up with both a logo that was similar to the current one as well as completely new designs. It was a fun and interesting experiment and one that managed to answer some questions and make us ask some new ones. We began to call one of the logo designs an “evolution” and the other a “revolution.” The more we worked on it, the more we found ourselves liking both executions for different reasons. And we began to debate the pros and cons for producing either one.



The things we considered were: What does this logo say about the game? If the game is only an updated version of 3rd Edition, then shouldn't the logo also be? It would be odd to have a logo that was completely new if the game was not as radically different as the logo change. And vice versa. We discussed the value of a logo that was recognizable and the identity of D&D for the last 8 years. Do we just throw that away? We considered everything.

And on a completely different note, in the case of either logo we addressed some of the problems that the current logo had created. The design of the current logo caused certain production problems. It did not size down very well. And it did not fit well in spaces that need a narrow horizontal logo configuration. The background plate also creates some production issues. So we went forward trying to create a more functional logo design, one that would have more versatility for a broader range of uses.

What you see now is the result of a team of great creative people working together to produce what we wound up calling the “evolution” of the D&D logo.

We hope you like it!

## ARTIST'S COMMENTARY

—William O'Connor

When I was asked to work on the 4th Edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, my initial reaction was shock. I had grown up with the work of Elmore and Parkinson and was inspired by the work of Lockwood in 3rd Edition. To be asked to add my impressions and ideas to this august history was daunting. Working with Stacy and the whole design team put me at ease because I continually received encouragement that my work was what they were looking for, as well as constructive critiques when I had gone off course.

My first impression of the assignment was to use what had come before and build upon the established aesthetic of the world of D&D. That was very important to everyone, “The World of D&D.” We all know what it looks like, we've all grown up with it, and I merely wanted to reinforce it. I wanted to establish the idea of each race in broad strokes while giving each of them a distinctive look, without straying from the classic archetype.

All in all, the experience of being a part of the 4th Edition of D&D is a dream come true. It is very hard to believe that the 12-year-old boy that spent hours drawing characters would grow up to actually work designing the game that inspired him. I feel very lucky to be a part of such a great team, and to be able to work every day with some of the most talented people in the world.

### NOTEBOOK ANECDOTE

Andy Collins, 5/5/2005

#### THINGS THAT WOULD MAKE ME HAPPY

*All classes effective at all levels. Game is fun and playable at all levels. Dungeon excursions last through many encounters. Game rewards tactical play; smart decisions are “right” (and vice versa). Defeat is meaningful but (usually) not final. Game's expectations are clearer to players and DMs. Character classes provide compelling archetypes. PC team is a collection of interchangeable parts. All characters can participate meaningfully in all encounters.*

## EMAIL

James Wyatt, 1/3/2006

Subject: Why we need a new edition

When the game gets to the point where we know the holes and pitfalls in the rules well enough that we constrain our design in order to avoid them, it's time for a new set of rules.

## EMAIL

Bill Slavicsek, 5/2/2005

Subject: Private and Personal: Orcus Design Tenets

EXTREMELY CONFIDENTIAL AND PROPRIETARY!

### ORCUS DESIGN TENETS

#### 1. It must be Medieval, Fantasy Roleplaying.

This is still DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, and we need to stay true to our roots.

#### 2. Dungeon Master as Storyteller.

We've discussed pitting the DM as an opponent, but we believe that the DM as storyteller is stronger and better suits our intellectual property.

#### 3. Cooperative Play Experience.

Likewise, we want to maintain the cooperative, team aspects of adventuring parties.

#### 4. Base Mechanics.

Keep the d20, high rolls are good, classes, levels, and fantasy races. Keep it a unified and mechanically sound game system, and follow that through in all areas.

#### 5. Three-dimensional Tactics.

We want to continue using miniatures in 5-foot squares. We want to design minis game (skirmish) to work with the RPG. More discussion on how this occurs to follow.

#### 6. Options, Not Restrictions.

We want to maintain this philosophy into the new edition, though we can see places in the game where we might want to have some restrictions in place for play balance.

#### 7. Improve the Game.

To best present a new edition, we need to create a better, faster, more robust game. Improvements might include something cool at every level, more design space/currency for character options (but watch the complexity), better mix of crunch (mechanics) and fluff (story/roleplaying elements). Remove problematic rules, spells, subsystems.

#### 8. Make the Game Easy to Design For, Develop, and Edit.

3.0/3.5 is a monster to design for, from stat blocks to encounter balance. Let's fix that this time out and make it easier for us to create products in the future. If we can spend

less time on the details and more time on the cool factor for future designs, we'll all be better off.

## EMAIL

Andy Collins, 4/20/2006

Subject: What Is and What Could Be

It strikes me that the most important question to ask regarding this rules set vis-a-vis the future of the game is not "Does this work?" but rather "Could this work?"

It's pretty easy to see parts of the Orcus version that don't quite work as they're intended, but in my opinion, those observations—while useful in the long run—are really of secondary importance right now.

We must force ourselves, instead, to evaluate what the rules set aims to achieve with its various new elements and determine if we believe that a) its goals are appropriate, and b) it's headed in the right direction to achieve those goals.

For example, whether Class A is better or worse than Class B, or whether the attrition mechanics hit the right balance, is largely immaterial at this stage of design.

What's much more significant (using the latter example) is whether we think that the idea of reworking D&D's traditional attrition mechanic to encourage longer-term adventures is a) a good goal that b) we can achieve by developing the concepts presented in the rules set. (That's one example of a goal/concept from the rules set, mind you, but certainly not the only one.)

I'm optimistic about our ability to turn great goals and concepts into a great game, because I believe that never in history has any company put together a department with greater ability and drive to design, develop, and edit a truly great new RPG.

And that's exactly why we need to determine whether this rules set has the right goals and concepts. If they're the wrong ones, we'll likely publish a good game, but not a great one.

But if they're the right ones, the game we publish will truly be great.

And that, my friends, will be a sight to behold.

## EMAIL

Andy Collins, 10/24/2006

Subject: Terse replies from Dev team

If you get a terse reply from a developer (whether verbally or via email), please don't read any animosity or annoyance into it.

We're just really pressed for time (particularly right now), so our communications may be briefer than normal.

If email isn't getting you the reply you want or need, try face-to-face, but please be patient and understanding if we can't spend as much time on something as you might like.

# HEROES IN THE WORLD

—Rob Heinsoo

4th Edition player characters are unabashedly the heroes of the tale. In a world of magical powers and terrifying threats, player characters are people who possess the potential for greatness. Even at the start of their careers, in the hardscrabble world of the beginning adventurer, player characters have abilities that set them apart from other mortals. They won't necessarily survive, but if they do, they're destined to tap into powers and abilities that are simply not available to the vast majority of other beings populating the world of D&D.

## EXPANDING THE SWEET SPOT

3rd Edition had a sweet spot. Somewhere around 4th or 5th level, characters hit their stride, possessing fun abilities and a number of hit points that allow the player characters to stick around long enough to use them. Somewhere around 13th or 15th level, the sweet spot gets a bit sour for many classes. Skilled players frequently disagree with that assessment, but the truth is that many D&D campaigns more-or-less rise out of existence. As PCs pursue the most fun reward in the game—leveling up—they get closer and closer to the levels where the abilities of the strongest characters eclipse those of the weakest characters, where hard math and a multiplicity of choices push DMs into increasingly hard work to keep their games going.

**3rd Edition: Tools, Not Rules**  
**4th Edition: Tools that Rule**

4th Edition aims to expand the sweet spot. We want PCs who start their careers as hardscrabble rangers and beginning wizards to cap their careers at 30th level as demigods and archmages. Our goal is to make games in the high-20s play almost as quickly, and just as smoothly, as games in the low single digits. Since the bulk of this preview book concerns flavor and style rather than game mechanics, you're not likely to hear a lot more about this underlying motive. But it's there.

One of 3rd Edition's advances was to model monsters using the same tools used to model player characters. 3rd Edition player characters and monsters calculate ability scores, hit points, saves, attack bonuses, and skill ranks using the same mechanical structure. 4th Edition recognizes the value of using

the same tools for PCs and monsters, but opts to turn the tools to a new purpose.

The parameters and basic game mechanics for 4th Edition player characters are not identical to the rules and powers used by the world's monsters and nonplayer characters. The PCs are going to be on center stage for the life of the campaign and deserve all the power options and customization features that the system can bear. Monsters and most NPCs are lucky to appear more than once, particularly if they're encountered in combat situations.

So we've made 4th Edition simpler to run and play by simplifying monsters and NPCs. The new system is not overly concerned with simulating interactions between monsters and nonplayer characters when the PCs are not on stage. 4th Edition orients monster design (and, to some extent, NPC design) around what's fun for player characters to encounter as challenges. Intricate lists of abilities and multiple significant exceptions-based powers are reserved for the PCs rather than handed out to every monster.

## POWER SOURCES

—Mike Mearls

Power sources have always been in D&D, but no one ever bothered to pay attention to them. From the earliest days of the game, it was clear that wizards (then called magic-users) tapped into a different source of magic than clerics. Later on, classes like the druid and illusionist seemed to tie into similar sources, but it was never completely clear. As the game expanded, psionics clearly staked out a completely different source of power.

4th Edition makes the move to create more vivid differences between the sources of magical power. It also creates a source of power for characters who don't use magic, such as fighters and rogues. While these characters don't cast spells, at epic levels they eventually gain the ability to perform superhuman feats. After all, some of the greatest heroes of myth and legend toppled buildings with their bare hands, wrestled gods, diverted rivers, and so on. The martial power source allows us to draw a clear line between a mighty hero and the average person in the world of D&D.

Power sources express their influence over the game through design strictures and the general feel of the classes that employ them. We all know that divine magic heals and arcane magic does more damage. That sort of divide provides a foundational building block that we used as the model for further traits to differentiate the sources.

Going forward, power sources are a useful tool for concepting and creating new character classes. When we release the psionic classes, you can expect that we will do more to make psi powers different from arcane ones, rather than simply steal the same mechanics. By the same token, when designing the *Player's Handbook* we took care to leave space open for the power sources we knew were around the corner. For instance, we expect that psi characters will have more powerful methods for controlling their enemies' minds. Thus, we toned down some of the mind control and charm effects available to arcane characters.

The exciting thing about power sources lies in the design options they open up. Divine and arcane magic are built to serve as independent magic systems, rather than as the core definitions of how magic works in D&D. This decision has a subtle but important impact on design. As noted above, it lets us avoid a kitchen sink approach to spell design. We no longer have to put every single imaginable spell effect into divine and arcane magic, relegating other forms of spellcasting to merely copying existing spells. We are also free to create bigger differences between classes without worrying about straining credibility. A class like the wu jen or the hexblade might use a completely new and different type of magic, allowing us to reinvent the ground rules rather than use what has come before. Since those classes clearly use magic in a different manner when compared to a wizard, we shelve them under a new power source, build a system of magic that works for their needs, and create spells tuned to them rather than simply use the 3E wizard/sorcerer spell list.

## LONGSWORDS AND LIGHTSABERS

—Rodney Thompson

Though you might think that Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader don't have much to do with the evolution of *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*, you might be surprised at how closely the two are intertwined. The *Star Wars Roleplaying Game: Saga Edition* core rulebook served not only as a platform from which adventures in a galaxy far, far away could be launched, it was also an early testing ground for many of the concepts that eventually made their way into the 4th Edition of D&D. Though the *Star Wars* game has a flavor and mechanics all its own, conceptually many design conceits come from the early design and development for 4th Edition.

The *STAR WARS* system had the benefit of being designed at a time when new concepts had just been introduced into D&D (via books like *Tome of Battle: Book of Nine Swords*) and when the game's designers were starting work on 4th Edition. During the early days of the design process for *Saga Edition*, ideas and concepts were filtering down from RPG R&D and into the *Star Wars* game. Ideas like, "give players options when designing their characters," and "keep the combat round quick and easy to understand," fit *Star Wars* as well as D&D and were simple to implement. Others seemed radical at first; the shock



Halfling  
fighter

of learning that we were giving out more ability score increases or of the demise of skill points were some of the most startling moments of the entire design process.

The changes being handed down from R&D were often shocking but always fired up the designers' imaginations. Replacing saving throws with static defense scores or eliminating ability damage were minor changes compared to the wholesale removal of iterative attacks. Chris Perkins, at the time the only in-house designer working on the *Star Wars* book, would come to the rest of the design and development team with ideas and concepts that had thus far not been seen in a d20 game. Those ideas had been part of core design philosophies for the earliest versions of 4th Edition. Since *Saga Edition* came out first, it became the perfect test for seeing if the mechanics could work together and form a playable system.

Once the core philosophies were in place and game mechanics were developed, the process then turned to making the system into something that reflected the type of gameplay that a *STAR WARS* game should have. In many ways, this was the first test of 4th Edition: to see how many of its core concepts could be adapted to roleplaying games of different stripes. By the same token, the development process for *Star Wars* revealed a number of ways that the original mechanics could evolve into something more exciting and playable. As a result, the mechanics that will eventually be in 4th Edition are partially influenced by the development of the *Star Wars* rulebook.



# CHOOSING THE ICONIC RACES

—Richard Baker

One of the long-unchallenged assumptions of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is that the world is populated by a variety of different fantastic races—elves, dwarves, halflings, and so on. Naturally, one of the first things we examined for the new edition of the game was the purpose and mechanics of character race. What were character races doing for the game? Were we creating compelling stories with our races? What more could we do to make our vision for some of the more familiar fantasy races uniquely our own? And finally, which races should we include in the game?

We decided very early in the process that we wanted character race to play a more important part in describing your character. In earlier editions, your character's race was something that you chose at a single decision point during character creation. Your race pick bestowed a whole collection of static, unchanging benefits at 1st level (many of which were useless clutter on your character sheet), and never really "grew" with your character. A 20th-level dwarf had the exact same amount of racial characteristics as a 1st-level dwarf—and during the nineteen intervening levels, the overall importance of that long-ago race selection had diminished to a tiny portion of the character concept.

That led directly to the first philosophical shift in the way we look at races: Rather than consider a race a simple package of ability modifiers and special abilities you choose at 1st level, we decided to include higher-level feats that you can choose for your character at the appropriate time. For example, dwarves are extraordinarily resilient, so they gain the ability to use their second wind [a healing ability] one more time per encounter than other characters can. Eladrins gain the ability to step through the Feywild to make a short-range teleport. You might remember that races such as githyanki or drow gained access to unique powers when they reached certain levels; this is an extension of the same principle.

One idea we borrowed from the FORGOTTEN REALMS and EBERRON Campaign Settings was racial feats—a collection of special tactics, resistances, or edges keyed to each race. So, not only can a dwarf choose from all the general feats in the game, he or she can also choose dwarf-only feats. These remain available throughout a character's career, so they help race to remain relevant even for high-level characters.

A small problem that handcuffed our design in 3rd Edition was the lack of "space" for ability bonuses and special benefits. Because the races in the *Player's Handbook* were all balanced against each other, we couldn't add new races in later products

that had significantly better ability modifiers or benefits, because they'd obsolete the core races of the game. The patch we used in 3rd Edition was the notion of level adjustment (more on that later), but with the new game we have a new opportunity to address this problem. Character races now offer a "net positive" on ability score modifiers, so there's more room for new character races to stand.

Which brings me to the fun part of this discussion: The process of choosing the races that would be iconic to the new edition of the game. Early on in the Scramjet process I sat down with our 3rd Edition game products and conducted a quick head count of player character races that had appeared in core D&D, FORGOTTEN REALMS, and EBERRON game products. Just how many PC races were out there? To my surprise I came up with 135 PC races, ranging from the aarakocra to the yuan-ti tainted one—and that was not even counting every monster that we provided with a level adjustment, or the races presented in *Savage Species* or *DRAGON Magazine*. Heck, we had eleven races of elves.

Some of these races were clearly core concepts of the game. You couldn't imagine a D&D game without elves, dwarves, humans, or halflings. Another half-dozen or so races seemed to merit a close look based on legacy value if nothing else—for example, gnomes, half-elves, or half-orcs. After that, we had a couple dozen character races from a wide variety of 3rd Edition sources that were particularly interesting, evocative, or creative. Given that immense wealth of races to pick from, and the ability to create as many new ones as we wanted to, just how many races did the D&D game really need? Which ones from the big list deserved to be at the front of the line? And which ones did we want to quietly disappear?

To begin sorting out the list of races, I noted for each one its source, "traction" (my assessment of which races were actually getting played based on what we could find in online chatter and office games), and "hook," a one-sentence reminder of what a race was. For example, my hook for dromite was "little psionic insect guy." Then the whole Scramjet team sat down and plowed through the list one entry at a time. We prioritized the list into character races that had to appear right away in 4th Edition, character races that should eventually appear, character races that we might bring into the new edition given the right product, and character races we would deliberately never print again.

Once we had this list, we asked ourselves the question, "What's missing?" Could we think of any iconic fantasy races or cultures that hadn't been represented in 3rd Edition and

Dragonborn  
paladin



needed to come forward? We briefly kicked around the idea of the “talking animal” race; after all, the *Narnia* movie was pretty good, and talking animals show up all over the place in fantasy literature. But we suspected that the mechanical design of such a race (or collection of races, really) would be very difficult, and we were afraid that most folks in our audience would see talking animals as some kind of bad joke. While that bit of brainstorming didn’t work, some additional brainstorming did: We realized that we had several varieties of “dragon man” rattling around in the system, and that we might combine them into a single character race with its own unique culture, society, and mechanical niche.

With our big list of character races pared down to a more manageable collection, we took a look at our planned product schedule and began to pencil in specific races for specific products. We decided that the first *Player’s Handbook* needed the tiefling—one of our most popular and evocative “second stringers” throughout 2nd and 3rd Edition, and a natural choice for players interested in creating warlock characters—and the dragonborn, a “new” character race. Even though dragonborn

didn’t have any kind of history with the audience, we felt that it was important to grow the D&D world by allowing the mix of characters to evolve in the new edition. Fantasy literature, gaming, movies, and television have all become much more cosmopolitan and less tied to traditional European mythology over the last 10 or 15 years, so it seemed like it was time for the D&D game to do the same right at the very foundation of the game system and game world.

Finally, we took on the most serious and controversial part of the work: We decided to take each character race back to the drawing board and re-concept its story, its role, and its look from scratch. For example, halflings were simply too small in 3rd Edition. You could create a halfling who weighed as little as 30 pounds. That’s like a human toddler, not a heroic adventurer. Halflings also lacked a real place of their own in the world; elves had forests, dwarves had mountains, but halflings didn’t really live anywhere. We think you’ll find many of these changes to your liking, and others you might wonder about—but the whole idea is to give you a new set of expectations for some of the oldest components of the game world.

# HUMANS

—Bruce Cordell

Stories, myths, and legends: People build their identities upon narratives that describe their past. Is it any wonder that humans, with their vague, ambiguous, and often demonstrably false origin myths, are the most changeable race of any who stride the world?

When the dwarves speak of being chiseled from the bones of the earth, and the elves sing of their leafy birth in the untamed Feywild, humans can only wonder. From what mold did humans spring? What god or primordial fashioned them, then abandoned them to the world without guidance or supervision? Or did they arise, as some learned sages claim, from the clay of the world itself, over millennia of slow variation from lesser beasts?

With no true knowledge of their beginning, lacking any familiarity with a creator, and absent a defined higher purpose a parent deity might provide, humanity claimed for itself the right to determine its own direction.

Thus since humans first burst upon the world, they have been a flexible, unpredictable, adaptable, and strangely malleable race. The tribes and societies humans create for themselves are as varied as all the leaves in the forest. Some cultures are enlightened, some are cruel. Some prize art above all, others the valor of military conquest. Those that persist long enough grow larger and larger, eventually emerging as grand empires.

Humans claim many past empires. Each empire exalted its own unique set of virtues. Some were realms governed by a caste of fearless warriors, some were rigid theocracies, some were sorcerous tyrannies, and some were far-flung mercantile empires tethered together by silk, steel, and gold. In truth, the story of humankind is the tale of the successive rise of great empires.

And each rise preceded a subsequent, seemingly inevitable fall.

Accordingly, humanity's proud claims of its myriad rises to imperial glory are besmirched by the fact that every one of its empires now lies long toppled. Many are remembered only in relics, ruins, and myth. Even Nerath, which persisted until a mere century ago, was finally overthrown by hordes of orcs, goblins, demons, and—some say—a secret curse.

Now Nerath's ruins, too, litter the murky world; only adventurers are brave enough to pierce the shadows that lie between what isolated outposts remain. Human civilization exists as widely separated points of light in a world of untamed, mysterious darkness. Many are happy to remain all

their lives within the perceived safety of their farming hamlet, village, and even the occasional city large enough to claim itself a state. Still, tales of great riches that lie unclaimed in the ruins of fallen kingdoms lure explorers into the wilds, where frontier justice is the rule.

Humans know their destiny is yet undecided. Though they've fallen often, they also know that their ancestors persevered in the face of terrible odds to build societies that lasted centuries. Thus the race possesses a stubborn confidence others sometimes find peculiar. A human's "can-do" attitude seems out-of-place for the average village farmer, yet the son or daughter of that farmer could well rise from obscurity to become the next hero of the age, forging the first link in an empire yet unborn. Such is the spark that burns in every human heart. Humans are ambitious, driven, pragmatic, bold, creative, and resourceful; they are a race from which heroes often spring, but also villains.

Human heroes (and villains) are decisive and sometimes rash. They are eager for new vistas and new experiences, and as a result are drawn to explore the darkest reaches of the world in search of knowledge and power. They hurl themselves into danger more readily than other races, dealing with consequences as they arise. They are inclined to act first and ponder later, trusting to their native resourcefulness, faith, and will to prevail to see them through perilous situations. More than a few humans perish when they push too hard and far, but enough succeed that the race always manages to step back from whatever brink their hubris pushes them to.

At an early age, most humans learn to handle at least one weapon, even if just a dagger or a farm implement. Since Nerath's fall, even the common folk find it handy to have some knowledge with the crossbow, sling, or other ranged weapon to hunt game and to defend their homes from creatures that roam the encroaching wilderness. Humans appreciate that conflict is never far from their homes and stand ready to drive off a marauding bandit band or wandering monster.

While many humans are content with learning a weapon or two and developing their own martial talents, a few find that the alien and sometimes fickle art of arcane magic is worth looking into, especially among the upper class and nobility. The requirements of the craft, at least as commonly practiced by wizards, put arcane magic beyond the means of commoners unless they are lucky enough to apprentice to an already established practitioner. In larger communities, human wizards gather together in small guilds or colleges.

At the same time, humans are drawn to divine magic. Humans are often culturally pious and easily take to the worship of gods. Some worship the entire pantheon as appropriate to a given situation, while others commit themselves to the service of a single higher power, such as Pelor or Ioun. More than one past kingdom derived its law from religious texts and exalted clerics over kings.



**Human on horseback,  
concept art and final**



# HUMANS

—Continued

Regardless of the god or gods humans choose to revere, they always look to the horizon, seeking to expand their influence and their territory. They chase power and want to change the world, for good or for ill. Their settlements are among the brightest points of light in a very dark and untamed world, and humans constantly seek to explore new lands and settle new frontiers.

The last great empire was ruled by humans, and it contained a place for all the common races. Even though it has fallen into ruin, the remains of the empire still serve as home to humans, dragonborn, tieflings, elves, dwarves, and others.

The human desire to push past boundaries finds expression beyond physical exploration and settlement of new lands, which in truth most humans will never get a chance to experience. Artistic works allow any human with imagination to create new realms without the worry of being assaulted on the road by bandits or having a new settlement attacked in the night by loathsome monsters. Whole new worlds of wonder can be found merely in color, sound, form, narration, and surprising



Human rogue

combinations of these. Indeed, human art extends across all forms: painting, sculpture, music, poetry, storytelling, and more. While other races have their own preferred art forms, humans have no specialty and can excel in any medium.

Because only two or at most three human generations are alive simultaneously (elves commonly coexist alongside great-great-great grandparents, in comparison), human societies may seem more turbulent than those of longer-lived races. Without the weight of generations to hold a particular society to a particular path, new generations usher in new modes of thought, commerce, art, and innovation. This aspect of human civilization is the driving force behind humans' adaptability and success, but it also often leads also to turmoil and revolution. Thus the race's greatest strength touches individuals with calamity and war.

Other races conveniently view humans as a wild and unruly people. However, if forced to admit it, even the race's sternest critics recognize that if humans have a single positive trait shared by all, it is their ability to never give up. If they fail in a task, they try again and again until they eventually succeed. If the task can't be completed by this generation, perhaps the next generation can pull it off. If an empire tumbles, well, in a century or two, another one will rise up, twice as grand and glorious as the previous one. No goal seems out of reach to a determined human, and no ambition too grand.

## HUMAN FRAILTY

—Matthew Sernett

The 3rd Edition *Player's Handbook* describes humans as "the most adaptable, flexible, and ambitious people among the common races" and human adventurers as "the most daring and ambitious members of an audacious, daring, and ambitious race." When considering their role in 4th Edition, that seemed great. It's the same way that humans are portrayed in other works of science fiction and fantasy from *Star Trek* to *Lord of the Rings*, and people have a tendency to think of humanity that way in the real world. Yet an aspect of that description bugged us: It's all positive.

Dwarves are described as suspicious, greedy, and vengeful. Elves are known to be aloof, disdainful, and slow to make friends. Gnomes are reckless pranksters. Half-orcs have short tempers. Each race in the 3rd Edition *Player's Handbook* brings with it classic flaws—except humans. Maybe that was because we know human flaws so well, or maybe humans were described in such glowing terms as a means of explaining why we presented them as the dominant race in all of D&D's published settings. Whatever the reason, it seemed like something that needed to change for 4th Edition.

Humanity needed a weakness—a trait common to all humans that could counteract their adaptability and ambition. It couldn't be a simple personality trait, such as bad temper, because the infinite variety of personality traits all stem from humanity in the first place. It also couldn't be something that might come off as odd when highlighted in humanity. If we say that "being fractious" is a big feature of humanity, it makes sense.



# HUMANS

—Continued

As with the other races I was asked to re-concept, I thought about where the humans came from, hoping to design around their environment. Since elves were of the forest, dwarves of the mountains, and halflings of the water, I came to the conclusion that humans evolved in the plains, so horses became important to their culture and their wanderlust became a signature attribute. A human and his horse became like a biker and his motorcycle, leading to most human costume design to have heeled boots, spurs, and split front armor for riding. The cultural history of the western and lone rider became the archetypal human for me. The humans always look like they're just coming from or just going to a bar fight. Scars, missing fingers and eyes, torn clothes, and dented armor speak of the human life of adventure on the edge.



Human  
fighter

## LEGENDARY LINKS

—Matt Sernett

When the Scramjet team hit upon the idea that humans are corruptible, we latched onto the concept with gusto and put humans at the root of many iconic monsters. In early drafts, yuan-ti were humans transformed into snake-people through a ritual to Zehir. Mind flayers, having been a transformative and parasitic race since at least 2nd Edition, would transform only humans to into illithids (no halfling-sized squid-faces). Some varieties of lycanthropes would only have human-looking humanoid forms.

This made a lot of sense to us at the time because we wanted to contrast humans with how we were treating the other major PC races. Elves, halflings, and dwarves each have a patron deity (or more than one, in the case of halflings), and each also has a creation story that involves its patron deity. We didn't want that for humans. It would seem incongruous with how humans have been treated throughout the history of the game, and we envisioned humans being zealots in their devotion to various gods. At the same time, it seemed odd to us that humans had no creation story that unified them.

To weave all these threads together, we decided that humans once had a patron deity, the creator of the human race. This mysterious figure died in the prehistory of the world, and his or her name was lost to history due to the machinations of Zehir, god of night (or, as we knew him then, Set).

Zehir had a problem: He couldn't make a race like the other gods. Whenever he tried, they turned out monstrous and wrong. Since he could not create a race of his own, Zehir determined to steal one. He appealed to Avandra, goddess of change, charming her into teaching him how to alter the creations of others. Although dazzled by Zehir's romantic overtures, Avandra managed to attach a condition to Zehir's power of change—he could only change a creature with its creator's permission. Shackled by the condition, Zehir was unsatisfied. He could see only one way to have his will: The dead do not deny permission. After the war with the primordials ended, when all the other gods had exhausted much of their strength, Zehir murdered the creator of the humans and laid claim to them as his own. But the other gods could not let this aggression stand, and they defeated Zehir and wrested control of humanity from him. The contest for control of humans continues to this day, and thus humans are both the most corruptible of the races and the most devout.

We were pretty happy with that origin story. It tied up loose ends and explained some choices we made about monsters. Then Bill Slavicsek pointed out that we had tied too much to humans and actually counteracted our other efforts to make humans share the spotlight with other races.

Back to the drawing board . . .

So now humans have fewer direct links to specific creatures, and they have many stories of what happened to their creator deity and who he or she was. The followers of Zehir have their story, and those of Bahamut have another. Although



**Human  
warlord**

we liked the cool ideas we developed, this more obscured version of the human legend gives DMs both more freedom and inspiration for cool human factions and adventures. And that's what it's all about.

## **MORE HUMAN THAN HUMAN**

—Logan Bonner

Designing mechanical benefits for humans is no minor task. The other races are simpler because they're all based on slices of human personality and biology. Dwarves are shorter and tougher gruff humans, tieflings are charming humans with horns and tails, and so on. These races are easy to understand and roleplay because they represent specific aspects of human nature (and you don't see us doing a lot of PC races that don't behave or think at all like humans). Humans as a race, though, have to be able to represent the full range of real-world humans.

3rd Edition D&D represented humans as the most diverse, most adaptable race. This is a reasonable niche for humans, and the mechanics back it up pretty well. Much of the 3E feel for humans is still there in 4E, though there's an extra little treat to increase your adaptability through feat selections.

The problem is that when you have a race that's pretty good at everything but best at nothing, it doesn't point you toward a specific class or role. One of our goals with races was that each would have an advantage for some classes and a disadvantage for others. We expected tieflings to be good warlocks and eladrins to be good wizards, but humans didn't have a mechanical or thematic precedent to follow. So how did this turn out for humans? Well, they're still good at everything. Humans stick with their adaptable shtick and their racial abilities are useful for any class.

Humans are our most resilient race. Though they don't have more hit points or higher defenses, they recover from damage and conditions more quickly than other races can. Humans are all about dramatic action and dramatic recovery. Many of these benefits come from racial feats.

Using the racial feats to emphasize humans' advantages gives the race an interesting dynamic. Even though they have more potential for some classes, it's never stupid to play a human of any class. Most classes' racial abilities intentionally make them lean toward some classes, but humans really can take on any task.



**Human  
warlord**



# DRAGONBORN

—Richard Baker

Of all mortal creatures in the world, dragons are the most awesome and powerful. In the beginning of days, the ancient deity Io created dragons by fusing brilliant astral spirits into the unchecked fury of the raw elements. The greater spirits became the dragons, creatures so powerful, proud, and strong-willed that they were lords of the newborn world, masters of all they surveyed. The lesser spirits became the dragonborn. Although smaller in stature than their mighty lords, they are no less draconic in nature. Dragons arose as the kings and princes over the dragonborn, who gladly followed their nobler and more powerful kin and in turn served as leaders and champions to lesser mortal races. In this dark and diminished age, dragons no longer rule over dragonborn realms, and dragonborn must struggle to make their way in the world as all mortals do—but in every dragonborn a hidden furnace of draconic blood burns with the same fury and pride all dragons know.

For centuries uncounted dragonborn have been among the fiercest and strongest warriors in the world. When Io perished, Bahamut and Tiamat fought furiously for dominion over dragonkind, and their mortal servants—dragon and dragonborn both—also battled. The dragonborn who followed Bahamut triumphed and went on to forge the powerful empire of Arkhosia in the arid lands of the south, but to this day some evil dragonborn clans still venerate Tiamat in secret. Ruled by royal lines of mighty dragons, the proud warriors of Arkhosia subjugated vast territories across the world. But many centuries ago, the city-states of Arkhosia came into conflict with the growing shadow of Bael Turath, the infernal empire of the tieflings. Dragonborn and tieflings fought several terrible wars, and ultimately both empires fell into ruin. The cities of Arkhosia became devil-haunted ruins, and the few surviving dragonborn were scattered to the four winds.

Today, dragonborn are a race of wandering mercenaries, soldiers, sellswords, and adventurers. Their empire once contended for dominion over the world, but only a few rootless clans of these honorable warriors remain. Dragonborn have no homeland to call their own, and so they live scattered among the other common peoples of the world. Most use their strength and martial skill to carve out a place for themselves, and therefore wander to places where they can find opportunities to fight for a living—frontier kingdoms who post bounties on bandits and monsters, decadent cities whose rich lords and merchants pay well for mercenaries, or war-torn kingdoms

where honorable service and a strong sword-arm can win great wealth and renown. Dragonborn rarely linger in lands with little need for adventurers or sellswords.

In physical form, dragonborn resemble humanoid dragons. Their bodies are covered in fine scales of gold and bronze. They are tall and strongly built, often standing close to 6-1/2 feet and weighing 250 pounds or more. Their heads feature a blunt snout, a strong brow, and distinctive frills at the cheek and ear. Their hands and feet are strong, talonlike claws.

Dragonborn are oviparous (egg-laying), and youngsters are generally referred to as hatchlings for the first few months of life. However, young dragonborn grow much faster than human children do. They walk hours after hatching and master the rudiments of speech within three months. By the time a dragonborn child is 3 years old, he or she has reached the size and mental and emotional development of a 10-year-old human child. By 12 years of age dragonborn attain their adult stature, and by 15 they reach maturity and are accounted adults by other dragonborn. They live about as long as humans do, although dragonborn much prefer an honorable death in battle to a long senescence and will seek out such an end when the infirmities of age begin to appear. Few live to see their 70th year.

Like their larger kin, dragonborn possess an internal well-spring of elemental power. As they mature and grow strong, they learn to call upon this power in the form of a natural breath weapon. A few dragonborn who harbor an exceptionally strong draconic heritage might eventually manifest majestic, leathery wings.

Dragonborn make their own way in the world, and most spend little time in the company of their own kind. Dragonborn claim kinship to the clan of the parent who raises them, and from time to time members of the same clan may travel together or live in the same spot. For example, some dragonborn clans form small mercenary companies of elite warriors, or swear to serve as guards or champions to a strong and honorable monarch of another race. A typical dragonborn clan numbers anywhere from twenty to fifty relatives, mostly cousins or second cousins to each other. Usually the oldest and most accomplished dragonborn is considered the Clanmaster. In routine matters, dragonborn clans reach most decisions through debate and consensus, but in times of danger the Clanmaster's word is law to be instantly obeyed.

Dragonborn marriages are dictated by old alliances between clans. Males and females don't remain together long, and go their separate ways when their offspring reaches three years of age. One parent then assumes responsibility for the child and raises him or her from that time forward. Dragonborn families are therefore small: one parent and one child who travel, work, and play together while the parent teaches the youngster what it means to be a dragonborn.



**Dragonborn warlock,  
concept art and final**



# DRAGONBORN

—Continued

Dragonborn leave their parent around fourteen to fifteen years of age. Although parent and child retain great affection for each other, the dragonborn are solitary and make their way through life alone.

While dragonborn don't have a civic society as such, they possess rich cultural traditions dating back to the days of their long-lost empire. A dragonborn parent is honor-bound to teach his offspring the ancient ways of the dragonborn people, the names of her ancestors, and the meaning of honor. Dragonborn know hundreds of myths and parables, each passed down for generations. Dragonborn are fond of couching arguments and illustrating points through reference to these old stories. These stories grow with every new dragonborn hero who accomplishes some great deed. It is a sign of great esteem when a dragonborn decides to share one of these tales with a comrade of another race, since it means that the dragonborn deems the person so instructed to have sufficient honor and wisdom to recognize the essential truth of the story and to be capable of learning something from it.

Dragonborn are widely regarded as arrogant and easily offended by other races, but everyone knows that they're people of their word; a dragonborn's honor is more important than life itself. They value skill and excellence in all endeavors. Dragonborn hate to fail and drive themselves to incredible efforts before they give up on anything. Likewise, they greatly admire honor, skill, and determination in others—even enemies.

Dragonborn seek out adventure for the chance to prove their worth, win renown, and perhaps become champions about whom stories will be told for generations. To win everlasting glory through mighty deeds, daring exploits, and supreme skill at a chosen calling—that is the dragonborn dream.

## LEGEND OF THE DRAGONBORN

—James Wyatt

Dragons are such an iconic monster of fantasy that we named the game after them. Until now, though, playing a dragon meant either using a lot of variant rules (as in the 2nd Edition *Council of Wyrms* campaign setting) or taking on a hefty level adjustment to play either a dragon or a half-dragon.

Not any more.

Dragonborn are a humanoid race of draconic origin. One dragonborn legend claims that when the gods warred with the primordials, one of the mighty primordials cleaved Io, the progenitor dragon god, in two. The two halves of the dead god's corpse rose up to become Bahamut and Tiamat, but where the god's blood fell, the dragonborn were made.

The legend more commonly told among other races is that Io created the dragonborn to serve and defend the dragons. In any event, the dragonborn are a martial race that forged a great empire of united city-states when the world was young. Their empire of Arkhosia fell after several terrible wars against Bael Turath, the infernal empire of the tieflings.

If you want to play a proud, battle-bred warrior, if you want to sprout wings and breathe fire as you go up levels, or if you just want to touch the coolness that is dragons, you'll want to play a dragonborn.

## DRAGONBORN CULTURE

—Chris Sims

Though they are a people dispersed by the ravages of time, history lives and breathes in the dragonborn. They issue from an ancient martial tradition founded on service, honor, and loyalty. Strength and pride are paramount, and excellence is the only path. Every dragonborn expresses these central racial traits in some way.

The dragonborn had a stable society in the empire of Arkhosia, where they revered their ancestors and the dragons. Although their empire crumbled, the dragonborn carried their reverence, their soldierly ways, and their honor with them. They adapted to survive as they integrated into other cultures, but their traditions live on in their behavior and their time-honored crafts.

Dragonborn respect their clan ties, which run deeper than familial connections. A single dragonborn parent raises a dragonborn child to know his clan and his heritage. An instilled desire to reflect positively on both helps to color a dragonborn's personal behavior. Those from the same clan more readily form cohesive groups, but most dragonborn simply behave in a fashion that garners them, and thereby their clan, respect.

Such admiration is most readily earned through direct action according to a solid creed. Direct action means decisiveness and courage, and a solid creed is usually a devotion to the ideals of a draconic god. In a dangerous world, and driven by military customs, dragonborn take up arms to make their way.

The armaments such a dragonborn carries into battle are often draconic in style. Sometimes a dragonborn even carries weapons originally created by the dragonborn of lost Arkhosia. These include the bastard sword (katana), the punch dagger (katar), and the claw gauntlet.

Regardless of appearances and the misfortunes of the past, dragonborn know their place in the world. The worst among them are greedy and vengeful warriors who still know the value of honor. Guided by their noble forebears, the best among the dragonborn have been and will be among the greatest heroes the world has ever known.

## DESIGNING THE VISUAL LOOK

—Stacy Longstreet

Design a new PC race based on dragons. Go!

What began as a very exciting challenge turned into a very difficult task.

Everyone agreed that this should be a really cool race that everyone would want to play. Yet everyone had different ideas about what it should look like: How much should it resemble a dragon versus how much should it resemble a human? There were lots of discussions and we started with trying to make the head unique by creating a blending of human and dragon. It became very apparent that this had been tried before. We quickly determined that we needed to go in the other direction and work with a more draconic head on a humanoid body.

Designing the male of the race was easier than the female. Like the earlier versions of the dwarves, we did not want the females to look so similar to the males. We wanted them to be more feminine and recognizable as female dragonborn. We gave them the curvy figure of a female and while they are more slender than the males, they are still stronger and bulkier than a human.

## WHY DRAGONBORN?

—Gwendolyn Kestrel

**Short Answer:** Because they're cool!

**Medium Answer:** Because the game needs an interesting, playable dragonlike humanoid.

**Long Answer:** There's something intrinsically attractive about playing a dragonlike person. Players want as an option a race that captures the power and majesty of dragons. For the first time in the game, we fulfill this need right from the beginning of the edition.

## INTRODUCING THE DRAGONBORN

—Gwendolyn Kestrel

When I started DM'ing a 4th Edition playtest group, I noticed that different aspects of the races appealed to different players. A few people came to the table pretty sure of what they wanted to play. Some folks went immediately to survey the stat boosts. Others started in on the descriptive text. One small bit of the dragonborn flavor text really caught one player's attention and enthusiasm.

Erin: "Oooh! I hatched!"

Susan: "Do you still have pieces of your shell?"

Erin: "Oh! I totally want some!"

It wasn't the race's dragon breath or dragon wings or its natural strengths as a warlord or fighter that appealed to her. She didn't look at the attractive stat boosts. The flavor text was what sold her.



Dragonborn wizard

# DWARVES

—Matt Sernett

Long ago, when the world lay hot upon the anvil of the gods and primordial, Moradin the All-Father chiseled dwarves from the bones of the earth and forged for them souls of iron. In each, he placed a diamond heart to beat the bright and burning blood of life, and having finished his craft, he plunged his works into ambrosia to cool them. These were the Firstborn, those dwarves given life by Moradin's divine skill and touched by his holy hands, and they aided the Soul Forger in his work.

The primordial, those ancient beings of creation and destruction that now gnash their teeth upon the world's foundations, had brought the world up out of chaos and populated it with their spawn. Yet when the primordial beheld Moradin's bright children and their many clever works, they grew envious and demanded dwarves of their own. Pleased that the primordial seemed to appreciate his creations, Moradin gave generously and then turned back to his work. He was to learn a lesson all dwarves now take to heart: that no gift should be given lightly.

The jealous primordial made the dwarves serve their hateful creations, the giants, and thus began the Age of Chains. In the long darkness of this ancient time, dwarves were slaves to the giants, building grand cities for them, crafting exquisite items for them, and offering them the treasures they found by breaking the bones of the world. Of course, the dwarves cried out to their creator, but Moradin had begun his next great work. He could not hear their lamentations through the furor of his labor. Indeed, he worked on his next creation ceaselessly, and only when the war horns of the gods sounded did he set down his tools.

When Moradin looked about the world, he was filled with fury. His creations—his children—were dying beneath the whips and boots of the foul giants. Some, like the azers and galeb-dur, had called out to him for so long that they lost the voice for it and became slaves to the giants in body and soul. Moradin thus learned another lesson now held close to the hearts of dwarves: that sometimes one must cease hammering to hear the truth.

Moradin set aside his work and turned his anger against the primordial, aiding the gods in their struggle for control of the world. Armed with weapons and armor forged by Moradin, the gods defeated the primordial, and Moradin opened his portfolio to the freed dwarves and to all who craft in metal or stone or who love the mountains.

Dwarves endured slavery for countless years, until after the primordial were laid low and the empires of the giants fell

into obscurity and ruin. In the centuries since winning their freedom, dwarves have not lost their enmity for the giants. Dwarves forget little and forgive even less. Nor have they lost their crafter's skill at the forge, mine, and quarry. Dwarves are much as they were, fierce and resolute creatures who believe in hard work and who value fine craftsmanship almost as much as they esteem loyalty and honor.

Now one of the most populous races of the world, dwarves live in mountain fortress-cities and among the other races in their settlements in forests and on the plains. Like all the major races, dwarves saw their great empires rise and fall, and they warred on other peoples and warred among themselves. Throughout their many long generations, dwarves achieved great advances and suffered grievous losses, and today dwarves exist in an age of uncertainty.

True, the ancestors' great empires are gone, and many dwarven clanhomes lie in the hands of enemies. And yes, the great dwarven nations of the world are little more than city-states, each with its own fears and foes. Yet dwarves know that the future cannot be written in stone, only the past, and looking out from their mountains, they see a landscape of danger and opportunity. With bravery, ingenuity, and endurance, dwarves might once again carve kingdoms of light from a dark world.

A dwarf finds solace in stone, and thus many a dwarven city gazes sternly down from a high mountain or hunkers deep in a protective vale. Few dwarven settlements remain purely on the surface for long, for dwarves feel the drive to carve and tunnel as much as halflings sense the irresistible pull of wanderlust. Some truly titanic dwarven cities cut clear through a mountain to emerge on the other side. Such underhalls, the largest and most ancient dwarven settlements, typically originated in the Age of Chains, and they exist still due to the work of countless generations of dwarves. Often, vast swathes of such structures remain disused by the underhall's citizens, who choose to live in the chambers close enough to the surface to benefit from natural light. Such abandoned areas become frightful catacombs, haunted by specters of the past and echoing with the cries of monstrous inhabitants.

When dwarves build, their works are grand. Perhaps due to their ancestors literally working in giant scale, dwarves construct and carve to awe the ages. They are justly proud of their monumental structures and famed the world over for their skills.

Within their great stone cities, dwarves live long lives steeped in traditions and dedicated to duty. Families linked by heritage share a clan name, and each clan performs the functions of specific professions within a settlement. Being practical by nature, dwarves tend to group professions by direct applications. Thus, a clan of farmers also serves as the city's brewers, bakers, and quartermasters in times of war. A clan of miners typically works as a settlement's smiths and minters.



**Dwarf cleric,  
concept art and final**



# DWARVES

—Continued

Dwarves excel at many crafts, most particularly great feats of architecture and the crafting of armor and weapons. Few would mistake dwarven items or buildings for those of any other race. Dwarves favor strong geometric shapes and sharp, straight lines that make their work distinctive. They use few adornments besides patterns of shapes, but when they do depict people or creatures, dwarves place such representations based on practical associations. The harness for a thundertusk boar would bear illustrations of boar heads. The saddle horn on the saddle for a griffon mount might look like the head or claw of a griffon. A comb for beards might be shaped like a bearded dwarf face.



*Dwarven designs*

Members of a clan apprentice to their future work from a young age, and therefore marriages between clans are regularly arranged in childhood and even before the birth of the betrothed. Having worked with the other clan in its profession for years, often shoulder-to-shoulder with the settled-upon mate, most dwarves find such alliances suit themselves as much as they aid their families.

Of course, no dwarf worthy of the race knows only his own job. Most dwarves make hobbies of other clans' work. A brewer might leave the city on sunny afternoons to pan for gold in a valley stream, a miner might share home-brewed ale with her friends after a day's hard work, or a tailor might in the evenings cut gems and craft jewelry that best compliments his clothing. Dwarves might give the products of such hobby work as gifts, but most sell them to the clan responsible for that kind of work in the community, and that clan can then either use the work in question or sell it for a small profit.

In the mixed communities that remain from the days of the last human empire, dwarven neighborhoods are common. Few humans ever visit a dwarven clanhome, but almost every human has lived, worked, and even befriended a dwarf who lives and works in their village, town, or city.

Dwarves train with weapons from youth, and their play and exercise often take the form of mock battles. Dwarves favor hafted weapons such as hammers, axes, and picks. These weapons closely resemble the tools they use in daily work, and most dwarves keep such a weapon handy wherever they might be. Unlike other races, dwarves have little fear of violence. Death and injury remain terrible specters that loom over conflict, but despite this, dwarves often seem joyful in combat. Even the most dour and taciturn old greybeard cracks a grim smile at the thought of hefting a hammer and bringing it to bear on foes.

This martial culture provides a deep and productive mine for brave adventurers. Dwarven legends are replete with great clerics, paladins, fighters, barbarians, rangers, and other individuals of martial skill. Less common but equally famed are the powerful dwarf wizards and elementalists. The hero's path can be long and lonely. Dwarves who walk it must often break the bonds of tradition, family, and even clan. Yet as the dwarven proverb says: "Deeds speak truth, and great deeds shout it from the mountaintops."

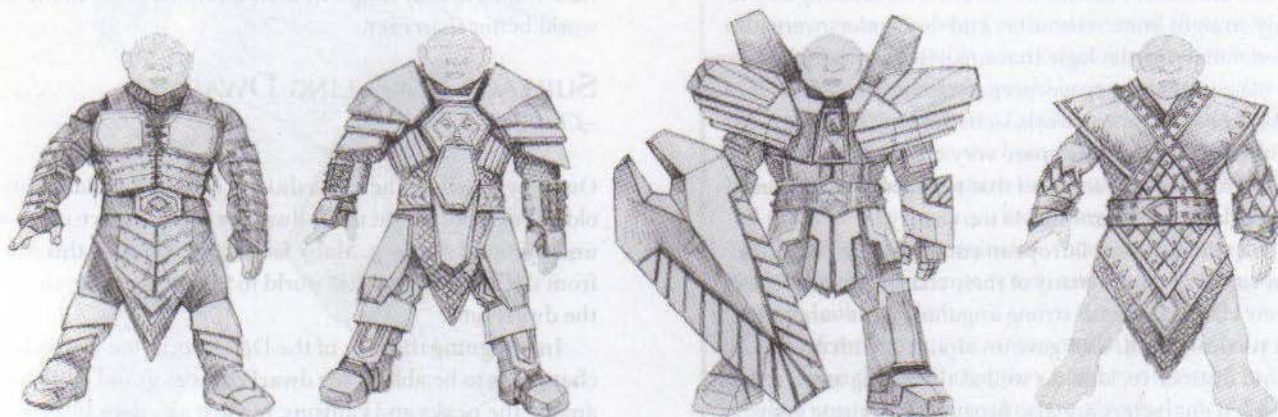
## DWARVES AND DARKVISION

—Matt Sernett

When we designed the 4th Edition of the D&D game, we knew we needed to improve how the game handled special kinds of vision. Out of the three 3rd Edition core rulebooks, only humans, halflings, and lizardfolk need a light to see normally at night. Every other creature possesses some special sight that allows it to see in dim light or even in darkness. That seemed a little crazy, and when we thought about it, the inequality of special vision also complicated the game. To play appropriately, the DM has to describe the big dark room one way for the drow



*Dwarven armor*



(who has darkvision 120 feet), one way for the dwarf (who has darkvision 60 feet), another way for the elf (who has low-light vision), and still another for the human holding the torch. And there's one more problem with many creatures having darkvision: The PCs don't get to see the scenery in caves or large dungeon rooms.

To eliminate those problems we took darkvision away from most creatures, including dwarves. Now dwarves illuminate the homes they build into mountains. They possess low-light vision so they don't use as much light as a human might, but when the PCs enter the dwarven city, it's likely everyone can see its splendor.

## ORC FOES

—Chris Sims

Since orcs and dwarves inhabit mountainous regions, the two races might have come into conflict simply over resources. However, the two peoples' diametrically opposed world views ensure ongoing clashes if not outright war. Both cultures share a martial spirit and a grasp of smithing weapons and armor, but there the similarities end. Where dwarves gather and build, orcs scavenge and destroy, and where dwarves are dutiful and industrious, orcs are treacherous and lazy.

Orcs see dwarf holds as ready-made shelter, as well as a source of food, wealth, and slaves. Why should orcs bother to build, farm, and mine when foolish dwarves have done so for them? After all, only the deserving end up with the spoils.

Dwarves see orcs as murderous, craven thieves. Through generations, dwarves have suffered the unrelenting brutality of orcs, and no dwarf forgets a grievance. Now, the only way orcs can repay their debt is with blood.

## WITHOUT A CLAN

—Chris Sims

Most dwarves toil their life through, enjoying the comfort of life in a clan—a close-knit group of friends and kin. They never contemplate foreswearing such social support, and they never bother to imagine the horror of being ripped from their clan. But the clanless abound.

Many a clanless dwarf is the sole survivor of the destruction of a dwarf hold. Orcs and giants target dwarf settlements, as do avaricious dragons and other monsters. Another clan might adopt a clanless dwarf, but no dwarf can forget or forgive the loss of his clan. If possible, such a loss must be avenged.

Dwarf adventurers often build a second clan around their adventuring companions, and such ties can be as strong—or stronger—than the ties of blood and tradition.



# DWARVES

—Continued

## DESIGNING THE DWARVEN ALPHABET

—Daniel Reeve

The Dwarven characters had to be suitable for carving into stone, so I created very simple shapes. At first this included curves, but these were discarded in favour of creating letters with only straight lines. Ascenders and descenders were also discarded, following the logic that superfluous flourishes were a waste of good carving space: preparing a good rock surface would be time-consuming work, so in the end, the letters should be compact, and use space very efficiently.

But this led to a character set that resembled the runes of ancient England and Scandinavia too closely.

The ancient northern European runes share a characteristic main vertical stem in many of their characters. So I created many new characters with strong angular marks—and often with no verticals at all. This gave an alphabet with quite a different, and distinctive, look. As well as the strong angular motif, the Dwarven characters are also broader than runic ones.

Creating numerals was a simple extension of these ideas, and most of them (0,1,2,3,5,7,8) bear some kind of resemblance to their Latin or Roman counterparts, or to the physical quantity they represent.

## SURE AND STEADY

—Chris Sims

In the evolution of the D&D game, dwarves have changed little. They've always had a clear place and role. In the new edition, the dwarf is a model for how races can be flavorful and still have clear mechanics.

From the early days of the game, dwarves have been tough and soldierly. Only with the advent of racial ability adjustments in the *ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Player's Handbook*

did they gain a penalty to Charisma and a cap on Dexterity. Dwarves have been apt at stonework and able to see in the dark since the *D&D Basic Rules*. In 3E, dwarves still made great fighters, but they became worse clerics than ever due to turning's reliance on Charisma.

The new edition's dwarf gives a nod to all its ancestors, while acknowledging the needs of the new edition. Dwarves make great fighters and paladins, and they can excel in leader roles as well, especially as clerics, since they have no Charisma penalty. Flavorful abilities round out the package, reinforcing the dwarf as a defender and as a creature that likes to live underground. Only darkvision, a troublesome game element, went away in favor of low-light vision.

Dwarves still play into the expectations of veteran players, and they live up to the conceptions of myth and fantasy literature. But now, they might fit their intended place in the D&D world better than ever.

## SURFACE-DWELLING DWARVES

—Chris Sims

One way in which the new edition's dwarves deviate from old stereotypes is that these dwarves build surface cities with underground sections. Many factors necessitated this move, from the look of the D&D world to minor thematic elements in the dwarf race.

In designing the look of the D&D world, we wanted player characters to be able to see dwarf cities as grand edifices among the peaks and canyons, not just as a door in a mountain-side. Sure, plenty of dwarves live in subterranean chambers. But since dwarves can't see in the dark, those magnificent halls are lit with streaming sunlight from windows to the outside and ventilated with fresh surface air. The dwarves might dig deep in the earth for precious materials, but even their mines are aglow with lantern light. As such, even dwarf delves are accessible to all characters.

With surface settlements, dwarves can grow their own crops and raise their own livestock. They don't need to rely on lowland sources for grain (and beer!), nor do they need to rely on contrived underground animals for all that meat they love to feast on. Dwarf towns are places characters can visit and even sneak into (try that with a small gate in a mountain-side). Dwarves seem more a part of the world when they're not sequestered in underground halls.



Dwarven runes



*Dwarf rogue*

When the dwarves were fighting for freedom from the giants, they lived underground for defense. But there's no doubt that the new edition's dwarves are surface-dwelling creatures whose love of the earth shows through in their culture.

## IN PRAISE OF DWARF WOMEN

—Rob Heinsoo

Back in the early days, back before D&D first became Advanced ...

... back when D&D players had three pamphlets in a brown or white box ...

... back when Tactical Systems Rules (TSR!) published wargame rules in the same pamphlet format on topics such as modern micro-armor tank battles ...

... back then when D&D was new, there were two topics that resurfaced endlessly in gaming magazines.

First, people argued about the best way to handle lightning bolt and fireball spells. The eventual publication of AD&D provided concrete rules, though that only intensified the Great Fireball Debate.

## ARTIST'S COMMENTARY

—William O'Connor

We all know dwarves are stocky, have beards, and live in caves in the mountains. Snow White, Arthur Rackham, Tolkien, Wagner, Nordic mythology: all have established this archetype. I began by developing the race of dwarves by looking at where they lived. The mountainous terrain and mining lead to the beards, broad hands, shoulders and low center of gravity. The culture of mining and rock inspired a faceted aesthetic that I felt would pervade the art of the dwarves and give them a distinctive look. Dwarves are a hard people, with a hard-edged style. The design team told me that dwarves should look like tanks. The beards became a fun experiment. Since no one ever sees a dwarf without a beard, it must hold a strong social, possibly even religious significance. I decided that the beards would be a key to individualizing characters denoting family, personal history and clan affiliation. Once the beards were designed, I found that the only facial feature that could be seen through all the hair was the nose, so I thought it would be very striking if it were prominent, since throughout art history dwarves have large noses, and small-nosed dwarves tend to look like Santa.

The female dwarves were a much greater challenge. The design team felt that they had been ignored in earlier versions because they are always depicted as so unattractive and masculine. I was directed to make them beautiful, even sexy. Short, stocky and large nosed is not exactly a schema for the classic female beauty. I had no inclination to depict them with beards or soft cherubic faces. Broadening the face and balancing the design with piles of hair and slightly bigger eyes was my solution.

Second, people argued over whether dwarf women had beards. Yes, it's true—"Hirsute Dwarven Women" wasn't a bad-hair band, it was a debate that flared through half-a-decade of fandom. Remarks by early D&D creators, particularly in reference to GREYHAWK, sparked fanbase suspicions concerning the apparent absence of female dwarves in Tolkien, despite the fact that they were said to be on the scene. Did female dwarves grow beards and move unremarked among dwarf males? Did female dwarves have to shave? Et Tediou Cetera.

So thank Moradin we're eight years into the Zeds and Bill O'Connor has gifted us with a magnificent new look for dwarf women. Strong, sensual, earthy and feminine, with an exotic beauty that no one would think to splash a beard on. Questions of dwarven female beauty have been buried once for and all.

We'll have to make do with the Great Fireball Debate.

# ELADRINS

—Richard Baker

Serene, graceful, and just a little inscrutable, eladrins are the people of the Feywild—the faerie world of twilight and magic that exists alongside the human world. They are the most highly cultured and learned of the elven races, and are often called “high elves” or “gray elves” by those who don’t know any better. They are graceful swordmasters, skillful artisans, and wizards of great cunning and power. Their shining cities lie hidden from the eyes of common mortals within the dark and wondrous Feywild, but are close enough to the world of humankind for travelers to sometimes catch glimpses of their turrets and spires.

Of all the races, eladrins are the most likely to take magic for granted. They grow up in an environment suffused with magic, even if not every eladrin is a wizard (as some ignorant humans believe). For eladrins, magic is a fundamental force of the universe, and it’s never mastered as much as temporarily tapped, redirected, and shaped. Sagacious master wizards instruct their eladrin apprentices to think of magic as a river flowing through the universe. Casting a spell or creating a magic item is like dipping a bucket into that river—or at most, diverting part of the river into a new channel. The flow of magic continues unabated despite the diversion, say the sages, and efforts to dam up the river completely are doomed to eventual failure. Even if an eladrin never casts a spell in his life, he sees evidence of the invisible river of magic flowing through all things.

Corellon, the god of magic, was the first immortal to discover the Feywild. Enamored with the beauty of this enchanted place, he created the elves to people the Feywild and the wild places of the world. From the beginnings of their race, some elves were fascinated by arcane magic and the skillful working of stone and metal, while others were enamored of the natural world and the shaping of wood and water. Those who were inclined to work in stone and magic built graceful, spire-topped cities in the Feywild, while those who loved living things more found the vast forests of the natural world more to their liking.

In time, the rise of the drow—the dark elves—precipitated a terrible time of war and ruin within the Feywild, and eventually divided the elven race into three distinct kindreds. Many elves abandoned the Feywild forever and took up a simpler existence in the great forests of the natural world. These are known as “wood elves,” or simply “elves.” Those who remained in the Feywild and rebuilt the ruined kingdoms became known as eladrins—a name given to them by Corellon in the

language of the immortals. They are sometimes known as “high elves” after the tall towers of their cities and their desire to remain above the concerns of the world. But to this day many eladrins and elves—especially the adventurers and sages of both races—pass easily between the Feywild and the world and back again with nary a thought.

Eladrins are at home in both the Feywild and the mortal realm. Academic-minded eladrins contemplate the deepest mysteries of magic within the arcane towers of elven cities such as Shinaelestra, Jenn-Tourach, and Avaellor. Others explore the ruins of long-gone high elven civilizations like the Anauli Empire, the Realm of the Twin Queens, and Cendriane, or seek delight in the sublime wonders of the Feywild, riding among its vast silver plains with unicorns or sailing its starlit seas. And eladrin knights and swordmages guard their beautiful castles and cities against the darker denizens of the Feywild, such as savage werebeasts, cruel and bloodthirsty forest spirits, and the dreaded fomorians.

The grand realms of the eladrins are largely a thing of the past, although powerful city-states remain. Most eladrin communities exist close to the ever-shifting border between the Feywild and the world. The city of Shinaelestra, for example, shifts onto the world at each midnight, replacing a glade deep within the Howling Forest for a few hours before returning to the Feywild with the first light of dawn. Jenn-Tourach crosses over onto a mountaintop only for a single day at midsummer. The towers of Avaellor, on the other hand, remain on the hill-sides of a fair green island all spring and summer, fading into the Feywild with the coming of winter.

## WHY FEY AND THE FEYWILD?

—James Wyatt

Fey have always been a part of D&D that has both proponents and detractors. The detractors have some good points, in my estimation—cute pixies and leprechauns aren’t fun opponents, and good-aligned creatures are hard to use in combat-heavy adventures. Yes, people recognize pixies from fairy tales. But D&D is emphatically not the game of fairy-tale fantasy. D&D is a game about slaying horrible monsters, not a game about traipsing off through fairy rings and interacting with the little people.

On the positive side, though, there is something very appealing about the legends of a faerie land, a world that’s an imperfect—or a more perfect—mirror of our own. There’s something genuinely frightening about the idea that a traveler in dark woods at night might disappear from the world entirely and end up in a place where the fundamental rules have changed. Magic is more real there, beauty is more beautiful and ugliness more ugly, and even time flows differently in the fey realm. Books like Susannah Clarke’s *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* depict that world in vivid language.

The 3rd Edition *Manual of the Planes* introduced the idea of Faerie as a plane of existence that lay outside the standard cosmology. It was a parallel plane like the Plane of Shadow,

touching the world in many places, similar to it in general form and landscape, but hauntingly beautiful and inhabited by fey. That's the plane we adopted into the cosmology as the Feywild.

What, then, to do with the cute sprites and good-hearted nymphs? Well, we put the wild back into the Feywild. One aspect of legendary and literary Faerie is that the fey are curiously amoral. They don't think of Good and Evil in the same way that mortals do, and they can be cruel or murderous almost on a whim. Those are the fey we wanted in the Feywild. The Feywild is home to unearthly eladrins who might call up the Wild Hunt and rampage through the mortal world to avenge some real or imagined wrong, or just because the moon is in a certain phase. Its dryads walk into battle alongside their treant allies, slashing about with branchlike arms. Its nymphs can kill with a glance or enchant mortals to act as their slaves.

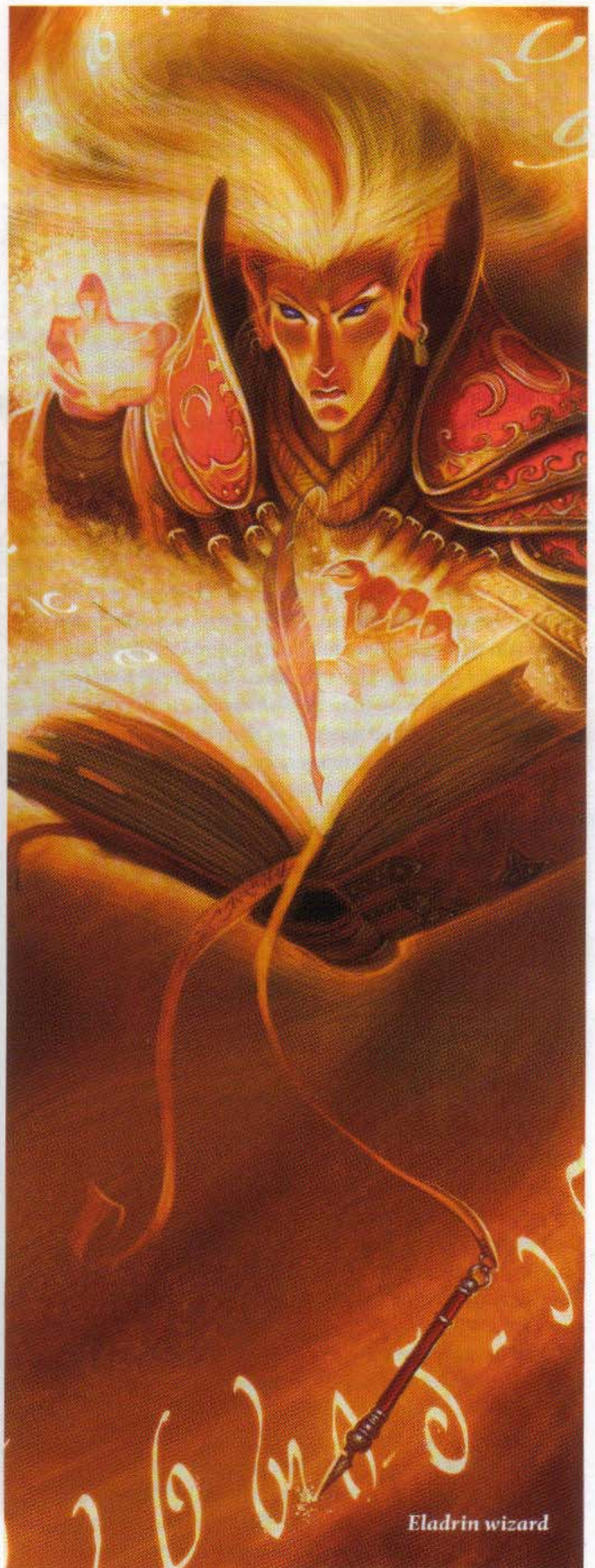
Like the world of humankind, the Feywild is a place of darkness interrupted by tiny, flickering points of light—but in the Feywild those are more like points of twilight. Even the beautiful palaces of the eladrins can be welcoming in daylight but places of terror when the sun fades from view.

## ELADRIN SOCIETY

—Dave Noonan

Whether an eladrin calls the Feywild cities or a white tower amid a human city home, he or she grows up in an extended family group known as a *house*. Most eladrins use their house name as a surname: Jauri Risingstar and Eledria Risingstar are both scions of House Risingstar, for example, even if they're only distantly related by blood. Each house has its own heraldic crest that's embroidered into a robe or tabard and used on pennants and other decorations.

Houses tend to be quite large, often numbering hundreds of eladrins due to their three-century life span. The long life span also explains why eladrin communities have simpler political structures than other races. A lord or lady may govern an eladrin domain for two centuries or more—a continuity of leadership that the short-lived races can't match. Conflicts over succession are more rare, and an eladrin ruler can draw on a vast reserve of experience when responding to a crisis. For exactly the same reasons, however, an eladrin lord is likely to be a conservative ruler. If you tell him of an invading army of orcs, it's likely that Lord Tynal of Shinaelestra will handle it same way he did five decades ago. Human diplomats find it hard to negotiate with the high elf realms because they're often told, "If we're at an impasse, that's fine. We'll bring the matter up with your grandchildren."



Eladrin wizard

# ELVES

—Dave Noonan

Quick to laughter and quick to anger, the impulsive elves temper their wild hearts with compassion and courage. They are a physically gifted race: slender, handsome or beautiful, and astonishingly agile and swift of foot. They are brave warriors, superb archers, and masters of the secret magic of nature that surrounds all living things. Elves make their homes in wild places of great beauty, building shelters and settlements amid the woodlands that are virtually invisible to travelers who lack their woodcraft and keen senses.

Ages ago, elves and eladrins were a single race, the people of the Feywild—the twilight world of faerie that exists alongside the world of humankind. The eladrins were fascinated by magic and the high lore of making, becoming skilled builders, artisans, and wizards. The elves loved the simple beauty of the natural world far more than the works of their own hands and minds, and they drifted apart from their more settled kinfolk. They became a race of wanderers and hunters, rarely building permanent homes or even living in the same place for more than a few months at a time. Other folk sometimes refer to the eladrins as “high elves” and the forest-dwellers of the world as “wood elves.”

Elves long ago spurned the cities and havens of the eladrins for the natural wonders of the wilderness—usually the deep forests of the world. There they dwell, stalking owlbears in the Howling Forest, leaping among the cascading waterfalls of the Durkellwood, and dancing within the hidden glades of Daggermoor. Their tribes wander the vast wilds of the world, crossing over into the Feywild or exploring the borderlands of the settled races when their curiosity leads them there. No matter how far their travels take them, they always seem to find their way back to familiar forests from time to time.

A typical elf community is a semi-nomadic tribe, building a treehouse village of living wood in a particular stretch of forest, then savoring the natural splendors of that place for a few seasons or years before their collective wanderlust takes the tribe elsewhere, searching for a new place where they can set down roots for a time.

And because elves are as long-lived as their eladrin cousins, those wanderings can go far indeed. An individual elf could spend a decade in the jungles of the Haruani Archipelago, then spend another year climbing Mount Keannor, a season living among the humans in one of their cities, and another decade tracing the overgrown paths through the Feywild that connected the cities in the ruined realm of Cendriane. She might not see tribe or family for two decades, but

it's likely that most of them will still be alive when she returns. Even if her great-grandfather is a century old, that elf could wander for 200 years and find him still alive when she came back to the tribe.

A chieftain, chosen by consensus during a collective trance-ritual, leads each elf tribe. Tribes are generally named after a geographic feature or a plant: the Whitepeak Tribe, the Oakroot tribe, or the People of the Shadow-Glade, for example. Within a tribe, each family unit takes an animal as a totem or mascot: the Falcons, the Wolves, the Owls, and so on. Elves don't usually use surnames, but when necessary they're equally likely to adopt their tribe name or their family mascot as a surname.

Unlike eladrins, who are often reserved and scholarly, elves love simple pleasures. They are plainspoken, quick to jest and laugh, and disinclined to tie themselves down to dull or unpleasant tasks. An elf tribe is far more egalitarian than an eladrin haven, a dwarven clan, or a human barony. Any member has the right to speak his mind to the chieftain (or anyone else, for that matter). Elves are blunt, but they're keen enough observers to avoid being rude—most of the time, anyway.

If anything is capable of souring an elf's compassionate and lighthearted nature, it's the presence of the drow: midnight-skinned creatures who dare to call themselves elves, yet long ago betrayed their entire race after being seduced by the lies of Loth, Demon Queen of Spiders. From their sinister cities beneath the earth—where elves and eladrins banished them after a long war that left many eladrin cities in ruin and great forests burned to ash—they hatch evil plots full of malice and revenge toward elf and eladrin alike.

Beyond the drow, other enemies abound. Goblins (and hobgoblins and bugbears, of course) have fought many wars against elves. Goblins build their fortress-cities wherever they can, but they favor dark forests whose gloomy shadows shelter them from the sun. They are eager to despoil and poison the woods they occupy, shaping these forests to their own tastes. Elves detest the wanton ruin and cruel excesses of goblinkind and will not hesitate to wage a long, merciless war to drive out any goblin band that claims part of a forest where the elves roam. For their own part, goblins have learned to fear and hate elven arrows, and deliberately pollute and burn the woodlands to drive the elves away.

The elves aren't without friends. Elves can call upon ancient fey allies, such as centaurs or dryads, to aid them. And elves are generally friendly toward humans, dwarves, and halflings—even if humans are maddeningly inconsistent, dwarves are dour killjoys, and halflings too sly for their own good.

Due to the unifications that occurred during the last human empire, most human settlements include at least a few elves.

**Elf ranger,  
concept art and final**



# ELVES

—Continued

## RECONCEPTING THE ELVEN LOOK

—Richard Baker

If you take a look at the height and weight suggested for elf characters in previous editions, you'll discover that elves used to be exceptionally small and slight. It wasn't unusual for elf characters to stand only about 5 feet tall and weigh less than 90 pounds—about the size of a typical 12-year-old. It's hard to make a character of that stature look slender and graceful without making him or her extremely small, at least as compared to the humans, dwarves, or half-orcs in the party. So we decided to revisit elf stature for the new edition.

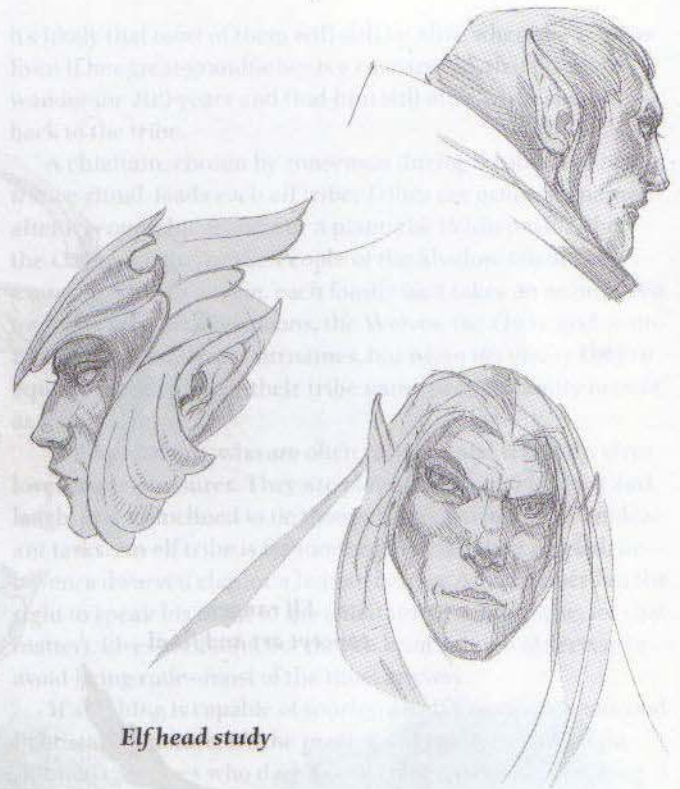
Core to the elves is the notion of elven grace—and if you're going to designate a race as particularly graceful, then they should have a physique that looks graceful. A male elf, no matter how strong, will never look like a linebacker. At most, that elf will have the chiseled but still lean physique of a lightweight boxer. That aspect of the elven “look” is key for reasons of identification. Elves now stand about as tall as humans do, or even a little taller. And they're athletic, not emaciated. They have the long legs and light builds of born runners.

Elves retain several of their distinguishing characteristics from earlier editions, most notably the pointed ears and the slight tilt to the eyes. And elf males don't have facial hair. They're not effeminate; they're lean, athletic, and clean-shaven. That's not to say that elves never look feminine—female elves sure do!

## DESIGNING THE ELVEN ALPHABET

—Daniel Reeve

Elven had to be graceful and flowing, so a curved script immediately suggested itself. Initial attempts had a flamelike

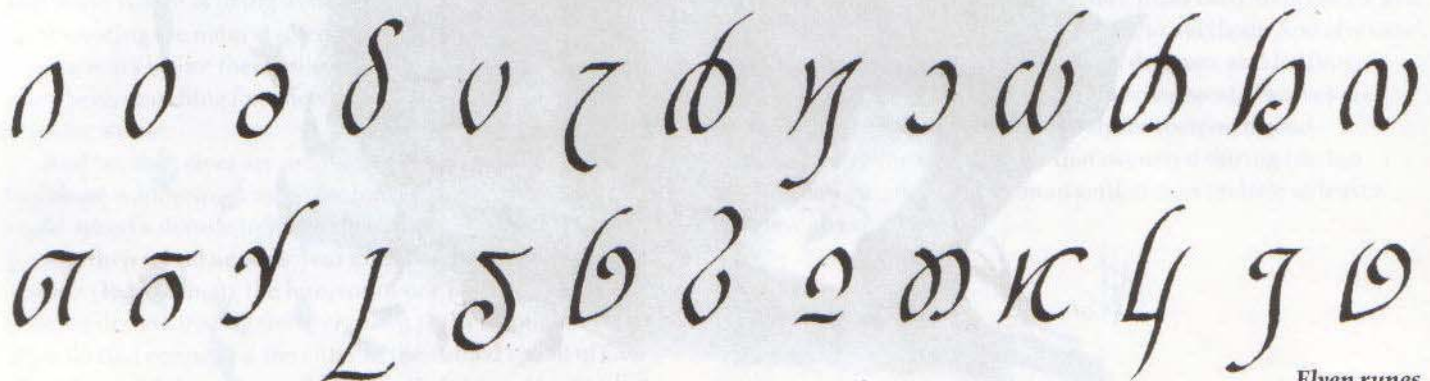


Elf head study

appearance, with ascenders and descenders lending a motif from the limbs of a recurve bow, but the overall effect was not quite convincing. Many of the characters seemed “forced.”

To create 26 unique characters, plus 10 more for numerals, one must arrive at a sufficient level of complexity of curves and lines while adhering to a style. A glance at some Malayalam script reminded me that it is perfectly acceptable to divide a character's “cell” space vertically (as with Latin “M,” or “W”), as well a horizontally (like Latin “E,” or “B”), and that the strokes forming a character are allowed to cross over themselves, forming more complex shapes than just simple open or closed curves.

Bearing this in mind, I created a fresh script in a single creative burst with the calligraphy pen, allowing loops and curves to flow freely from the nib. The resulting characters have a consistent style, and the italic slant lends a nice flow to the writing. Calligraphic flourishes suggest themselves easily when writing this script by hand.



Elven runes

The new alphabet also improved on the first draft by using finer lines, with less difference between thick and thin strokes. This adds to the elegance and gracefulness of the script.

The numerals came in a second burst, the only restriction being that they should each occupy a similar amount of vertical and horizontal space.

## ALL YESTERDAY'S SUBRACES

—Richard Baker

Somewhere around twenty years ago, the D&D game started to suggest differences between varieties of dwarves and elves. Dwarves were either hill dwarves or mountain dwarves; elves were high elves, wood elves, or gray elves. Of course there were drow too, so that suggested the dwarves might have an evil variety, and thus the duergar were born. Different campaign worlds came up with unique and flavorful names for these varieties, and different abilities too, making even more subraces. So before we knew it, we had a game with a dozen varieties of elves and just as many dwarves—and most had different mechanical characteristics from the basic elf, turning one character race into a dozen.

For 4th Edition, we decided to take a big step back from that. We decided that most of the differences between different types of elves (drow excluded) were cultural, not physical. We

could retain the notion of two elven races. The D&D game has always boasted two very strong iconic themes for elf characters: the woodland ranger and the highly cultured wizard. Therefore we narrowed the field of elf subraces down to two entries that matter: high elf and wood elf. Gray elves, sun elves, moon elves—they're all high elves. Wild elves, wood elves, green elves—they're all just elves.

Given the story we'd settled on for the high elves (a race of fey lords who live in castles in Faerie), it seemed that it would actually be counterproductive to also bring forward the eladrin into the new edition (a race of fey lords who live in Arborea, a plane that looks a lot like Faerie). In a sense, eladrin and high elves were competing for the same conceptual space, so we chose to combine them into a single race of fey lords and made the Feywild their home. The name "eladrin" became available to use as the name of the "high elf" player character race. Now there are three races—not subraces—of elvenkind, and each is equally distinct from the others: Drow, Eladrin, Elf.

By comparison, at the close of 3rd Edition, the elven subraces that had appeared in various D&D sourcebooks included elves, Aerenal elves, aquatic elves, avariel, drow, moon elves, painted elves, snow elves, star elves, sun elves, Valenar elves, wild elves, and wood elves. And we probably missed a couple.

Elf, Eladrin, and Drow





# HALFLINGS

—Bruce Cordell

When the sun-hot strife between gods and primordials was barely cooled, the goddess of the moon, Sehanine, and the god of the wilderness, Obad-Hai, were drawn to each other. A tempestuous affair ensued, and before the two separated forever, a love gift was fashioned from the moon's dreams and the undisciplined glens and rivers of the world: the halfling race. The goddess of luck looked upon the fruit of Sehanine and Obad-Hai's abandoned effort and was delighted. Within the newborn halfling race stirred a spirit of adventure that could never be sated, and a devil-may-care attitude that surrendered their hopes and desires to luck as much as any knowledge or artifice.

Curious and active, open but secretive about their internal dealings, halflings are quick and resourceful wanderers, small in stature but great in courage. They are an athletic race known for their ingenuity, quick wits, and steady nerves. Despite their lesser size, halflings have stout hearts and the ability to stand up to punishment that few could scarce credit.

Halflings benefit from a nomadic, world-spanning culture that has survived thousands of years, including the rise and fall of several empires. When other races saw their great empires topple, found their deals with extra-mortal entities go bad, or were enslaved by terrible monsters, halflings survived



Halfling  
rogue

unchanged. Their oral histories contain a vast amount of lore about people and places long past, especially remnants still found in the world of today.

Bound by traditions and customs that have served them well for thousands of years, halflings place great importance on being friendly to other peaceful societies and on sharing both the burdens and rewards of fortune. Among their own kind, halflings settle easily into their customary interactions, which are characterized by a more serious and practical mien.

Halflings don't collect themselves in kingdoms or realms, and they don't recognize any sort of royalty or nobility. Instead, halflings organize themselves by clans, groups tied together by family relationships. Thus, the head of a clan is also the head of a family. Clan elders are expected to look after their own folk. Families many miles distant from each other keep in touch by means of avian couriers and messengers, so most halflings in any given area are quite well informed about what's going on all around them. Clans move around with the seasons to avoid trouble, to find better fishing and hunting, to visit a distant family group, to relocate their water caravan to a new center of trade, or simply to live someplace different. In their travels, clans pass knowledge on to others they meet, exchange members via marriage, and reestablish relationships with clans with whom they have been out of touch.

The fine points of clan law varies from one family clan to another, but in most cases a halfling is technically a member of both the mother's and father's clan at birth. Upon reaching maturity, a halfling must formally declare between the two clans and adopt the family name of the chosen clan. However, ties between both clans remain close.

Clan elders are chosen by acclaim every so many years, depending on a particular river caravan's luck and happiness—the less happy, the more often new clan elders are chosen. The title elder is more ceremonial than accurate—any halfling can be an elder as long as he or she is at least twenty-four years old. Clan elders hand down family law, mediate in disputes between members, and provide general direction to the clan's activities. No set number of clan elders exists—more elders are elected whenever it seems too much work has fallen upon the shoulders of too few. Sometimes clan elders from disparate clans meet to pass on important warnings; however, such information is normally trusted to standard means of dispersing information.

Always roaming, halflings are at home in any land but call no land their own. Through their constant travels, usually via waterways and marshlands, few peoples have learned more of the world and what goes on upon its face than halflings. Where most other races find their peace in a domicile lived in by generations of parents and grandparents, or in sturdy-built homes deep in the earth that hardly change at all over the centuries, halflings find peace in the act of traveling. Instead of being wearied by days of paddling canoes, pushing rafts, riding rapids, and pulling barges, halflings are rejuvenated by such activity. Halflings are not much for riding or traveling by hard, dusty roads; river trips are their preferred means of touring.



Halffling riverboat

The river offers routes to places near and far. Halffling water-caravans can be found traveling up or down a river or tributary subsisting on trade, entertainment, and sometimes graft.

When a halffling water caravan ties up its many craft to the piers of an established community, halffling merchants, day laborers, tricksters, and entertainers jump from their boats, eager for the day. At the same time, those remaining with the boats begin songs of labor as they get to work patching holes, mending sails, and performing other repair work, already anticipating the next leg down or up the river.

Some of the halfflings who disembark from a river caravan hire themselves onto nearly any enterprise, including masonry, farming, guard duty, or even as companions on perilous, one-off quests into the wilderness. Others who have salable skills of their own seek the local marketplace to offer their services, be it brewing, weaving, cobbling, or leatherworking. A few who've bought lots of merchandise from somewhere farther up or down the river try to sell or trade their wares, sometimes even setting up temporary stalls from which to do business.

Halfflings are also powerfully drawn to games of chance and luck, and in such games tend to do so well that others sometimes suspect them of being a race of cheaters. While it's true that

halfflings are not above a trick or two, their natural luck is more than enough to put them over the top in many a game. Even when halffling proclivities for winning and tricks is known, there always seems to be those of other races eager to "match wits" with halffling dice masters, and card sharks who believe their own luck and the stories their sycophants feed them. Some even win a hand or two, but usually halfflings come out on top.

When halfflings deal with the population of a community they're visiting, they present a plucky, affable face to outsiders. They possess an easy-going, friendly, optimistic, and curious demeanor. This behavior isn't a false front, but instead is their natural inclination outside the bounds of their traditional culture. Halfflings are also known for the favors and great deals they sometimes accord their buyers. Such favors can take the form of aid to those in need, discounts on services for those who have little to spend, and small gifts to people who have treated them especially kindly—or unkindly. While it is probably true that such halffling good will is merely part and parcel of a halffling personality, such actions go a long way toward maintaining the feelings of good will most other races feel toward this diminutive people. If halfflings were known to be a race of liars and swindlers, no community would allow an itinerant water caravan to set up camp.

# HALFLINGS

—Continued

Of course, it should be noted that halflings' happy-go-lucky view of the world sometimes comes across in a less than positive light to other, more conservative peoples. Owning only a minimal amount of property themselves, halflings look at others' possessions in a "different" light. To some halflings, the fact that another creature "owns" a particular object is less relevant than how soon the halfling in question might "find" that same object himself. Thus, halflings have also acquired something of a reputation for being prone to theft—but from a halfling's point of view, such action is a result of a powerful curiosity, not outright dishonesty. When halflings do sell the proceeds of illicitly gotten gains, they do so with the belief that they've merely redistributed resources to where they were able to do the most good to those most in need.

Then again, not all halflings are motivated by curiosity and an honest spirit of fun to do tricks. There exists the rare halfling who fully understands the ethics of larceny, deception, and the profits crime can accumulate if such activities are never discovered. Such a halfling is motivated more by greed than curiosity. When such halflings are discovered operating within the confines of a halfling water caravan, they are exiled and

can never return to the river-born life. Messages bearing the description of the offender are sent to all other nearby halfling caravans, lest the offender attempt to take up with them. These halflings may seek another caravan, though most decide to live permanently within the bounds of a human city so they can continue to pursue their questionable ways.

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE HALFLING

—Dave Noonan

In the beginning (which we'll call 1974), halflings were hobbits straight out of Tolkien. The D&D game—at that point three booklets and some reference sheets costing \$10—even called them hobbits. But then D&D made the transition from an overgrown hobby to a full-fledged product line, and by 1977 all the hobbits became halflings.

Throughout the 1970s and the early 1980s, the D&D halflings still looked and acted like something right out of the Shire—they were often a little plump and they walked around with their fuzzy feet bare. Most of them were thieves, a class that's conceptually similar to what we'd call a rogue today.

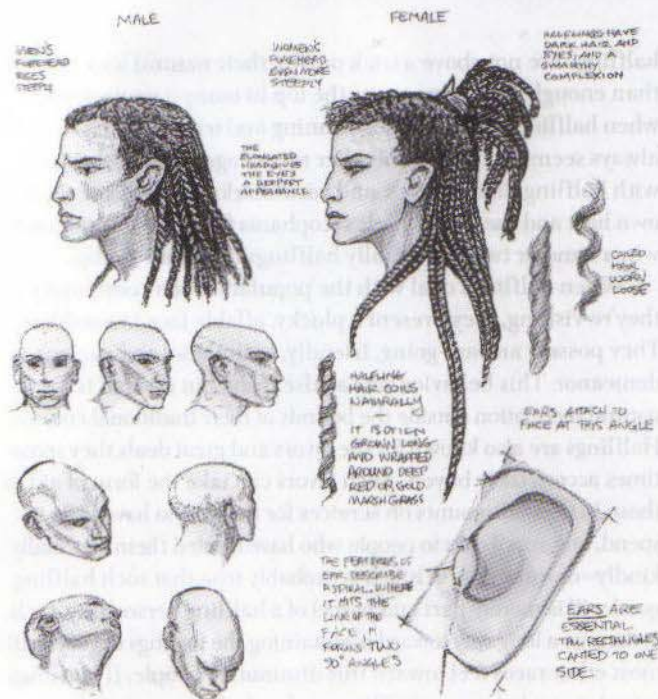
In the mid-1980s, halflings started to move away from the Tolkien vision—spurred on by tens of thousands of D&D players. Bilbo Baggins might have been a reluctant thief, but D&D tables everywhere were full of mischievous, wisecracking, and *enthusiastic* halfling thieves. The players drove D&D halflings into new territory, and the little fellows became a key repository for much of the game's humor.

The look of halflings started to change, too. Subraces emerged: the traditional hairfeet, the somewhat dwarflike stouts, and the tallfellows, who were associated with the elves and were only tall when compared to hairfeet and stouts.

Then came the DRAGONLANCE version of the halflings: kender, a diminutive, vaguely elfin race. Talk about a race designed for a mischievous player—kender are impossibly curious, utterly fearless, and they have an instinctive desire to "borrow" things from the pockets and backpacks of whomever is standing nearby. Some players embraced the kender, while others found them a little too far in the "comic relief" territory. Whether the antics of the kender PC at your D&D table were hilarious or annoying tended to determine how you felt about the kender as a whole.

With the onset of 3rd Edition D&D in 2000, a consensus quickly emerged: retain the halfling's natural enthusiasm, but shade them a little darker than the kender so they could be more than comic foils. Get them out of their comfortable homes, and for heaven's sake let them wear boots like everyone else. Halflings became nomadic and had a measure of whimsical trickery—but whimsy that could turn sinister at a moment's notice. Their visual identity changed, too. Halflings got the lithe physique of gymnasts rather than the portly physique of rustic gentleman farmers.

As we began our work on 4th Edition, we decided that we still liked the 3rd Edition look and feel of halflings—but we needed to continue to evolve the halfling role and appearance in the game.



Halfling head study

## How Small Is Small?

—Richard Baker

One thing we got wrong in 3rd Edition was halfling size. As it turns out, someone who is barely three feet tall is really, really small. A halfling who is three feet tall and thirty-five pounds is only about as big as a typical three-year-old. I have two kids, and I remember when they were that small. I pointed out to my teammates on several occasions that I could not imagine how many preschoolers it would take to beat me (or any good-sized adult) in a tug-of-war. You can assume that adult halflings are two or three times stronger than human children of the same size, and it's still hard to believe that a halfling warrior would really stand a chance against a monstrous savage marauder like a gnoll or orc.

So we decided that we would let halflings get closer to the size of 9- or 10-year-old kids. That means about four feet tall and roughly 65 pounds. That's still not very big, but certainly less of a stretch than before.

Besides, it means that we can make our Small-sized halfling miniatures about two-thirds the height of our human miniatures and give them proportional athletic builds. They'll just look better at that size. We've been quietly filling out and growing our halfling miniatures for a while now anyway.



Halfling  
fighter

## LIFESTYLE AND SOCIETY

—Richard Baker

Halflings are waterfolk, skilled boatbuilders and fishers. Halflings don't live in caravan wagons; they live in large clans aboard keelboats, barges, and rafts. They are the far-ranging traders who control the best roads in the world, and they have a knack for providing their trading partners with whatever commodity or expertise their friends lack. Halflings provide foodstuffs to the dwarven stronghold, metalworking skills for the elven village, and hand-worked leather and pelts for the nearby human town.

Halflings are still an affable and easygoing people, but they know how to stand up for themselves when they need to. To master the difficult environment they have chosen to live in, they have gained a great respect for and understanding of the natural world around them. They frequently domesticate animals and birds to serve as scouts, messengers, guards, and workers.

While other races build permanent cities and try to raise up great empires, the world's halflings form a sort of "invisible empire" from sea to sea. All clan leaders are more or less equal, and all the clans in a particular region or kingdom confer with each other when any one of them is faced with a decision that might affect all halflings.

Because halflings haven't raised many empires, they haven't suffered any great racial reversals like bigger folk. Halfling culture and tradition is quite old, stretching back for thousands of years. Their legends and tales recall people, places, and events that other races no longer remember.

## WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

—Richard Baker

Elves and dwarves have always been tied to specific terrain types in D&D. Forests with elven tree-cities and mountains with dwarven fortresses are a staple of the game setting. Of the major nonhuman heroic races, halflings have always lacked a native terrain. It leaves them oddly flavorless compared to the others.

In thinking about possible terrains halflings might like, we quickly discarded forests and mountains (that's where the other races live), hills (too much like mountains), and plains (not very distinctive, really). So, what's left? Marshes and swamps.

At first blush, it might seem that looking at halflings as marsh-dwellers is not very interesting. We tend to see people who live in swamps as backwater rubes. But when you think about it, halflings have good reasons to live in swamps. First of all, marshes and swamps are waterways that provide access to coasts and rivers—and rivers are the best roads in the world in a nonindustrialized society. Second, marshes and swamps offer excellent defensive terrain. They present hiding places and impede the movement of most attackers. Finally, marshes and swamps are filled with life and offer lots of opportunities for hunting, gathering, and fishing.

# TIEFLINGS

—Bruce Cordell

Sundered from humanity by their ancestors' overweening ego, tieflings are a race whose bloodline stems from an infernal bargain made nearly a millennia ago.

Lacking any knowledge of their creator and without a purpose instilled by a caring maker, humanity determined its own purposes, but often only by accident. Unpredictable and adaptable, this strangely malleable race claims many an ancient and long vanished empire. One such empire birthed the tiefling race.

Do you recall the whispered stories of Bael Turath? The empire of Bael Turath's reach exceeded its grasp, but the empire's ruling nobility were addicted to their own power and glory. They vowed they would retain their rule, no matter the consequences, no matter the cost, no matter what they had to give up. Even their own humanity.

Bael Turath's brash promises were heard in a distant, burning realm amid the silvery Astral Sea . . . a realm called the Nine Hells.

Whispered secrets slithered into the dreams of those who thirsted most for the continued dominion of Bael Turath, and upon waking, the red-eyed dreamers repeated their visions in the day's wan light. Those visions were instructions for how the nobility could achieve its ends. A grisly month-long ritual would be required, one that every living ruling house of the empire needed to participate in if the desired effect was to be achieved. The ritual included unsavory and terrible deeds that had to be enacted by each of its participants.

A few houses, even in decadent Bael Turath, refused. These houses were exterminated, and the remaining houses conducted their ritual without naysayers to question their grim certainty.

The ritual began in darkness and blood, and deep into the small hours of the second night, the first devil appeared from Hell's iron doors. The first was followed by others, each more terrible than the last, and to each pacts were sworn by the power-mad leaders of Bael Turath. Infernal bargains were avowed with names such as the Scarlet Claw of Hunger, the Iron Crown of Madness, Night's Loving Void, and the Million Pains of Eternal Torment. Though hardly remarked upon at the time of their swearing, the pacts bound not only the nobility present in the hideous ritual, but also promised to mark the descendants of every one present, even unto their last generation, so that no one would ever forget what Bael Turath had agreed to.

And so was born the tiefling race.

Flush in the power of its new-made pacts, fully comprehending the power granted by those pacts that later generations would mostly forget, Bael Turath recklessly expanded its lands. The nobles ruled their empire in the name of various infernal masters and patrons. They called down hellfire, curses, and eldritch power to scour those who resisted them, those who angered them, and in the end, those who seemed likely to make amusing victims.

Thus, Bael Turath became an evil blot on the past, and many annals of human history conveniently forget to recall that the empire's infernal reign began in human hands and that human ego alone bred the Hell-Chained Empire. Instead, histories merely speak of the sudden appearance of tieflings and leave all mention of human involvement out of the picture, though learned sages know the truth.

Bael Turath's expansion eventually led it into direct contact with the dragonborn empire of Arkhosia. Arkhosia's power and history was no less grand and storied than that claimed by the shadow of Bael Turath. Neither empire would yield anything to the other. Border skirmishes grew with each passing year, sometimes breaking into full-scale wars, including the War of Teeth, the War of Wings, and the War of Ruin.

Some of the most appalling battles in history were fought between Bael Turath and Arkhosia during their wars. Legends recall the terrible Battle for Razortear in the final War of Ruin. Razortear was a fortified Arkhosian garrison, one of three strategically defensible locations on Arkhosia's border. Bael Turath decided to attack Razortear. The tiefling generals knew they would not be able to storm past the garrison and into the Arkhosian heartland, but they felt that in defending Razortear, the dragonborn would stretch their resources to the breaking point. And so when winter's winds blew coldest, Bael Turath darkened the ground with half a million warrior-slaves—each company led by a sub-prince of Hell itself—against Razortear, which was defended only by a tenth that number of dragonborn soldiers.

The resultant siege lasted ten full years. The battle finally concluded when the tiefling general Achazriel completed the tunnel she'd started digging when the siege was initiated, one large enough to move a hundred thousand troops through quickly. With Achazriel in the lead, Bael Turath finally secured Razortear, but at a cost so devastatingly brutal in lives, resources, and even will, that history marks this conflict as the beginning of the end for both imperial nations.

Ultimately, both empires fell into ruin. No stone was left standing atop another in Bael Turath's grand capital. Even the buried Athenaeum of Bael Turath, where the texts of each original pact were inscribed in burning fire on guarded iron shrines so they could never be forgotten and their full power lost, was destroyed. Bael Turath's few surviving noble houses scattered, weeping and cursing, their power lost and their dreams turned to ash.



**Tiefling warlock,  
concept art and final**



# TIEFLINGS

—Continued

Over the centuries, even the name of Bael Turath was mostly forgotten by all but a few lore keepers and racial zealots—the bulk of the tiefling race is shorn of all but the broad outlines of its past. Most tieflings know they are the heirs of a lost empire. Those who want to portray tieflings in the worst possible light say the tiefling bloodline is tainted by the ill-considered dealings and diabolical connections of their ancestors.

This taint, or mark as others prefer to call it, visibly manifests and passes like a curse to each new generation. In many ways, tieflings are human—they can bear children with humans, though the result of such pairings is always a tiefling. The infernal bloodline gets passed on, though the culture of Bael Turath is completely stamped out, except in a few hidden-away places as mumbled prophecies and unlikely dreams. Today, tieflings have no realms of their own but instead live within human kingdoms and cities.

When tieflings are spied in a city thronging with other peoples, they appear human at a distance. Tiefling hair and specific body shape and configuration share the same wide range of variation that humans possess, though a closer look reveals obvious discrepancies. Their small horns on their brow, their thin tails, their pointed teeth, and eyes the color of burning coals “accent” their human appearance, while their infernal legacy lends them an unearthly air that others either

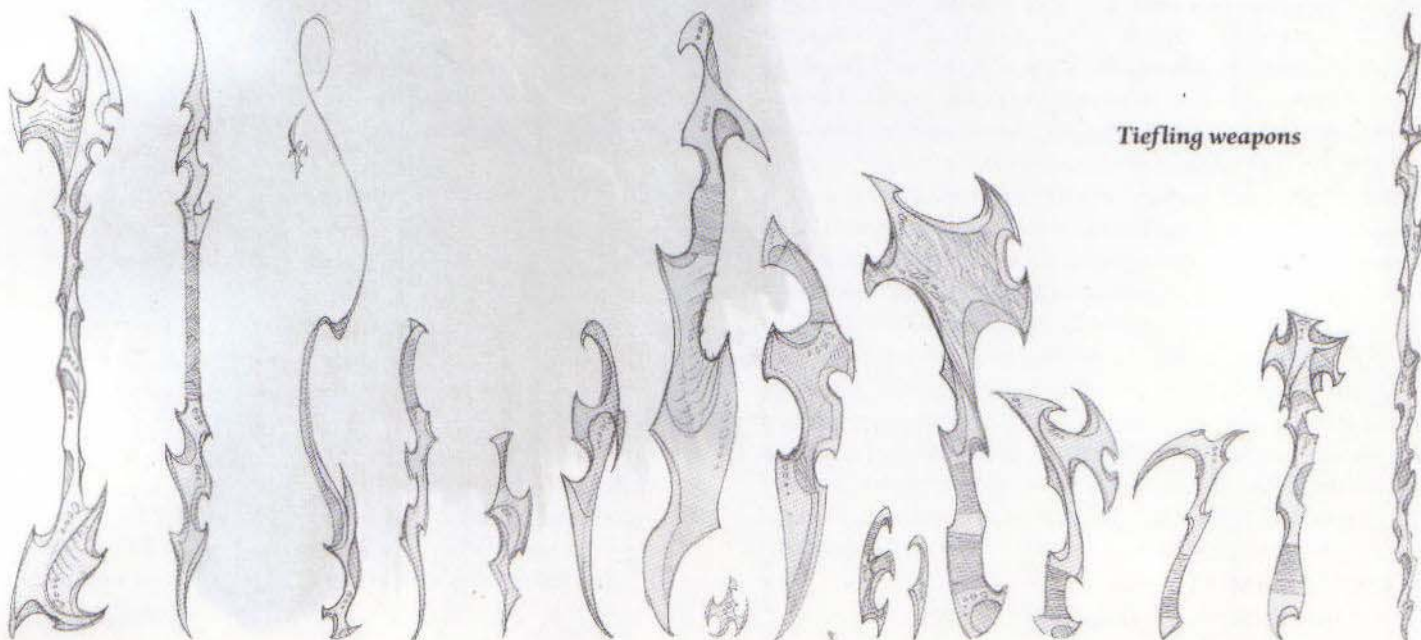
## CULTURAL APPEARANCE OF ITEMS

—Chris Perkins

The attire and weaponry of the tieflings is influenced by their diabolic heritage as well as human culture. While tieflings adopt human attire and use human weapons as a means of blending in with their surroundings, a few of them gain access to “infernal-wear” and weapons that humans find mildly to profoundly disturbing. Given that tieflings don’t have their own cities, such distinctive attire and accoutrements are rare . . . but any tiefling with enough gold to spend and an eye for fashion can wear and wield just about anything he or she fancies.

When we sat down to define some of the “unique” items of tiefling culture, we focused mainly on weaponry. Tieflings may live among humans, but they aren’t afraid to let their natural predilection for sharp pointy things manifest in creative ways. Tiefling weaponry is exotic and cruel. The elegant curves of tiefling hell-steel blades can’t hide the nasty serrations and flanges designed to inflict terrible pain going in *and* coming out. What a human might mistake for a twisted shard of metal could easily be a tiefling dagger.

High-level tieflings have much less to fear from angry mobs. Far from bashful, they often shed their common human wardrobe and don specially tailored outfits and armor more reflective of their infernal ancestry, favoring revealing garments and formfitting armor. After all, what’s the point of having horns and a tail if you can’t show them off?



Tiefling weapons



**Tiefling fighter**

find confident and commanding, or scary and arrogant. Their preferred dress also makes them stand apart from the masses; many tieflings favor dark colors and reds, leathers and glossy furs, and small spikes and buckles. Tiefling-crafted arms and armor have a curiously archaic style to them, perhaps harkening back to the glory of their long-vanished empire.

The centuries since the collapse of Bael Turath have forged tieflings into a self-reliant and proud people who are sometimes willing to live up to the expectations of others. As people without a homeland, tieflings know they have to make their own way in the world, and they know they have to be strong to survive. When they do form bonds, the connections are solid and uncompromising.

Though some folk are deeply suspicious of tieflings and generally assume that they grovel before devils in secret, nothing could be further from the truth. Most tieflings give little thought to gods or patrons of any kind, preferring to look out for themselves. Finding little in life to inspire faith, and possibly unconsciously rebelling against the decisions of their ancestors to throw their lot in with supernatural beings, tieflings often lack piety. Therefore, tieflings seldom follow the path of the divine—tiefling clerics or paladins are exceedingly rare.

Tieflings are not very common, and usually live in the shadows of human society. Tieflings are natural bargainers, arrangers, and traders, and they gravitate toward mercantile pursuits, both legitimate and otherwise. Those who are not adventurers often do very well as merchants.

In more rustic environments, folks sometimes get nervous and suspicious at the sight of two or more tieflings in the same place, so most tieflings are loners, scattered to the four winds. In rare cases, an extended family or small clan of tieflings descended from one of the old dynasties of Bael Turath settles in some out-of-the-way manor or estate where wealth can purchase safety and comfort. Such families keep to themselves and rarely interact with others of their kind. Of these hidden enclaves, a few keep the legend of Bael Turath alive. They say the Vault of Pacts wasn't truly destroyed when Arkhosia got its final posthumous revenge. Instead, it was pulled into the deep earth, there (as mostly discredited prophecies foresee) to lie in darkness until the day the New Emperor arises, a tiefling whose destiny it is to forge Bael Turath anew. Whether the New Emperor will stand for good or ill, not even the prophecies know.



# TIEFLINGS

—Continued

## PROMOTION

—Chris Perkins

Tieflings trace their origins back to the 2nd Edition PLANESCAPE® Campaign Setting. With their horns, tails, and wicked tongues, tieflings quickly became the exotic “bad boys” and “bad girls” of the Outer Planes. Sly, sexy, and a little sinister, they afforded D&D players a chance to flirt with the dark side without actually crossing the line into full-blown evil. Why play Drizzt when you could play the great-grandson of a pit fiend?



Tiefling  
body study

Tieflings reappeared in the 3rd Edition *Monster Manual* as one of the “plane-touched,” inexorably bound to their do-gooder cousins, the aasimar. Forgive my bias, but I’ll take horns and brimstone over sunshine and perfection any day. Sometimes it just doesn’t pay to be the super good guy.

In 4th Edition, tieflings finally claim their rightful place among the core races. Including them in the 4th Edition *Player’s Handbook* was an easy, early decision. Their infernal heritage gives them plenty of angst and an excuse to “get medieval” whenever the mood suits them. However, unlike their Machiavellian rivals for coolness, the Underdark-dwelling drow, tieflings are neither confined to the darkness nor afraid to mingle with the surface dwellers. They also carry less evil baggage and enjoy far more autonomy.

In fact, they can pretty much go anywhere they want and do as they please. Players can take the race to either extreme, portraying tieflings that embrace their inner devils spawn as well as tieflings who strive to transcend their twisted heritage and lead honest to semi-honest lives. Or they can play tieflings who walk the line between Good or Evil without fully embracing either. That kind of versatility makes for a great core race and places tieflings on a footing comparable to humans.

Thanks to Bill O’Connor’s amazing powers of illustration, it’s easy to imagine tieflings kicking ass and looking hot in any role. Along with the 4th Edition promotion, we’ve given the race a slight horn-lift and removed the cloven hooves to make boots part of the tiefling wardrobe. Given their diabolical appearance, we’ve also tied the race more closely to devils than demons. Finally, we’ve tweaked the race’s abilities so that tieflings have more to offer than a *darkness* spell once per day. Check out the new *Player’s Handbook* to learn about their newfound, uh, assets.

## TIEFLING SHARED HERITAGE

—Chris Sims

All tieflings issue from the wicked root that was Bael Turath. They’re creatures descended from the devil-tainted rulers of that fallen empire, doomed to carry and pass on fiendish blood. In deciding on this single origin for tieflings in the world, we aimed to make them as easy to use as any other mainstream race.

A common origin meant we could give tieflings a unified appearance, and that look could be edgy instead of ugly. This cohesive origin allows players to imagine what their individual tiefling is like, as they would with a human, without worrying about a list of possible devilish traits. Further, knowing that every tiefling shares a similar body shape makes it easier to write new material for tieflings.

Also of primary importance is allowing a race so obviously touched by evil to get by and even be heroic in the world. Tieflings are obviously fiendish, but to the world at large the evil of Bael Turath is long gone and mostly forgotten. Each tiefling can now be judged on the merits of his or her behavior, rather than the reputation of an evil empire. While a town full of bigots who want to lynch every tiefling might be an interesting part

of a single adventure, a world full of such hatred would make it unfairly hard on a tiefling's player.

The D&D game has always had the niche of the bizarre and dark race to fill, and the need to do so without burdening the DM or the player. The tiefling, with its shared heritage, does that job well.

## IT'S GOOD TO BE BAD

—James Wyatt

Ah, tieflings. Clad in leather jackets, riding noisy motorcycles, full of attitude and confidence—that's how I imagine tieflings in the modern world (or, say, the 1950s of the modern world). They're the bad boys and girls of D&D, and that's a part of their appeal.

Tieflings appeal to the rebel in us all—the part that doesn't want to conform to social norms. Like rebellious teenagers, they express their nonconformity in blatant ways, from their hairstyles to their wardrobes. Even more blatantly, their bodies reflect their fiendish heritage. When you look at a tiefling, you see some trace, at least, of an incarnation of evil. What could be more rebellious?

Playing a tiefling (or a warlock, or a drow or half-orc, or any other “bad boy” of D&D) is different from playing an evil character. Part of the appeal of playing a tiefling is that being a hero is both more challenging and more dramatic when you're overcoming the weight of heritage and stereotype to do it. If Han Solo had burst into the room to save Luke from the Emperor at the end of *Return of the Jedi*, it would have felt contrived. But the fact that Darth Vader, the great villain of the trilogy, sacrificed himself to save his son—that was powerful. Drizzt Do'Urden is a compelling hero because of the evil society he grew up in, the fear and prejudice he faces on the surface world, and the hatred the other drow of Menzoberranzan still hold for him.

It's fun to flirt with danger—to walk the edge of the dark side without crossing over. There's an appeal to playing a character who might not be Evil, but who might be described as “Evil-curious.” It's a chance to give expression to our dark sides, the parts of our own personalities that we suppress for the sake of getting along in society. Tieflings almost literally embody that dark side, our shadow selves.

### ARTIST'S COMMENTARY

—William O'Connor

My first reaction to tieflings was mixed since I had no cultural experience with them as with dwarves and elves, so I asked Chris Perkins to tell me who they were. He said, “They are the forsaken people.” That one sentence summed it up, and they became the easiest for me to develop. I wanted them to be dark and mysterious. Cloaked, secretive, and sexy; catlike. The entire aesthetic of the tiefling should undulate. Their association with devils inspired their weaponry. I conceived the idea that if you took normal weapons and melted them in hellfire, what would they look like? Twisted, contorted, almost liquid shapes.



Tiefling  
wizard

## DESIGNING THE TIEFLING

—Bruce R. Cordell

The player character races for the new edition have gone through many iterations. The three largest iterations include the Orcus first draft, the Orcus second draft, and finally the races as they appear currently in the third draft. Of course, even within the third draft of the Orcus rules set, playtesting and development can radically change a race from its initial conception.

For instance, I put together the tiefling racial ability progression (and several other races) during an early phase of the writing of the third draft of Orcus. That particular progression doesn't even have any meaning with the way races now work, months later, but here is how I designed tieflings.

In my conception, each tiefling character would choose one strange ability they would accrue from a list as their character advanced through various levels. Depending on the particular strange physical trait they chose at a particular level, the tiefling would gain some minor ability. Plus, each physical trait chosen opened up a small suite of feats that only a tiefling with that trait could gain.

But after several refinements by at least three other writers, the tiefling of the current draft recalls only echoes of my original, overly complicated planetouched humanoid. For which I'm grateful—the latest version is far superior.

# OTHER RACES

Here are some brief looks at other races we're working on for 4th Edition D&D. Most of these won't appear right out the gate, but will eventually show up in the game.

## CELESTIALS

—Rob Heinsoo

If you're a long-time D&D fan, odds are that you've already noticed that the tieflings' promotion to first-rank player character race has left another race behind: the race that was the tieflings' light-side counterpart, a race of golden humans descended from angels—the aasimar.

Even now I struggle to type that word without spelling it like buttocks.

I'm one of the designers who argued that we should stop using the word "aasimar." In the aasimar's place, you'll meet a race of celestials who have plunged through the same transforming fires as the tieflings.

I won't lie: making Good-associated creatures as exciting as their Evil-curious counterparts is a challenge. I call the challenge the "Ave Maria" problem, a reference to Walt Disney's original *Fantasia*, a wonderful animated film that ended with musical meditations on Evil and Good. Evil got *Night on Bald Mountain*, accompanied by an evil-storm orchestrated by a whip-wielding demon. Good followed up with barely animated candle-bearing keepers of the faith proceeding across the screen singing *Ave Maria*. It's a sweet piece of music, and it certainly speaks to the possibilities of Good, but the animation just didn't hold a candle to lightning storms on Bald Mountain.

So now you know our mission: celestials who sizzle bright enough to hold their own against Bald Mountain lightning storms. We're working on it!

## DROW

—Chris Sims

Elves. Lolth. Spiders. Underdark. Drow are iconic in the D&D game, and we didn't fix what wasn't broken. Drow have changed only to fit into the world of the new edition, evolving in ways that make them more accessible as characters and villains.

Drow are cruel and matriarchal, focused on the dogma of Lolth, their mad spider goddess who was once the deceitful eladrin goddess of shadows and the moon. Lolth took the spider as her symbol, so drow revere all things that share this form.

## FIXING LEVEL ADJUSTMENT

—Richard Baker

One mechanical element of 3rd Edition that we weren't happy with was the concept of level adjustment. While the system seemed simple, it was actually very difficult for inexperienced players to understand. Worse yet, the level adjustment system proved to be absolute poison to low-level characters and any kind of spellcaster. It wasn't unreasonable to choose between being a 14th-level human fighter and a 13th-level genasi fighter, but taking a one-level hit on spell progression was just so bad for spellcasters that players quickly learned to not create genasi wizards and sorcerers. Level adjustment was one of our top fix-it priorities for character race in the new edition.

The solution we adopted has two distinct aspects. First, we decided that race should be more important to your character. Since even basic character races offered more to your character, it was pretty easy for better races to receive the interesting advantages and powers they need to measure up to the source material. In essence, if every PC race is as good as a level adjustment +1 or +2 race, then drow aren't all that much better than humans.

Second, we decided to move some of our powerful races' iconic abilities into feat choices that would not become available until certain levels. For example, everyone knows that drow can levitate and cast darkness. But they don't have to automatically be able to do it at 1st level, do they? Now you decide if you're playing a drow whether or not those abilities are worth a feat pick (and presumably many or most NPC drow make exactly that choice).

Another significant change is that drow are fey, but in type only. Drow don't live in the Feywild, and they don't work with other fey. They live in the Underdark beneath the world, from where they surface regularly to raid and take prisoners.

The most exciting change is that drow will be available as a player character race without any level adjustment. The average drow isn't much more dangerous than a human peasant, because drow gain significant abilities as they gain levels.

Drow who travel are to be feared. They hunt other creatures to serve as sacrifices and slaves within drow communities. When a drow abroad isn't after captives, her agenda can only be darker.

## THE TROUBLE WITH GNOMES

—Matt Sernett

Gnomes lack a strong position in D&D. If you ask someone to name the important races in the world of D&D, gnomes

always seem to come in last. They're elf-dwarf-halfings—a strange mixture of the three with little to call their own besides being pranksters. DRAGONLANCE presented an iconic image of the gnome, but the concept of tinker gnomes and their crazy machines has now been thoroughly used by games such as *World of Warcraft*, and many D&D players dislike the technological element that version of the gnome brings to the game.

So, what to do with the gnome? How can gnomes be repositioned or reinvented so that the race has a unique position in the world?

Early on, we entertained the idea of replacing gnomes with one of the gnome subraces, deep or forest gnomes. Yet each has the same problem as the gnome, only more exaggerated.

Next we considered making gnomes like the whisper gnomes of *Races of Stone* and positioning them more fully with elves. The gnomes would be advisors and spies for the elves, living in concert with them. Yet after some thought, it seemed like this didn't really give the gnomes a place as much as it just threw them in with a more iconic race, and it diminished the elves' coolness to have servants that were also advisors.

We took that idea and placed a dark spin on it. Rather than being associated with elves, gnomes were once the servants of evil fey on the Feywild, having escaped only recently. Most other races would be wary of these dark and dangerous escapees, and with good reason. But we discarded that concept since it took gnomes too far from their roots.

So what are 4th Edition gnomes going to be like? At the time of writing this essay, we've yet to decide.

## WARFORGED

—James Wyatt

Warforged are sort of a metaphor for the state of the world of EBERRON in the wake of the Last War, but that post-war condition is hardly unique to that world. In a core D&D game, the warforged might be an ancient race, perhaps even predating humans—maybe even a prototype for humans! But they were built for war, and in the absence of war they're somewhat at a loss for what to do.

People are often inclined to play warforged as unfeeling robots, but that's not how I see them at all. They're living creatures, and part of living is emotion, attachment, grief, and love. They might have trouble expressing their emotions because of their blank, almost featureless faces, but to my mind, at least, they feel them just as strongly as humans do.

Constructs in 4th Edition don't have the long list of immunities that they do in 3rd Edition, which made it a lot easier to make warforged playable as 1st-level characters. (Other races also got beefed up a bit, so the 1st-level bar is set a little higher.) You can't poison a warforged, but you can paralyze him or sap his strength. They're good at resisting some effects that can hamper other characters, but if you prick them, they bleed—those cords and fibers in their construct bodies carry fluids just as vital to life as blood is to humanoids.

They no longer carry a list of immunities, but warforged are still an attractive option for fighters, paladins, and warlords who can benefit from the stamina and endurance that come with this race.



Warforged  
fighter

# CLASSES OVERVIEW

—Richard Baker

Character classes are the heart of the D&D game. Fighters wear armor and mix it up with monsters in melee. Wizards are fragile but use potent spells to swing entire encounters. Clerics heal and rogues sneak. All those things have been true for 30 years, and they're going to remain true in 4th Edition.

We started our work on character class by identifying the important party roles each class should occupy and identifying the source of power each class is based on. Once we figured out those important distinctions, we examined the mechanical chassis of the character class. What sort of rules did classes need to live up to their roles? How could we improve the basic skeleton of the game?

## IDENTIFYING CLASS ROLES

One of the first things we decided to tackle in redesigning D&D's character classes was identifying appropriate class roles. In other words, every class should have all the tools it needs to



Human warlock

fill a specific job in the adventuring party. Clerics must heal, fighters must lock up monsters in melee to protect weaker characters, and wizards must deal damage to multiple enemies at range. If you want to exchange characters in the party—for example, replacing a cleric with a druid, or a fighter with a paladin—you should still maintain a mix of high-defense characters, healers, and damage dealers. If you drop in a character who can't fill the role of the class he's replacing, you're weakening the adventuring party and damaging the table's fun.

We debated long and hard about which roles actually existed, and which classes corresponded to them. Ultimately, we came up with four important roles.

**Defender:** A character with high defenses and high hit points. This is the character you want getting in front of the monsters and absorbing their attacks. Fighters have been doing this job in D&D for 30 years. Ideally, a defender ought to have some abilities that make him "sticky"—in other words, a defender should be difficult to move past or ignore so that he can do his job.

**Striker:** A character who deals very high damage to one target at a time, either in melee or at range. This is the job we want to move the rogue toward—when she positions herself for a sneak attack and uses her best attack powers, she deals some of the highest damage in the game. Strikers need mobility to execute their lethal attacks and get away from enemies trying to lock them down.

**Controller:** A character who specializes in locking down multiple foes at once, usually at range. This involves inflicting damage or hindering conditions on multiple targets. The wizard is a shining example of this role, of course. Controllers sacrifice defense for offense; they want to concentrate on taking down the enemy as quickly as possible while staying at a safe distance from them.

**Leader:** A character who heals, aids, or "buffs" other characters. Obviously we thought about just calling this role "healer," but we want leaders to do more than simply spend their actions healing other characters. The leader is sturdier than the controller, but doesn't have anywhere near as much offense. The cleric is the classic example. All leaders must have significant healing abilities to live up to their role, as well as other things they can do in a battle.

## ONE PROGRESSION INSTEAD OF FOUR

In 3rd Edition D&D, each character class began with a skeleton consisting of four distinct progressions: Attack Bonus, Fortitude Save, Reflex Save, and Will Save. In 4th Edition, these have been combined into a single level-based check modifier that applies to all of your character's attacks, defenses, and skill

checks. All 10th-level characters have a +5 bonus to AC, all three defenses, attacks, and so on. Naturally, your ability scores, class abilities, and feat selection impact this single progression, so you can expect that a paladin's Fortitude defense will be significantly better than his Reflex defense, and likewise better than the rogue's Fortitude defense. In fact, every class features important attack or defense boosts at 1st level that distinguish their best traits from their ordinary ones.

We think this significantly simplifies character creation and advancement and improves the interaction of characters and monsters. In earlier editions, it was far too easy to accidentally create a monster who could hit the party's fighter at a reasonable success rate but then would never miss the party's wizard—or one who hit the wizard at a reasonable rate, but then could never actually land a hit on the fighter. Characters still have significant and important variations in their attacks and defenses, but it's driven from one simple progression now instead of four.

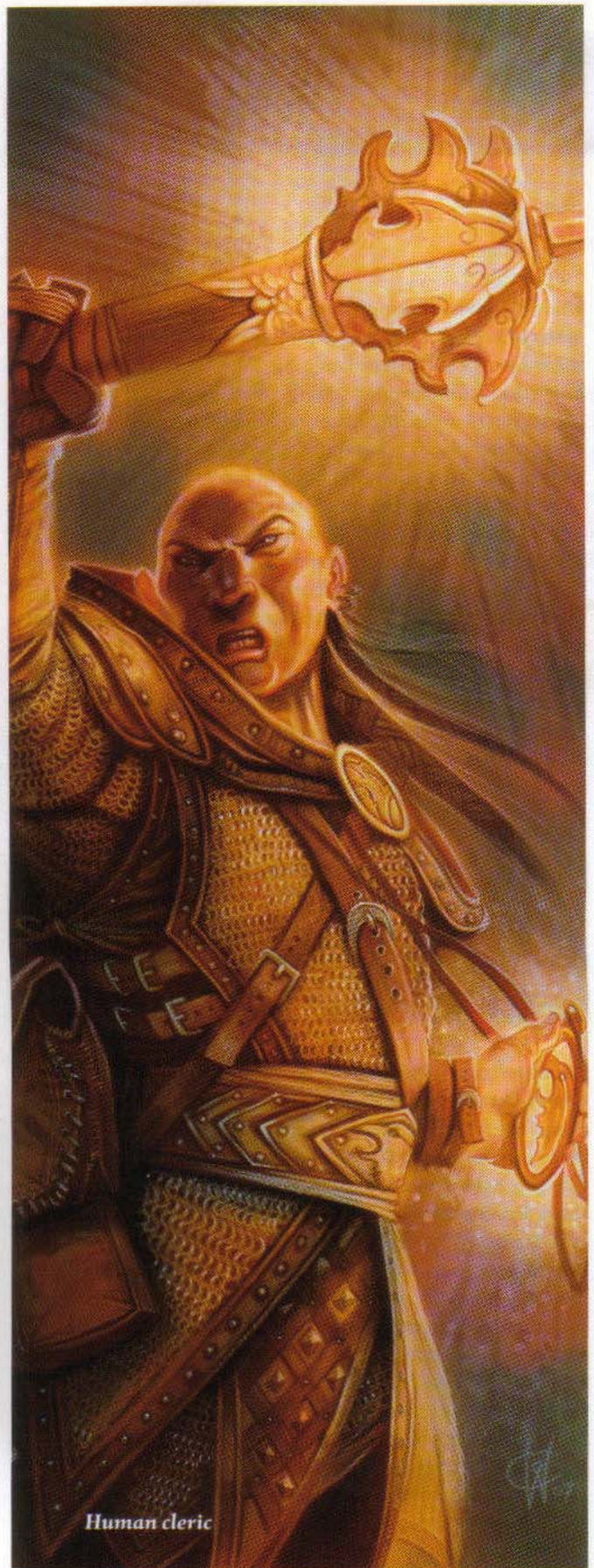
## EVERY CLASS GETS POWERS

Perhaps the single biggest change in 4th Edition D&D is this: Every character class has "spells." In other words, every class has a broad array of maneuvers, stunts, commands, strikes, heroic exploits, or what-have-you to choose from, just like clerics and wizards in previous editions had a wide assortment of spells. Ultimately, a spell, curse, weapon trick, or command is at heart a "power"—a special ability that a character can trigger in a fight.

There are a couple of reasons we decided to do this. First, all previous editions of the game simply placed far too much of the adventuring party's total power in the spell selections of the cleric and the wizard. These classes were simply better than other classes by any objective standard. Characters such as fighters and rogues accompanied the adventuring party to protect the spellcasters while the spellcasters defeated the encounters. We decided to shift to a model in which all characters were equally vital to the party's success. That required offering powers for the fighter and rogue to choose from, just like the cleric and wizard.

Second, choosing and using powers is fun. Fighters in 3rd Edition D&D had many more options than fighters in previous editions thanks to feats such as Power Attack, Spring Attack, and Combat Expertise, but for the most part, fighters still spent 90% of their rounds doing the exact same thing time after time—taking a basic melee attack. A selection of powers to choose from means that fighters now have real choices available to them in combat. From round to round, they decide whether to employ one of their once per encounter abilities, expend a precious once-per-day power, or conserve resources and execute one of the simple at-will attacks they know. Every round is different for the fighter in 4th Edition D&D, and that's lots more fun.

We've also given characters something to add to their power mix at every level, so that a character always gets meaningfully better every time he or she advances a level. There's always a choice, and always something cool to look forward to every time you level up your character—and that just adds to the fun of the D&D game.



Human cleric

# CLERICS

—Chris Sims

Faith has given rise to nations, and it has brought just as many low. As a cleric, you're foremost in anyone's mind when the subject of the divine comes up. You represent your deity as a worldly ambassador, and if you're doing your job correctly, you're an exemplar of your convictions and the duties your patron places upon you. Everything you do reflects upon your sanctified station, so it falls to you to lead the strong along the proper path and to treat the weak and helpless as your religion dictates. Whether you lead from the front, weapon in hand, or direct from the rear, bringing down divine judgment on nonbelievers as those who support you hold the battle line, you're the heart of any group organized around you.

That's where you belong. A cleric's place is leading others to fitting action, meting out succor or retribution according to your beliefs. With authority granted from on high, clerics easily form one sort of central authority for the people of the world. Those who desire the gifts of the gods respect—or at least fear—those the gods have invested with power.

*He doesn't necessarily hit you with his sword arm.  
He hits you with his faith.*

—Andy Collins, March 2006

Strong religion is more conventional among some races than others. Dwarves come to divine service naturally, in veneration of the forge god Moradin for their ancient rescue from slavery to the giants. The dragonborn, deeply traditional as they are, hold their heads high whether in service to Bahamut, the draconic god of honor, or to Tiamat, the draconic deity of vengeance. Eladrins and elves are rarely deeply religious, but eladrins adore magic and so love Corellon, much as the elven love of nature leads elves to revere Obad-Hai. Halflings still remember Avandra's mercy, but much like that goddess, they rely on boldness and luck more than prayers. As might be guessed by their infernal heritage, tieflings are the most at odds with established religious practices, though more than one tiefling has been thrown down as the head of a cult to Asmodeus. Among all the races, the humans' lack of a clear creator make them the most varied in their spirituality.

As a cleric, your place in the world is clear. Common folk of all races defer to priests. Every town, no matter how small, has

a shrine or a temple dedicated to the gods. Larger settlements might support a number of grand houses of worship, some devoted to one particular deity or another. In the shadows, the cults of more sinister divinities thrive. People look to the servants of gentler religions to protect them from the depredations of the wicked. They rely on clerics to teach them and to keep time-honored ways strong.

Your own theology determines how you act in the world. Most clerics are devotees of one deity or another, garnering their mystic power from their god's specific creed. If you adhere to Pelor's code of belief, you alleviate suffering, live as a model of kindness, and protect the innocent from evil. As a shrouded follower of the Raven Queen, you instead revere the natural cycle of life and death, revel in winter, and work as the hand of fate in the world. Devotion to Vecna requires you to keep secrets, corrupt others, and oppose all other gods—without revealing where your loyalty truly lies. Should you choose to worship Erathis, you seek to build and maintain strong communities, to work with others, to uphold laws, and to expand the dominion of civilization.

Unlike a common village minister, though, a cleric's life isn't one of hearth and home, of performing marriages and funerary rites. Clerics are people of action. Going out into the world to bring the color of your devotion, dark or light, into new places is only part of your duty. Your patron will lay other tasks upon you as befits your worthiness. That merit depends on how you live up to your ideals and complete the undertakings your morals require. Yours is a life of seeking and obedience, as well as the life of someone others look to for guidance. Determining what to do in a given situation is as easy as looking to your core philosophy, but what those standards require of someone that possesses your divine might is rarely easy.

Despite the fact that your ethics drive you, they don't entirely define you. Ioun might admonish her clerics to seek lost knowledge and perfection of the mind, but how you follow these teachings can be unique. Certainly a cleric of Kord is brave and strong, but many ways exist to show courage and wisdom. Perhaps you're a purist who follows the ancient ways of a well-established church, but you're still jovial and open to new ways. It could be that you've had a personal visitation or a vision, but you still have doubts as to the truth of your own experience. Maybe the zeal of a true believer runs hot in your veins, fresh from the halls of a newly established cult that has a novel perspective on a customarily dogmatic faith. Even in the same religion, clerics can be as different as any two individuals who share similar beliefs might be.

As one who leads, you have to respect this sort of diversity even if you'd prefer to be among those of like mind. It takes vast array of skills to get some jobs done, and no one person has all it takes when the work is complicated. Few tasks are as thorny as delving into the unknown, protecting the innocent from malevolence, or secretly advancing a higher agenda. As a cleric, you might be called on to do all three and more. You'll need help.

That aid comes in the form of other capable persons who are willing to work with you, even if they're doing so for their own reasons. In recompense for their helping you, you'll no doubt facilitate their aims, as long as those ends aren't counter to your beliefs. A soldierly type is essential for defense, and a good offense is always vital, so you'll need someone for that too. Oh, and don't forget an expert at controlling and clearing wider areas. Your comrades shore up one each other's weak spots. You'll provide plenty of support yourself, using your god-granted talents to heal, protect, and guide your allies. At the same time, you'll be dishing out punishment to those who dare oppose you and your righteous path—righteous, at least, in your eyes.

You're a leader with a cause, your religious devotion differentiating you from secular leaders such as the warlord. And you are a leader, not a true soldier of faith such as the paladin. Although the warlord leads through tactical acumen and motivational force, you do so by keeping your companions alive and fortified through divine aid. A paladin wields godly energy like a hammer, directly pounding foes and shielding his allies through force of personality and direct conflict. You're subtler, using your abilities with craft to ensure success through careful manipulation of the situation with the guidance of your intuition and insight.

Choices you make won't necessarily lock you into a specific niche. They'll just define your style. As you grow in power, your methods can change with you. If you use a weapon, you can emphasize powers that augment your up-in-front approach. You can choose protection over inflicting divine wrath, or vice versa, if your emphasis is more on prayers than battle. Mixing and matching is always possible. Any of these paths will be viable in your life of bold action.

Such daring will be required of you. Exploration and accomplishment won't only develop your expertise and your dedication, but it'll also increase your wealth and the quality of the tools you wield. Magic arms and items add to your arsenal. As you ascend, even your holy symbol, the central instrument of your faith-based powers, can be a magic implement that focuses and expands your abilities, improving their accuracy and adding to your options.

You can be certain, though, that your ascension will attract the attention of your deity . . . and your god's enemies. This might place you and your comrades at the forefront of a divine crusade. You could find more and more that your patron defines your aims, or that the foes of your faith instead lead you onward. You'll never lack a cause. And if your friends find they're in need of some direction, well, you've got just the thing.

Those who take up the cleric's role do so to show the way—to become a leader by knowing how to follow something greater than themselves. Take up the mantle only if you want to lead by example, helping those bold enough to aid you. If fortifying and healing your allies is your way, and you're eager to rain holy wrath on your foes, the cleric's life might be for you. Choose this existence if you prefer devotion and a clear belief structure to mere martial shrewdness and personal ambition.



Halfling cleric

That's not to say that you must be without aspirations. Yours is the power to change the world by your deeds and your influence over those with whom you align yourself. Perhaps you and yours will climb to the pinnacles of legend, defying death itself. Or maybe you'll merely flout the mystery of death, continuing on as a saintly servant to your god after death takes you. Could you even join the divine ranks? Regardless of your path, remember: Mighty heroes of faith are among the most revered.



# CLERICS

—Continued

## CLASS ROLE

—Logan Bonner

The cleric is the archetypal leader. Divine magic grants the cleric numerous ways to increase his allies' combat effectiveness and pull them back from the brink of death. Clerics are known for their devotion, both to their deities and their allies.

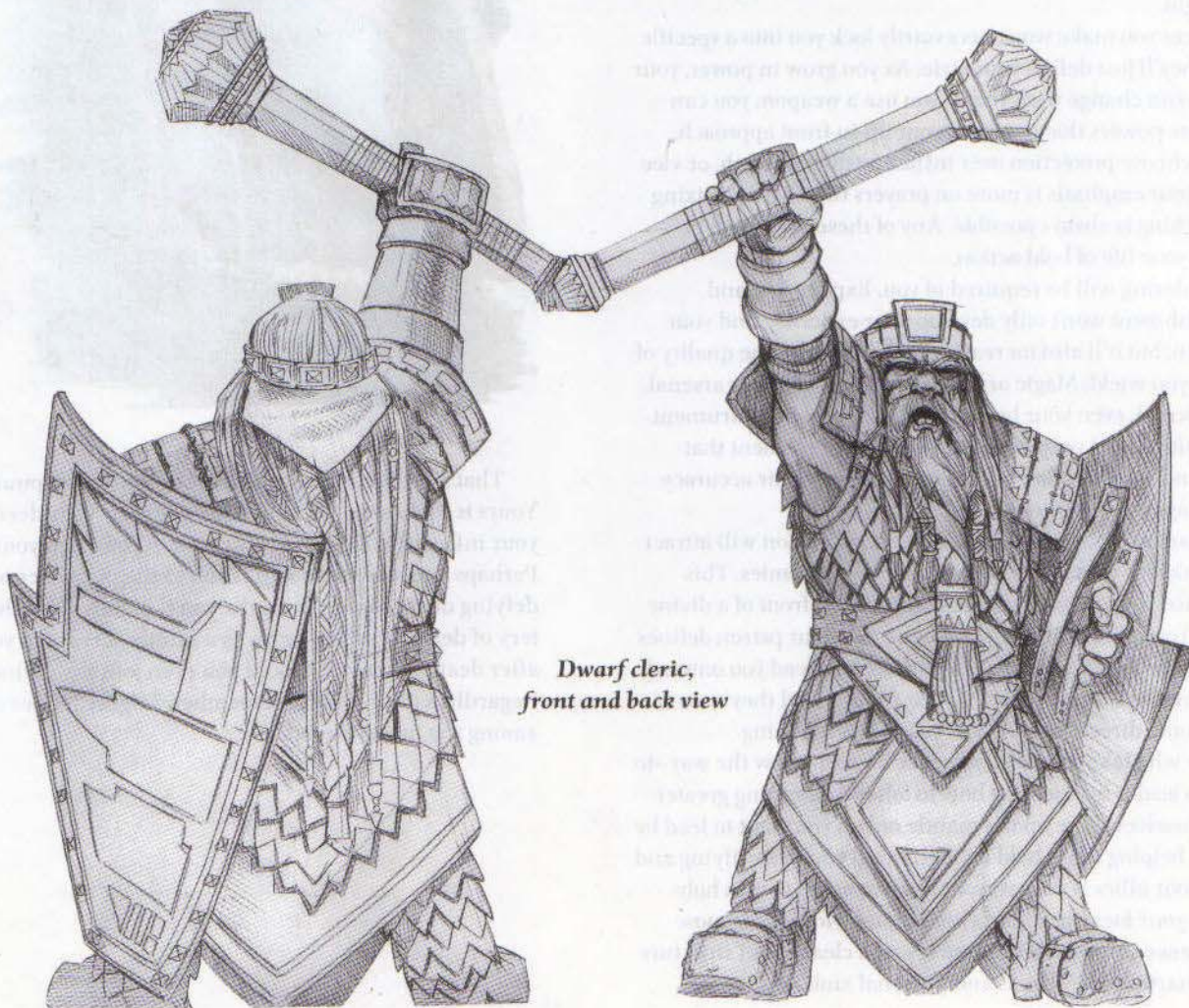
The defining aspect of a cleric is a connection to a deity. As the gods' most devout worshipers, clerics are granted holy magic to go forth and follow a path in keeping with their deities' moral guidance. Each deity gives a cleric some specific benefits, such as a favored weapon or a defense bonus.

Clerics are capable melee combatants with divinely empowered physical attacks. They can single out enemies as targets by lowering their defenses or damaging them round after round, and they can increase an ally's offensive and defensive prowess. An individual cleric might choose to emphasize any one of these specialties.

Battle prayers and spells are a cleric's main combat powers. They include both magical attacks and boosts that increase allies' attacks or defenses. These are the effects that clerics will activate most often. Effects might include calling down holy light and flame, commanding a foe to flee, or protecting an ally from all attacks.

All 4th Edition characters have some ability to heal themselves and all leaders can increase that healing. A cleric grants all allies near him an increase to their self-healing, and he can also cure their wounds by using healing words. A cleric doesn't spend any of his other spells to use them, nor will he need to spend the lion's share of his actions healing others.

Rituals allow a cleric to heal persistent conditions, create wards, and even bring people back from the dead. Many 3E spells have become rituals instead, allowing the cleric to fill his spell and battle prayer lists with proactive attacks and enhancements.



*Dwarf cleric,  
front and back view*

## WHY WE CHANGED THE GODS

—Matt Sernett

The gods presented in the 3rd Edition *Player's Handbook* originated in the GREYHAWK Campaign Setting. It might seem odd to tell you that if you've been playing D&D for 10 or more years, but if you started playing during 3rd Edition you could easily have missed the GREYHAWK setting or not know much about it. GREYHAWK was the original setting used by Gary Gygax for his home games. I mention that because it shows how long ago those gods were designed.

We didn't move forward in 4th Edition with that pantheon because its deities weren't designed for the improved experience of D&D we were forming. Also, its ties to Greyhawk and its uses in 3E wouldn't sync up with the new cosmology and mythology we've designed to be better for play. We struggled with what deities to put in the game for a long time, and many factors influenced our final decisions:

- We don't want deities to be thought of as omniscient and all-powerful. Omniscience and omnipotence makes it difficult to use gods in adventure plots or have them interact with characters.

- We want epic characters to be capable of challenging gods and even of becoming gods.

- We wanted deities to be designed for play in the D&D world. Sure, it's realistic in a sociological sense to have a deity of doorways or of agriculture, but it's hard to figure out how a cleric who worships such a deity honors his god by going on adventures.

- We wanted fewer, better deities. In your campaign, you can have as many deities as you want, but in order to design classes, a cosmology, and products that work well together, we wanted a good set of deities that cover most players' needs without that pantheon being too complex and cumbersome.

- We wanted deities to represent the new game and new vision for the D&D world.

For a long time we wanted to design a pantheon that was wholly new, but the harder we pushed it in that direction, the more it seemed like some of the deities of the 3E pantheon were a good fit for the game's needs.

Thus, the pantheon is a blending of old and new.

## 3E CLERICS RULE! 4E CLERICS ARE BETTER

—Logan Bonner

It's no secret that 3rd Edition clerics are really good. 4th Edition clerics are no longer better than other classes, but are more fun to play.

The huge difference between the two versions is that clerics no longer spend all their time healing and buffing. Moving a modest amount of self-healing into every class has really loosened up the reins on the cleric, as has putting healing in its own



Human cleric

bin so it doesn't overshadow offensive magic. We expect that, in an average encounter, a cleric will use *one* standard action to heal and will be using the rest of his actions for offense.

The 3E cleric spell list was chopped down, and we removed everything that belonged in rituals and healing prayers (these made up a huge portion of the old cleric's list, including *restoration*, *raise dead*, *cure* spells, and all wards). Since alignment no longer has a major mechanical effect, this was another big chunk of the list gone. We also removed summoning from the current list (though it will likely appear in future supplements).

So what does this mean? It means we wrote a ton of new cleric powers! We wanted persistent magical effects that the cleric could maintain over many rounds (such as *spiritual weapon*), big magical attacks (like *flame strike*), and short-term buffs. Most persistent effects sit in the battle prayers, so a cleric drops one in every fight, usually to keep an enemy under control. Big attacks can be found in battle prayers and in spells. They include big explody things like *flame strike*, supernatural weather (inspired by *storm of vengeance*), and spells that utterly crush a single opponent. Short-term buffs are much improved because we did away with the duration-tracking that was such a big part of cleric life in 3E. Most short-term buffs lasts until the end of the encounter. That's it. It's simple, it's clear, and the effects are more powerful since the duration's shorter.

So you might miss the 3E cleric if you just have to be a bit overpowered or were such an altruistic soul that you liked healing somebody every round, but we think most players will prefer the new cleric over the old.

# FIGHTERS

—Richard Baker

Master of a hundred weapons, you are a fighter—an adventurer who relies on strength, speed, skill, and steel to overcome your adversaries. You might be a noble champion, a calculating mercenary, or a rapacious marauder, but first and foremost you *fight*. You pit your guts, your heart, and your skill at arms against the most terrifying monstrosities imaginable, and more often than not, you're the last one standing.

In some ways you are the most ordinary of adventurers, because your trade is a common one in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS world. Every lord or chieftain—human, dwarf, elf, orc, or otherwise—commands the loyalty of tough, well-armored guards who enforce his will with cold steel. You wear steel much as any professional warrior would, and you can easily pass yourself off as such if you wish. However, you are no mere soldier or dull-witted thug. You are a highly skilled champion, a true master of your chosen weapons, and you owe no lord your unquestioning obedience. You are a hero, and you are called to a higher destiny.



Tiefling fighter

Fighters are commonplace among all the common races. All peoples in the world give rise to martial champions and honor those heroes who confront evil with a strong arm and a courageous heart. Dwarf fighters are renowned for their tenacity and battle-zeal; elf fighters are known for their quickness and skill; and human fighters—audacious, reckless, indomitable—are the backbone of many adventuring parties.

Strength is important in your chosen trade, yes, but you value agility and endurance too. More important, you fight with your head and your heart. You train yourself to a truly uncanny level of vigilance in battle, learning to use all of your senses and react without conscious thought to the subtlest of threats—or the tiniest of openings. And when your arm grows weary and your skill is not sufficient, you can dig down and call forth truly extraordinary efforts from your deepest reserves of will and endurance.

*If you don't choose a defender, the monsters will choose one for you.*

—Richard Baker, November 2005

When you and your companions encounter fearsome monsters or waves of evil minions, your job is simple: Put yourself and your superior fighting skill between your enemies and your comrades. You excel in melee combat, and you are the toughest and most resilient of heroes. The spot where you decide to make your stand defines the “front line” of the combat. Enemies who choose to ignore you in order to attack your friends soon learn that they do so at their peril—you can exact a deadly toll from enemies who don't give you their full attention. All characters threaten foes around them and take opportunity attacks when foes try to move past, but fighters have several potent abilities that make their opportunity attacks extremely deadly. You therefore exert tremendous control over your enemies' ability to move around the fight.

You may not have the rogue's knack for a single devastating attack or the wizard's ability to routinely demolish a number of foes at the same time, but you are quite dangerous at close range. You can wear down the toughest opponents with determined attack, and you know a handful of weapon tricks and stunts—attacks to knock your foes down, disarm them, or shove them out of your way—that can turn the tide of a battle in the blink of an eye.

Fighters pay more attention to questions of personal armament than other characters. Your first decision is whether you will use a weapon and shield, or instead wield a bigger, two-handed weapon. A shield offers outstanding defense, and a shielded fighter is a difficult foe to bring down. On the other hand, choosing a large, powerful weapon such as a greataxe or a greatsword allows you to deal superior damage in melee. Sometimes the best way to prevent damage is to quickly kill the creature that poses the threat; as they say, the best defense is a good offense.

Once you have decided on your chosen fighting style (shield or two-handed), you should study feats and powers that compliment your style. The distinctive combination of tricks, stunts, maneuvers, feats, or exploits you acquire during your career mark you as different from every other fighter out there. Most fighters fall into one of three schools of thought: assault, defense, or control. *Assault* is best for you if you prefer a big, two-handed weapon. You learn powers and select feats that emphasize offense and dealing damage. *Defense* is best if you are agile and make use of a shield; powers and feats that improve your Armor Class can make you almost impossible to overwhelm with physical attack. Finally, *control* is a subtle but powerful strategy; you study powers and choose feats that improve your ability to hinder and constrain your enemies' movement.

Weapons are the tools of your trade, and like any good craftsman, you should be careful to use the right one for the right job. Most of your weapon stunts require you to use a specific weapon. For example, hammers and maces are good for stunts that will stun your foes or knock them back, but big, heavy blades such as the greatsword or greataxe are excellent for big, sweeping blows that threaten all enemies nearby. Other characters are content to wear a single preferred blade at their side, but you're a walking arsenal more often than not. Keep a variety of weapons on or about your person, just in case.

Just like any other character, fighters work best as part of a team. You may be tough and capable in melee, but you have few ways to attack multiple enemies at the same time or to attack enemies at range. You are most effective when you work to protect the party's wizard and allow him to put his magic to work on distant foes, or serve as the anvil against which the party's rogue or ranger can flank foes. Finally, you need a good leader in the party to support you. Even with your excellent defenses, you will take more damage than any other character in the adventuring party; it's the job of the cleric or warlord to keep you at full fighting strength and help you withstand deadlier attacks than you could survive on your own.

Fighters naturally look to deities of battle, strength, and conflict for strength and inspiration. Good fighters often choose to follow Bahamut, the Platinum Dragon, god of justice and protection, or Kord, the god of strength and storms. Other fighters turn to Bane, the god of war, a grim and demanding deity. However, fighters can be found among the followers of most other deities in the pantheon, too.

No matter which deity you favor, ultimately you place your trust in your skill, your determination, and a good piece of steel. Other characters might wield powerful magic, but you have mastered an art that is every bit as difficult and deadly—the mastery of close combat with almost any weapon imaginable.



A fighter at each tier:  
heroic, paragon, and epic

# FIGHTERS

—Continued

## CLASS ROLE

—Richard Baker

Fighters are the classic defenders. They get in front of the monsters and keep the monsters from attacking less resilient members of the party.

First and foremost, a defender needs the ability to absorb damage in melee, so fighters have excellent hit point totals and can wear some of the best armor in the game. In fact, fighters can get more out of their armor than other characters; the certain feats allow a high-Dexterity fighter to add some of his Dexterity bonus to his AC even when he wears heavy armor, which no other character can do. In addition, during the course of the adventure fighters can call upon their healing reserves more times than most other characters. Of all the other character classes, only the paladin approaches the pure toughness of the fighter.



The second quality a defender requires is an ability to keep the monsters focused on him. We called this “stickiness” around the office—once you get next to a fighter, it’s really hard to move away in order to go pound on the party wizard or cleric. Fighters are “sticky” because they gain serious bonuses on opportunity attacks, have the ability to follow enemies who shift away from them, and guard allies nearby through an ability called battlefield control. Once the fighter gets toe-to-toe with the monsters, it becomes very dangerous for the monsters to do anything other than battle the fighter . . . which is, of course, what the fighter excels at. Enemies ignore fighters at their peril!

## FIGHTERS HAVE POWER!

—Richard Baker

In previous editions of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, the fighter has always been the character who didn’t have any spells or special class powers. Generally speaking, a player running a fighter character did the same thing every round: He took a swing at the bad guys. In 3rd Edition D&D more options became available through the use of various feat trees, but it was still true that the fighter offered none of the resource management or battle strategy of a spellcasting character. *Tome of Battle: The Book of Nine Swords* introduced a new twist on the 30-year-old mechanics of the fighter class by describing fighterlike classes who used a variety of spectacular martial maneuvers. Using *Tome of Battle* you could play a fighter (well, a warblade) with the tactical challenge of choosing when and how to use dramatic maneuvers. The new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS 4th Edition game improves and expands this concept even more.

As with all 4th Edition character classes, fighters have three categories of powers: at-will, per-encounter, and per-day. At-will powers are relatively simple attacks that the fighter simply knows how to do. For example, one *defensive strike* is a simple attack that deals normal damage, but if you hit, you get a bonus to your Armor Class against the foe you hit. Your attack leaves you in a good defensive stance against your foe, and he’ll have a hard time striking back at you.

Per-encounter powers are special weapon tricks, surprise attacks, or advanced tactics that can only be used one time per fight. The fighter doesn’t “forget” a power once he uses it, nor does a power deplete any innate reserve of magical energy. He can’t use it again because it simply isn’t effective more than once per battle. If an enemy has already seen your *dance of steel* maneuver, he won’t be taken in by it a second time. Because you can use one of these powers once per battle, the challenge is to find the exact right moment to use each one for maximum effect.

The fighter’s per-day powers represent a single act of incredible strength, endurance, and heroism; the fighter digs down deep and finds what he needs to make the ultimate effort. For example, the *great surge* power allows you to make a devastating melee attack and also call on your reserves of healing. When the battle looks grim, the fighter finds a little more strength to shrug off his injuries and strike a crippling blow. Because you

can only use each of these powers once per day, the trick is to decide which combat during your adventure deserves the use of such a precious resource—and then exactly when during that battle your exploit will have the greatest effect.

## SUPPORTING DIFFERENT BUILDS

—Stephen Schubert

The fighter has always been one of the four iconic pillars of the D&D game (along with the cleric, wizard, and thief/rogue). As the game progressed, the fighter grew into an extremely customizable class, especially in 3rd Edition D&D, where a fighter's feat choices could change the way he looked: was he a lightly armored, Spring Attacking, glaive wielder? A Power Attacking, greatsword-swinging, damage dealer? An impregnable, Combat Expertise-using, sword and board AC junkie? Or maybe just a spiked chain trip monkey?

The new fighter still allows for such customizations within the role defined for the class. The class "builds" are supported through feats, class features, gear, and power selection, with each aspect of character creation adding its own flavor to the mix.

Much of the focus on the fighter's choices revolve around creating a distinction between a fighter that carries a shield



Human fighters

## ARMOR

—Andy Collins

Armor comes in many shapes, sizes, and materials, from bloodweave robes to crysteel plate armor. A character's choice of armor says a lot about his approach to battle, his tactics in a fight, and his ability to foresee the threats before him.

The simplest category of armor includes woven robes, padded vests, and similar items of heavy clothing. Wizards wear these armors, relying on their magic (and their allies) to protect them rather than layers of steel. At higher levels, these armors are crafted from feyweave, spidersilk, and other wondrous fabrics that imbue the armor with magical properties.

Rogues, on the other hand, like to be a little more protective of their own skins than the average spellslinger, and as such prefer armors crafted from durable leather. Stout yet flexible, this category of armor provides an added measure of safety without restricting the wearer's movements. The elves also create leatherlike armors from the leaves of certain trees native to the Feywild and regions of the natural world close to the arcane realm.

Slightly more durable still are hide armors, crafted from the heavy skins of fearsome creatures. Rangers, druids, and barbarians favor such armor, particularly those that imbue their wearers with aspects of the original beast, from the stalking panther or raging cave bear to the many-headed hydra.

for extra protection and the fighter that eschews protection for the greater damage output of a big two-handed weapon. But more than just creating a distinct visual look for the character, we want the way each character acts to be different based on which choices he makes.

The sword-and-board fighter, with a one-handed weapon and a shield, can specialize his build by choosing feats or powers that improve his AC and defensive capabilities, defending his allies by simply getting in the way. When designing powers, though we didn't want to limit them to defensive boosts, and so we've included options for intercepting enemies that might try to avoid him in order to attack his allies, such as giving him greater mobility during an attack, or allowing him to follow creatures that try to shift away.

On the other end of the spectrum, the greatsword-wielding fighter gets more damage from his attack powers, threatening enemies with massive damage if his allies are attacked. In addition to Power Attack-like abilities that give the two-hander the option of dealing more damage with a less accurate swing, this type of fighter might choose those abilities that give him more opportunities to attack. While any fighter benefits from such abilities, the advantage is greater to the two-hander, since his larger weapon will do more damage per swing.

Of course, the system allows for more than just a couple of builds for the fighter class. It would be possible to include support for the dancing fencer or the two-weapon fighter. Even when powers are designed to support certain builds, a player still has the ability to choose any fighter power, regardless of build.

# FIGHTERS

—Continued

Those adventurers who require a bit more staying power in a fight turn to chain armor. Clerics and warlords, as well as the occasional elf or halfling fighter, prefer the feel of a sturdy suit of chain mail. They trust in its ability to turn aside otherwise lethal strikes, which lets them stay in the fray supporting their allies as long as possible. Many races craft their own special versions of chain armor, from the lightweight elven chain to the dwarflink chain forged beneath mountains. The chain armors created by the eladrins combine quality and beauty in a manner unmatched by any worldly armorsmiths.

The truly dedicated warriors, however, know that the heavier your armor the more likely you are to survive combat. That's why most fighters don a suit of scale armor before heading into the dungeon. With its superior fit, it provides more protection than chain armor without hindering the



Elf fighter

fighter's agility. Of course, they'll never admit that it's not just function that attracts them to scale armors—what fighter doesn't look good in a suit of blue dragonscale armor or obsidian razorscale?

The king of armors, however, is plate armor. Though it gives up the flexibility of scale armor, plate armor makes up for this by providing the best protection gold can buy. It's rare to see a paladin out of his plate armor, and many fighters eventually turn to it as well. The dwarves are the most famous crafters of plate armor, and dwarf-crafted plate is perhaps the most highly sought-after armor in the land.

No discussion of armor is complete without mentioning the humble shield. Capable of turning away spear-thrust, arrow-shaft, and *fireball* alike, this slab of oak or steel has saved the lives of more fighters, paladins, and warlords than all the *potions of healing* in the world. Not surprisingly, a wide range of magic shields have been created over the years, all dedicated to protecting their owners from dangerous foes. For those adventurers untrained in the use of shields, enchanted bracers and vambraces provide similar benefits.

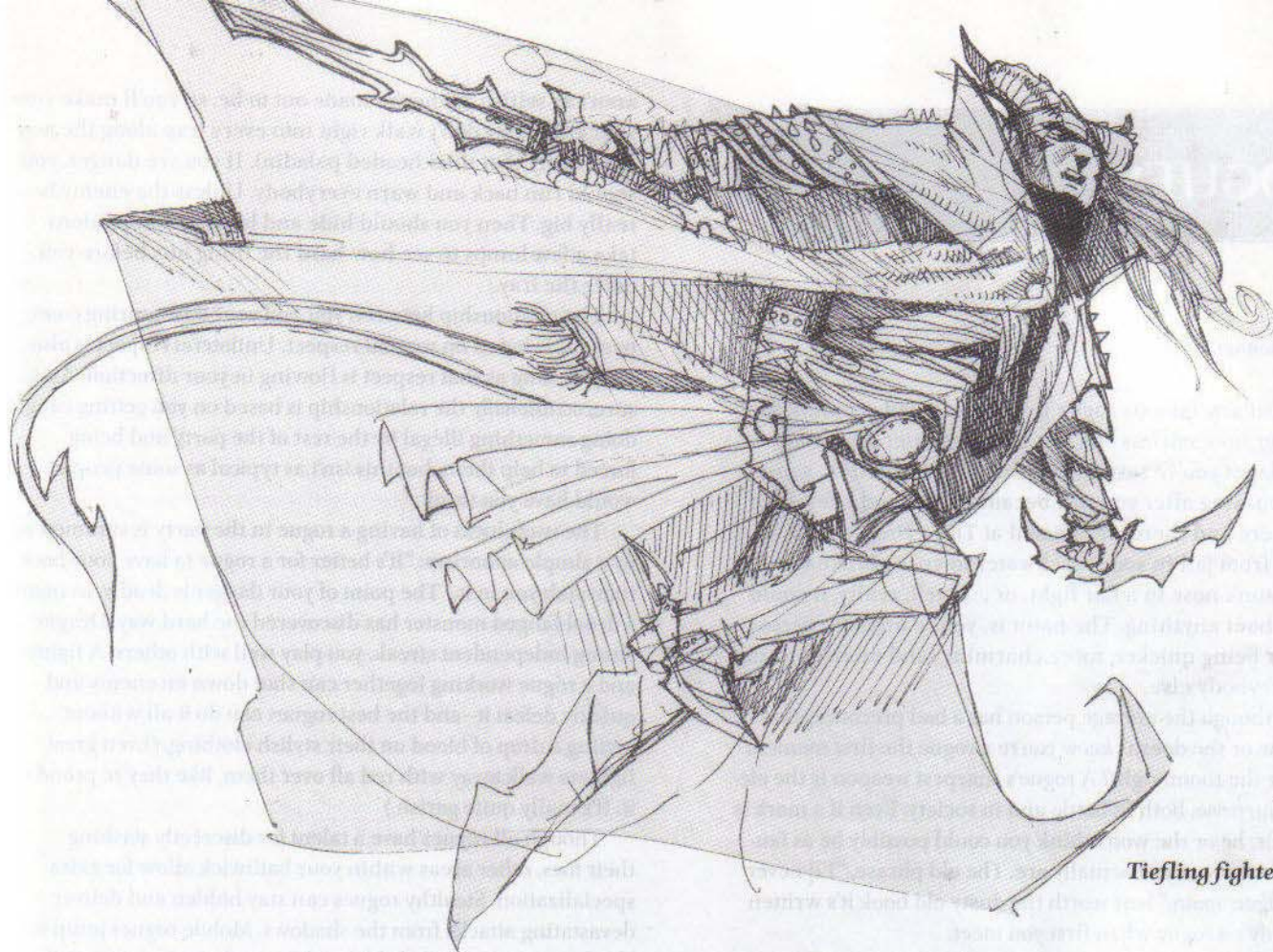
## INFLUENCE OF BOOK OF NINE SWORDS

—Richard Baker

If you think you've seen the idea of per-encounter powers for fighters before, you're right. *Tome of Battle: Book of Nine Swords* built a system of maneuvers for martial characters that presaged many of the nonspellcaster powers coming up in 4th Edition D&D.

At one point in our power design, we examined the idea of whether or not character powers could be constructed more or less like a card-game model. In other words, all the power choices available to you would be your "hand," and when you used a power in a fight, you'd "discard" it. In fact, you might even have important "draw" or "refresh" mechanics to return discarded powers to your hand. One of the most aggressive ideas of this sort was the notion of a character who drew his hand randomly as the fight progressed. So, to test the acceptability of these changes to our audience, we adopted the classes in *Book of Nine Swords* to use an execute, discard, and refresh system for their maneuvers.

While the *Nine Swords* classes actually work fine with the system (even the crusader!), we eventually moved away from the idea of maneuvers refreshing in an encounter. We decided that we didn't want to make the players play a game of managing their "hands" at the same time they were playing a game of defeating the monsters. But we learned a tremendous amount from watching D&D fans play with the rules in *Book of Nine Swords*. And heck, they were fun enough that most of our D&D games around the office saw plenty of *Nine Swords* characters enter the dungeon.



*Tiefling fighter*

## WELCOME TO THE WEAPON SHOP

—Andy Collins

Every successful adventurer, of course, is defined by his choice of weapon. (Well, perhaps not exactly every one of them, but I don't see any wizards here so we'll just ignore them for the moment.) Keen-edged longsword or mighty warhammer? Twin scimitars cutting a swath of destruction or massive greataxe cleaving enemies in half? Hidden hand crossbow or deadly war pick? The selection isn't just about your look, although we certainly can't deny the importance of that, can we? No, the weapon you carry speaks to the style of warrior you want to be.

Over here we have our maces and spears: the simplest weapons available to the adventurer. (No, I don't sell clubs—may I suggest a visit to the lumberyard for that?) Those with only limited weapon training, such as clerics, rely on these weapons for melee combat. Maces and morningstars are good for cracking skulls, while spears (particularly longspears) prove useful in keeping enemies at bay.

If you mastered simple weapons during basic training, you're probably looking for something with a bit more punch. Fighters seeking to deal extreme damage to the enemy gravitate toward the warhammer or maul, though these weapons can be a little unwieldy. The warlord who wants to trade some of that devastating power for good accuracy picks up a longsword, greatsword, or perhaps even a katana. Sitting between the two

categories are the trusty axes, favored by dwarves across the land for their ability to cut taller opponents down to size.

But maybe you're a ranger or rogue fancying something with a little more finesse. In that case, may I suggest a short sword, scimitar, or rapier? Any of these fine weapons will allow you to display your dazzling dexterity without skimping on the death-dealing.

Now, not every weapon is designed to be used close up and personal. In some situations, the best option is to kill the monster before it's close enough to kill you, and for that we turn to our ranged weapons. Daggers, spears, hand axes, and throwing hammers all give you a good short-distance option without giving up the ability to defend yourself should the monsters appear a bit closer than you'd hoped. If you're willing to go all-out, I'd recommend a good crossbow; you can't beat that first-strike capability. Rangers (and elves) should instead look to the bow: faster than a crossbow and each shot almost as deadly, these are good for the archer on the move.

Of course, these aren't the only options available for your perusal. From the flail to the glaive, or the humble sling to the elaborate spiked flail, the array of death-dealing tools at your character's disposal should daunt any hobgoblin warchief or marauding dragon.

Now if you don't mind, I'll leave you to your decision—I see a halfling admiring my collection of shurikens a little too much, if you know what I mean.



# ROGUES

—Logan Bonner

The tale of any famous rogue is built on a bad reputation. No matter how selfless you are and no matter how many little villages you've saved from certain destruction, somebody is chasing after you just because you lifted a few coin purses here and there, or cheated at *Three-Dragon Ante*, or escaped from jail in some backwater town, or broke the mayor's son's nose in a bar fight, or . . . well, really, it could be just about anything. The point is, you're unjustly persecuted for being quicker, more charming, and more cunning than everybody else.

Even though the average person has a bad preconception of rogues, he or she doesn't know you're a rogue the first moment you enter the room, right? A rogue's sharpest weapon is the element of surprise, both in battle and in society. Even if a mark is suspicious, he or she won't think you could possibly be as fantastically tricky as you actually are. The old phrase, "I'll never trust a rogue again," isn't worth the dusty old book it's written in—nobody's a rogue when first you meet.

The life of a rogue is one spent largely in the shadows—sneaking into well-guarded castles, taking out adversaries with surprise attacks, or listening in on secret meetings. When out adventuring, you're usually out front. Rogues

aren't as selfish as they're made out to be, so you'll make sure your comrades don't walk right into every trap along the way (especially that thickheaded paladin). If you see danger, you should run back and warn everybody. Unless the enemy is really big. Then you should hide and let your companions take a few lumps to see how hard the thing hits before you enter the fray.

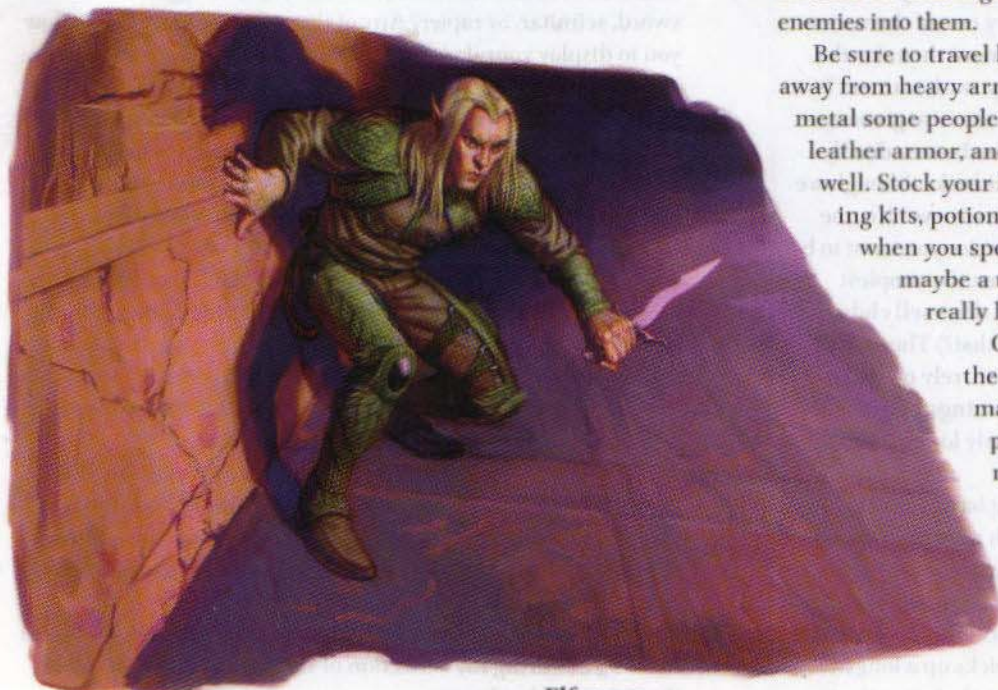
The relationship between you and your adventuring companions is based on mutual respect. Unilateral respect is also okay, as long as that respect is flowing in your direction. And sure, *occasionally* the relationship is based on you getting caught doing something illegal by the rest of the party and being forced to help them, but this isn't as typical as some people would have you think.

The usefulness of having a rogue in the party is summed up by a simple aphorism: "It's better for a rogue to have your back than stab you in it." The point of your dagger is deadly, as many a drool-fanged monster has discovered the hard way. Despite a strong independent streak, you play well with others. A fighter and a rogue working together can shut down an enemy and quickly defeat it—and the best rogues can do it all without getting a drop of blood on their stylish clothing. (Even great fighters walk away with red all over them, like they're proud of it. It's really quite garish.)

Though all rogues have a talent for discreetly slashing their foes, other areas within your bailiwick allow for extra specialization. Stealthy rogues can stay hidden and deliver devastating attacks from the shadows. Mobile rogues jump and climb across the battlefield, laughing at their enemies' pathetic attempts to hit them. Tricky rogues use their words as weapons, getting what they want through sheer bravado (and maybe just a little deceit). Regardless of your expertise, your abilities all focus on avoiding dangerous situations and getting your enemies into them.

Be sure to travel light. Since you rely on mobility, stay away from heavy armor and the big, unwieldy hunks of metal some people call weapons. With a dark cloak, leather armor, and some sharp steel, you can get by pretty well. Stock your backpack with climbing gear and thieving kits, potions, some well-concealed chocolate for when you spend too long away from civilization, and maybe a unique magic item for when things get really hairy.

Given the choice, you probably prefer the comfort of the city more than the majestic wonder of sleeping on rocks and picking mosquitoes out of your teeth and not bathing for weeks out in the wilderness or deep underground. Where there are people, there are people with money. A good rogue can feel a tug in his gut when he's within a mile of a gambling hall, and his mouth gets dry the instant the scent of ale wafts over from the tavern.



Elf rogue

Ask a rogue where his home is, and chances are he'll name a bar. Taverns are a little bit restaurant, a little bit clubhouse, a little bit den of vice, and every bit full of ale and sexy wait staff. After a night in a tavern, you'll know what's going on around town, what needs stealing, where the town guard keeps the keys, who in the party has the highest tolerance for alcohol, and—for good or ill—the color of the barkeep's underwear. While the wizard's poring over musty books at the library and the fighter's knocking on a practice dummy at the training grounds, you're getting important work done at the alehouse.

A rogue settles wherever fortune and charm take him, whether it's in a grimy back alley or an alabaster mansion. In fact, it's not uncommon for a rogue to go from one to the other and back again in a matter of days. A timely compliment, big treasure hoard, or purloined key can be the ticket to an opulent lifestyle. On the other hand, a high-stakes card game, a really expensive garment, or even an up-and-coming rival rogue can send you right back to the bottom. Many rogues dream of fortune, and some get it. Wealthy rogues are split between two categories: those who flaunt it and those who stick to a pattern of secrecy. For every rogue hitting the town in fancy clothes, there's another with platinum coins and magic daggers stashed under a ratty straw mattress.

When you meet another rogue, be wary. You can be relatively sure she's not your enemy if you're members of the same thieves' guild, but otherwise one rogue can never know what to make of another. Rogues know better than anyone that appearances can be deceiving, and that's why it's so difficult to win a rogue's trust. If two rogues become enemies, they are prone to clandestine attacks against the other's fortune and character—or outright assassination. Tracing a trail back to the culprit is notoriously difficult, and many a constable has tried in vain to capture a crime kingpin with a long list of dead enemies, but no evidence of guilt. A truly evil rogue makes a powerful adversary, even for a whole party of adventurers.

Among the different races, halflings are the most adept rogues. With their small size and lithe physiques, they're stealthy and mobile. Elves' and half-elves' inborn talents make them suited to the class, and humans thrive in such an adaptable role. Tieflings gravitate toward becoming rogues because they're charismatic and have an inborn tendency for trickery and deception.

If you choose to take up the life of a rogue, keep your dagger sharp, your coins hidden, your cloak concealing, and your eyes open. Danger lurks around every corner in the world, and if you play your cards right, you can be that danger.

## CLASS ROLE

—Logan Bonner

The rogue is the prime example of a striker. Capable of delivering more damage to a single target than many other characters, a rogue has to spend some effort setting up such



Human rogue

a boost. By skillful maneuvering, the help of allies, and the occasional dirty trick, a rogue sets up devastating attacks. In exchange for high damage, a striker ends up frail compared to a defender.

Darting between shadows, jumping over enemies, and deftly scaling walls are simple for rogues, who can use their skills more effectively than other classes and can move in ways utterly impossible for other characters. The capability to fearlessly traverse the battlefield gives rogues the potential to surprise and quickly overwhelm their foes.

Rogues excel at hitting unprepared enemies to cause the most harm. One of the ways a rogue gets high damage is an old favorite: sneak attack. In fact, sneak attack is now easier to pull off and works with a new, simple system that defines when creatures are particularly vulnerable to attack. Not only will the fighter be giving the rogue a flanking bonus, but more spells and attack powers will set up sneak attacks.

# ROGUES

—Continued

Another source of extra damage comes from a rogue's follow-up attacks, which can be tacked on to successful attacks. These allow a rogue to turn a normal attack into a truly vicious one, dealing huge amounts of damage and dishing out major penalties to the target.

At the highest end of the rogue's power list come difficult maneuvers that incorporate multiple attacks and tactical movement. These flashy assaults make short work of powerful monsters and—more importantly—impress the rest of the party.



Tiefling rogue

## SNEAK ATTACK

—Mike Mearls

In the beginning thieves had the backstab ability, and it was good. A +4 bonus on attacks and double damage were great back in the day, but they came with a catch. It was really, really hard to actually complete a backstab. The rules were vague about how they worked, and most DMs shied away from allowing thieves to use this ability on a routine basis.

When D&D 3E arrived on the scene, gamers who loved rogues had reason to celebrate. Sneak attack, while perhaps not as swingy as backstab, was clearly implemented and easy to use. Those extra d6s of damage were great. At least, they were great when the rogue got to use them. Entire categories of creatures, most notably undead and constructs, were immune to sneak attack. Without the offensive boost provided by this ability, rogues were severely crippled.

For D&D 4E, we've made sneak attack more flexible while retaining its basic mechanic. You can now use sneak attack whenever you have combat advantage, a combat modifier gained whenever an opponent's defenses have been compromised. Flanking a foe gives you combat advantage, as do some special abilities. More important, immunity to sneak attack has been scaled back to almost nothing. Almost every creature a rogue now faces has the requisite vulnerable spots needed for a sneak attack to take place. While a construct might lack internal organs, you can still smash its knee or find a weak point in its construction to deal a fistful of extra d6s in damage.

This change reflects one of the important philosophies behind D&D 4E. Some abilities are so key to a character's class that they should rarely, if ever, face a blanket immunity. Monsters that shut down one character are more likely to make the game dull for a few characters, or force the spotlight on to a sole player character, rather than create interesting situations for the entire party. The rogue relies on sneak attack for his or her offensive abilities, so we're much better off making it a reliable tool.

As a rule, immunities are almost completely gone from D&D 4E. In their place we have damage thresholds to reflect resistances and invulnerability. A fire elemental might ignore a wizard's *fireball*, but an elder red dragon can still blast it into oblivion with its breath weapon.

In the design of D&D 4E, the team sought to create a game where a reasonable Dungeon Master could create a reasonable challenge for everyone at the table. A DM must make a conscious decision to shut down a PC or close off a set of options. For this reason, sneak attack now functions against a wide variety of monsters.

## WHAT'S NEW WITH THE ROGUE

—Mike Mearls

The rogue character class retains the core of what it has always been, a class that focuses on light armor, light weapons, skills, and dishing out extra damage to unprepared opponents. In D&D 4E, we've taken some aspects of the rogue and strengthened them to match what many players want to do with a rogue. For example, a rogue with a good Charisma score now has a variety of special maneuvers to choose from that highlight his abilities as a trickster and deceiver. A rogue with a high Intelligence score gains a flat bonus to all trained skill checks. Finally, the addition of maneuvers to the rogue's bundle of abilities allows him or her to fight in melee and dodge attacks much better than before.

The D&D 4E design team saw the rogue as more than just a skill expert, but a warrior who bears some similarities to a swashbuckler. In melee, a rogue is just as dangerous as a fighter. While his leather armor makes him less durable, he can dish out a lot of damage in a brief amount of time. Making the rogue a little more of a swashbuckler helped give him a clearer role in a fight.

This design decision highlights one of the principles of D&D 4E design. In prior versions of the game, designers would sometimes use out-of-combat abilities to balance combat deficiencies. A rogue might have low AC and low hit points, but a lot of skills were supposed to balance that. True, the rogue had sneak attack, but moving into a flank also left him vulnerable to being flanked himself. Since D&D 4E moves from a model of "the party versus one monster" to "the party versus an equal number of monsters," this problem became even worse.

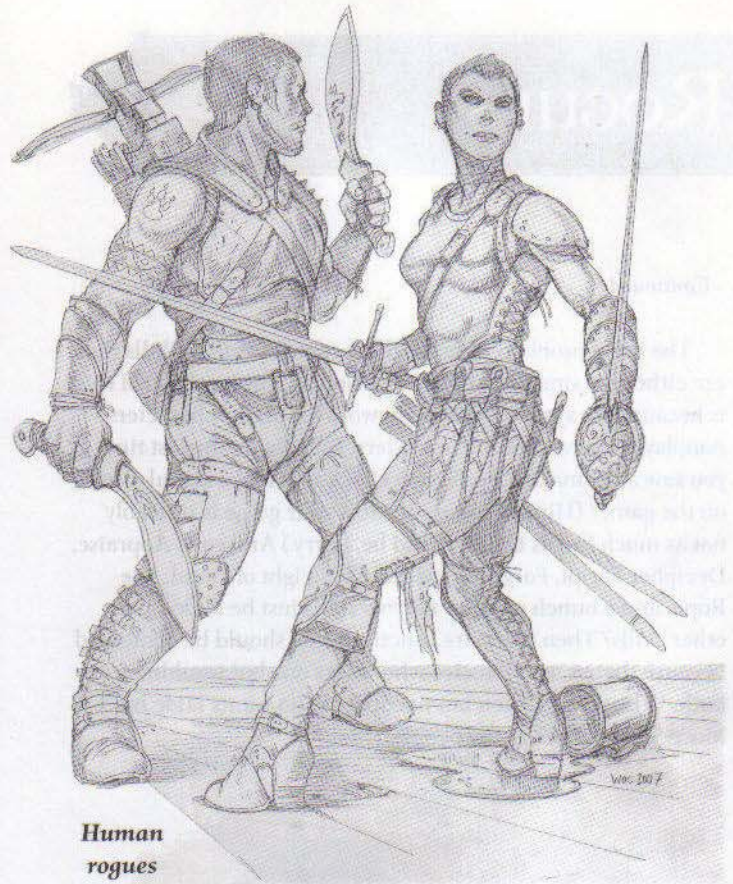
To better balance the classes, the design team set aside noncombat functions and looked solely at what each class does in a fight. We then balanced their abilities across the board, while following a similar process for noncombat abilities. By cutting off any bleed in balance between those areas, we created characters that are on equal footing across every part of an adventure, rather than creating a situation where player characters are balanced only if you look at all the encounters as a whole.

Along with a clearer fighting archetype, D&D 4E strengthens the rogue's core competencies both inside and outside of combat. Rogues are now the best skill users in the game. Not only do they get more skills than other classes, but they also have more options and abilities relating to those skills.

### SKILLS

—Logan Bonner

DUNGEON & DRAGONS 3rd Edition's skills are based on a good premise, but they suffer from a number of problems we wanted to rectify as we went about building the 4th Edition of the game.



**Human  
rogues**

The first problem is that skills are high-maintenance and full of little complexities. Whenever you level up, you need to look at your skills and determine where you want to spend your points. You have a list of class and cross-class skills that changes depending on what class you're leveling up in. Skill synergies are just obnoxiously frivolous. These problems wouldn't be too egregious if the reward for keeping track of it all were bigger, but it's rarely worth the effort, and most players would rather be spending character generation and leveling time elsewhere.

The second problem is that the skill system is built with two different skill strategies in mind, but only one is really valid. You can dump max ranks in a few skills to keep them high, or you can dabble by spending a few ranks in various places. Now, the first of these works out pretty well, but the second is usually worthless. To be sure, there are a few skills it might be worth getting 1 rank in just so you can be trained, but they are the minority. The system scales in such a way that when you gain levels and don't spend ranks in a skill, you quickly fall behind the required DCs needed to accomplish a task.

# ROGUES

—Continued

The third problem is the skill list, which is full of skills that are either too similar to others or just plain useless. Part of this is because the system is meant to work for player characters, nonplayer characters, and monsters. But when's the last time you saw a PC make a Profession check that had a useful effect on the game? (Hint: If it was recently, your game is probably not as much fun as D&D should be. Sorry.) And can't Appraise, Decipher Script, Forgery, Open Lock, Sleight of Hand, Use Rope, and a bunch of other narrow skills just be folded into other skills? Then there are functions that should be combined because there's no character who wants one but wouldn't want both. Who wants Listen but not Spot? Who wants Hide but not Move Silently? Not many people.



Dragonborn  
rogue

We greatly simplified the skill system to fix these problems. We stripped the list down and combined skills that were pointing in the same direction (Open Lock and Sleight of Hand appeal to the same character, so they're now functions of a single skill). Knowledge (arcana), Spellcraft, and Read Magic have all been combined into a single Arcana skill. As of this writing, we have cut the number of skills in half (while maintaining most of the functions). The *Star Wars Roleplaying Game Saga Edition* includes some of our experiments with skill simplification, most notably in the way it removes the need for constantly increasing skills.

Of all the classes, rogues are the most skill-focused (followed closely by rangers). Many classes have a few skills that are crucial to their functionality, but rogues get the widest swath of options.

Another major change to skills was the removal of several skill functions that we no longer believe should be default parts of skills. The prime example is using Tumble to avoid attacks of opportunity. To have a check (one that can even be made untrained) be able to bypass such a fundamental risk of the game is just too easy and ultimately not all that much fun. Now, skill functions like this are either unlocked by taking a feat or are incorporated into specific powers.

Another idea that's been bandied about lately is converting some skills to passive "defense" values. Spot and Listen are good examples. Telling the players to roll Spot checks, first of all, tells them that something is up. Also, if you have everybody roll every time there's something to see, there's a high probability at least one party member will see it just due to a lucky roll. Skills like this might work better as passive values: Every player character could have a value equal to 10 + skill bonus. Then, when there's something to see,

*Sample power writeup from the D&D 4E Player's Handbook (current draft), with placeholder names (that will be changed before the book goes to press):*

#### **I'M BATMAN**

*You send a ranged attack against your foe to get its attention and lure it in your direction. Then, you spring from the shadows and deliver a devastating follow-up attack.*

#### **THE RABBLE YAMMER IN TERROR**

*You deliver a stinging blow to an enemy who besets you. His allies shrink back from you, each unwilling to draw your ire next.*

#### **GO AHEAD AND HIT ME**

*Your daunting glare gives you an edge over foes who dare attack you.*

the Dungeon Master can compare the DC to notice it to the player characters' "take 10" numbers. So far in playtests, no one has batted an eye and it's easier on the Dungeon Master—and on your d20.

## ROGUE WEAPONS AND ARMOR

—Mike Mearls

A D&D 4E rogue is likely to wear armor and carry weapons similar to his brethren from earlier versions of the game. Their options include leather armor, rapiers, short swords, hand crossbows, slings, and similar items. We knew that rogues still want to use small, light weapons that favor Dexterity over brute Strength. If it isn't broke, don't fix it (is what R&D Director Bill Slavicsek is always telling us).

The rogue's weapons and armor don't exist in a vacuum. For each class, we looked at their expected gear and then sought to create abilities that fit well with those abilities. The rogue who carries a hand crossbow should feel happy about that weapon. Leather armor must, at later levels, present options for new materials and magical effects that rogues want to use. When working on a magical item, it's important to think about who wants to use it and why. Creating a set of weapons and armor for the rogue helped clear up this design process.

So, you can rest easy with the knowledge that the rogue miniatures that you already have in your collection are just as usable in D&D 4E. Like generations of gamers that came before, you can live by the wisdom that the guy (of gal) in leather armor who claims he (or she) is a fighter might be a rogue trying to pull a fast one on you.

## TRAPS AND ROGUES

—Mike Mearls

Traps have always been a part of the D&D experience, but they've never really had a stable place in the game. D&D 4E changes that on a two levels.

Most traps challenge the entire party. While the poison needle on a treasure chest or the pit trap dug into a hallway still exist, the rules now support more elaborate death traps. Dungeons play host to spiked walls that close in to impale and crush adventurers. A trapped room opens up floodgates and fills with water, while secret doors open to unleash skeletons into the room. D&D has always had these traps, but D&D 4E makes them the norm rather than the exception. The random pit or the trapped chest is the exception, not the expected norm. If it is broke, fix it (is what R&D Director Bill Slavicsek is always telling us).

Now that traps threaten the entire party at once, they also give options for any character to defeat them. A fighter or wizard can damage a trap mechanism to shut it off or delay its effects. A cleric can heal the party as the trap slowly damages the characters. A rogue can still disarm the trap, but that is just one option among many. Furthermore, Trapfinding is now a



*Drow rogue*

feat. Rogues receive it for free, but anyone can become skilled in disabling traps.

This decision points to a larger trend in the game—challenge the party, not a single character. We don't want one character handling everything in an encounter, and our new trap rules reflect this. After all, D&D is about an adventuring party, not a single character. Not even a cool one, such as the rogue.

# WARLOCKS

—Dave Noonan

As a warlock, you are fluent in the universal language: Power. All creatures, no matter their species, alignment, or place in the world, speak the language of power. Or at least . . . they understand it when you speak the language of power to them. When you curse their every effort, summon a pit fiend to thwart their feeble attacks against you, then finally excise them from existence with an *eldritch blast*, they understand your power firsthand.

Power has its price. It must be bargained with. And you've done so, repeatedly and enthusiastically. As a result, you exude power from every fiber of your being. Everyone from the street urchin to the village priest to the grand duke senses the arcane power you carry with you.

And it makes them afraid.

The presence of a warlock makes almost everyone uneasy, and you've seen countless people make clumsy attempts to

hide their obvious fear of you behind a façade of bravado, unctuousness, or disinterest. Why does a warlock make people uneasy? Because you hold up a mirror that reveals their cowardice. You are willing to pay the price to acquire power, and most people quail at the price. When they see you, they're subtly reminded that they were too weak to gather similar power for themselves.

But let's lay all the cards on the table. It's not just a question of fear. Your magic has an unsavory, sinister aspect. Are warlocks by nature evil?

Not necessarily. While many of the mysterious forces that warlocks tap for their powers are irredeemably evil—the infernals and certain ancient demons, for example—other forces are simply amoral or completely inscrutable. Some warlocks make pacts with the stars themselves, for example, and it's clear that the stars shine on good and evil alike. Summon a pit fiend to raze the lord's castle or curse his sheriff, and many will be quick to call you evil. But saying it doesn't make it so. Ambitious? Certainly. A little on the ruthless side? Probably. But ambition and ruthlessness can serve the noblest efforts as well as they can serve the most diabolical.

Warlocks don't do much in the way of public relations efforts, however. People take one look at your black cloak with the glowing runes, see the strange tattoos on your arms, and catch a whiff of brimstone in your wake—and then they jump to conclusions. Conclusions that might be inconvenient for you, whether or not they are wholly, partially, or no where near true.

Just remember that they fear you because you were willing to seek power while they fled from the difficult path that power demands. Then, one way or another, give them a demonstration of what that power looks like when you loose it upon the world.

Leave the wizards their colleges, and the clerics their cloisters. Your training was one-on-one—a master/apprentice relationship. Because most communities don't understand warlock magic, your training happened out of sight, either in a hidden part of the city or a safe place in the wilderness. Secrecy was paramount. You attended clandestine meetings where darker mysteries were revealed to you. Some called you and your fellow apprentices a cult or a secret society. You didn't even know all the details yourself. But you excelled, proving yourself more driven and more talented than your fellows. That led to greater mysteries being revealed to you. And with each new secret door that opened, you knew you wanted more. So much more!

If a wizard's training is educational, a warlock's training is transactional. Spellcasters learn new power by understanding their powers' theoretical underpinnings, then practicing delicate acts of their art. That's for lesser, more fearful minds. You learn new powers by compelling the dark forces of the world to reveal their secrets to you—or at the very least, striking a deal to let you tap into that dark force for yourself.

One of the most important bargains you strike is your pact. Early in your career, you forge a connection to fey earth-spirits,



**Tiefling warlock**

scheming devils, long-dead demon gods, or the stars and the darkness between them. Regardless of the patron you chose, making that pact is a defining moment in your life. That's when you separated yourself from others and say, "I want more power, no matter the cost!"

As your power grows, the pact becomes more and more important, granting you powers and perceptions beyond the reach of other mortals. The very best warlocks can establish two pacts, playing the two forces against one another and drawing strength from both.

As a warlock, you largely disdain mere swordplay and archery. A longbow is a quaint, rustic tool of the hunter—to make your enemies kneel before you, nothing beats an *eldritch blast*. You can focus your power at will in a beam that flays the flesh from those with the temerity to stand against you. As you wrest more warlock techniques from your master, you learn to set your *eldritch blast* afire, hit more than one enemy with it, or turn it into a force of crawling darkness from which there is no escape. Try doing that with an arrow.

You wear leather armor that reeks of eldritch power and carry a simple weapon, such as a spear or dagger, for use against foes too weak to waste your arcane power against. You also have a *soul ruin* attack that wounds the very spirit of someone who threatens you in hand-to-hand combat. Given the choice between slicing someone with your dagger or tearing off a chunk of their immortal spirit with *soul ruin*, you'll opt for *soul ruin* every time.

You are also able to transpose yourself, flashing from place in the blink of an eye. Eventually, you learn to transpose others as well, banishing them or drawing them closer to the danger that you represent.

You learn invocations, similar to wizard spells. Some protect you, others summon otherworldly aid in a time of need, and some just consume your enemies in a roiling cloud of hungry darkness.

Finally, you can deliver curses to your rivals and enemies. A curse diminishes your enemy in some way, sometimes wounding and sometimes magically thwarting that enemy's efforts. You can lock a foe in a cage of blood, encircle your foe in emerald coils, or turn the foe's very blood into black acid, then force it to burn its way out of the body.

Your *eldritch blast*, *soul ruin*, transpositions, invocations, and curses each have their place in your personal arsenal of power. But the wellspring remains the pact that you establish on the first day you can truly call yourself a warlock.

You can bargain with ancient fey spirits, primal forces from when the world was young. Though the world has forgotten the names of these now-buried fey, you haven't—and you sense their feral, primitive hunger as keenly as your own feelings.

Immortality is not a guarantee of eternity, as forgotten demigods and ancient demons learned to their chagrin. Though these godlings are no longer worshiped, they retain a vestige of their deific might, and that's power they'll trade as part of their own long-term plans.

Elf warlock performs a ritual





# WARLOCKS

—Continued

Some say there is a cold malice that lives and watches us all from the darkness between the stars, and by tracking the progress of the stars across the sky, we can attain a glimpse of this mystery presence. You've learned the secret names of the stars and can tap into whatever's up there . . . waiting.

Scheming devils from the dawn of time created one of the most seductive paths to power; in fact, this pact may be the foundation of the warlock's art. Asmodeus may have expunged these devils from the Infernal Rolls, but he didn't bury their perilous secrets deeply enough. You may be among those who have unearthed the dark lore of these infernals and entered into a power-bargain with their shades.

*I think you should only be able to get soul blast if you take the Pact of James Brown.*

—Logan Bonner, March 2007

## FAMOUS WARLOCKS

—Dave Noonan

Many warlocks work from the shadows, grasping power from darkness and then disappearing to apply that power elsewhere. But some warlocks have attained a degree of fame—or notoriety, at the very least.

**Jibaal of the Mountain:** A hired killer, Jibaal became a warlock as part of an effort to expunge his guilt from an assassination gone tragically wrong. He retained the knack for stealth from his previous occupation, augmenting it with the ability to surround himself in an undulating cloak of shadows or tear a hole in reality itself, then step through the breach. He now teaches worthy students from the ruins of a great mountaintop castle . . . but why he's teaching them is unknown.

**Corvax Croweye:** Known for the crow feather he leaves wherever he goes, Corvax is a perpetual thorn in the side of High Lord Demetrius and the City-State of Landarna. He organizes revolutionary cells throughout the city state, escorts fugitives beyond the reach of Demetrius' "justice," and systematically curses and destroys everyone in the High Lord's family. After losing a third son to Corvax's "brilliant icy destruction" curse, Demetrius has placed a vast price on Corvax's head.

**The Jade Hand:** This mysterious eladrin lives alone in the Feywild atop a tower made from desiccated tree branches. His

left hand is made entirely from shards of jade, and it is said that the touch of his *soul ruin* is death itself. Every year he accepts one new apprentice from the dozens who seek his tutelage, pitting them against each other in a series of ruthless tests.

## CLASS ROLE

—Richard Baker

Warlocks are arcane characters. They learn their powers from magical entities they commune with through ancient rites. These may be dark, primal fey spirits, old as the earth itself; the restless shades of ancient warlocks and demipowers long dead; strange, magical intelligences associated with prominent stars; or infernal beings bound by ancient laws the warlock knows how to exploit.

Warlocks of different traditions favor different types of patrons, but any warlock has the ability to wield some amount of power from any of these sources. Regardless of the true nature of the warlock's patrons, some of these spirits offer knowledge freely, some exact terrible bargains for their wisdom, and some must be compelled to speak through long and arduous rites.

In battle, warlocks are strikers. They are highly mobile and elusive adversaries who scour their enemies with potent blasts of eldritch power and harry them with a variety of potent curses. They deal high damage to one or two enemies at a time. Warlocks have few powers that attack multiple foes at once, but they excel in dealing with small groups of enemies.

Warlocks are not very durable, but they are quite good at avoiding attack by magically evading their enemies. They possess highly accurate and highly damaging short-range attacks and shift easily from ranged to melee combat.

In 4th Edition D&D, the warlock gains two important new magical tools: pacts and curses.

The warlock's pact describes what type of bargain he made to gain his power: Fey, Infernal, Star, or Vestige. Each pact type offers subtly different benefits and favors different types of warlock powers. For example, the Infernal pact gives the warlock exceptional ability to exercise control over his enemies by reinforcing curses that create phantasmal objects to trap, hinder, or attack foes, while the Vestige pact is best for dealing damage through *soul blast* attacks.

Each pact is associated with a number of curses. These are the warlock's per-encounter "spells," and they deal high damage to foes along with crippling restrictions on movement and actions. The warlock gains a significant damage boost for his eldritch blast and soul blast attacks when he targets a creature he's already cursed. Finally, each curse includes a potent death effect: When the cursed creature is reduced to 0 hit points, the warlock often gains a powerful follow-up attack against other nearby foes. Warlocks excel at weakening, immobilizing, and hindering foes with their curses.

## WARLOCKS HAVE CHANGED. WHY?

—Logan Bonner

The reason warlocks changed is simple: Their cool, unique thing isn't unique anymore.

Since their resources don't deplete over the course of the day, warlocks hold a special place in D&D 3E. In 4th Edition, any spellcaster can use a power every round without worrying about running out, so warlocks need something new to differentiate them.

The early changes from the 3E warlock to the 4E version included access to powerful sustainable curses that gave penalties to their enemies and picked up the binder's vestiges as "hellpacts." All this pointed them toward the same sort of maybe-this-guy-is-a-little-too-nasty-to-hang-out-with-our-party vibe that the 3E version has, but gave him some new tricks so he's not playing in the wizard's sandbox quite as much (duplicating spell effects and the like). It also brought forward some elements from other interesting, but less popular, 3E classes. Of course, the warlock kept *eldritch blast*, along with abilities that modify the blast.

These were good ideas, but they weren't quite clicking in playtests. The pacts, like binder vestiges, didn't have benefits that all pointed to a single theme or play style. Since we wanted to emphasize certain builds, these got narrowed and focused so when you take a pact, you really know what type of character you're playing. They also aren't just "hellpacts" anymore. You can make pacts with various powers, each of which has its own build focus and a strong hook for your backstory. Curses were, initially, imparting penalties and giving advantages to the warlock if he voluntarily ended the curse. Unfortunately, this usually meant that a warlock spent his turn invoking a curse, then watching the target die before he had a chance to do anything else. This was an easy problem to fix: We cranked the curses up. Now the curses themselves could put down a ton of damage and impose huge penalties on the target's actions.

Throughout all this, it was clear how important it was that we keep the warlock's dangerous, one-toe-in-the-pool-of-evil feel intact. The warlock might not be evil, but he sure is *mean*. The curses evoke this theme. You might have your foe crying burning tears of blood or shove him into a conjured iron maiden. Sure, the paladin might look askance at you, but you're all on the same side, right?

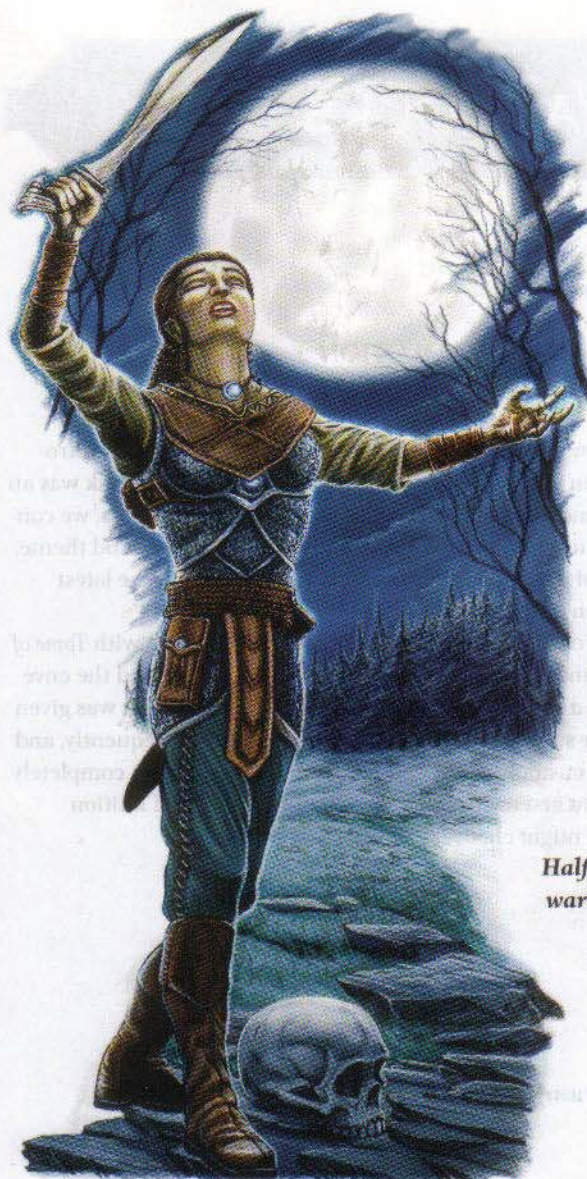
So has the warlock changed? His rules have, sure, but he's still going to be the class of choice for people who want to play a darker character. In fact, we're making it easier to develop a theme to your warlock powers, so you can have an intriguing backstory that's supported by what you're actually using in combat.

## WHY THE WARLOCK?

—Chris Sims

Supporting the arcane power source, the warlock appears in the D&D 4E *Player's Handbook* along with the wizard. For those with notions derived from D&D 3E, this might seem weird. Let's look at the real reasons why the warlock made the muster.

Important to understanding the warlock's proper place is in the game from the outset is power source. All the other power sources in the *Player's Handbook* have at least two representative



Halfling  
warlock

classes. Without the warlock, arcane has only have a single representative—the wizard.

Role is also significant. Wizards are controllers. Warlocks are instead strikers, focused on dealing a lot of damage to one foe at a time. They appeal to players who want to dish out punishment with magic. Even though the *Player's Handbook* has a ranged striker and a melee striker, additional strikers are good for party success. The warlock seemed like a natural choice.

Warlock is also an expected option for the tiefling. Tieflings are the darkest player race in the initial release of the game. The warlock class gives them that much more for someone who wants to play a sinister hero.

Although all of the above is true, we also couldn't ignore the fact that the warlock had a lot of traction in D&D 3E. In fact, it might be the most popular class released between 3E's *Player's Handbook* and *Tome of Battle*. We couldn't leave a class that appealed to such a wide section of our audience out of the new edition's first showing.

# WARLOCKS

—Continued

## WARLOCK EVOLUTION

—Stephen Schubert

The new warlock class is an evolution of the class first introduced in *Complete Arcane*. Even as the D&D 3E warlock was an experiment in a new way of looking at an arcane class, we continued to explore other venues for both mechanics and theme. Some of those ideas have been incorporated into the latest iteration of the warlock class.

For example, we also tried new magic systems with *Tome of Magic* and *Magic of Incarnum*, and each effort pushed the envelope in a different direction. In *Incarnum*, each class was given a larger suite of powers that could be activated frequently, and a bit of customization so that a shaper might have a completely different arsenal each day, much like a D&D 3rd Edition wizard might choose her spells.

Dwarf warlock



In *Tome of Magic*, we tried different levels of acquisition of power. The binder could choose a “silo” of power, gaining a suite of thematically related abilities, some of which were always active boons while others were limited to a few uses each day. The shadowcaster could build his powers broadly, choosing many of the simplest of mysteries, or could build deep into two chosen trees. The truenamer had an ever-growing repertoire of abilities, all of which could be used at-will, but with a progressively more difficult chance of success each time an utterance was used.

In addition to exploring different themes of D&D magic, these classes helped us see new class mechanics in action. From these experiments, we incorporated such concepts as the themes of the binder’s pacts, so each warlock can choose from a small selection of thematically linked class abilities. While we didn’t include aspects from every class from *Tome of Magic*, we have the flexibility to mine those themes for future additions to the warlock class, or bring those concepts into other places of the new game.

## ALIGNMENT

—Logan Bonner

Alignment is one of those systems that’s been in flux for a while because everybody has a strong opinion about it. When one person’s saying “kill it entirely” and another is saying “keep it as it is,” you know there will be a lot of time and discussion about the topic. R&D is really just like a big gaming group: We all have our opinions about what alignment should be.

To tackle this issue, an elite team of special agents (Michele Carter, Bruce Cordell, Steve Schubert, and Bill Slavicsek) convened to figure out why people do and don’t like alignment as it has appeared in previous versions of the game. We wanted to keep the recognizable names of alignment, but we also had to recognize the failings the old systems had.

A major change to the system is the concept of unaligned characters. Most people just never choose sides, and never dedicate themselves to an ideal—they just do what they can to get by. Alignment is now a system you don’t have to play in if you don’t want to. Only characters with strong ideals will take up the cause of Good or Evil. This allows players more latitude. They can play a character who isn’t all that nice, but can still be in the same party as the bright and shining paladin and not have much difficulty. An “Evil-curious” character might be underhanded or bloodthirsty without crossing the line into evil.

We also wanted to emphasize the difference between personality and alignment. For a long time, people have used alignment as a guide to roleplaying, but that ends up being too restrictive and predictable. While alignment should influence your actions, it shouldn’t define your entire personality. A Good-aligned person can be surly, or even do something that’s not exactly “good” once in a while. This doesn’t mean the person isn’t trying to uphold the virtues of

a good alignment—and the dedication to keep trying is what's important about alignment.

Perhaps more important than any other change is the de-emphasis of alignment. Instead of the overarching system of previous editions, alignment is now a much smaller part of the experience. Only a minority of people (and monsters) is aligned at all, and most spells and abilities that key off of alignment have been eliminated. For a player, choosing a Good alignment won't make your character *more* susceptible to evil attacks. Dungeon Masters get the freedom to create storylines with intrigue and deception that can't be derailed by a *detect evil* spell. Shades of gray can make a campaign deeper and ultimately more rewarding. PCs should decide for themselves whether they think someone is evil, not rely on spells to make their decisions for them.

*Sometimes these warlock powers get written up so horrifically that they sound like they should be freaking your allies out as well as your enemies.*

—Rob Heinsoo, May 2007

## CUBE CHATTER

—Logan Bonner

I worked on the *Player's Handbook* with Rich Baker and Dave Noonan (this was in the third stage of the process). We all sat within two cubes of one another, close enough to shout out whatever weird thing one of us had just come up with. Even though people in nearby cubes were working on different projects, they would occasionally hear one of these snippets about the *Player's Handbook*. Usually, this was some oddball placeholder name Rich had written for a warlord power, but warlock powers were a common topic, too. I think our neighbors might have known more about the warlock than any other class, actually.

I wrote up the basic structure of the warlock and established the over-the-top descriptions and effect names the class would use (stuff like the *curse of the bloodfang beast* and *iron chains of misery*). The power-writing stage came after that, and Rich was in charge of taking the few powers already written and fleshing out the list (while incorporating changes the development team had made to the overall class structure). Whenever Rich would write up a crazy power (and the warlock is master of crazy, mean powers), he would relay it across the cube walls to Dave and I, and thereby give everybody else nearby a dose of warlock joy.

Once or twice a day, Rich would say something like, "Okay, here's a new one: *hurl through hell*. You banish a foe to the depths of the Nine Hells. During his journey he takes a bunch of damage. He returns prone in his former square, suffering from fear." Everybody in earshot would have an evil chuckle (Dave's is the most evil, by the way) and think about



*Tiefling warlock*

the reaction the hapless monster will have when that happens during a game.

Rich (and maybe all of us) really wrote his most entertaining stuff when he was getting punchy at the end of the day. The warlock is a great class to work on when you just need to cut loose and write the most insane powers possible, and he'll likewise be more fun to play the more exhausting your day has been.

I can't wait until people first get their hands on this class and say, "I can do *what*?" And the reactions of the other people at the table will be even better. You just might hear your party's cleric saying, "I know I said we should punish these evildoers, but *ouch!*"

# WIZARDS

—Mike Mearls

As a wizard, your path is a study in contradiction. You can conjure a wave of acid that turns a battalion of soldiers into a pile of bones. With a wave of your hand, you send forth a bolt of fire that detonates with enough force to level a building. Yet for all your power, a slack-jawed orc with a scimitar can end your



**Human  
wizard**

life with a single blow. While the fighter absorbs blow after blow, you have to keep to the back of the group and avoid the monsters. In part, you know that only a fool lets a monster swing a 10-pound hunk of sharpened steel at him. On the other hand, for all your power you are simply more vulnerable than other adventurers. Fighters, clerics, and rogues can afford to let monsters use their heads as punching bags. What little brains they have aren't needed, as long as you are around to figure things out.

In battle, you play a dangerous game. You must destroy your enemies with arcane power before they come close enough to pose a threat. In theory, the rest of the group is there to protect you. Unfortunately, the clerics and fighters of the world are rarely known for their intellectual and tactical genius. Sooner or later, one of your companions will make a mistake that might cost you your life. A wizard survives only as long as he keeps an escape plan, so keep a path of retreat open at all times. You'll never regret it.

A rested wizard is a deadly foe. Even after several battles, a wizard has a number of incantations he can call on again and again, provided he has a chance for a brief rest. When it comes time to set up camp, you need as much sleep and relaxation as possible. Keeping watch is not the same at resting, but provides another instance where you must rely on lesser intellects to protect you. You need your rest. Insist on sleeping in the middle of the group. If an attack comes, let the monsters fall upon your allies first. When you awake, the few seconds this tactic buys you might be the difference between victory and defeat.

The mightiest of wizard spells, those capable of turning a phalanx of warriors into smoldering bones, are too powerful for any mortal to use more than once without extensive rest. In contrast, the simplest wizard spells, those that you can call on again and again without limit, are weaker than a fighter's sword stroke. You must play a careful balancing game, one that requires you to hide your power over the course of an expedition. A wizard who is too rash to save his spells, or one so cautious that he never casts them, places himself and his entire adventuring group in danger. Use your spells judiciously and always reserve something to save your own bacon.

Luckily, you have access to power words. Power words are spells that drain energy from you, but not so much that you need a long period of rest to recover. With a minute to catch your breath, you can concentrate and summon forth the energies needed to use your power words. Power words are your most trustworthy tool, spells you use again and again in a variety of situations. A smart wizard relies on his power words to defeat his enemies, with his more powerful spells a potent weapon against tough foes and his weakest spells a reliable tool for simple situations or weakened enemies.

Between these three types of magic, you are well equipped to handle adventures. Compared to other classes, your once per day abilities are the most powerful and your more frequently used abilities are slightly weaker. During an adventure,



*Elf wizard casts a spell*

you are best served in finding the perfect situation to use your most powerful spells. The right spell at the right moment turns certain defeat into an easy victory.

A simple crossbow is a simpleton's tool not worthy of sullying a wizard's hands. After all, you can generate bolts of arcane power to smite your foes. Why rely on something as cruel and inelegant as a crossbow? For melee weapons, you might wield a staff as a melee weapon in emergencies, but most wizards need little more than a simple dagger.

Around town, simple robes, a hat, amulet or other item that signifies your membership in an arcane order broadcast your power to others and indicate that you should be treated with respect. On an adventure, you need more practical garb. Heavier armor is useful only to those too dense to use magic to protect themselves. Instead, opt for light, cloth armors that protect you from attacks without weighing you down.

Finding or creating a magical implement to match your specialty is your highest priority. Such a magical item grants power to your spells while offering unique abilities in its own right. Most wizards carry a few such items, to increase their versatility and to ensure that they carry the right tool for the right job.

Hoard them whenever possible. You'll never regret keeping your options open.

Wizards fear wraiths, ghosts, and similar monsters above other foes, as the party's fighter cannot easily hold such insubstantial foes at bay. Agile, fast foes, from fearsome blackspawn raiders to sneaky goblin skirmishers, force a wizard to keep an eye on the shadows for a sudden attack. A surprise attack might be the last attack you face. Smart, sneaky enemies have the greatest chance to outwit your comrades. Keep an eye out for enemies who are capable of presenting an intelligent challenge.

# WIZARDS

—Continued

In the end, you are the most powerful adventurer in the group but only when you work with their allies as a team. A lone wizard faces death at the end of foe's weapon, yet a wizard alone can call down powers that overshadow any other adventurer's attacks. While some wizards sequester themselves in isolated towers, far from other folk, the mightiest wizards achieved their great deeds with the help of equally legendary warriors, clerics, and rogues. Sure, they might not provide the most intellectually stimulating campfire conversation, but they do have their uses.

Tiefling wizard



## WIZARDS MAKE THINGS GO BOOM

—Stephen Radney-MacFarland

It's really just that simple. The wizard is, and always has been, the quintessential battlefield controller. *Fireball*, *lightning bolt*, *meteor swarm*, even *magic missile*—they're all iconic wizard spells that deal damage to multiple opponents at a distance. They are fun, evocative, and the new wizard gets them in spades.

But the wizard is more than a simple arcane howitzer. The wizard has always had a huge bag of tricks, and the new wizard is no different. In previous editions, those tricks' natures were expressed by way of the schools of magic, and while many of those tricks endure, the new wizard identifies them by implements of her art—the orb, staff, or wand.

Wizards who wield an orb flavor their blasts with terrain control and manipulation and focus on retributive and perception effects. If you see a wizard with a staff, you can count on her magical might smiting you with lines and cones, and you can expect to go flying across the battlefield as a consequence of the spell's effect. A wand wizard is the truly long-distance controller who sits behind layers of magic protection—he's a hard nut to crack.

But don't get comfortable thinking that you've got a wizard's number after you've spied his arcane implement. The wizard's specialization doesn't preclude any of the other powers; it just improves the power and versatility of spells thanks to the focused implements.

## FEATS

—Stephen Radney-MacFarland

Lots of things in D&D are changing, but don't fret too much: You'll still get feats.

Some of the feats will look familiar, but many are just brand new. And, if you're playing a wizard, the first thing you'll notice is that there are two types of feats that have gone the way of the dinosaur—metamagic and item creation feats.

Don't distress, there's a method to our madness.

In general, we wanted to stray away from feats that were conditional on a specific effect. For instance, metamagic feats applied a condition to an individual spell at a cost (or, for the nonmagical reading this, *Power Attack* might change your numbers round by round). Instead, we went with feats that apply a benefit once. The things that the feat adjust might change from level to level in the standard leveling way, but the benefit the feat grants won't change, nor will you have to pick what the feat does round-by-round or even day-by-day. Feats enhance your character build, while per-round, per-encounter, and per-day choices sit firmly in the powers section of your character sheet.

As for item creation, we stuck them in a new area we're calling rituals. Wizards get some rituals for free, but you're not spending precious feat slots (or experience points) to craft magic items anymore.

With these two iconic wizard feat types living in other places, at first blush you may think the wizard has few options. Not so!

The intent was not to limit choice, but rather to create new and interesting ones for the wizard (and the other classes). Feats can increase the potency of arcane powers. Many of these choices will seem self-evident for the role of the traditional wizard—feats that increase defenses, feats that limit the penalties for using powers in melee, feats that increase speed—but others, called skill feats, add breadth to skills. Cherry-picking skill feats can enhance the know-it-all nature wizards exude.

Oh, and here's something for martial-minded wizard players (fans of the warmage and the duskblade, listen up): arcane strikes, power words, and spells of the wizard don't have anything like the arcane spell failure of past editions. And while the wizard starts with very few armor and weapon proficiencies, feats can expand those choices. While you'll never reach the melee might of the fighter and paladin, it's easier to play the controller with the sharp pointy bits and the tough outer shell that hurls lethal arcane energy across the battlefield!

But all of this feat goodness isn't for the wizard alone. While feats sometimes require a specific race, training in a skill, or a minimum level, they never require a class. Feats enhance your character build, whatever it is. You can pick feats that compliment your build, you can pick feats to play against type, and you can find feats that create interesting synergies in the rules. And no feats accomplish the last two choices better than class training feats.

Each class has a corresponding set of feats that allows other characters to pick up select class abilities, skill training, and even powers from another class. Have that idea for the martial wizard? Take the Fighter Training feats. Maybe you want one of those archetypal rogues who dabbles in magic. Take either the Warlock or Wizard Training feats. These feats allow you to flavor your character with elements of another class without diluting your original class's power and role.

## BALANCING THE WIZARD

—Stephen Schubert

When we set out to determine the right power level for each class, we first had to establish a baseline, independent of any particular class. Once that was in place, we could discuss the aspects of each class in relation to that baseline, comparing the components of a class's offense, defense, and utility.

The wizard has always been high on the offensive scale and on the lower end defensively, and much of that flavor has been maintained. We set out to preserve the idea that the wizard is very powerful, with abilities that affect multiple opponents at once, but he doesn't last long if the enemy brutes start wailing on him. Thus, the wizard's powers follow our higher curve of output, using spells and abilities that hit lots of enemies in quick bursts (as opposed to other



Dwarf wizard

high-damage classes like rogues or warlocks that do lots of damage to a single opponent, or spread their damage out over a few rounds).

With potent spells and powers, the wizard can clear away weak minions with fireballs, and he can also control the actions of multiple opponents through directly targeted control powers or indirectly by changing the battlefield with walls and clouds. But where the D&D 3E wizard had many "save or die" spells in his repertoire, to cast over and over until the opponent finally failed a save, the new wizard has fewer powers that can eliminate a worthy foe with a single shot (critical hits not withstanding). Many of the wizard's direct control powers affect targets for a much shorter duration.

Defensively, the wizard is still less sturdy than most of the other classes. While the new system allows all first level characters to survive at least one solid hit, the wizard might not last past the second hit. More so than in 3rd Edition D&D, the wizard will find it hazardous to cast spells when next to enemies, which will make him rely a bit more on his allies or shifting around out of reach.



# WIZARDS

—Continued

Ultimately, the wizard could end up being the class with the highest offensive output in the game, but getting to that level is going to require careful positioning or good tactics on the part of the player, both to maximize his output and to insure that he doesn't get his wizard killed in the process.

## ARE SCHOOLS OF MAGIC DEAD?

—Logan Bonner

With 4th Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, spells are categorized based on their effects more than their thematic links. For instance, in D&D 3E *Melf's acid arrow* and *scorching ray* both fire rays that deal energy damage, but they come from different schools because one creates a real object. If you look at them in terms of their effects, these schools don't always mean much as a way to differentiate types of magic. The D&D 4E wizard instead uses different arcane foci that tie to specific types of effects.

The introduction of foci also led to changes in spells. All the effects that were useful only outside of combat went over to rituals, a move that actually made those effects better. More casters will be using these effects because they can pick up a ritual and spend a bit of gold to get the effect instead of having to spend spell slots on spells that aren't useful in combat.

*From the Player's Handbook design draft, notes in files passed between Andy Collins and Rob Heinsoo:*

### HOLD PERSON 2 (HOLD PEOPLE) (TD)

AC: I won't be held responsible for what happens if we publish a spell called "Hold People."

RH: People. People Who Hold People. Are the Luckiest People.

AC: Don't make me come over there, Heinsoo.

So where are the schools now?

Abjuration's long-term wards and restorative effects like *remove disease* moved to rituals. There are still plenty of mid-combat protective spells, especially in the cleric list.

Conjuration's long-distance *teleportation* moved to rituals.

Divination spells have moved almost entirely to rituals.

Enchantment is still around, but expect future classes

to emphasize it more than the classes in the *first Player's Handbook*.

Evocation is all about blowing things up and, since the wizard fills the controller role, we need more options for blowing things up.

Illusions are common in the wizard's list. Still, much more are coming.

Necromancy is the most diminished set of effects, but this was an intentional change for the good of the game. Save-or-die effects were too unpredictable, and high-level play was a nightmare because of them. Negative levels also make the game less fun, and penalties are now more focused and generally don't last longer than the combat encounter.

Transmutation is a school I can't really understand. What the heck binds these spells together? Anyway, since this school is a bit of a grab bag, expect some things to show up and others to not. You can bet that *polymorph* won't be making an appearance (at least, not as a single spell).

So schools have obviously disappeared, but does this really mean they're dead? Well, all the coolest spells are still there. A school is really only dead as its spells. All we did was remove "school" as a mechanical division. If you want to play an "abjurer," you can grab all the defensive spells you want—and if *wall of force* seems like abjuration to you, go for it! Removing the word "school" from our spell vocabulary doesn't mean the effects and themes have gone anywhere. Some future classes will even be based more heavily on past schools. Don't be surprised if you see illusionist or conjurer appear as classes or paragon paths at some point.

## EXPERIMENTS IN 3RD EDITION

—Stephen Schubert

Design of the new wizard really started as we began looking at new ways to express magic in D&D 3rd Edition. Many of those directions helped us learn what would work best for wizards.

*Complete Arcane's* warlock class showed the viability of a class that could have an always-available at-will magic strike. While the warlock continued to evolve into its own new class, the lesson had been learned: Every class should be able to do something interesting each round, even at the lowest of levels. The wizard needed to have a power, or better yet a selection of powers, that he could use every encounter or even every round. Of course, this thinking was part of the core of the new system, where every class would be a different mix of at-will, encounter-based, or daily resources.

We were also looking at the role a class might fill, creating stronger definition for each class by identifying each one with a primary role. *Complete Mage* introduced and discussed the blaster role, which is the core of the new wizard class. That same book also further expands on the concept of wizards with an always-on or at-will ability, through the mechanic of the Reserve feat, which grant a wizard a minor at-will power as long as that wizard has an appropriate spell prepared. The new wizard evolves this concept to give the class an array of

at-will strikes that the wizard can use every round, without the restriction of requiring a saved spell slot.

These trends speak to the greater issue of extending the amount of fun players can have, by extending every class's resources over many more encounters. While wizards still have the opportunity to cast (and run out of) spells, they'll have a few other powers to use much more frequently, allowing them to continue to contribute even once their spells run out.

## WIZARD ARCANA

—Bruce R. Cordell

While working on the Orcus II team with Rob and James, I was concerned about wizards losing the flavor associated with schools of specialization. I also wanted a way to figure out what types of rites a wizard could learn. On a treadmill down in the gym here at the Wizards of the Coast offices, the idea burst upon me that perhaps wizards should care more about their implements than their schools, because the implement they had in hand would determine the spells they could cast. Thus, instead of spells being divided up by abjuration, transmutation, and so on, they'd be divided up by the implements required for their casting.

I returned to the meeting room where Rob, James, and I were scheduled to meet and dashed off the core concept on the white board. James arrived first. I couldn't wait for Rob to show up, so I gave James a jumbled run down. I explained the idea of wand, staff, mask, and tome being implements a wizard would build his spells around. He didn't shoot me down. Then Rob arrived, and I gave the same explanation. Rob's a cautious guy, and he didn't grin the maniac grin I had when the idea came to me on the treadmill, but neither did he dismiss it. We all talked about the concept for a couple of hours, going over various permutations. In that meeting, we evolved additional potential wizard implements, including dagger and familiar. By the end of the meeting, I was still halfway sure the concept was dead. Actually, it turned out Rob was coming down with some sort of horrible, life-sapping virus (it wasn't an allergy to milk in his coffee, as he'd hoped), and his enthusiasm was at a low ebb.

The concept has mutated from what we originally worked out in that small meeting room that day, and even from what the Orcus II team delivered to the larger R&D team, but today I'm gratified to see the wizard using wand, staff, and orb arcana. I don't doubt that in some future book additional arcana will be introduced, including mask, familiar, and even dagger (Rob's favorite).



Dwarf  
wizard

## CLASS ROLE

—Stephen Schubert

The wizard is the “controller,” the player character who hits multiple enemies for lots of damage. He isn't as good against a lone target as, say, the rogue or the ranger, but if he gets all the opponents in a *fireball* or similar area-effect spell, then his damage output is unmatched.

There are two key components to every role: offense and defense. Offensively, a controller's job is to affect multiple targets, preferably at range. The classic *fireball* spell is an iconic example of the wizard's role-fulfilling powers, but those powers don't have to be directly damaging. Controlling effects like *Evard's black tentacles* or the various *wall* spells are also ways that the wizard can affect multiple targets and control the course of a battle, even when they don't deal damage.

Defensively, the controller is a bit more vulnerable. In the wizard's case, this is expressed by low hit points and little in the way of armor. As a result, the battlefield position of the wizard is typically in the back rank, lobbing his strikes and spells at range. He can also overcome some of his defensive weaknesses by making himself harder to hit through spells like *displacement* or *invisibility*, or move out of range with short-range *teleports* and the like. Of course, choosing these defensive powers is made at the cost of fewer offensive powers, a dilemma that's always been true for the wizard class.

# OTHER CLASSES

Now let's take a look at some of the other classes we've been experimenting with for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS 4th Edition . . .

## BARBARIANS

—Mike Mearls

I love barbarians. One of my earliest 3E moments in good die rolling involved a barbarian rolling a crit with a greatsword, dropping a foe, and critting on his Cleave attack to drop a second foe. The words “I rage” are a great part of D&D. At the time of this writing, barbarians are in draft form, but here's what we have so far.

Rage is the heart of every barbarian, and that's still true in 4E. With the increased customization in the game, barbarians now have several varieties of rage to choose from. We've also



Human  
barbarian

tied barbarians and druids closer together, creating a relationship between them similar to the link between paladins and clerics. If a paladin is the sword of the faith, the barbarian is nature's fury given physical form.

We wanted the barbarian to be more than a fighter who rages, and to that end we firmly pushed weapon tricks and mastery into the fighter's realm. Barbarians still heft axes and mauls with the best of them, but they now have access to feral, totemic abilities that make them unique.

On a historical note, my playtest barbarian character used a rage ability called *lightning panther strike* to move across a dungeon chamber and chop down five skeletons in one round. He also had an unhealthy tendency to follow up strikes from his axe with a quick bite attack. Barbarians are more feral and, well, angrier, than ever. All that stuff might not make it into the final draft, but that's the direction we're headed.

## BARDS

—Logan Bonner

A master of artistry and social grace, a bard is a leader who wields magic both dramatic and subtle. Harnessing a natural talent for creativity (be it song, painting, dance, or oratory), a bard draws magic from otherworldly patrons that admire the bard's work. This is fundamentally different from the relationship other spellcasters have with their power sources. A bard is not a subservient worshiper like a cleric, nor does he bend forces to his will like a wizard. The relationship between a bard and his patrons is one of mutual respect, and the magical gifts given cannot be taken away.

Though many bards hone their skills through intense study and practice at bardic colleges, others are free-spirited wanderers with inborn creative genius that, though rough around the edges, is truly marvelous to behold. To most bards, understanding history and lore is essential. Because they are respected as artists, performers, and sages, bards are accepted in most societies and can enter doors that are closed to others (especially to other adventurers).

A bard can be truly inspiring to the rest of his adventuring party and immensely aggravating to his enemies. With the skill to fool enemies with illusory magic and to influence them with mental trickery, a bard can make his foes work against themselves. The bard makes his enemies distrust their eyes, their ears, and even their allies. And that is why he's truly dangerous.

Though many bards are fond of treasure, a bard is a storyteller at heart. Every expedition is a new tale to spin—and the show must go on.

## DRUIDS

—Mike Mearls

The druid presents an interesting problem for D&D 4E design, in that the class in 3E covers so much ground. Is the druid the guy who summons monsters? Is he the guy who transforms into monsters? Is he a spellcasting healer like a cleric? Many



**Halfling  
druid**

gaming groups consider the D&D 3E druid one of the most powerful classes in the game, and for good reason. The druid does a lot of things well, though it takes an experienced player to see and fully utilize the possibilities inherent in the class.

Moving forward, design identified a few things that made the druid unique. We expect other classes to cast spells, and we expect other classes to summon monsters. We don't expect many classes to have the ability to turn into raging dire bears and elementals, so that talent became the foundation on which the druid is built. The current design for druids allows them to use *wild shape* a lot more often, though at a price. Druids select shapes they can assume in much the same way that other classes pick spells and maneuvers.

To carry this analogy forward, we designed a variety of forms to fit different needs. A druid might turn into a hawk to fly over an orc camp and spy on the monsters below. He then turns into a mouse to sneak into the orc king's tent, then shifts into bear form to tear the king in half. The druid's forms are the primary tools he uses on an adventure. To give the druid an incentive to walk around in humanoid form, he gains a selection of nature-themed spells that give him some ranged firepower and utility abilities.

## MONKS

—Logan Bonner

Through dedication and practice, monks become supreme martial artists, capable of great feats of speed and strength.

What others accomplish with magic and steel, monks can do with only their bodies and minds. Monks live an ascetic lifestyle and carry minimal gear (at least compared to other adventurers). Most are taciturn and disciplined, so they sometimes find it difficult to socialize with their party members. This might be a liability in society, but it translates to a single-minded, unflagging focus in battle.

The typical monk lives in a monastery or as a hermit in the wilderness. Those who begin adventuring usually do so to continue the perfection of their bodies and technique. Some have altruistic ideals and adventure to protect the weak. A few monks are simply obsessed with being the most powerful fighters and wander the land seeking out strong adversaries to defeat.

In battle, no one is faster or more agile than the monk. After darting across the battlefield, a monk can execute rapid maneuvers that send his opponent flying, knock it to the ground, or stun it into submission. A monk's defenses are also strong—an awareness of his own body and his surroundings lets a monk avoid attacks, and he can channel his ki to heal his own wounds.

The monk class is still on the horizon, but we know it will work great in the game's new structure. Since the monk relies on mobility, the class will likely be a striker, putting down high damage with unarmed attacks.



**Halfling  
monk**

# OTHER CLASSES

—Continued

## PALADINS

—James Wyatt

In every stage of 4th Edition design, the paladin has been one of my particular interests. Conceptually, it's my favorite class. I love the idea of a noble, virtuous warrior. I want to play Sir Lancelot (pre-Guinevere), to live the highest ideals of the good alignment, to strive for the truly exalted cause.

In practice, I hate playing paladins. They live somewhere between the fighter and the cleric, but they get none of the bonus feats of the fighter and none of the cool spells of the cleric.

*Smite evil*, the paladin's best attack, is limited to a few times per day and it's useless against a non-Evil foe. Not only that, it has a terrible tendency to not work at all when you use it!

A paladin can summon a warhorse that's pretty much useless in a normal dungeon environment, and he or she can use *remove disease* a couple of times a week.

Whoop. De. Do.

Early on, I set out to make paladins as cool as I possibly could. The designs have changed a lot since I started and

gone through hands other than mine, but the result is a class that will truly stand at the front line of the adventuring party as a shield wall protecting allies from harm. Paladins fill much the same role as the fighter, but they do it with divine power instead of martial skill. They still smite evil, but they do it with a broad variety of smites that are available in every encounter.

Paladins have a long and mostly distinguished history in D&D. With 4th Edition, we're putting them back on top and returning them to the glory they deserve.

And I have two more words to whet your appetite: Evil. Paladins.

## RANGERS

—Chris Sims

Precision with bow and blade, sharpness of eye and ear, communion with nature and its signs—the ranger embodies all these. Where the rogue keeps to the shadows, you keep to the backwoods and other dangerous wilds. There, you guide your friends safely to their destination and run your enemies down.

Guerilla tactics are your food and drink. You strike hard and move quickly to evade your foes, all the while setting them up for another deadly blow. Arrows fly from your bow as quickly as your blades flash, and although you might be better at one sort of combat over the other, your deadliness with either mustn't be underestimated.

Intuition and keen senses can't be undervalued either. You feel when danger is about to strike, sometimes turning an enemy's seeming advantage into a liability. The surroundings can tell you where your foes have gone, and your training keeps you in rapid pursuit. That same agility and speed allows you to rove the battlefield, slaying at will and avoiding return strikes with apparent ease.

Reliance on mobility means you need a stout friend to engage your enemies long enough for you to find the right angle from which to land a telling blow. Although you're doubtless fit and able, your body isn't as resilient as soldierly types, nor is it encased in steel armor, so you need healing or motivation to push forward despite injury and adversity. Your talents are wasted on rabble, so an ally able to clear the field of nuisances might be more valuable than any other form of target designation.

Like attracts like, and as part of an elite team, you shine. In the dark places of the world, you are the finely honed instrument that gets the job done.

You are the ranger, and you live for action and adventure.



Half-elf  
paladin

## SORCERERS

—Mike Mearls

The sorcerer presents an interesting design challenge in that the class stands so close to the wizard. In 3E, both classes use the same spell lists. They differ in how they access those lists. The magic system in 4E makes that differentiation hard to carry forward. The design team also wanted to create clearer, vivid differences between the two classes. Not only do sorcerers in 4E use different spells, but they utilize a different method of spellcasting.

The design team posited a class that has a more rudimentary, simplistic style of magic. Sorcerers use inborn talents, giving them a leg up on wizards when it comes to learning spells. The magic they use is more art than science, driven more by a feel for the ebb and flow of energy than by hours of study and practice.

To capture this flavor, the design team built mechanics that reflect a caster who barely controls the power he wields. A wizard creates magical effects by carefully reciting a magical formula. The sorcerer reaches into the magical energies that burn within him and lets them loose on the world with little real control.

The power wielded by a sorcerer is powerful enough that even after a spell is done, ambient energy swirls around him. A sorcerer who blasts you with a *cold* spell is protected by a small, swirling cloud of snow and ice for a short time. One who unleashes a *fireball* bursts into flames that scorch enemies who try to attack. The sorcerer is one with his magic, and he (in some cases quite literally) wears it like a second skin.

## SWORDMAGES

—Richard Baker

The intersections of character roles and power sources naturally suggest a number of interesting character classes that have never really been seen in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game before. The swordmage is one of these—an arcane character who fills the role of defender. Like the fighter or the paladin, he seeks to stand toe-to-toe with the monsters and draw their attacks to his own superior defenses, protecting the more vulnerable members of the adventuring party.

Magic is the armor of the swordmage. He relies on innate magical wards and spell-shields instead of heavy armor. He might be an elf bladesinger, graceful and deadly; a dwarf runic warrior who infuses his axe with words of ancient power; a sly tiefling dervish who whirls through the thick of battle, guarded by wards of infernal fire; a wandering seeker after knowledge who leads an ascetic life; or a noble-born eldritch knight of a magical empire, raised in an exotic tradition of arcane chivalry.



Elf ranger



Dragonborn sorcerer

# OTHER CLASSES

—Continued

Where the fighter learns powerful weapon stunts and the paladin uses divinely inspired smites to deal damage, the swordmage uses a set of arcane power words to perform his astounding feats of arms. With his magic a swordmage can make his blade burst into flames or crackle with lightning; he can infuse his limbs with a sudden burst of fearsome, sorcerous strength; or he can even summon ghostly blades around his weapons that mirror his movements and strike together as one.

The swordmage is no wizard; very few of his powers allow him to attack at range. He must meet his enemies in melee, blade to blade, but there no other character matches his perfect blend of skill at arms and skill at magic.



Tiefling warlord

## WARLORDS

—Richard Baker

The warlord is a distant descendant of the marshal, a class introduced in *Miniatures Handbook*, but the warlord is a much broader and more complete character concept with a wide array of powerful abilities at his command. The warlord does not rely on magic; he is a martial character. The leadership qualities of a warlord vary, but they're all from his own personal power.

Above all, the warlord is a skilled battle leader. He might be a bloodthirsty barbarian warchief; a pious knight-commander in a militant order; an ambitious nobleman seeking fame and fortune; a graceful elf firstblade; a calculating mercenary captain; a halfling marchwarden charged with the defense of the clan's holdings; or a courageous marshal of the borderlands who fights to stem the tide of monsters ravaging the frontier. Regardless of his race or background, he is a skillful warrior with an uncanny gift for leadership. Even young and untried warlords have greatness in them and are born leaders.

Warlords are resilient, front-line leaders who significantly increase the party's damage output by using powers that help other characters to fight better. In addition, they help others to recover from damage and shield them from harm almost as well as clerics do. But their distinguishing characteristic is an unprecedented control of battlefield positioning. Warlords are tactical masters who can reshape the lines of battle in a way that no other D&D character has ever been able to.

### FEATHER ME YON OAF!

—Richard Baker

I often use placeholder names in feat and power design until I figure out exactly what I want to call something. For example, in *Book of Nine Swords* I came up with a Tiger Claw power I simply called *Tear His Damn Head Off*. But the single most egregious example from the Orcus design process was the warlord rally I called *Feather Me Yon Oaf*. Basically, the warlord uses the power, and everyone in the party gets an immediate opportunity to yank out a missile weapon and shoot the target creature the warlord designates—in other words, “shoot that guy for me” or “Feather me yon oaf!”



**Human warlord**

*As someone who tried out a warlord in playtests, I can attest that I chose this power purely for the opportunity to shout “Feather me yon oaf!” at least once per session. I have no idea if the name will persist into the final edition, but it cracked me up every single time.*

*—Michele Carter*



# TIERS OF ADVENTURE

—Mike Mearls

Tiers are one of those things that existed in D&D 3E without any official acknowledgement. Anyone who played the game from 1st level on up to double digits likely noticed a subtle, continuous shift in the game. Monster damage grew high enough that low hit point characters could take only a hit or two before going down. Saving throws became more important, as more monsters had save or die effects. Once *teleport* came into the game, the PCs could go anywhere they wanted, helping to make traditional dungeons more difficult to run. Wands became affordable, allowing a smart party access to unlimited healing, flight, and invisibility. In short, D&D changes across the levels that it covers. The tier system seeks to quantify those changes and define the roles of adventurers across the levels.



**Human fighter,  
heroic tier**

## HEROIC LEVELS

—Mike Mearls

The Heroic tier covers that first portion of play, where adventurers are still gaining the basic abilities offered by their classes. The adventurers are only beginning to put some serious space between themselves and the average person.

The Heroic tier is firmly entrenched in the classic tropes of low-level D&D. The experience is aimed at the “real” world of D&D, in the sense of locations that are analogous to areas in the real world. Human cities, dwarven strongholds, dungeons found beneath ruined castles, and so on are all typical vistas for Heroic tier. In essence, if you took the real world, added magic, and sprinkled dungeons beneath the earth, you’d have the basic set up for the Heroic tier. While you still face strange monsters and enter bizarre dungeons, you return home to a house in the midst of a city or town between adventures. Your travels rarely take you to other worlds or places where magic has utterly warped reality.

At this point in your adventuring career, the Underdark is a scary place that you might hear rumors about, but you’ll go there only as you approach 10th level. You might fight troglodytes or grimlocks who emerge from the depths, but a single drow warrior or wizard poses a significant threat. You might take part in a short expedition to the uppermost fringes of the Underdark, but its deepest recesses and places such as the Vault of the Drow are likely beyond your reach.

You can count on facing pit traps, skeletons and zombies, orc hordes, squads of well-drilled hobgoblin soldiers, and endless hordes of kobolds. The classic humanoids of D&D, from goblins to gnolls, stand as your primary enemies. The design team has attempted to create more flavorful and mechanical differences between these creatures, creating a different feel for an adventure that pits you against a gnoll tribe or a goblin horde. Some humanoids, most notably gnolls and troglodytes, received a significant increase in power. Just as goblins and kobolds are ideal adversaries for beginning adventurers, near the end of the Heroic tier troglodytes and gnolls are good off-the-shelf choices for villains. Gnolls, with their link to the demon prince Yeenoghu, have a number of Abyssal allies who make them tough opponents. Troglodytes inhabit the outermost reaches of the Underdark and are likely the first foes you face if you enter that realm. Orcs and hobgoblins are balanced at the middle of the tier, giving them the flexibility to fight against adventurers from 1st to 10th level and even beyond.

The dragons you face at this tier are the youngest specimens of their kind. They’ve only just begun to master their

special abilities. A well-equipped party that takes the right precautions can probably deal with one as long as they are not completely outclassed in terms of level. Don't get used to this situation. Once you hit Paragon tier, a dragon has so many advantages that even a well-prepared party is in for the fight of its life.

You face the lowliest of demons and devils in Heroic tier, creatures such as imps who are clearly subordinate to the evil humanoids and villains you face. A lone bearded devil might serve as the ringleader of the diabolic cult that you're fighting against. Don't expect an easy fight. If you see a vroock or a similar mid-tier demon, run for your life.

Heroic tier is the stuff of classic dungeon crawls, a party of adventurers gathering in the Inn of the Welcome Wench before setting off for an expedition to the ruined moathouse outside of Hommlett. The Caves of Chaos, the dungeons of the slavelords, and the upper levels of the Temple of Elemental Evil are all iconic Heroic tier locations. These places were either once great shrines to evil that have fallen and now seek to restore their status, or they are new outposts of evil that have only recently taken root. In any case, many of the quests you go on during the Heroic tier focus on taking out minions of evil who pose a direct threat to a limited area of the world, such as a single town. You might catch

**Dwarf paladin,  
paragon tier**



**Halfling warlord,  
epic tier**



hints of greater, cosmic evils or world-spanning conspiracies, but at this tier you don't yet have the power needed to confront them.

The classic dungeon crawl, with the party slowly making its way down labyrinthine dungeon passages, stands as the iconic example of an Heroic tier session. Pack your torches, keep a 10-foot pole handy, and stock up on iron spikes and rations. You'll need them whether you delve into the depths of a dungeon or venture into the wilds outside of town.

When it comes to urban adventuring, you are likely to face off against wererats and doppelgangers. Criminal conspiracies, hidden cults, and other threats to the city serve as typical villains, with some of these groups tying into planar enemies and creatures from beyond the world.

At this tier, you can count on finding +1 longswords, +1 suits of armor and shields, and *potions of healing* in treasure hoards. In a larger town or city, a skilled smith is capable of forging such goods if you have enough money to afford them. For mightier goods, you must venture into the largest cities in the world.

# TIERS OF ADVENTURE

—Continued

## PARAGON LEVELS

—Andy Collins

When a character reaches 11th level, he crosses a significant threshold. No longer a mere adventurer, he is now known as a *paragon hero*.

Paragon-level adventurers see the bigger picture. It's not enough for a paragon just to protect a town from evil cultists, or to root out the band of ogres preying on travelers. Paragon adventurers are the type of folks you call on to save the kingdom from an army of giants massing in the mountains, or to uncover the fiendish plot to overthrow the empress and replace her with a pawn of Asmodeus. They're also the adventurers brave enough to enter the trap-filled tomb of a deadly lich, or to take out that red dragon that's been demanding sacrifices for the last five generations.

Paragon adventurers battle many of the D&D game's mightiest classic monsters—giants, demons and devils, beholders, mind flayers, rakshasas, yuan-ti, and, of course, dragons—along with a few new or updated foes, such as runecarved idols, elemental archons of fire and ice, and the fomorians, the dreaded tyrants of the darkest caverns of the Feywild. They venture ever farther from familiar locales, exploring the gloomy reaches of the Shadowfell and delving deep into the Abyss to battle their enemies.

*You can choose your friends. And you can choose your destiny. But you can't choose your friends' epic destinies.*

—James Wyatt, March 2006

During these levels, characters further specialize their talents, differentiating themselves from others of the same class. The paths followed by two paragon-level fighters in the same party might be as different as night and day. Every path provides a wealth of abilities and powers; some fine-tune your existing strengths, while others open up entirely new options in combat. Overall, however, these new talents have a very simple aim: to make you even better at doing what you do best.

From this specialization comes a certain level of fame and notoriety. Locals might recognize Jarvis the fighter from that

time he helped the townsfolk of Great Rock with their stirge infestation, but mention Jarvis the Vigilant Defender in any tavern in the Western Province and tongues start wagging.

“Wasn't he one of those folks who stopped the goblin siege of Blackmere City?”

“Yup. I hear he staked that vampire who'd turned Spirodon into a town of zombies, too.”

“Don't forget that gigantic, slimy demon that burrowed up in the middle of the city. He killed that thing right quick, he did.”

From the arcane archer to the veiled assassin, the paragon-level character aims to make a name for himself (or herself) by showing everyone that he's the best there is at what he does. These levels, then, represent a testing ground, a crucible that lies between the life of the average dungeon delver and that of the immortal epic hero. If your battle captain or mystic theurge has what it takes to survive this ordeal and prove his worth, even the grandest secrets of reality will soon be within your grasp.

## EPIC LEVELS

—Bruce Cordell

D&D has always contained the seeds for high-level play. Did you, like my friends and I, choose gods from 1st Edition's *Deities & Demigods* book to fight each other? Those were some epic battles indeed.

The thing is, all previous editions of the game have added Epic level support only after the core rules were out the door. No matter how great these efforts, support for high-level play in products not specifically designed as such was nil to patchy. Therefore, only a fraction of the players ever routinely advanced a character beyond 13th level.

With the new edition, we bring Epic level play into the core experience. Every player can run a character from 1st to 30th level, and during the final ten levels of play, they shake the pillars of heaven and hell to achieve their epic destiny.

Your character's epic destiny describes the mythic archetype you aspire to achieve, perhaps from the moment you began adventuring. Whether you're a wizard who dreams of assuming the mantle of an archmage or a fighter finally realizing your previous lives as an eternal hero, your epic destiny is what you were born to become.

Only adventuring heroes have epic destinies; average folks are just not fated for such cosmic prominence. On the other

hand, player characters, by definition, can and should expect wonderful, majestic events to populate their future, if they can survive long enough to grasp greatness.

Each epic destiny defines your lasting impact on the world or even the universe; how people forever afterward remember and talk about you.

Your epic destiny ensures your name and exploits will live on forever.

Compared to a class or a paragon path, an epic destiny grants few benefits: the abilities gained at these levels are extraordinary. Certain laws of the universe work differently for you . . . or perhaps don't apply to you at all.

Perhaps most important, your epic destiny describes your character's exit from the world (and from the campaign), which occurs after you've completed your final quest. Each epic destiny provides a clear and meaningful reason why, after so many adventures, you finally take your leave of the mortal realm . . . and where you go when you leave. Will you found an arcane academy, join a pantheon, or become reincarnated anew?

## PARAGON PATHS AND EPIC DESTINIES

—Logan Bonner

The prestige class is dead. Long live the paragon path!

We have new ways to expand on your character at higher levels. You'll pick up a paragon path at 11th level and it will carry you through 20th. At 21st, your epic destiny kicks in and you'll become a legend. In some ways they're similar to prestige classes (and a few prestige classes have made the jump to paragon paths), but they're much cooler because you don't give up anything. As you're leveling up in your main class, you're also gaining abilities from your paragon path or epic destiny. At the same time the requirements are much simpler; they're easier to understand and won't make you jump through hoops.

The first *Player's Handbook* design team consisted of Rich Baker, Dave Noonan, and myself. The concepts of paragon paths and epic destinies were out there, but it was up to us to determine the way they would work. We came up with a set progression for each with the idea that everybody would be getting, say, a per-encounter power at the same time. That way, they'd be easier to design and DMs could mix, match, and tweak to get paragon paths that fit their campaigns. We also determined to loosen up the restrictions prestige classes had. If we want you to be a wizard for a certain path, we're going to tell you so.

The next step was coming up with a list of ones we wanted in the *Player's Handbook*. We planned to include twelve paragon paths, so we saw that if we had each path based on two classes, each class would lead to three paths. (This was really just the basis. Most paths are quite broad, but we made sure each one appealed strongly to at least two classes.) Quite a few old favorites came along (though they might look pretty different), but new ones like the weapon master, prince of knaves,

and cavalier look really great and will let you play the character you've really wanted to be all this time. You want to be Robin Hood? No problem.

We divided the paths up to get four each. I picked up the cleric/paladin, paladin/fighter, fighter/ranger, and wizard/ranger paths. Dave grabbed all the, as he would say, "evil-curious" paragon paths. I'm not saying Dave is evil . . . but he does cackle maniacally on a regular basis.

Epic destinies are a smaller group, but each one gives you some huge benefits. Only a few are planned for the *Player's Handbook*, but when you have the option to serve as the right-hand man to a god, become an undying warrior, or call dragons with a wave of your hand, more than a few choices will make your head explode in a burst of awesome. By the time you finish your epic destiny, you'll be stomping down all challengers, breaking rules of science, and odds are you'll be immortal.

Human warlord,  
epic tier



# THE NEXT WORD: DDI

—Bill Slavicsek

As we come to the end of this first look at the making of the 4th Edition of the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game, I thought I'd take a moment to say a few words about the companion to our physical products—the digital *Dungeons & Dragons Insider*. Instead of saying the same thing all over again, I've decided to reprint what appeared on *D&D Insider* when it went live on August 16, 2007 . . .

## & (AMPERSAND)

I always thought we should have a magazine called “&”. After all, it worked so well for “Dungeon” and “Dragon” that it just seemed to me that we were losing an opportunity to make use of the bit that brings it all together. So, until we figure out what to actually do with that recognizable little ampersand, I'm going to use it as the identifier for my regular feature here at *D&D Insider*.

I'm Bill Slavicsek. I've been the R&D Director for the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game since Wizards of the Coast acquired the company. Before that, I was a Creative Director and Game Designer with TSR, Inc. And way back when, I ran the creative portions of West End Games. Over the years, I've worked on roleplaying games, board games, computer games, miniatures games, novels, and nonfiction books of all kinds, and you can see my work on everything from *Star Wars* to *D20 MODERN* to *D&D*. I'm going to use this space to regularly talk to you about things related to *D&D* from the unique perspective of my Director's chair here at WotC. Let's start out by talking about 4th Edition *D&D* and *D&D Insider*.

At GenCon this week, we announced that the 4th Edition of the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game will debut in May 2008. We also announced that for the first time, the *D&D* game would consist of four integral and integrated parts. In addition to the physical products—the core rulebooks, supplements, adventures, miniatures, and accessories—the *D&D* experience would be enhanced by robust Community features (powered by Gleemax.com), a fully integrated Organized Play program that will offer benefits to convention and home play alike, and the digital initiative we're calling *D&D Insider*.

Why 4th Edition and why now? Because the time was right. My R&D team has been watching the play environment since the release of the 3.5 rules, listening to what you, the players, have been telling us. Two years ago, I assembled a team of designers, led by Rob Heinsoo, Andy Collins, and James Wyatt, to review all the data we've been collecting and see if we could

make the *d20 Game System* (the engine that powers the *D&D* game) better, more intuitive, and more fun. When I saw the first expressions of that effort, I knew we could make *D&D* better, stronger, faster, more fun. We could rebuild it. We could take the *d20 Game System* we all know and love and rocket it to the next level.

At the same time, we also began imagining a robust and exciting suite of digital features that could enhance and complement the roleplaying game. It became clear to me that we had two winning directions that would be even more powerful when we combined them, and that's when we made the decision to move forward with *D&D* 4th Edition.

The future (only nine months away!) contains the same *D&D* we all play on a regular basis. It's still going to be a tabletop roleplaying game. It's still set in a medieval fantasy world of magic and monsters. It's still the *d20 Game System*. But the rulebooks appear more vibrant, more visually stunning, and much easier to use. The game mechanics have been amped up to eliminate the game-stoppers, accentuate the fun factors, and make play faster and more exciting. In the future (now only eight months, 29 days, 23 hours, and 50 minutes from now!) *D&D Insider* provides its members with immediate access to *Dragon Magazine* and *Dungeon Magazine*, to enhanced and expanded content tied to the newest physical book products, to an amazing suite of digital tools to make *Dungeon Master* preparation and campaign management easier to handle, to a *Character Creator* that provides not only an interactive character sheet but a visualizer that lets you determine the exact look of the characters you create. And, *D&D Insider* provides a digital *D&D Game Table* that turns the Internet into your kitchen table. This amazing application, which we'll talk more about as the weeks go on, allows you to supplement your face-to-face gaming 24/7, helps you find a group to game with if you don't happen to have a face-to-face group, or lets you hook up with gaming buddies who long ago scattered to the four winds. Take a look at the prototype movie we showed at GenCon to get a first taste of the *D&D Game Table*.

Wow. There's a lot more that I want to share with you, but I've already exceeded my allotted word count for this first column.

Keep playing!

*Bill Slavicsek is the R&D Director for Roleplaying Games, Miniatures, and Book Publishing at Wizards of the Coast. All of the game designers, developers, editors, book editors, and D&D Insider content managers working on Dungeons & Dragons, Star Wars, and the WotC Publishing Group report into Bill's R&D team.*



*Dwarf concept art*



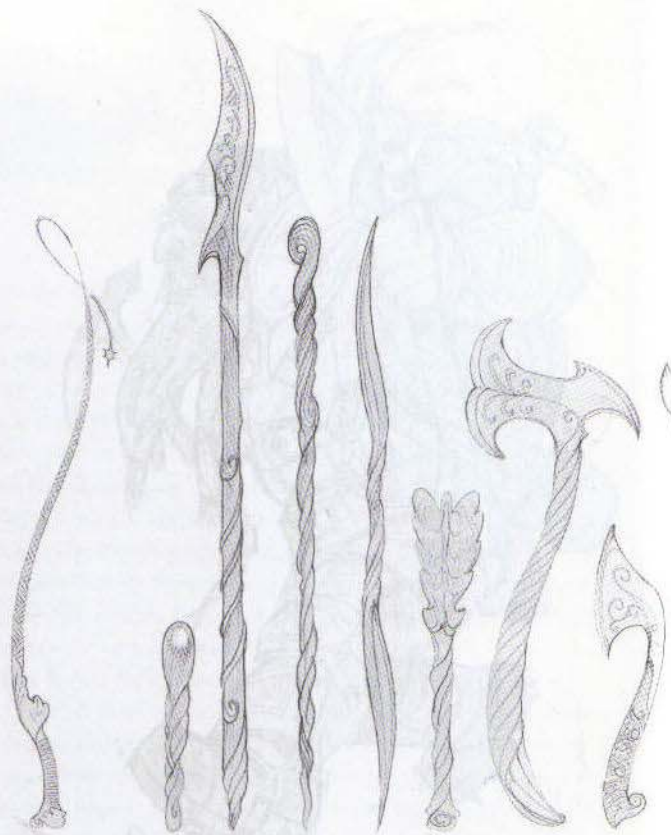
*Elf ranger*

# ART GALLERY



W07

Human wizard



Elf primal blaster

Elven weapons



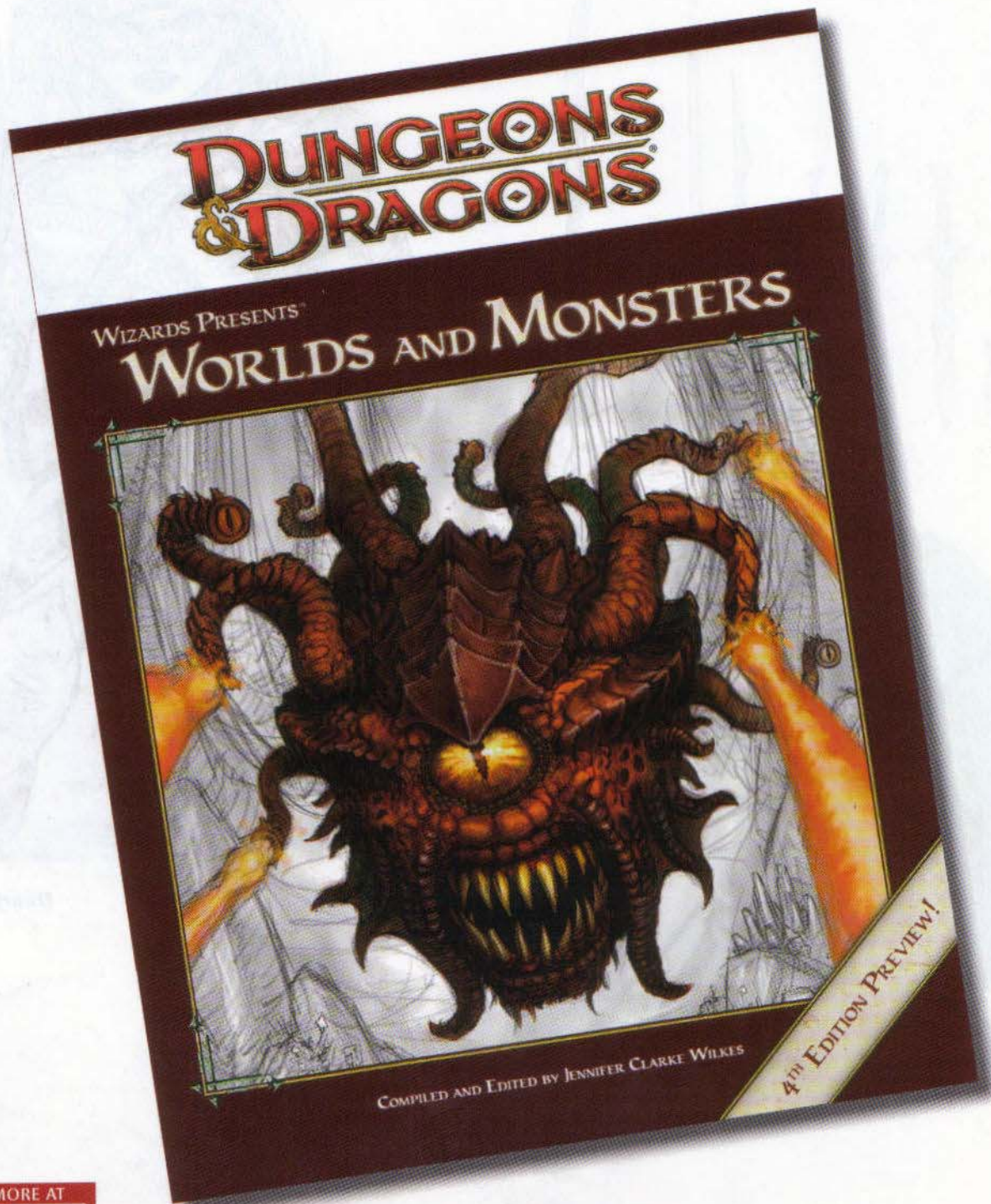
Shifter ranger



Dwarf rogue



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THE MAKING OF  
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4TH EDITION

This lavishly illustrated book gives roleplaying game fans a unique, behind-the-curtain glimpse into the making of the 4th Edition rules of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS<sup>®</sup> Roleplaying Game.

Through words and images, it previews some of the iconic races and classes of the new edition. This book also features essays and insights from the game's designers, developers, and editors.



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