

Escalation!

THE 13TH AGE FANZINE | SUMMER 2021

HOUSE RULES

9



CODY
CRAFTING
CONSUMABLE ITEMS
SWENDROWSKI

IMPERIAL DISPATCH



Before the team had wrapped up Escalation Issue 8, we'd received several articles with a common theme: house rules. This put a smile on my face. There's something I find quite appealing about house rules. They're these little glimpses into how other tables customize a game to make it their own. The more house rules I come across, the higher the likelihood that I'll discover something that will be a great fit for my own groups.

The articles in this issue sparked my imagination. They're begging me to incorporate them into my upcoming games. In a few cases, I already have! There are rules for icon relationships, NPC companions, consumable item creation, increasing monster challenge, injury and dying, initiative, packing even more richness into a natural die roll, and more. Some of these house rules complement each other, while others directly conflict with one another. This reminds me of the framework offered for the Dragon Empire, with each table encouraged to make the setting their own. Pick and choose from the options presented in this issue. Experiment with the house rules that inspire you, and ignore the rest. Even better, save the rest for a future game with a very different tone.

To those of you who contributed to this issue, thank you for sharing your articles and artwork with the community. While this issue is now in the hands of the fans, don't stop sending us your house rules. We'll continue to include the options that work well at your table in our future issues, even when they're not related to an issue's theme.

Gratefully yours,
Tim Baker



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VARIANT RANGER

By Dick McGee



TB.
20.

VARIANT RANGER

After years of complaints, experimentation, whining, playtesting, more complaining, and even more playtesting, I'm making some fairly serious changes to the ranger core class the next time I run 13th Age. The reasoning behind these changes are in italics following each big alteration. I'm fairly happy with the ranger now, although the two "spellcaster" talents still bother me a bit. They don't seem to get as much use as the others, and when they do show up it's almost always the same spells being used. Haven't found a solution to "always Ex Cathedra with Hammer of Faith and the heal feat," yet. Maybe someday.

RANGER REWRITE

CLASS FEATURE

TRACKER

Per the core book's Tracker talent but without the Terrain Stunt (which is now its own talent). You receive a free +5 background in tracking that works only in non-urban environments.

Adventurer Feat: Urban tracking ability, per the core book's Tracker talent champion feat.

Champion Feat: Increase your free background from Tracking to +7 ignoring normal limits.

Epic Feat: "Impossible" tracking per the core book's Tracker talent epic feat.



The ranger is the only class in the core book with NO features, which has led to grousing about how they feel less like a defined class and more like a grab bag of talents. This change gives them one unifying ability and guarantees that your ranger can actually follow a game trail while still having decent skills in other areas.

†TALENTS

†TERRAIN STUNT

Per the core book Tracker talent with the following changes.

1. You may now use this talent once per battle when the Escalation Die is 1+, rather than rolling a die to determine when it becomes available.
2. If you have the adventurer tier feat for your Tracker class feature, you may use this talent in urban environments as well.

Terrain Stunt is one of the game's few "improv" talents, which is great if you like them and terrible to have welded to Tracker if you don't. Separating it as its own talent fixes that, while retaining a nod to the original connection to Tracker with the (effectively) shared feat. It's a little easier to use now that it's off by itself, and like the other improvs, doesn't need a feat tree.



DOUBLE MELEE ATTACK AND DOUBLE RANGED ATTACK

These talents are gone, combined into the single Double Strike talent below.

DOUBLE STRIKE

This combines and replaces the core book's Double Attack talents. Mechanics remain the same, but you can use them with EITHER two one-handed melee weapons OR a ranged weapon each round, depending on what weapon(s) you have readied. The feat tree remains the same as the original ones from the parent talents, but all references to those talents now read "Double Strike," instead.

Adventurer Feat: Your second attack gains a +2 attack bonus if it is against a different target.

Champion Feat: Once per battle, you can use Double Strike after a natural odd attack roll.

Epic Feat: Each turn, you can pop free of one enemy before one attack roll that is part of a Double Strike. You can also use your move action in between your two attacks if you wish.

Great cats, I hate mechanics that drive rangers into shoot-or-melee choices. Just stop that already. You didn't even make different feat trees for these. Boo, hiss. If you want to lean into being an archer or cutter, Archery and Two-Weapon Mastery are still there for you.

FAVORED ENEMY

You now choose TWO monster types when selecting this talent and gain the benefits against both. “Humanoid” counts as two choices, not two talents. Add “spirit” to the list of monster types (see *13th Age Bestiary 2*). The adventurer tier feat lets you select new types after a full heal-up as before, but you can choose “humanoid” as two choices. The epic tier feat adds a third monster type choice. As always, choosing “humanoid” will count as two choices, so you could have either three types or “humanoid” and one other type active at epic tier.

This talent underperforms way too often for my tastes, going dead for entire sessions if you guess wrong about your enemies. It's also going to slowly but surely get worse as more creature types get added, as has already started with “spirit” showing up. It still isn't much better, but at least GMs won't have to feel as guilty when their encounters for the night completely skip the ranger's favored targets.

ANIMAL COMPANION

The changes to Animal Companions in *13 True Ways* are in effect. Add the following animal companion type to the list of Companion Bonuses.

Ape (also Baboon, Orangutan)

Acts: After ranger

Advantage: It has hands. While it isn't smart enough to do everything a human can with them, simple tasks like opening doors are easy enough, and somewhat more complex actions like turning a key or using a potion could be done with training or instruction via hand gestures (maybe requiring a quick action from the ranger). They can also carry or drag an object (or ally's body) while still fighting normally, something other animals struggle to do. They still can't generally use weapons, but GM might allow the occasional swing with a makeshift club against targets that look dangerous to maul (for example, fire creatures or acidic oozes). This impromptu weapon attack still uses the companion's normal attack stats.

The benefit here is very freeform—even more so than an eagle. GMs should be lenient about what a trained ape can do, but I wouldn't let them try anything requiring actual skill checks, even with training or help from their boss. You probably shouldn't choose this one in Glorantha (where baboons are explicitly an intelligent species).



CRAFTING CONSUMABLE ITEMS

BY CODY SWENDROWSKI



CRAFTING CONSUMABLE ITEMS

Ritual castings of known spells is a powerful tool in the core rulebook, especially as a story element. Spending spells for minor rewards such as potions and arrows seems too steep a cost, however, so this establishes rules for using other resources to create consumable items. Seeing as magic items require magic, Ritual Casting is a required talent for crafting on the go. Sorcerers get a bit more bang for their buck as a reward for investing in the feat, yielding stronger but more random results. Chaos mages, as always, have too little control over their magic to achieve these craftings.

For those who are less apt to magic, training and special tools provide an alternate path.

Adventurer Feat: You are experienced in how to craft consumables using the standard tools of the trade, and receive a +4 bonus to the skill check when using them. Using these tools eliminates the need for the Ritual Casting feat, as the magic is provided by the tools instead.

THE BASIC RULES

1. Tell the GM what you are trying to craft. The GM will tell you what ingredients need to be gathered. This can turn into a mini-adventure, if the GM desires.
2. Spend 1d2 minutes/quarter-hours/hours preparing and crafting. You can't perform other magic during this period. The important thing is that crafting can't be done during combat without risk to the crafter.
3. Make a skill check using one of your backgrounds and the ability score the GM deems appropriate. Use the standard DC targets (or a special DC set by the GM), depending on your tier and the results you're hoping for. The higher the quality of ingredients consumed, the greater the effect.



Determining results: The GM chooses the outcome that seems like the logical (or magical!) outgrowth of the ingredients' normal effects. The effects don't have to play within the usual constraints of the system, and they don't have to be taken as a precedent for future crafting. For instance, the enhanced effects gained from crafting potions may wear off prior to the end of the battle if the result of the skill check barely reaches the DC target. Additional examples of some effects appear below.

Failure means life gets interesting: As usual, use the fail forward mechanic: most crafting "works," but failure may yield results you had not properly bargained for. These might include side effects that send the story careening in a direction no one intended, complications with spirits that aided in the crafting but fail to disperse

when the crafting is done, and coming to the attention of enemy spellcasters who note a partially-botched crafting as a disturbance in the aether.

Crafting expends the ingredients: No matter the outcome, crafting expends the prepared ingredients.

A NOTE ON INGREDIENTS

The core rulebook doesn't list ingredients for rituals, so we've intentionally left those vague for consumable crafting. The examples below are meant to provide a few possibilities, but are nowhere near an exhaustive list. If the GM is struggling to think of appropriate ingredients, one approach that's worked well for us is to source suggestions from the players. We're never disappointed by our players' creativity and their ability to make life harder for one another.

POTION AND OIL BREWING

With the appropriate amount of time and ingredients, you can make potions and oils of your tier or lower. You can generally buy the materials for 75% of the total cost from any city that produces the desired consumable. Particularly rare or tricky ingredients can be acquired by hand. This is also advantageous to those who wish to pinch a few gold.

Item	Price
Brewing kit	20 gp
Seasoned Cauldron (+2 to check)	50 gp
Glass bottles (for 5)	5 sp
Bottles of preservation (for 5)	8 gp
Newt eye	1 sp

PORTENTOUS POTIONS AND OILS

The time and effort put into crafting a potion or oil shouldn't *just* give the character the consumable they are looking for—like any lovingly hand-crafted good, these are more inspired versions of their mass-produced brethren.

For most Ritual Casters, select one option from the following table. The enhancement is added to the potion or oil's standard effect. An enhancement doesn't typically stack with the standard effect. A *Potion of Fire Resistance* wouldn't benefit from the *Fire* enhancement, for example. Perhaps you can provide your GM with a particularly compelling reason why they should make an exception.

#	Enhancement Type	Potion Example	Oil Example
1	Acid	You gain +2 to saves against ongoing damage.	The first enemy you attack with this weapon has their AC reduced by 2 (save ends).
2	Cold	You gain resist cold 16+.	The first time you hit with this weapon, your target is <i>weakened</i> (save ends).
3	Fire	You gain resist fire 16+.	On a natural 14+, you inflict 5 (champion: 10; epic: 15) ongoing fire damage (save ends).
4	Lightning	You gain resist lightning 16+.	Your crit range expands by 2 until you score your first crit.
5	Force	You gain +1 to PD.	You deal double damage to the first mook you strike.
6	Mind	You gain +4 to Intelligence skill checks.	On your first natural 16+, your target is <i>confused</i> until the end of their next turn.
7	Body	You gain +1 to AC.	On a natural 16+, your target is <i>hampered</i> until the end of their next turn.
8	Psyche	You gain +1 to MD.	On a natural 16+, you have a <i>fear aura</i> until the beginning of your next turn.
9	Insight	The first time an enemy hits you, they must reroll the attack and use the lower result.	Your allies gain a +2 bonus to attack the first target you hit (save ends).
10	Wisdom	You gain +4 to Wisdom skill checks.	On a crit, you also cast an at-will spell against the target.

SORCERER'S ENERGY

Sorcerers have to pull their power from others, and therefore have less control over their outcomes. However, they receive a stronger end result. Roll a d10 twice on the preceding table instead of choosing a result.

EXAMPLE BREW 1

A group of adventurer tier PCs are deep in a hellhole and are running low on recoveries, potions, and health. The group's wizard taps into her rolled 5 (icon advantage with complication) on a conflicted relationship with the Crusader. She suggests to the GM that from previous encounters with the Crusader's forces, she recognizes the signs of a hidden cache of supplies that are sure to contain the reagents she needs, but are also sure to be missed. The GM agrees, and adds that the cache also includes a cutting of a rare plant used to help negate the effects of the hellhole.

The PCs hole up and take turns resting and standing watch as the wizard combines the reagents, rare plant, and a few strands of her own hair in an empty bottle. An hour later, she acquires a fresh healing potion, and picks the *Fire* bonus, suggesting to the GM that the rare plant plus her magic grants temporary fire resistance to the drinker. The GM agrees and grants the potion the effects of a *Potion of Fire Resistance*, but only for 3 turns instead of the full battle. The rare cutting also gives her *Resist Demonic* 14+ for the same duration. The party soldiers on.

EXAMPLE BREW 2

A champion tier party is having some particular trouble with a group of fire imps that have been hounding them during a journey that brought the PCs a little too close to an active volcano for their liking. After taking damage from yet another hit-and-run, the party decides to lay a trap to deal with these imps once and for all. They're willing to accept the risk of not getting to their destination in time if their trap fails. In order to deal with the imps quickly, the wizard crafts an oil or potion of cold.

The wizard notes to the GM that he had saved a few of the scales from an ice drake that the party had fought earlier in the campaign, and the GM suggests strong offensive oil rather than a defensive potion as a result. The group's rogue applies it to his dagger, then lies in wait in the shadows as the party camps in what seems to be a poorly chosen location. The imps take the bait and launch a ranged attack from higher up the mountain, only for the leader to feel an icy stab from behind. Not yet dead, but now frozen in place with their fire magic temporarily disabled, the tables have turned on the imps.

Crafting Runes

With the appropriate amount of time and ingredients, you can make runes of your tier or lower. You can generally buy the materials for 50% of the total cost from any city that produces the desired consumable. Particularly rare or tricky ingredients can be acquired by hand. This is also advantageous to those who wish to pinch a few gold. Unlike the runes leftover from creation, these crafted runes only last 1d4 rounds (roll when activated).

Item	Price
Chisel and hammer	15 gp
Chisel carved from dragon bone (+2 to check)	60 gp
Softly magical stones (for 5 runes)	3 sp
Stone from Oldwall (+1 additional round)	10 gp
Etching acid (1 vial)	5 sp

Runic Choice

Runes already come with a random bonus, but it's not always what one may desire. For crafted runes, roll twice on the appropriate table in the core rulebook, page 284, and pick one.

Sorcerer's Borrowed Power

Sorcerers have to pull their power from others, and therefore have less control over their outcomes. However, they (usually) receive stronger end results. Roll twice on the

appropriate table and take *both*. If you roll the same result twice, they don't stack and you don't reroll—the icon you're borrowing power from must be feeling stingy today.

Example Rune

A siege is imminent, and the PCs are doing everything in their power to prepare the town against the forces of the Orc Lord. One of the party members, a barbarian tiefling, isn't so good with traps nor defenses—but she *does* know how to use her full-sized axe to good effect, and would like to make it even more powerful for the upcoming battle. She visits the town's shop, but they are fresh out of most supplies due to the upcoming battle. The shopkeep directs her to the blind sorcerer hermit who lives in the alleys, known for causing mischief but also for (rarely) helping those in need.

The tiefling approaches the sorcerer and makes her plea. He tilts his head to one side momentarily, then cackles and agrees to her request. His only price? A small vial of her blood. She takes her turn considering, then agrees—better some blood lost now rather than more later, right? The GM rolls for the sorcerer NPC (15 and 51) as he draws some runic symbols with her blood on a kobold skull while muttering an incantation. The tiefling now has an atypical weapon rune with *+4 to opportunity attacks* as well as *+4 attack bonus on the first round*. The tiefling thanks the sorcerer and heads to the front line, and the sorcerer pockets her vial of remaining blood with a smile on his face. . . .

Crafting Ammo

With the appropriate amount of time and ingredients, you can make arrows, crossbow bolts, and slingstones of your tier or lower.

You can generally buy the materials for 75% of the total cost from any city that produces the desired consumable. Particularly rare or tricky ingredients can be acquired by hand.

This is also advantageous to those who wish to pinch a few gold.

Crafting produces a batch of 2d3 projectiles.

Item	Price
Fletching table	10 gp
Salve of straightening (1 bottle) (+2 to check)	20 gp
Arrow shafts (for 5 arrows)	10 cp
Arrow shafts from sung wood (for 5 arrows)	5 gp
Arrowhead made from banshee teeth	1 gp

Accurate Arrows

Ammo in 13th Age sits with one foot in mundane items and the other in true magic items. As such, the bonuses granted by crafting them by hand can vary even more wildly than for oils.

For some ideas, reference the examples from oils. You may add the magic ammo types from the core rulebook or other sources to your options list. The following table includes the core rulebook magic ammo, but you are encouraged to make the table your own.

The enhancement is added to the enchanted projectile's standard effect. An enhancement doesn't typically stack with the standard effect, but perhaps you can provide your GM with a particularly compelling reason why they should make an exception.



#	Enhancement Type	Ammo Example
1	Acid	This projectile gains the acid damage type, and deals +1d4 damage (champion: +2d6; epic: +5d6).e.
2	Cold	This projectile gains the cold damage type, and deals +1d4 damage (champion: +2d6; epic: +5d6).
3	Fire	This projectile gains the fire damage type, and deals +1d4 damage (champion: +2d6; epic: +5d6).
4	Lightning	This projectile gains the lightning damage type, and deals +1d4 damage (champion: +2d6; epic: +5d6).
5	Force	This projectile gains the force damage type, and deals +1d4 damage (champion: +2d6; epic: +5d6).
6	Mind	If you hit with a natural 16+, your target is <i>confused</i> until the end of their next turn.
7	Body	If you hit with a natural 16+, your target is <i>hampered</i> until the end of their next turn.
8	Psyche	If you hit, your target reacts as if you have a <i>fear aura</i> .
9	Insight	If you hit, your allies gain a +2 bonus to attack this target (save ends).
10	Wisdom	On a crit, the projectile also delivers an at-will spell that you are capable of casting against the target.
11	Keen	When you make an attack with this ammunition, the crit range of that attack expands by 1 (usually 18+ including the default bonus).
12	Lethal Strike	You deal +1d10 damage on a hit (champion: +2d10; epic: +4d10).
13	Lucky Strike	On a miss, you can make a basic ranged attack against another foe that is near the target or along your line of sight to the target (between you and the original target or past the original target).
14	Seeking	You deal +4 damage on a miss (champion: +10; epic: +25).
15	Twin	When you attack with twin ammunition, a second projectile materializes out of the first and targets the same or a different enemy. Make a free action basic ranged attack for it with a +8 attack bonus instead of your normal bonus (champion: +12; epic: +16).

SORCERER'S ENERGY

As always, sorcerers should get a little more bang for their buck but a little less say in the ordeal. Roll twice on the preceding table instead of choosing a result.

EXAMPLE AMMO 1

The party is preparing to descend into a crypt rumored to hold a vast unclaimed treasure. It's unlikely anything that moves down there is still living, but their cleric is off doing "more important things" like "going on a quest to save their god," so they don't currently have an effective counter to the undead.

The ranger of the group uses the fletching table installed at their home base to prepare a few special surprises for things that go bump in the night. He dumps a healing potion into a bowl and throws in the serrated teeth gifted to the party's boat by a hungry dire shark. While the teeth soak, he fletches some arrow shafts with the feathers of a griffon, sold in bulk in Axis. An hour later, he attaches the imbued teeth and produces 4 arrows. His GM has the player roll a recovery (but not gain the healing), then split the 20 rolled across the 4 arrows—the arrows deal their normal damage and additionally "heal" the target 5 on hit. Luckily, the ranger knows that this will deal additional damage to the undead.

Who needs a Cleric now?

EXAMPLE AMMO 2

A sorcerer with a penchant for things that go "boom" wants to be able to contribute (explosively) when he runs out of spell slots; at-will spells just aren't his thing—don't judge. The GM has him collect some moss and the prettiest stones the sorcerer can find, and combine them with regents the sorcerer bought in the last town.

Buying a bag of fine dwarven marbles carved out of a beautiful clear crystal, the sorcerer narrates the ammo creation by describing the deathly cold flame he uses to boil the ingredients in the skull of a goblin dug up nearby. The sorcerer rolls on the *Enhancement Type* table and gets a 5 (*Force*) and a 4 (*Lightning*). A week later, the marbles are laden with latent magic, ready to release all at once.

The next time his hearing-impaired party sets out, they best beware—these marbles now explode and do 1d4 force damage and 1d4 lightning damage to all nearby creatures, including allies.

13 EASY STEPS TO STARTING A CAMPAIGN IN YOUR OWN WORLD

BY MATT MORAN



13 EASY STEPS TO STARTING A CAMPAIGN IN YOUR OWN WORLD

Ever had that disheartening feeling when you've built a whole world from scratch, pared down the details to the bare bone for your players and they still won't read it?

Ever had to swallow a sigh when your GM makes you do homework just to play a game, demanding you read several pages before submitting 1,000 words on your character's backstory?

Both of these things have happened to me. I've created a system for starting a campaign in a homebrewed world intended for gamers on both sides of that coin. As a GM, you can use it with a world you've already started writing up, or with one you've created from scratch for this campaign. Either works, but it's important to leave yourself space and freedom in which to discover new and interesting developments. If you've written in Forgotten Realms levels of detail already, your players will have very little room to develop their characters or, worse yet, their plots. Remember that One Unique Things are a key part of 13th Age, and if all the cool ones have been contradicted before you start, your players will begin the campaign on a bitter note. With these thirteen steps, you can focus on what's really important in your world and explore the rest alongside your players as the game goes on.

The key to this system is the use of "negative space," focusing only on the essentials so that the rest of the world can be filled in during play. It's admittedly not for every GM, but it provides a wonderful freedom of action week-to-week as you devise new ~~tortures~~ adventures for your player characters. Beyond that, it reduces your time spent preparing before each campaign and each session. That's the key here: you don't want to answer each of the following questions with a laundry list of details, rules, and exceptions. You want one to three sentences, tops.



STEP ONE: CHECK IN

Decide what tone you want. Choose anything you definitely want to include or exclude, and set an approximate length for your story and/or campaign. You can log it in levels, sessions, heal-ups, or whole plot arcs, but having this information available when recruiting your players makes a world (heh) of difference to ensuring everyone around the table is committed to the same thing. That's key when you have an overarching plot to finish and Babylon 5-style "trapdoors" for key player characters aren't really viable. If your group doesn't know each other very well, consider using something like Christopher Chinn's "[The Same Page Tool](#)" to ensure you're all . . . well, you know.

STEPS TWO & THREE: UNIQUE SELLING POINTS

What? Two steps in one go? Cheat. (ed.)

No cheating, just a rhetorical point! You want two—just two—unique selling points for your world to inform players why you aren't just in the Forgotten Realms or the Star Wars universe. Both steps are here together because you shouldn't need more than a sentence for each. Actually, I hereby restrict you to a sentence for each! It's all about getting



to the marrow of the fluff, the juicy bits, the stand-out info. Never mind the supporting structure for now; pick out a couple of highlights. "No Magic, Only Superpowers"? "World War Two – but with Magic" (sorry Mr. Turtledove)? "There is a Hierarchy of Kings, and whoever slays a monarch takes their place"? All good. When you have two for your world (the rest can emerge in play if you have more ideas), move on to step four.

STEP FOUR: THE ELEVATOR PITCH

This says it all, really. One sentence to describe the campaign you want to run, the high concept, the quick sell. “Revolutionary Rabbits Fight Back Against Oppressive Foxes”? “The Gang Invades Ankh-Morpork”? “International Adventurers Attempt to Save the World from a Sleeping, Time-Warping Leviathan”? All good. If you can’t fit it in a sentence—you *can*!

Sounds unhelpful, right? What I’m saying is that most of the information you want to cram in there is for later. You don’t need to frontload it. Backstories, politics, the weave of divine and arcane magic . . . that can all come out in play. Now you have the Pyramid of Power, the three-point star to tell people what’s going on, just like in a movie trailer. “In a world where X, and where Y: a campaign about Z.”

STEP FIVE: UNAVOIDABLE ADMIN

Bleh. But it’s important. This is where you let your players know what they need to create their characters. Are you sticking to core books? Are all elves in this setting re-skinned as Greys? Do only two gods allow mortals to channel their magic? That last one is a bit rubbish because you want open-ended questions that don’t restrict player creativity too much—you might learn something about the setting by answering

their questions. Why yes, there *is* another god, long without temples, who seeks new devotees to spread word of their power to the masses!

STEP SIX: UNAVOIDABLE PREP

Bleh redux. This is your version of the last question. What do you need to know about the world to run this campaign? Don’t get ahead of yourself; we want short declarative sentences, remember? I’d say you should only get one, but that’s not likely. Restrict yourself to thirteen, tops, *including* the first seven Icons that your players are likely to have connections to in this brave new world. Do not use this as an excuse to splurge on detail. The players’ OUTs, character concepts, and backgrounds will all help you fill in the blanks naturally.

STEP SEVEN: THE CURTAINS OPEN

How will the campaign open? Don’t worry, you don’t have to plan a whole session (see Step Twelve). You just need to know what the opening scene will be, so the players have an idea how the PCs all know each other. Is it a king’s banquet? The middle of a miles-wide arcane battlefield? A prison for amnesiacs (*no!*)? Just let your players know how the campaign will open, and then go have a cup of tea. You’re half done. The rest of the steps are just for you, and can honestly be done after you’ve collected a group that can agree on a time to play if you don’t want to waste the energy too early in the process.

STEP EIGHT: THE SECRETS OF THE ILLUMINATI

Well, secret singular. Again, just one sentence. This time: what is the campaign *really* about? What's the climax you're driving toward? You don't need a plan to get there, you just need to know what it is so that you can nudge things during play to lead there "naturally." The revolutionary rabbits might discover the foxes are working for Big Farmer. The Time-Warping Leviathan might need to use the PCs' bio-matter to trigger the beginning of evolution way back in the stone age. Whatever your mustache-twirling finale is, it goes here.

STEP NINE: TASTING MENU

Probably a weird one, but I like the "taste" of certain words. Having a list of them in mind helps me get into the warp and weft of an area—like the area in which your campaign starts! Not even a sentence, this is just a list of the thirteen nouns and adjectives you feel best describe the feel of your area. Just off the top of my head, in a Viking setting you might use Snow, Ice, Rock, Hammer, Axe, Shield, Red, Tooth, Helm, Sail, Blood, and Gold. In a more industrialised setting and time, the words might be Coal, Smoke, Smog, Cog, Furnace, Cobble, Dock, Brass, Sulphur, Velvet, Mansion, Theatre, and Baron.

These actually serve two purposes. One is, as usual, to drill into the core of what makes this setting "pop" for you. The other is to

help you come up with names on the fly. New Viking jarl? Iorek Rockaxe. New location outside the City? Cobblesmoke Mansion. Who owns the Mansion? Oh, that old family, the Hammerhelms. Yeah, they've been here for generations. Made their money raiding, I think. You can make titles too—The Red Sail, The Velvet Cog, the Sulphur Smoke. Simple for locations, artifacts, and mysterious NPCs.

This approach makes it very quick and easy to come up with names on the fly that are cohesive, fitting with each other, and, more importantly, with what represents the real core of the setting.



STEPS TEN & ELEVEN: THEY SAID WHAT?!

Cheating again, I see! (ed.)

Again, I'm making the rhetorical point that a step should be as close to a single sentence as possible. J. Michael Straczynski wrote *Babylon 5* with an eye to “wham” episodes to shock the audience at the end of each season—one political/military in the penultimate episode, and then something deeply personal in the actual season finale.

Steps Ten and Eleven are to pick two secrets whose exposure would be a wham moment for the players (and their characters, in best practice). You can use them as cliffhangers, as endpoints to aim arcs towards, or just to inform your personal grip on what is going on in your world. Preferably, they will work towards (or at least lay the groundwork for) the reveal of your Step Eight secret, so your players can look back and go *daaaamn*.

It will be easier to focus on “world” secrets at this point—the Necromancer was on the White Council all along; the Seer of Castle Graysmoke was dead the whole time; the plague wracking the City is the totally avoidable side-effect of the Chancellor's quest for unnatural long life. As the campaign develops, you can use the players' actions to tie their characters into these events and produce the more emotional events that produce inner turmoil rather than outer carnage—if you play that sort of game, of course.

STEP TWELVE: EVERY TALE NEEDS A GOOD BEGINNING

Now that you know where you're going, it's time to build on Step Seven to map out your whole first session/adventure. Personally, I build my campaigns like the MCU, where each part of the tapestry works perfectly well as its own story, rather than just a chapter of the whole.

There are a variety of techniques you can use for this. Johnn Four's famous “[Five Room Dungeon](#)” is just as good for designing a 3–4 hour session as an actual mini-dungeon. I use a variant on the Alexandrian's “[Node-Based Scenario Design](#)” that I alliteratively apply the name Seven Scene System to. What that means is I write seven scenes—or situations—each with a conflict/challenge to overcome, a bit of information that leads to the session finale, and a bit of cool scenery (or a particularly stand-out NPC). I let the players' own machinations lead them from one to the next, though I never insist on using all of them. This is, of course, easier in theater of the mind, but 13th Age's stripped-down rules for NPCs and monsters make it very feasible to work out the composition of an encounter in short order.

I think it's particularly important to have a finale to every session so the players can go out feeling like they've *done* something. That doesn't have to be a boss-fight. It could be successfully funding an orphanage,

getting a vital piece of information, or arriving at their destination. The point is simply to give them that feeling of achievement (yes, or a cliffhanger) so that the session feels satisfying as its own thing. The Lazy Dungeon Master's books are full of good advice, and Jason Cordova's "[7-3-1 Technique](#)" is a wonderful tool for flexing the creative muscles during both prep and play.

If you're worried about doing too much or too little for your session, remember that as a rough rule of thumb you want to budget half an hour for non-combat challenges and encounters, and at most an hour per "balanced" combat encounter.

STEP THIRTEEN: GET PLAYING!

Okay, now you're DEFINITELY cheating! (ed.)

Hey, it's a vital step in any campaign! But seriously, this is the key part of the system. Make sure you take a few notes to ensure consistency later on (and to keep track of party decisions that could lead to juicy and deserved challenges in future sessions).



CAMPAIGN AREAS

You may feel that I've rather left you hanging, but wait—there's more! This system can be used to design new campaign areas with barely any tweaks:

1. Arrange the session (and learn what the players want to do next ahead of time).
2. Unique Setting Points (USPs) for the area—a reason for the players to be there at all. A quest hook, basically.
3. A second USP for the area.
4. The main, or "A" plot for the area.
5. What do the players need to know? What info would the PCs have?
6. What do *you* need to know?
7. How will the party enter the area/adventure?
8. The secondary, or "B" plot for the area, that will be revealed by going through the A plot.
9. Theme words
10. A secret or twist to reveal during play.
11. A second secret or twist.
12. Prep the session.
13. Get playing! That's right, this system is turtles all the way down!

EXAMPLE CAMPAIGNS

Here are three example campaigns that each took about half an hour to put together.

Example Campaigns			
Step	Fall of Lantmor	Rise of Yuvrata	Siege of Yond
1	A cathartic “dragon-killing” campaign to blow off some steam. Open-ended.	A heroic Bronze Age campaign. Levels 4–10.	Gritty “Black Company” style game in a weird fantasy world. 13 sessions.
2	The continent of Lantmor is said to be the slowly sinking corpse of Father Dragon (see “Muzzle, Maw, and Great Jaw”), and his fossilised blood provides the oil that lights our lamps and the powder that powers our guns.	The River Kingdoms are an oasis of green in a blasted—even radioactive—world of dust and doom.	The most common weapons of the trade city’s Road Wardens are the shard-staves that count as both longswords and longbows.
3	The human kingdoms in the Muzzle are called the Black Colonies because of their connection to the oil industry, and because they are mostly too poor to afford their own oil and must burn sooty wood instead.	All the River Kingdoms are ruled by divinely-appointed Priest-Monarchs, though the Mandate of Heaven can easily be granted to a cunning enough adventurer. . . .	Yond’s wealth comes from the fireflower fields that surround the city and light up the night for miles around.
4	Wild drakes threaten your homeland’s delicate balance of power; by the end of the campaign, you may discover where those drakes and their bond originate from.	The River Kingdoms have been quiet too long; now serpent-men are rising from the delta to conquer all before them!	Yond, the Trade City of the Flower Plains, is under siege by the beast-masked hordes of the Silver Host. Can it survive where so many have fallen?

Step	Fall of Lantmor	Rise of Yuvrata	Siege of Yond
5	<p>Elves and halflings are not allowed—one heritage is missing, the other is replaced by cannibal Ewok-types. Armoured Bears (reskinned half-orcs) and gnolls (reskinned dark elves) are allowed. Pelgrane books only.</p>	<p>Humans, elves, and half-elves only. Third-party books are okay if they're on the SRD site.</p>	<p>All heritages open, but only Pelgrane classes. You will be Road Wardens of Yost, assigned to special operations against the Silver Host.</p>
6	<p>The Muzzle is made up of competing imperial colonies and the Exarchate over which it maintains control. Imperial names are broadly 17th century Spanish/Arabic.</p> <p>Icons: the Ashen Empress, the Bear King, the Prince of the Woods, the Mistress of High Brahil, the Proud Matriarch, the Kine-Wrought King, the Emperor Dragon.</p>	<p>The gods/elements are Sky and Earth, Sun and Moon—two paired opposites in constant tension and allying back and forth with the other two.</p> <p>Icons: the Sun Queen, the Moon Duke, the Last Druid, the Serpent Prince, the King of the Rocs, the Wanderer, the Bound Smith.</p>	<p>No gods, only arcane magic and treaties with spirits.</p> <p>Icons: the Magister of Yond, the Magician-Emperor, the Great Dragon, the Brass General, the Silver Wolf, the Argent Adder, the Mist King.</p>
7	<p>You are being hired to slay the drakes that were released from their bondage when Duke von Waage died without an heir.</p>	<p>You are the finalists in the sacred games of the Dust-Water Tournament, about to receive your rewards from the Sun Queen.</p>	<p>You are summoned to the Council of Yond for an update on the Silver Host's advance . . . and to be assigned a mission to thwart it.</p>
8	<p>The Kine-wrought King's plan to slay the Emperor Dragon and unleash the kingdom of Hell on earth.</p>	<p>The River is turning back into the sentient Queen of Serpents she was before the gods defeated her and laid her down.</p>	<p>The true master of the Silver Horde is not the Magician-Emperor, but the Great Dragon who wants Yond's wealth for his hoard.</p>

Step	Fall of Lantmor	Rise of Yuvrata	Siege of Yond
9	Bleak, Bones, Dark, Eye, Fire, Frost, Hammer, Jagged, Mirk, Moss, Powder, Steel, Storm	Altar, Blood, Bronze, Burnt, Cattle, Clay, Dust, Green, Sacrifice, Sun, Spear, Wall, Water	Debt, Ebony, Fire, Flower, Gold, Honour, Hope, Leather, Mud, Road, Scar, Spire, Witch
10	The True Elves, Father Dragon's most loyal children, are finally about to return from High Brahil across the water and ensure his return.	Everything living in the River Kingdoms has leached its life from Yuvrata. Gods help them if she starts drawing it back in. . . .	Rather than declare bankruptcy, a traitor on the Council of Yond has called forth the Host to seize the city and so excuse their empty coffers. . . .
11	The gods are beings of arcane power so great they have transcended and live in Father Dragon's dreams instead of his corpse, while the Elder Gods are shards of his heart, who must be reunited to resurrect him.	The Moon Duke's advisor is actually a snake-man in disguise, brother to the Serpent Prince itself.	The Silver Wolf and the Argent Adder are at odds, terrible odds, and either might be convinced to turn their banners against the larger Host if they were assured of victory against their rival. . . .
12	Getting directions to Bonemire Howe; negotiating a river crossing with Rusalya; surviving a beastman attack in Muddlebrook; finding the drake in Bonemire Howe and defeating the Shorn Men who captured it.	Introduction to Sun Queen's court; attack on the Tournament by serpentine infiltrators; quest to end their depredations given; following tracks leads to encounter with the smugglers who brought them in (but can be turned into allies).	Receive mission from the Brass General, clearly haggard; pass through the gates past angry civilian mobs; evade/destroy scouting parties; attempt to destroy bridge in the face of the first of the Magician-Emperor's summoned monsters.
13	Get playing!	Get playing!	Get playing!

Try not to over-prepare . . . instead, let the players drive things. Give them hooks, of course, but random tables can quickly take things in a different direction.

Continent of Lantmor



Draw maps; leave blanks.

I've been playing for a while now. As of the time I wrote this, we're just shy of twenty sessions into the Fall of Lantmor, and the Empire is ablaze. The party's machinations have left the Amarantine Empire in real trouble, so it's a good thing they have the grudges to lead them to war against the Kine-Wrought King! Everywhere the party has gone, they've confused expectations and wrought absolute havoc, with the world as well as my plans. Luckily, very little prep has gone up in smoke because *I haven't had to do any*. All hail the Thirteen Steps!

Continent of Lantmor



HOUSE RULES FROM THE CRUSADER'S GAUNTLET

By TIM BAKER



HOUSE RULES FROM THE CRUSADER'S GAUNTLET

My introduction to tabletop RPGs is probably different from most. I began playing superhero games like *Heroes Unlimited* and *Marvel Super Heroes*, rather than fantasy games. I'd started collecting comic books about two years earlier, and by the time I started running adventures, I was familiar with the superhero tropes and comic books' approach to storytelling. While I prefer playing in fantasy settings these days, my love of superheroic gameplay never died.

As heroic as 13th Age is, I've introduced a handful of house rules that tend to nudge gameplay closer to the superheroic side of the spectrum. This isn't true of all my games—I've run some funnels using the 0-level Novice rules from *Dark Alleys & Twisted Paths*, and those are anything *but* heroic. But when I look at the majority of my campaigns, they lean toward those elements that I became enamored of in my childhood: big heroes who make the critical shot when the stakes are high, who work together to perform "stunts" that wouldn't be possible individually, and who rarely die.

When I introduce house rules, I think of them as experiments. I ask myself what I'm hoping to achieve, and how I can measure results. While many experiments have failed, others have stood the test of time. Most were developed during my six-year campaign running *Shards of the Broken Sky*, beginning with its earliest playtest. Our party was named the *Crusader's Gauntlet*, as they began the adventure as mercenaries affiliated with the Crusader, so I'm naming my house rules after them.

Reflecting on my house rules for this article, I realized that the successful changes were the ones that led to stories more like those found in comic books. They foster player agency, taking action as a team, and survivability with a sense of drama. This framework offered me a way to organize my house rules.



ICON RELATIONSHIPS

ICON ADVANTAGES AS PLAYER CURRENCY

Heroes have this knack of saving the day when the odds are against them. When it's time to make that crucial die roll, how can a player take narrative control of the moment and increase their chances of success? I use icon advantages to satisfy this requirement, both in and out of combat. While I use the characters' icon relationships to inspire my adventures, by putting players in control of their own icon advantages (5's and 6's rolled on their icon relationships), this took the weight off my shoulders. What's more, it offered my players additional agency a handful of times each session. This simple but powerful shift in how icon advantages are used at my table transformed my game into a cinematic spectacle.

- Spending an icon advantage requires that you describe how your relationship with the icon inspired you, sparked a memory, ensured that you came prepared for such a situation, or manifests as an immediate benefit.
- You may spend an icon advantage to gain one of the following 13 benefits. Only one benefit can be applied to a given action—you can't spend multiple icon advantages on the same action, nor can your fellow players stack their icon advantages onto yours.

1

Introduce a new detail to the scene. This narrative element cannot contradict what has already been stated as being true, but it can reveal something previously unnoticed. For example, you trigger a trap, the doorway sealing behind you, and the chamber filling with water. You cannot turn back the clock to avoid tripping the trap, but you can use an icon advantage to introduce a helpful frogfolk—a fellow follower of the High Druid—who peers at the party through a grate in the ceiling, offering instructions on how to escape. The GM is encouraged to use a “yes, and” or “yes, but” approach to these details, but ultimately has final say on whether that new element is a reasonable use of an icon advantage.

2

Add a +5 bonus to an attack, saving throw, or skill check (yours or an ally's). You can apply the bonus after you've seen the results of the roll.

3

Reroll an attack, saving throw, or skill check (yours or you can grant this to an ally). If you roll a 1–10, add a +10 bonus. Take whichever result you prefer.

4

Reroll damage from your attack or reroll hit points from your recovery, using the average value of the roll as the minimum. Take whichever result you prefer.

5

Add 1 to or subtract 1 from your natural die roll on an attack.

6

Turn an enemy's crit into a normal hit. Other effects triggered by the natural die roll still occur.

7

Turn a recharge roll for an ability, spell, or magic item into a success.

8

Receive a healing potion, oil, or other single-use magic item.

9

Heal from a minor injury or turn a major injury into a minor injury during a quick rest or full heal-up.

10

Save yourself or an ally from an effect caused by a narrative element. For example, when a party member is knocked off a cliff by a monster (after failing their save), you may describe how your icon advantage allows you to slide across the ground, grasping their hand at the last possible moment.

11

Rally as a free action during your turn. You may only rally once per turn.

12

Make a saving throw at the beginning of your turn. This roll *is* your benefit, so it can't be combined with other icon advantages.

13

Gain an additional move action.



- Use physical or digital tokens to represent icon advantages whenever possible. These serve as reminders that the advantages need to be spent.
- Icon advantages that aren't spent during a session are lost.

PROACTIVE ICON COMPLICATIONS

Thinking of an interesting twist when a player spends an icon advantage with a complication can be tough. I do my best to think of a complication at that moment, but find that it's more helpful to act on those moments when a complication will drive drama and cinematic tension in my game. By allowing the GM to introduce complications from icon advantages whenever it's appropriate, it solves a couple of problems. First, players are more likely to use those advantages with complications when they know that the complication can come at any time. Second, it avoids putting the GM on the spot when the icon advantage with complication is used.

If I'm using icon tokens at the table, I'll ask a player to flip their 5 over, turning it into a 6. If they've already used their 5, I'll ask them to slide it over to me, so I'll remember to use it later.

Here are some ways that I use icon complications. This list is by no means exhaustive.

- Introduce an NPC at exactly the wrong moment.
- Reinforcements arrive to aid an opponent.
- An environmental effect hinders the party.
- A monster has a nastier special.
- A monster gains an additional action.
- A monster shrugs off a save-ends effect.
- Allow the monsters to receive the benefits of the escalation die for one round.

EVERYONE NEEDS AN ICON ADVANTAGE

When introducing more mechanical options that apply to icon advantages, I recognized how disappointed players were when they didn't roll any 5's or 6's on their icon relationships. To address this, I ensure that every player has at least one icon advantage in a session. This approach grants the GM an automatic complication as well, so it's a win/win.

- If a player rolls no 5's or 6's on their icon relationship rolls at the beginning of the session, have the player roll the icon die or use the icon spinner ring.
- If you don't have an icon die or an icon spinner ring, use the *random icon influence* rules on p. 183 of the core rulebook.
- The player receives a 5 with the icon rolled on the die. The player may choose the nature of the temporary relationship.

I use these rules to introduce "guest appearances" from the icons who don't often appear in our games. I find that these occasional reminders of the other icons' machinations make the world feel alive. While the campaign is ultimately about our heroes, it's nice to take a momentary breather from the *A plot* and the *B plot* to check in on the *C plot*.

ICON RELATIONSHIP ROLL AS ROLEPLAYING REWARD

When a player does something particularly cool, funny, or clever, I let them roll an icon relationship. They can use a 5 or 6 as usual. There's no effect on a 1–4. They may exceed their normal maximum number of icon advantages in this way. As with standard icon advantages, any unused advantages are lost at the end of the session.

CLASS FEATURES

Certain class features and talents don't quite fit with the way I use icon advantages. When a character is granted a new icon relationship as a result of such a feature, I have the player roll for a 5 or 6 and use it as described above. This covers most situations.

I interpreted the bard's *Storyteller* talent in the following way. When I encounter similar class features, I use this approach as guidance.

- **Storyteller:** Once per scene, as an interrupt action, you can tell a short story related to an icon that an ally has a relationship with. Your ally may roll an icon relationship check with that icon. If they roll a 5 or 6, they must use it immediately.

The fateweaver's *Meddling from the Sidelines* (*Dark Pacts & Ancient Secrets*) is very similar to my "everyone needs an icon advantage" house rule. Because it uses a 7th-level daily spell, I grant this icon advantage in addition to my house rule.

- **Meddling from the Sidelines—**
Effect: Grant that ally a 5 with an icon of your choice that he or she does not have an icon relationship with. Your ally also receives a 5 with a random icon as usual.

The champion tier feat *Favored by the Icons* (*Dark Alleys & Twisted Paths*) grants the same benefit as my "everyone needs an icon advantage" house rule. Because it's a champion tier feat, I grant this icon advantage in addition to my house rule.



This could lead to an interesting use of the adventurer tier feat, where you'd re-roll your only 5 or 6 in the hopes of rolling a 1–4, thus receiving two 5's as a result.

- **Favored by the Icons—Champion Feat:** When you roll your icon relationships at the start of a session, and you don't get a 5 or 6 from your rolls, gain a 5 with a random icon in addition to the one you would usually receive. Roll for each random icon separately.

VARIANT INITIATIVE

PASSIVE MONSTER INITIATIVE

I enjoy when players use clever tactics as a team, rather than acting as lone wolves seemingly unaware of what their comrades are doing. Combined with *dicey stunts* (see the *Miscellany* section below), group initiative fosters the party's ability to combine their abilities in ways that you might see in comic book team-ups. Fastball special, anyone? However, group initiative alone leads to the potential for one side to become overpowered before they ever had a chance to act. That's no fun for the players or for the GM, depending on who's on the receiving side of the punishment. Additionally, players invest in their characters' initiative, including racial powers and feats. I didn't want to tug on a thread that risked unraveling too much of the combat system.

I was inspired by the humble skill check. By setting the monsters' initiative as a single DC, the party is divided into those who are faster than the monsters and those who are slower. Randomize this each round by rolling initiative again, and you mitigate careful strategizing around moving last in one round and first in the next to effectively get two turns in a row. Now, you run the risk of acting during the slow turn in the following round if you don't roll high enough. Plus, initiative bonuses and features still matter. After some playtesting, I was surprised by how well this approach worked for my group. This quickly became my favorite approach to initiative when we're playing in person.

- Roll initiative and compare the result to the passive initiative (DC 10 + initiative bonus) of the monster with the greatest bonus.
- If you pass the check, go before the monsters. Work with the other players who pass the check to determine the order in which you take your turns.
- If you fail the check, go after the monsters. Work with the other players who fail the check to determine the order in which you take your turns.
- Use physical tokens to track who goes before and after the monsters. The large and small Dwarven Tower coins work well for this. Select one player to hand out a token of the appropriate type to each player as initiative is rolled. When the player takes their turn, they hand the token back to the volunteer. This makes it easy to ensure that everyone acts during the correct phase.
- Roll for initiative for the next round.
- Delaying your initiative only applies to the current round. If you pass the initiative check, you may opt to act after the monsters, instead.
- Readyng an action can spill into the next round. When this happens, it uses up your action in that round.

For monsters with dramatically different initiative bonuses, I have the slow monsters act at the end of the round. This ensures that the players only need to track a fast and a slow phase, while treating monsters such as zombies appropriately.

Round-Robin Initiative

When I'm running an in-person game for new players, I look for opportunities to simplify the rules. I've found that tracking initiative adds one more element that players need to keep track of. Even with index cards or a volunteer tracking initiative, new players often lose track of when their turn is coming up. I've tried alerting the next player that they're up next, but it still feels like I'm forcing a behavior that doesn't have to be this complex.

I solved this with *round-robin initiative*. Players are already familiar with games where turns are taken in the order that people are seated around the table. This familiar element is one less thing they have to think about. It works great when running games for young kids or particularly large groups, too.

- Roll initiative as usual. If you have the highest initiative, you go first. The GM rolls only once using the highest monster's initiative.
- Initiative moves clockwise or counterclockwise in the direction of the shortest path to the player (the GM counts as a player, too) with the second highest initiative. If you can reach that player via an equal number of hops in either direction, the player with the highest initiative chooses the direction initiative moves.
- If there's a tie for highest initiative, use your initiative bonus as a tie-breaker. If there's a tie for the second-highest initiative, the player with the highest initiative chooses the direction initiative moves.
- You cannot delay your initiative. If you ready an action, it doesn't reset your initiative after you act, but if your action occurs in the next round, you don't get to act twice in a round.

Standard Initiative

It's worth mentioning that I use standard initiative for online games. Depending on your VTT or video conferencing platform, you and your players may not view who's to your left and right in the same order. This makes it tough to use *round-robin initiative*.

Handing out tokens to ensure everyone acts when using *passive monster initiative* is similarly challenging. I also found that this approach to initiative leads to an increase in discussion at the top of each round. That kind of collaboration is difficult when video conferencing typically only allows one participant to speak at a time. If you like these variations on initiative, perhaps you can find clever ways to overcome the technical hurdles. In the meantime, I'll continue using the tried-and-true initiative approach found in the core rulebook when I play online.



INJURY AND DEATH

INJURIES MITIGATE THE “YO-YO EFFECT”

After dropping to 0 hp or below, what happens when a hero regains consciousness? They spring back into battle, seemingly with no effect. I call this the “yo-yo effect.” I use *injuries* to provide clearer consequences for surviving that near-fatal attack. I’ve found that my players will often blame all subsequent failures on their injuries, even if the injury had absolutely no mechanical effect on what they attempted. This sense of cause-and-effect increases verisimilitude, but I needed an approach that avoided the death spiral—the accumulation of penalties in a game such that the more injuries you sustain, the less competent you are in combat, which leads to more injuries, and so on, until you die. Thus, my injuries rules affect skill checks, and nothing else. They add challenge to roleplaying situations, without negatively impacting the carefully balanced combat system.

- If you’re dropped to 0 hp or below, you take an injury. The injury acts as a negative background until it heals.
- The first time you receive an injury during a battle, it’s a *minor injury*: you suffer a -4 background that your GM describes. For example, after receiving a crushing blow from an ogre, you note “wrenched back -4” on your character sheet.
- The second time you receive an injury during a battle, it’s a *major injury*: you suffer a -8 background. So if the ogre mage caught you in his cone of cold, you add “severe frostbite -8” to your character sheet. Two injuries is plenty for a single battle—you don’t accumulate additional injuries in this battle, but you may receive injuries in subsequent battles.
- As with positive backgrounds, you select the background with the highest value that applies to a situation. Injury penalties don’t stack. If a physical skill check would be impacted by both “severe frostbite -8” and “wrenched back -4,” only the -8 penalty applies. Later, if you’re trying to hold a heavy stone slab up, keeping the passageway open for your companions, only “wrenched back -4” applies, as the GM rules that frostbite is unlikely to impact how much weight you can hold across your shoulders and legs.
- During a full heal-up, make a normal save for each injury. On a success, a minor injury is healed, or a major injury is reduced to a minor injury. On a failure, the injury persists.
- When you are healed by an ability that grants healing from a free recovery or from a daily power, you recover from one injury of your choice.



DEBILITATED BEFORE UNCONSCIOUS

I describe hit points as the amount of grit, stamina, and luck a character possesses. It's their ability to avoid what might otherwise be a lethal attack. When the hero finally runs out of good fortune and skill, it isn't very interesting for them to lie unconscious on the ground rolling death saves or waiting for the cleric to heal them. I introduced the *debilitated* state to give the player the opportunity to push their luck and continue fighting.

- When you drop to 0 hp or below, you're debilitated until your hp value is greater than 0. You sustain an injury as described above. Effects that are triggered when you're knocked unconscious apply when you're debilitated.
- You fall prone. You're stuck and weakened until you spend your move action to get back up.
- You're hampered while debilitated.
- You cannot rally while debilitated. In case being hampered doesn't already cover this statement, your own powers and class abilities cannot heal you. You can, however, use your action to drink a healing potion.
- Continue to track negative hit points. At negative hp equal to half your maximum hp, you die.
- Roll a death save (16+) at the beginning of your turn. If you succeed, use a recovery and heal starting from 0 hp at the *end* of your turn. If you roll a natural 20, heal immediately.

- If you fail the death save, note the failed save as usual. Additionally, at the end of your turn, roll a Constitution check (normal CR for your environment). On a failure, you fall unconscious and are dying per the standard *death and dying* rules. Unconscious or not, after the fourth failed death save, you die
- If the enemy that injured you is defeated while you're debilitated, you marshal your strength. Use a recovery and heal starting from 0 hp. If you were injured by a mook, you marshal your strength only when all mooks in the mob are defeated.
- You're no longer debilitated if you have positive hit points. If you receive healing while debilitated, you heal starting from 0 hp.

CHEATING DEATH

To balance the use of injuries, I offer some options that characters can take advantage of to avoid death.

- You may use an icon advantage to heroically save yourself or an ally from death caused by a narrative element. For example, when a party member is knocked off a cliff by a monster (after failing their save), you may describe how your icon advantage allows you to slide across the ground, grasping their hand at the last possible moment.
- You may turn a critical hit into a major injury and take the standard damage instead. Other effects triggered by the natural die roll still occur.

“DEATH” REALLY MEANS “TERRIBLE CONSEQUENCES”

At my table, we use the *optional meaningful death rule* found on p. 170 of the core rulebook. I take this a step further. Even named opponents are unlikely to kill a PC. If a death should occur by the rules, then it's time for a discussion with the player. We work together to come up with the outcome that they're most comfortable with.

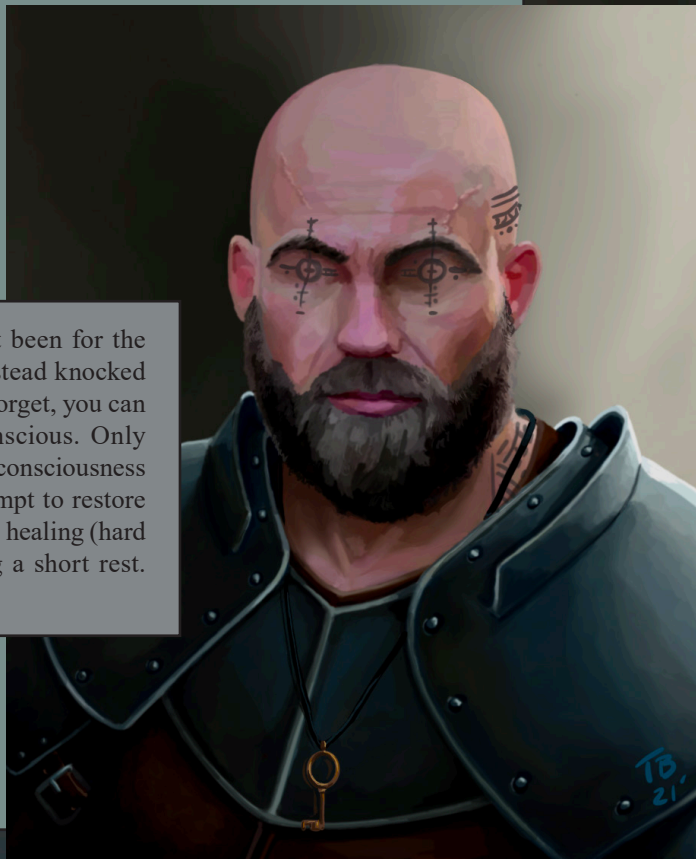
- The PC dies. Sometimes, this is the cinematic and meaningful death that makes the most sense in the character's arc. Perhaps the player is ready to try a new character concept, and this will serve as the catalyst. If the player is ready for their PC's story to come to an end, then they have that agency. There are further options to consider if the player chooses to have their character die.

- When does the PC die, exactly? Should the death occur immediately? Should the hero fight valiantly through the end of the scene, despite wounds that are clearly fatal? Did the character sustain a wound, such as an internal injury, that will kill them at the end of the adventure arc? I'm generous with bonuses and narrative advantages for a character who is now destined to pass to the afterlife. This is their chance to shine one last time, and it should be memorable.
- Is death permanent? Does the player want to create a new PC? Or in a world filled with magic and wonder, will the character return? Beyond the resurrection spell, in a high-magic setting like the Dragon Empire, there are countless ways a hero could return to the living.



- The PC suffers a loss. Death isn't always the most interesting thing that could happen to a hero. If the player would like to continue with the same character, there are several ways that could happen.
 - Faustian bargain. A powerful entity, likely tied to one of the icons, can offer the hero a bargain. I try to think of terms to the bargain that will give the player pause, but they're just as likely to accept as reject. This isn't intended to be a carefully-worded trick. The player should *know* that there will be consequences later. These should drive the story and be interesting, not purely punitive.
 - An injury and a terrible loss. The hero receives a major injury (see the *Injuries* section). Additionally, they suffer a loss that will be deeply felt. Perhaps they lose an important magic item, sacrificed at the last moment to save their life. Maybe an NPC ally intercepts the attack that was meant for the PC. Or it could be that the character receives a scar or loses a body part, and no magic will fully erase the loss—at least not without a quest. The most important thing is for the player to agree to whatever the consequence is. Some players would rather see their own PC perish than lose a beloved NPC. Others feel that gaining a metal arm in the downtime between adventures is the coolest thing that could happen to their character. It's all about player agency.

If you would have died had it not been for the meaningful death rule, you are instead knocked unconscious for 1d3 hours. Don't forget, you can fight in spirit while you're unconscious. Only magical healing can restore you to consciousness instantaneously. An ally may attempt to restore you to consciousness with mundane healing (hard CR for your environment) during a short rest. Only one such check can be made.



AN ASSEMBLAGE OF TREASURED SUBSYSTEMS

I use a few other house rules that generally follow the theme of more heroic play with an emphasis on player agency. Several of these house rules are borrowed from blog posts or inspired by other games. I'll point you to those sources, rather than describing these house rules in detail.

- **Abstract Wealth and Consumable Resources:** Represent wealth and consumable resources, such as the number of charges on a limited-use magic item, using a *risk die*. The larger the die size, the longer a resource will be available. When a consumable resource is used, roll the risk die. On a 1–3, the die size steps down (e.g., a d8 becomes a d6). This continues until a 1–3 is rolled on a d4, indicating that the resource is fully depleted. You might roll on each use of a magic item, after firing arrows throughout a battle, or after negotiating price on an expensive purchase to see if it significantly impacts your remaining wealth. (Inspired by *Macchiato Monsters*.)
- **Alternative Ability Scores Array:** Use the updated ability score array from [13th Sage: New Alternative Array Ability Scores](#).
- **Alternate Utility Spells:** Use the alternate utility spells from [Alternate Utility Spells in 13th Age](#).
- **Crits:** When rolling damage for a crit, it always results in at least the maximum damage that could normally be rolled on the normal attack. For example, if your attack does 3d8+4, a crit will do at least 24+4=28 damage. (Inspired by *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition: Player's Handbook*.)

- **Dicey Stunts:** Use the dicey stunts rules from [Dicey Stunts for 13th Age](#).
- **Fumbles:** Player characters are heroes, and a fumble doesn't diminish this. The fumble doesn't represent a moment of ineptitude. It reflects the chaos of battle, and the chance that an unexpected event will cause a moment of bad luck. Roll on the [Laying Waste Critical Generator](#) and interpret the results in a way that makes sense using 13th Age mechanics.
- **Mob Attacks:** Whenever a group of six or more identical creatures attack a single target, take the number of enemies that can make a ranged attack or can reasonably engage with the target at once and divide them into three groups. Roll the attack just once for each group, critting or fumbling as usual. Damage is multiplied by the number of enemies in the group. On a miss, each group deals damage equal to the level of its members, but this damage isn't multiplied by the number of enemies in the group. Whenever a mob attacks a character in this way, the mooks take attrition damage equal to the attacked character's level in the very act of attacking. The character must currently have a means of damaging the attacking mob. If, for example, the mooks are attacking from range and the attacked character does not have a ranged weapon handy, this damage doesn't apply. If a group from the mob fumbles, they take this attrition damage an additional time. (Inspired by *Against the Dark Yogi*.)
- **Monster Ability Checks:** Use monster ability checks from [Monster Ability Checks in 13th Age](#).

- **Skill Challenges:** Skill challenges are worth their own article or sourcebook. In short, the party will use skill checks to proceed through a scene that requires multiple successes using different approaches to solve an overarching problem. I typically introduce a twist near the end of the skill challenge. After a set number of checks, the number of successes vs. failures are tallied and compared to the consequences I prepared. Skill challenges are affected by the use of limited resources such as daily spells, which count as successes. (Inspired by *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition: Player's Handbook*.)
 - **Slow Leveling (Myth Points):** Each character gains an incremental advance at the end of a session. After a PC applies four incremental advances toward their next level, additional incremental advances can be converted into *myth points*. Myth points can be spent on the following options at the cost of four myth points per option. The player must justify how events in the adventure led to the benefit, and the GM has final say on the availability of these options.
 - A new permanent magic item, the transformation of a mundane item into a permanent magic item, or the improvement of a magic item if the PC has reached a new tier of play.
 - Additional social standing/fame (2 point reputation background with an icon or geographic area; may be chosen up to three times per background, but the background cannot exceed 5 points).
 - A unique mount.
 - A local contact.
- A torchbearer/hireling/retainer.
 - Special martial training.
 - Discover a new spell (does not give an additional spell slot).
 - A unique pet (does not gain familiar abilities, except perhaps flight if appropriate).
- **Updated Grab:** Use the updated grab rules from [13th Sage: Escape the Grab!](#)
 - **Vulnerability:** When a creature is vulnerable to a damage type, it takes extra damage from that damage type. Adventurer tier creatures take an extra 5 damage, 10 for champion tier, and 15 for epic tier. This effect is in addition to the expanded crit range that vulnerable creatures are subject to. (Inspired by *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition: Player's Handbook*.)



INSPIRATION

ICON RELATIONSHIPS

- *Dorkadia*, [13A Hack: Player Driven Relationship Rolls](#)
- *13th Age Game Master's Screen and Resource Book*
- *Fantasy AGE Companion*
- *Sly Flourish*, [13th Age Icon Roll Benefits](#)
- *Castles & Crusades: Castle Keepers Guide*
- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Revised Core Rulebook*
- *Mutants & Masterminds, Third Edition, Hero's Handbook*
- *Cypher System Rulebook*

VARIANT INITIATIVE

- *Shadow of the Demon Lord*
- *Cypher System Rulebook*
- *King of Dungeons*
- *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition: Player's Handbook*
- *Tribality*, [D&D 5e Combat – Initiative House Rule Option #2](#)
- *Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition: Player's Handbook*

INJURY AND DEATH

- *Dungeon 204*, “Unearthed Arcana: Less Death, More Danger!”
- *Thoughtcrime*, [Curses & Broken Bones: Negative Backgrounds in 13th Age](#)
- *The Angry GM*, [We've Got Fighting Spirit, How About You?](#)
- *Dungeon World*
- *Guild Wars 2*



BATTLE OF EDEN'S KNOLL

BY MATT MORAN



BATTLE OF EDEN'S KNOLL

I don't much like doing math during my RPG time. Sure I won prizes for mental arithmetic at school, but I'm old and tired now. Judge all you like, but the minimization of in-game math is part of 13th Age's DNA, from averaged hit points and damage to managing NPC resources based on a natural d20 roll.

Recently, my party of 6th-level adventurers decisively cut ties with the imperial faction led by the Ashen Empress in our homebrew 17th century world. Despite all being imperial veterans of one kind or another, the characters' icon relationships with the veiled monarch were conflicted at best. So when they were caught in the midst of a battle between the imperial Grenzers and an outnumbered company of gnolls—the Battle of Eden's Knoll—of *course* they took the gnolls' side (granted, one of them was also a gnoll, the hyena-folk taking the “dark elf” archetype in our world). So far, so standard, but they were key actors in a battle of two thousand humans, twelve hundred gnolls, eight cannons, four dragons, and an imperial duchess (she was a triple-strength level 4 caster). This played out on a map measuring five hundred meters per square, not five feet.

Ugh.

Even using mooks with a virtual tabletop to roll the dice, imagine the administration, not to mention the action economy and how it would stack against the party! Instead, most of this battle formed a backdrop, covered not by standard combat mechanics, but a flat save (easy, standard, or hard depending on proximity to an enemy massed unit). Every bullet, blade, stray horse, and random spell from a non-protagonist in this culture clash was abstracted away into a save each time a given battalion's turn came up in a round.

But where's this lack of math? Where are the *consequences*? Well (aha!), I simply used my multiplication tables. Yes, boring, old, low-level flat damage in the dribs and drabs normally caused by mooks. I just multiplied them by the score rolled on a failed save. Rolled a 5 against the light infantry (damage 3), when a 6 or better was needed? $5 \times 3 = 15$ damage total. Rolled a 14 against the Duke's Dragoons (damage 5), failing the hard save? That's 70 points. That took our ranger by surprise, felled in the *foule* as the dragon-injured horsemen strove to protect their mistress from these unexpected assassins.

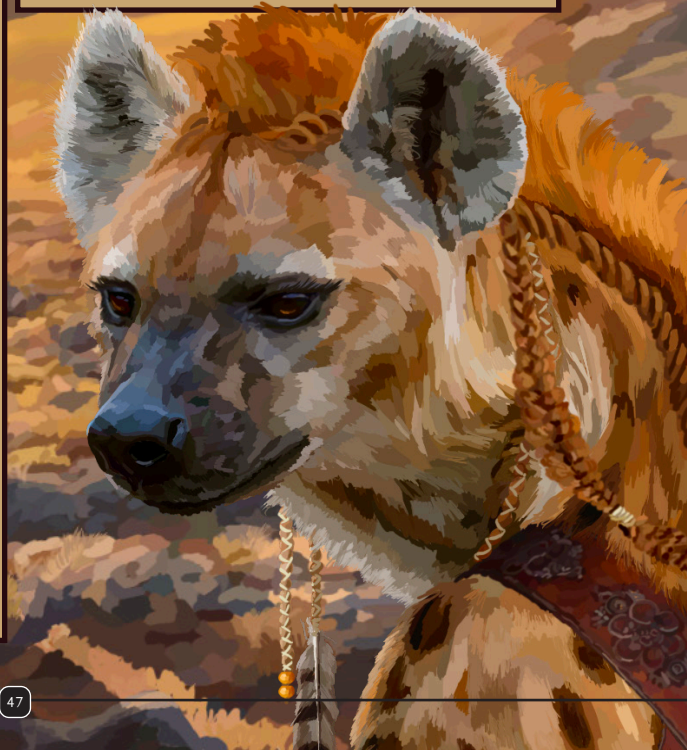
When the players took time out from their mission to lash out at the mobs that threatened them, I simply applied damage as if it were a mook mob. “Seventy-two damage? Yup, eight men dead. You reap your way through the standard guard and everyone who reaches to stop the flag falling.” AC? PD? MD? Honestly, drawn half at random from troops in the bestiary. (Oh orcs and hobgoblins. You serve me so well in so many costumes.)

Afterwards, our tiefling barbarian said it felt like being in a battle from one of the Sharpe books. An excellent and almost admin-free way to administer armies as environmental effects!

Speaking of environmental effects, this built on six months of piecemeal iteration as I sought transparent consequences for failing ability checks against all sorts of perils. Multiplying base damage by the player’s own roll is simple, provides clarity and a sense of “you did it to yourself,” and—just as importantly—caps the threat range.

After all, high rolls pass saves and checks alike, and therefore bring no pain. As is only right and proper, easy saves have a lower pain ceiling than hard saves by virtue of failed rolls running 1–5 instead of 1–15. It’s a simple technique with a wide range of potential uses in worlds as dangerous as the ones our players fight to save.

Speaking of simple techniques with very little math for a lot of bang, here is how I build my random encounter tables. First up, let’s acknowledge that 13th Age is a narrative game: one of—if not *the*—best F20 narrative games on the market. Verisimilitude in world-building therefore legitimately takes a back seat to flavor, protagonist-centric action, and excitement. I stock each session and/or area with 4–8 optional encounters. Since I use a loose approximation of the [Five Room Dungeon](#) to plot session arcs, this fills out a 4-hour online session nicely. As appropriate for the narrative nature of the game, these encounters are drawn from session themes, a character’s one unique thing, and previous loose ends. This keeps the action focused on the party while still allowing for some of that emergent gameplay that forms the beating heart of the TTRPG experience.



Where’s the math? Well, there’s no sense in doing hard work without any payoff, so I use a weighted random encounter generation system. For each travel period (week to hour depending on the location), I have a player roll a die. If one of the results comes up, that encounter comes up. Pretty simple. But I use different sizes of dice to change things up. I usually start with a d8—a d10 if I’m feeling generous. If the player rolls higher than the number of events that I prepared in the table, nothing happens.

But the next roll is made with the next die size down, so *eventually*, something is going to happen. And if, like me, you stock the table with the most dangerous random encounters on the lowest numbers, avoiding trouble for too long means almost certainly running up against something nasty when the other shoe drops. Once there’s been an encounter, the die size goes back up to the original size.

Here’s an example random encounter table. You would only prepare the first two columns in this example. The remaining columns represent the die rolls that the players made over time and their results.

Roll	Result	1 st Roll (d10)	2 nd Roll (d8)	3 rd Roll (d10)	4 th Roll (d8)	5 th Roll (d6)
1	Dragonrider & dragoons					This
2	Éomer-style horde of hussars					
3	Sabertooth tiger pack					
4	Tempest – skill check		This			
5	Gnoll raiders					
6	Reavers seeking spoils					
7	Imperial “compliance” unit					
8	N/A				Nothing	
9	N/A	Nothing				
10	N/A			Nothing		

Drop me a message explaining how to macro this in Foundry VTT so that the players make a whispered roll against the GM’s table and the dice go up and down in size. Seriously. Please.



As a rule of thumb, I spread out encounters based on the type of travel: crossing empty continents gets a roll a week, while a county-sized metropolis gets one an hour. The starting size of the die (d6-d12) represents the danger/busyness of the area. Let's not forget that not all random encounters need be violent, and can instead do sterling work supporting the atmosphere and ambiance of an area.

I've done something similar with icon advantage rolls, using the party's failures as an "oracle" to grade local appreciation of the relevant icons on a scale of 1 (hated) to 4 (loved). There's no space for neutrality in my Manichaean elfgames, only for questions like, "Why do they love the Emperor but hate the Great Gold Wyrml?" With a party of four (sixteen icon dice at level 6), I can also use the total number of failures to:

- Determine the Big Bad's level (either based on the number of failures, or the sum total of the failed icon dice rolls if you want to be mean).
- Determine level and number of mooks in the next encounter (the number of failures and the sum total, respectively).
- Decide the level of NPC allies (number or sum total).
- Decide the number of local factions with relationships to an icon or player (the number of failures specific to said icon or player).
- Decide when on the escalation die events tied to that icon will occur in one or more fights (number of failures specific to said icon).
- Determine after how many encounters/recoveries spent a threat from the character or party's past will catch up with them (number of total failures or number specific to a character—be warned that if you use total party failures, this complication might arrive at a *very* difficult time).
- Use the number of total failures as the first roll on your random encounter table!



Not all of these are suited to every tier of play, but let me give you a few examples. Let's say my party is travelling between plot points G and H (they've done the other letters already). It's basically a monster-of-the-week episode to give them a sense of journey and give me a chance to prep. Out of their sixteen encounter dice, we get ten failures: 1, 1, 1, 2, 2, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4—sum total of 23. Now, a level 23 Big Bad for this session (sum total) would be crazy, so let's go for a level 10 boss (number of failures), but with 23 minions. These don't all need to be "level-appropriate"—sometimes it's fun to wade through the chaff!

Although this is technically the Ashen Empress' territory, she got 1, 1, 2 on her related icon advantage rolls...clearly the locals are holding a grudge! Could it be due to machinations by the Archmage and his 2, 3, 3? I decide there's a level 8 wizard in the area who is showing the locals the benefits of magocratic over aristocratic governance, but their support is divided among three local factions—who the players might turn against one another if they're cunning enough.

The Prince of the Woods (Orc Lord) has the most failures, so I'm going to say the boss for the session is a level 10 beastlord with a herd of angry beastfolk around him.

The Prince of the Woods got 1, 2, 4, 4 for their failures, which is perfect for assigning moments in the fight. Rounds 1 and 2, I can have some basic "legendary" actions, but if we reach round 4 after a comparatively quiet round 3, well...he's not called the Prince of the *Woods* for nothing—bring on the dryads!

As I've written this, I've realized it's not just about reducing math and leveraging rolls to get the most bang for your GMing buck. It's about engaging and involving your players and showing them their rolls and their input matter in terms of plot as well as combat resolution.¹ You can do this all in secret of course, but giving players just enough knowledge of the process to give them a frisson every time they touch the dice is well worth the small loss of Secret GM Power. I hope you get as much use and joy out of these ideas as I have.

Slán!

¹For more ideas on this that dovetail perfectly with 13th Age, check out Matt Colville's *Running The Game* videos #59 and #60.

TREASURE TALENTS

BY BRIAN ROGERS



TREASURE TALENTS

Per the guidelines for gold piece treasure on page 191 of the Core Book: *The amount of gold we award is based on rough assessments of how many potion, oil, and rune resources it seems interesting to let characters draw on each day.*

I've found, at my table at least, that unless I'm running a deliberately resource-scarce campaign, the players couldn't care less about gold or even remembering to purchase consumable items. It just stops being relevant to their character's story unless we have a moment where the PCs can legitimately strategize against a known foe, and by then we just end up abstracting what they would be able to afford since no one kept track of what gold they found.

Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan provided one idea on how to resolve this with [Resources Saves](#), but here's another: divide the treasure types into groups, and then give them to PCs as a bonus "Treasure Talent." Each PC receives one Treasure Talent during character creation, and this doesn't count against their class talents.

Each Treasure Talent yields 1–3 uses per day of that type of consumable item, cutting out the middleman of turning gold into one-use items. The character simply has the consumable items, with the rationale specific to their history, backgrounds, or One Unique Thing. Yes, this removes the ability for everyone to carry a healing potion or two along with an oil or rune, but it has the advantage of turning consumable items into a reliable character niche, and perhaps filling holes in a small party configuration. (I've found it's also very useful on Roll20, where Treasure Talents can be added as Power Cards to the character sheet.)

Treasure Talent uses are the same as any other talent use: they can't be saved up or stored. If you don't use it that day, it's gone. In practice, it's a good idea for the players to confer as a group on which Treasure Talents they want, so as to best split up resources and use the talents as a method of niche protection.

HEALING POTIONS

- *The Priestess' temple in your home town contains a font of powerful healing water that you have earned access to, and your waterskin staves off death a sip at a time...*
- *Decades of training in plant lore under the Elf Queen or the High Druid let you prepare poultices that slow bleeding and warm the blood...*
- *The surgeons of the Archmage's collegiums master healing techniques that draw on primal forces to force the body to heal...*
- *The Emperor's agents will be gifted with a spirit Hospitaller, the ghost of an honored knight who aids the Emperor's cause by healing his agents in battle...*
- *The Crusader's battlefield surgeons are second to none, using fast but brutal "meatball surgery" to get soldiers back into the fray...*
- *Allies of the Great Gold Wyrms know words to whisper into wounds that make them vanish as if they were a dream...*

These are only a handful of ideas to explain why characters with the Healing Treasure Talent gain three uses of tier-appropriate healing potions per day. All the usual rules apply, with the extra dice of healing and cap on recovery for their tier.

This treasure type has the most immediate utility, allowing the cleric to get a real boost in available healing, allow another PC to act as a reliable backup healer, or, best of all, put reliable healing into a party that is otherwise lacking it. It's also the one with the greatest chance to trample over a cleric PC's desired niche, so it's the one best served by a communal Treasure Talent discussion.



RESISTANCE POTIONS

- *The perfumers of the Elf Queen's court have mastered scents that redirect the wrath of the storm...*
- *Chefs in the Emperor's court are unparalleled in lacing antivenoms into wines and cheeses...*
- *The Lich King's agents distill spirits (yes, spirits) that protect against the gods' attentions and the breath of an angry White...*
- *The Archmage's alchemists' beakers hold reagents that save them from acidic burns and ward contact of disembodied forces...*
- *Acolytes of the Priestess bless holy water that strengthens the psyche and the soul...*
- *The Dwarf King's great smiths know the secrets that toughen the skin against fire and toxins that erupt from the exotic metals they forge...*
- *A thief currently employed (possibly) by the Prince of Shadows has a pouch that might, just might, have exactly what she needs at this moment...or might not!*

All of these and more are ways for characters with the Resistance Treasure Talent to protect themselves and their allies. Resistance potions are difficult as a treasure type because they are the most strategic of the consumable treasures: the heroes stock up on the ones they think they'll need as they descend into the volcano or enter the crypt. If you let the hero produce *any* when they need it, the talent is much more useful than the others. If you limit it to just one type, the player is probably being short-changed.

Here are two options:

1. The character can make a normal save (11+) to have any one resistance potion per day. The character has a chance of

having exactly what's needed, but it's not guaranteed. On a failed save, they can try again in the following battle.

2. The character has a Daily (Recharge 11+) resistance potion(s) selected from 2-3 options. The player and GM should work out which resistances they can brew potions for, and the decision of which one is on hand is made when needed. The GM should take the player's requests as flags for what sort of threats they want to face in the game, and the player should take the GM's subtle hints of what sort of threats she's planning to include. One advantage to Option 2 is that more than one PC can have this treasure type without overlaps.

ALTERNATE RESISTANCES

In addition to the normal array of Acid, Cold, Fire, Force, Holy, Lightning, Negative Energy, Poison, Psychic, and Thunder, I allow players to swap a damage type to a monster type, gaining Resistance 11+ to attacks of that monster type in their tier or lower. This is a *huge* flag from the players that they want to face this sort of monster with some regularity, but at the same time taking half damage from *all* of a monster's attack options can easily make an encounter too easy. Make sure you work with the player on their expectations and their explanation for this offbeat resistance.

Example: Hosier, ranger of the Elf Queen's elite Hamster-Knights, seconded to the Druidic Circle of Brinham Wood, has the Resistance treasure type with Poison, Insects, and Plants as her resistances. She has mastered old druidic lore for poultices that, when applied, drive off insects, counteract plant-based attacks like spore clouds, and can draw poisons out of wounds. I worked with the player to arrange this, knowing that these monster types would be showing up about once a level, and the resistance to poisons is always useful.

Oils

- *You alone have smuggled out the secrets of the Dwarf King's quenching oils that infuse newly forged items with power. You dare not sell the secret until you can launder the knowledge safely, but until then you have supplies on hand for immediate use...*
- *Buried at the bottom of your pack is a heavily thumbled copy of 1001 Uses for Demon Blood, many of which involve linking objects of our realm temporarily to the hellscape...*
- *A former quartermaster in the Emperor's armies, you have sources across the Dragon Empire who can provide you with a quick flask of magical ointment...*
- *No true apprentice of the Archmage's collegium escapes without Oils, Ointments, and Poultices 101; you're just one of the few who took and retained the 200s-level course...*
- *One congregation of the Priestess' gallimaufry of faiths are syncretic animists who believe the right herbs and fluids can awaken the spirits of objects; you've drunk deep of their wisdom...*
- *The Great Gold Wyrm will slip the true names of objects into the dreams of his followers; whispering those names to an object at the right moment will enhance its innate power...*

The offensive alchemy of oils has many paths to entry, and characters always find a way to use them. Taking Oils as a treasure type yields a Daily (Recharge 11+) dosage.

Runes

- *The elvish sagas speak of verses so pure that they temporarily rewrite reality when sung, swapping the praised item for one of ancient myth for a few moments...*
- *Dwarven stonecarvers can take a moment to chisel one of the 29 Great Runes into an object to grant it massive power...*
- *The Diabolist has learned the 666 Waymarkers of the Abyss, and her followers will slice them into things with specially treated fingernails, opening the object to chaotic power...*
- *The Three know old secrets from the dawn of creation, and give their followers the ability to draw on that power through them, if only once a day...*
- *The Emperor has rooms full of runes for his agents, as for ages his tax collectors have accepted runes in lieu of gold at collection time...*
- *...And for ages the Prince of Shadows has been robbing those tax collectors...*

Taking this treasure type grants the character one Rune per day, with all the usual effects.



SCROLLS

- *Apprentices in Horizon spend years copying esoteric rituals to their own books and their masters' scrolls; of course they remember how...*
- *Cloistered Ecclesiastics of Santa Cora cross compare the lore of dozens of gods, writing out rituals to share with the broader world...*
- *Spellsingers of the Orc Lord have rituals tattooed across their bodies, the words burning away when the magic spreads panic across whole valleys...*
- *Clerics and paladins of the Great Gold Wyrn occasionally reveal hours-long chants that produce amazing magics...*
- *The Prince of Shadows will slip scrolls to his agents from time to time, just for last-ditch ways to confound their enemies...*
- *Demon-skin books of ancient rituals are commonly held by the Diabolist's spellcasters, and claimed as loot when they are driven back by the Crusader's forces...*

Introduced in the *Book of Loot*, Scrolls are pre-set rituals that let you cast the ritual without expending a spell slot to do so, even if you do have to follow all the other rules for Ritual Magic (gather ingredients, extra time, and a skill check to pull it off). Taking the Scrolls Treasure Talent gives your character access to two scrolls per day.

Like Resistances, this is such a potentially versatile treasure type that it could unbalance play. As such, the characters with this type potentially have one scroll per day that does exactly what they're looking for, but not always. If they don't come up with the scroll, they will have to expend a spell slot, as per normal.

1. If the Scroll's spell level is equal to their effective caster level (1, 3, 5, 7 or 9), then they need to make an 11+ save to have the right scroll.

2. If the Scroll's spell level is *higher* than their effective caster level, it's a hard save (16+).

3. If the Scroll's spell level is 2 levels lower than their effective caster level (so it's a 3rd level spell slot when they are 5th level characters), the save is easy (6+).

4. If the Scroll's spell level is more than 2 levels lower than the effective caster level (it's a 1st level spell slot when they are 5th level characters), no save is required.

Of course, the lower the spell slot, the less potent the ritual. Epic Level spellcasters can always have 3rd level scrolls on hand, but will that be enough?



MONEY

The final treasure type grants a character access to an imperial treasury, the pouch full of gems and ancient gold coins looted along the way, or the collection of infallible confidence games that can provide a bankroll when needed. You're the one with the money.

Alas, in 13th Age that doesn't mean terribly much.

While the Treasure Talent system replaces the Resource Save system mentioned earlier for consumable magic items, Resource Saves fit in nicely with mundane gear. Characters who have taken the Money Treasure Talent use the Resource Save system with the following advantages:

1. Assume that their resource saves always produce high quality gear. Maybe that means it's superior and gives a marginal advantage, maybe it just looks pretty, but it's always the good stuff.
2. When making Resource or Wealth Saves, the character rolls twice and takes the better of the d20 rolls. (This increases their chance of getting higher-tier goods from 25% to 44%.)
3. The character has access to a new treasure category of "Adornment." These are items of great value that convey social status...for a short while, given the ever-changing fashion norms of the Empire. Adornment functions as an Oil for social interactions, literally greasing the gears of politics and business. Three times per day, the character can give themselves or an ally a +1 on social interaction.

This functions upward for all tiers: an adventurer tier character can get a +1 on epic tier interactions by dressing in the most expensive and fashionable clothing and jewels they can afford. It may let them pass as lesser nobility or give them patronizing "it's so cute to watch them try" acceptance, but it will get them the bonus.

In the opposite direction, the bonus increases when you're using higher tier Adornments on lower tier targets, increasing +1 per tier above the current environment. Epic level Adornments mark the character as clearly being part of the elite when traveling among the peasantry and adventurer tier folk, providing a +3 bonus to social interactions.

As with all consumable items this bonus only lasts one scene. It's probably longer than 5 minutes, but not longer than one grand ball, one attempt to talk your way into the bank vault, or one return to your hometown to show those jerks how successful you are. The three uses per day is designed for the players to be able to outfit three PCs for a big social scene or have one PC be able to carry off a wealthy look for three scenes straight.

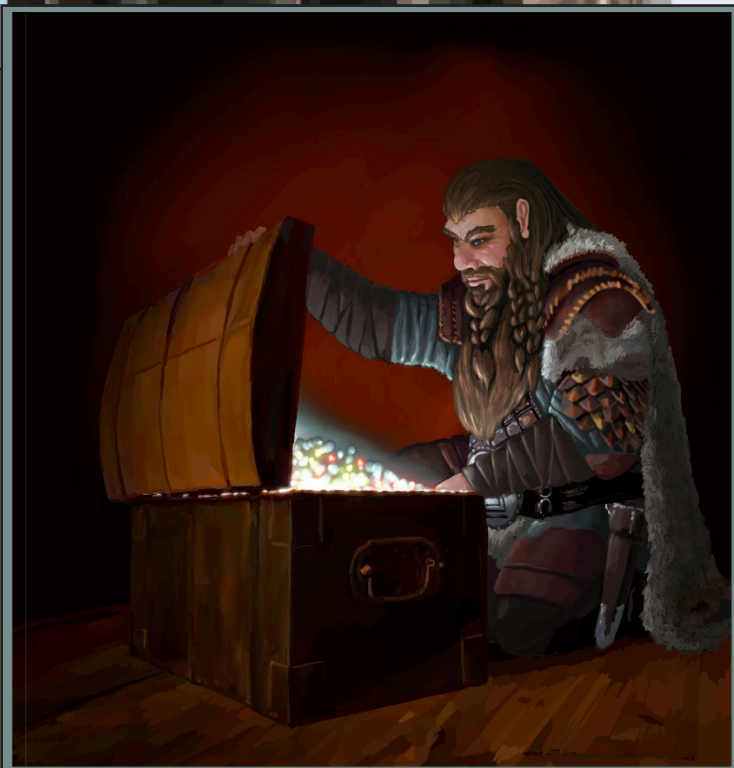
The Adornment isn't literally consumed in its use, it's just wearing the same adornment regularly deprives it of its ability to impress a crowd. What was in fashion last season isn't the thing next season. If a player falls in love with her ruby-studded hair sticks for her elaborate coiffeur, she can absolutely use those repeatedly, but each one costs an Adornment use: if you don't spend the Adornment use the hair sticks are still beautiful, but they no longer impress.

† THE MATH

The logic behind this is taking the average GP per full heal-up for each tier and dividing in the cost of that tier's consumable items. In cases where the cost doesn't divide in neatly, give the item a Recharge of 11+ so the character will sometimes have more than one per day. If you're feeling generous, you can let the player roll that recharge immediately, making it possible for them to have more than one of that consumable item going into a fight/scene.

This formula will let you add in other consumable items from the Loot books or other supplements if your players want their Forgeborn to be able to, for example, reliably have consumable items from the Beatsmith Market in *The Archmage's Orrery*.

As always, if you want more or fewer consumable items in your game, feel free to adjust the effective average GP or Consumable Items cost.



Tier	Adventurer	Champion	Epic
Average GP per Full Heal-Up	150	300	600
Cost			
Healing	50	100	200
Resistance	100	200	400
Oils	100	200	400
Runes	150	300	600
Adornment	50	100	200



ПРС COMRAPIONS AS MAGIC ITEMS

BY | GRUBER
INSPIRED BY ALEXANDER
W CORRIPI

NPC COMPANIONS AS MAGIC ITEMS

“Your magic items aren’t just your gear. They’re part of who you are, like your circle of friends.”

-13th Age, p. 295

For my homebrewed campaign world, *Sleeping Gods*, the group wanted to go toward a low-fantasy Howard/Lovecraft/Lieber direction. Magic is rare and mysterious here, so pains are taken to implement creative workarounds for introducing magic items and solving problems that can usually be done away with by using magic from above.

The “NPCs-as-magic-items” concept is a great tool to work around these problems in the short term, as I attempt to prove to all the naysayers that 13th Age works just fine in the low-fantasy setting. First, an obligatory definition of “low fantasy”:

“Low Fantasy stories focus on people’s daily lives and practical goals ... A Low Fantasy campaign asks *what it’s like* to live in a world of monsters, magic, and demigods.”

-GURPS Fantasy

“First get your facts straight, then distort them at your leisure.”

-Mark Twain

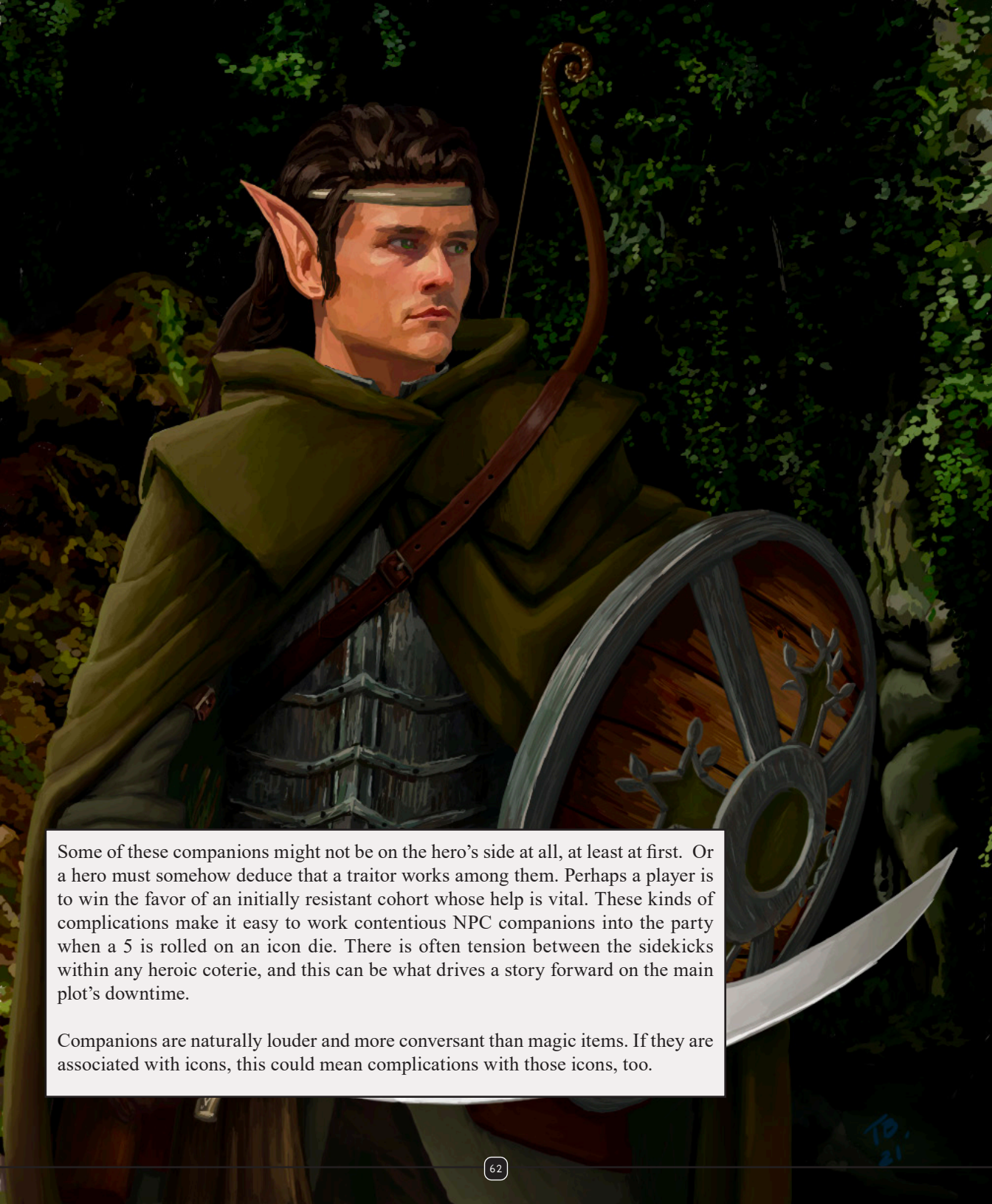
By contrast, high fantasy makes the assumption that supreme magical power is a normal part of life. It might manifest down the block, or in the distant mountains, but it’s generally accepted without question that one can learn to hurl fireballs if one attends night classes at the local Wizard’s Academy.

You may ask, “Why don’t you just play RuneScape, you emo bastard?”

Because low fantasy doesn’t mean more rules and subroutines, as so many attempts seem to suggest. That is an unfortunate interpretation. Also, because 13th Age is fun, and its solutions to merging storytelling with mechanics are nothing short of ingenious. And because others have tread these dangerous low-fantasy waters long before me, and they did it quite well.

Granted, trying to fit a high fantasy peg into a low fantasy hole poses many hurdles. When a player would like to use an icon advantage to manifest as a piece of valuable information, delivering that message to the party may not be so easy. Under high-fantasy conventions, this can be solved by beaming a pixie courier into a floating bubble on behalf of the Elf Queen. When a 13th Age PC gains a magic item from some stroke of good fortune, having to turn down the volume on premade items from the *Book of Loot* or *13 True Ways* can be a major hassle, and can make the player feel robbed by an overbearing GM.

Problems that afflict parties with a surfeit of magic items can occur with companions too, albeit in their own ways. Having too much NPC backup means your companions start showing their quirks more often. Think of the archetypal “naïve hero” on a quest to do something they don’t understand or appear unqualified to undertake. Along the way they draft many colorful characters, powerful but uniquely flawed, each with a special virtue or skill to contribute to the adventure ahead.



Some of these companions might not be on the hero's side at all, at least at first. Or a hero must somehow deduce that a traitor works among them. Perhaps a player is to win the favor of an initially resistant cohort whose help is vital. These kinds of complications make it easy to work contentious NPC companions into the party when a 5 is rolled on an icon die. There is often tension between the sidekicks within any heroic coterie, and this can be what drives a story forward on the main plot's downtime.

Companions are naturally louder and more conversant than magic items. If they are associated with icons, this could mean complications with those icons, too.

SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION

A gained companion's powers and traits can be weighed in sidekick points, representing the sum of commonality and connection with the PC. A 1-point hireling will not take up a lot of bandwidth, but a 5-point sidekick might function as a secondary character in the party for whomever pilots them.

You can only have one NPC companion sidekick point per level. This will stop players from having five 1-point hirelings at level 1, for example. So at level 3, you could have a 3-point companion or three 1-point lackies.

What happens when you get greedy? At lower levels, this could mean squabbles between the NPCs slowing the party down, or they start voicing their own needs because they feel

ignored. At higher levels, they may be the seeds of much more sinister intrigues, such as thefts, betrayals, and so forth.

NPC companions have both a roleplaying ability and a combat ability. The player chooses the ability that will come into play until the next full heal-up. This can be selected when there's a need, rather than choosing as soon as the full heal-up occurs.

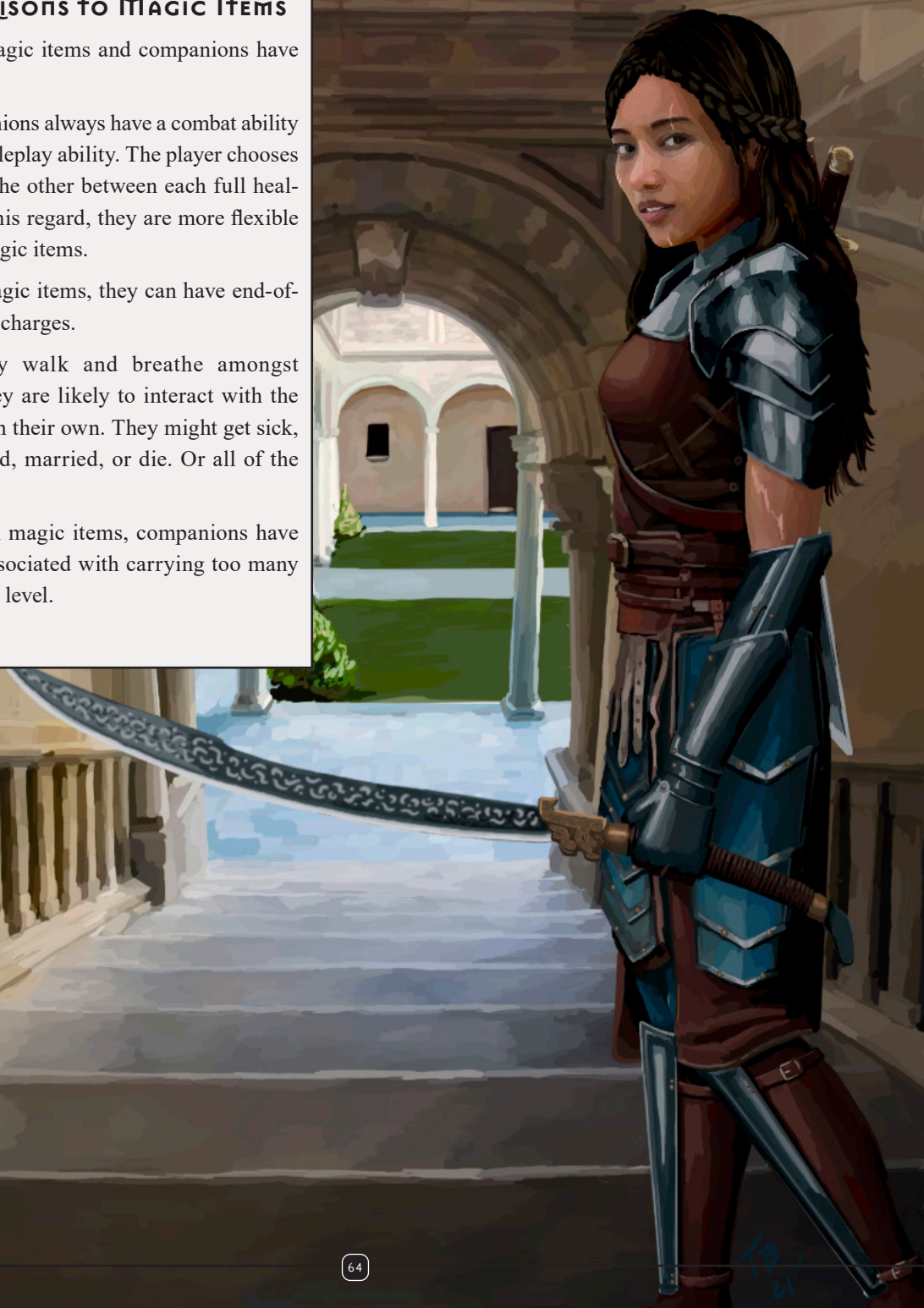
The abilities that NPC companions provide in combat should be imagined as contributions to the entire battle scene—the net sum of their presence at the character's side, and not a single karate chop or interception. This is in the spirit of the footloose and story-driven way combat works in 13th Age.

NPC COMPANION SIDEKICK POINTS, IN LIEU OF MAGIC ITEMS

# Sidekick Points	Suggested Companion Form	Tier
1	A hireling, apprentice, or new relationship that might grow at higher levels.	Adventurer
2	A capable cohort equivalent to an adventurer tier low level magic item.	Adventurer
3	A veteran artisan or soldier at your disposal, equivalent to a strong adventurer tier magic item or a lesser champion item.	Adventurer + Champion-
4	A powerful ally with powers closely in sync with yours. A champion knight on loan from the Emperor.	Champion
5	An essential relationship in your story, part of your OUT, a hero's true sidekick, a weathered party fixture.	Champion + Epic-
6+	Epic stuff.	Epic

COMPARISONS TO MAGIC ITEMS

- Both magic items and companions have quirks.
- Companions always have a combat ability and a roleplay ability. The player chooses one or the other between each full heal-up. In this regard, they are more flexible than magic items.
- Like magic items, they can have end-of-battle recharges.
- As they walk and breathe amongst you, they are likely to interact with the world on their own. They might get sick, wounded, married, or die. Or all of the above.
- As with magic items, companions have risks associated with carrying too many for your level.



EXAMPLE IN USE

Let's decorate a level 2 fighter, **Lyndel**. She has the following backgrounds:

- 3 pts as a hunter and trapper in Dire Wood
- 2 pts as a caravan raider on the spice roads
- 3 pts as an imperial cavalry charger

Lyndel wants to use her 6-roll on the icon dice (a positive relationship with the Emperor) to acquire an NPC companion, just as she would a magic item in normal 13th Age core rules. The Emperor rewards her with the arrival of a routed Imperial Scout companion named **Hazar**, a 2-point NPC companion.

A great thing about companions is that they are easy to introduce. Pull them from an icon relationship or a background story. The player is allowed to come up with a reason why a certain background applies. This saves the GM from having to do more storytelling work than they already have to do.

Lyndel explains the following, drawing from her background as a trapper. "I made friends with a lot of the local hunters in Dire Wood. I would sometimes go on hunting expeditions with Hazar for larger, more dangerous game."

The GM then introduces a quirk for the NPC companion. Magic item quirks can serve as inspiration, as can the many random NPC personality resources available online. While magic item quirks possess the PC who uses them, NPCs can butt in at any time during roleplaying. You can have the players manage the extra RP weight, unless their companions come with complications attached.

The GM grabs a magic item from her personal homebrew stash. She decides upon:

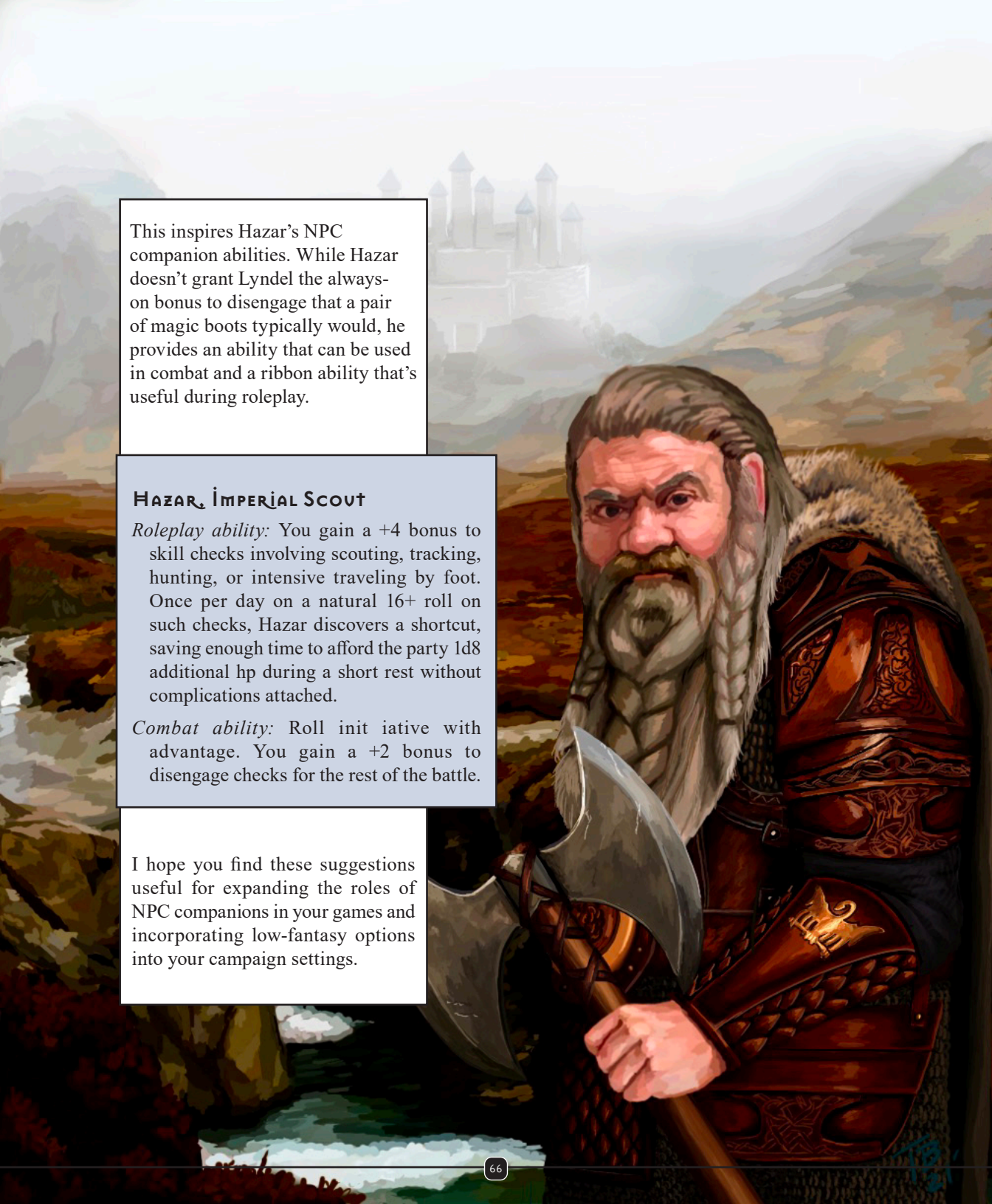


BOOTS OF THE BEATEN PATH

The boots are scorched, beaten up, and wrinkled. Numerous holes and tears are observable across the surface of the material, which has the texture of weathered rhinoceros hide. The worn thumbprints of centuries of different wearers press into their grips. They seem to want to walk their wearers, and tug in different directions off of main roads and arterial thoroughfares, where a good story likely awaits. They are the most comfortable shoes you've ever worn.

Adventurer Tier Boots (Disengage checks and other checks involving fancy footwork: +1 bonus)

You gain a +4 bonus to skill checks involving scouting, tracking, hunting, or intensive traveling by foot. Quirk: Tells a story about the shortcut the party is taking. These shoes have been around a *long* time.



This inspires Hazar's NPC companion abilities. While Hazar doesn't grant Lyndel the always-on bonus to disengage that a pair of magic boots typically would, he provides an ability that can be used in combat and a ribbon ability that's useful during roleplay.

HAZAR, IMPERIAL SCOUT

Roleplay ability: You gain a +4 bonus to skill checks involving scouting, tracking, hunting, or intensive traveling by foot. Once per day on a natural 16+ roll on such checks, Hazar discovers a shortcut, saving enough time to afford the party 1d8 additional hp during a short rest without complications attached.

Combat ability: Roll initiative with advantage. You gain a +2 bonus to disengage checks for the rest of the battle.

I hope you find these suggestions useful for expanding the roles of NPC companions in your games and incorporating low-fantasy options into your campaign settings.



DUNGEONBORN

By CODY
SWENDROWSKI

DUNGEONBORN

Dungeonborn appear as small bits of cobblestone and rough cut features.

Dungeonborn
+2 Con OR +2 Str

Shifting Corridors (Racial Power)

Once per battle, as a quick action, the landscape around you rearranges itself to allow you to treat far targets as nearby and vice versa. Engaged enemies stay engaged.

Dungeonborn are seldom, in fact, born – or at least not in the way most consider the word. In larger and more established living dungeons, the monster-generating walls will occasionally bloat and yield a dungeonborn instead.

Some dungeonborn almost pass for human. Others barely qualify as humanoid – the largest single group of these are called the blockheads, and work for (and within) the Stone Thief. Regardless of where they fall on the spectrum, all dungeonborn share the fact that at least some of their body is stony, embedded with bits of building material and architecture from their parent dungeon. The smallest of these could be passed off as particularly large warts, while the largest is where the blockheads get their name.

Dungeonborn have a strong connection to their home dungeon, feeling a growing sense of longing as time passes during their separation. It is currently unknown what happens to dungeonborn when their home dungeon is slain, so few are their numbers, but most assume the worse. Dungeonborn from the same dungeon tend to stick tightly together and near their home dungeon, often going to war with other living dungeons to expand their home's strength and wealth.

The Dragon Empire does not formally extend its laws to the dungeonborn, although those who pass as human tend to get the benefit of the doubt. For those who don't, Drakenhall extends its welcome. The Archmage has taken an interest in dungeonborn as test subjects.



LAGNIAPPE OF THE LICH KING

BY JEB BOYT

LAGNIAPPE OF THE LICH KING

This is a collection of odds and ends of home-rules that I have used in my campaigns—a little something extra (lagniappe). These home-rules are grouped by mechanics, monster design, and cosmology.

Mechanics

Zones

One of the things that makes 13th Age so much fun to play is its abstracted range bands. However, things can get odd when part of “nearby” includes difficult terrain or you want to describe the area effect of a spell or some other event. Zones are used in Fate, 2d20, and other games to describe areas of a battlefield to account for such terrain effects.

A zone is an abstract area that describes a portion of a battlefield. An overall battlefield can be divided into zones based on the features of the area and how difficult it may be to move through an area. These are examples of how a battlefield might be divided into zones:

- Street or alley: near end, far end, adjacent street or alley, merchant’s stall, adjacent buildings, stack of barrels or baskets.
- Tavern or inn: Common room, behind the bar, kitchen, back room, beer garden, upstairs, street out front, courtyard, stables.
- Ship: Main deck, quarter deck, fore deck.

13th Age uses the abstract ranges of Engaged, Nearby, and Far Away. A battlefield at a bridge may include zones for each side of the stream, the stream, bridge, and adjacent woods. Ranged attacks across the stream are Nearby. But, to move from one side of the stream to the other, a character can either move across the bridge or move into the stream and on their next turn move onto the far bank. Similarly, a character could move back into the woods, but they would then be Far Away from the opposite bank.

Advantage and Disadvantage

Fifth Edition popularized these terms, but their spirit can be found throughout 13th Age. If nothing else, they are an easy shorthand for saying “roll 2d20 and take the better/worse result.” Useful for summarizing effects.

Lair Actions

This is another great thing from 5e to import into 13th Age. Some powerful champion and epic tier creatures have additional actions that they can take when confronted in their lair. Classic examples include dragons, vampires, and ogre mages. Each round on initiative count 20, the lair takes an action from a menu of choices. These can include environmental effects or providing the creature with an additional, specific action, such as a perception check or attack. Actions with a recharge can be used again in a battle if the roll is successful. Following is an example of lair actions for an 11th level green dragon:

Lair

Deep in the Wild Wood, there is a cave at the back of a ravine. Moss hangs thickly from the trees around the ravine, and the ravine is filled with a low-lying mist.

Lair Actions

Each round on Initiative count 20, one of the following occurs:

- **Entangle +16 vs PD (1d3 + escalation die nearby targets in a group)** — Once per battle, vines and roots spring from the ground. If hit, targets are *stuck* (save ends). All potential targets and other creatures must succeed on a DC 30 check to move through the area until the end of the following round (Recharge 16+).
- **Moss wrap +16 vs PD (1d3 + escalation die nearby targets)** — Once per battle, moss flies from the surrounding trees, wrapping around the targets' heads and limbs. Targets hit are *dazed* (save ends). (Recharge 16+)



• **Rockslide +16 vs PD (1d3 + escalation die nearby targets in a group)** — Once per battle, a side of the ravine or cave collapses on the targets, they suffer 50 damage and are *hampered*. For the remainder of the battle, a DC 25 check is required to move through the area of the rockslide. (Recharge 16+).

• *Fog* – Once per battle, the mists thicken into a fog that lasts for three rounds. For the first round, all creatures are blinded. In the second round, engaged targets and allies can be seen. In the third round, nearby targets and allies can be seen. The dragon is not affected. (Recharge 16+).

• *Poison breath* – The dragon may make a free attack.

• *Healing green* – Once per battle, the dragon heals 60 hp. (Recharge 16+).

Conditions

There are two additional conditions that I like to use:

• *Prone* – 13th Age generally doesn't care about positioning. But being knocked prone and standing up after being knocked down is a classic of heroic adventure. The *prone* condition can be as simple as, "You're knocked down and have to take a quick action to stand up."

• *Upset* – Similar to the *shocked* condition from Bestiary 2, *upset* is when "You have disadvantage on attacks and movement checks."

Monster Design

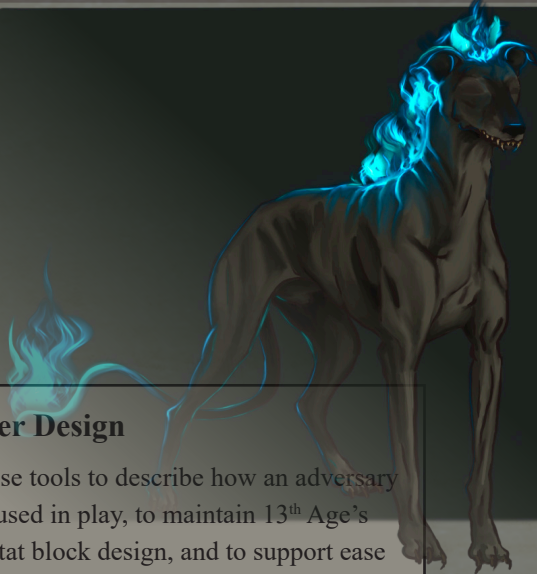
I use these tools to describe how an adversary may be used in play, to maintain 13th Age's simple stat block design, and to support ease of use.

Natural 16+

I like to add an additional effect on the roll of natural 16+ as a way to diversify a creature, change the rhythm of play, and make an adversary more deadly. Typically this adds a condition or ongoing damage. I prefer this over "on an odd/even hit" for several reasons. Mainly, it is easier to use. As a GM, my focus is on whether an attack hits or not. Noticing whether an attack is 16+ is a part of that. Whether an attack is even or odd is not something I typically pay attention to. Plus, I have a bad habit of picking up the dice before noticing whether they were even or odd.

[Special Trigger – short statement of the triggering event]

I favor this over the standard use of just *[Special Trigger]* because while it is good to know that an attack or effect only occurs due to a trigger, it is vital to clearly know what that trigger is. Often, in the standard stat blocks, the trigger is hidden inside the stat block. This makes the trigger explicit and easy to read when scanning the stat block.



Casters

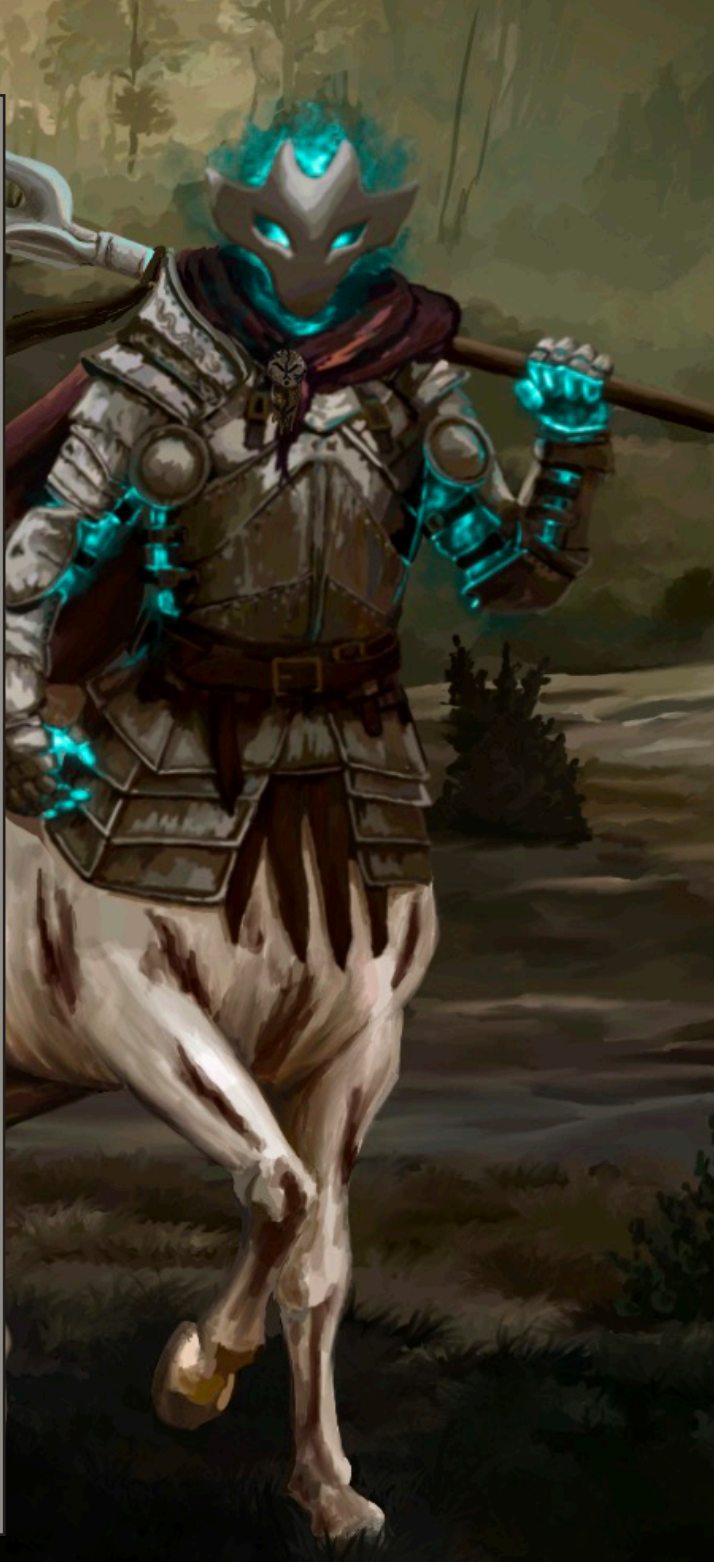
Generally, adversaries in 13th Age only have two attacks. I always design casters with at least three attacks: a ranged spell, a close-quarters attack, and a melee attack. Casters are meant to be trixy and to have a variety of attacks. For more powerful casters, particularly champion tier and above, I add an extra attack that is a powerful once per battle ranged spell or close-quarters spell that allows them to pop free.

Nastier Specials

This is 13th Age's "get out of jail free card." Forget about balance and throw in an attack or ability that might be overpowered or just one attack too many. Nastier specials are perfect for using if the playing characters are rolling over the opposition.

Elite Troops

13th Age is perfect for combats with large numbers of adversaries. I use a hierarchy of mook < troop < elite troop < boss. The PCs may first encounter a group of icon-affiliated mooks led by a troop-statted adversary. Their next encounter may then be against several troops backed up by mooks. Then, they can face squads of mooks, each led by a troop with the group commanded by an elite troop. The elite troop is a mini-boss (or two), generally with the same stats as a troop but with half again as many hit points. They act on the same initiative as the troops. This is an easy way to diversify the adversaries in a battle.



Cosmology

Overworld

I've portrayed the Overworld two different ways in my games. The first was as an airy realm of sky islands, airships, high elves, and cloud giants. This Overworld was accessed through the fixed points of the Cathedral and Starport and through the Archmage's teleportation network. The second was more of a fey realm accessed both by the fixed points and by fey crossings. It still had sky islands, but it was much more chaotic and uncertain, with darker skies thick with clouds. In both, there was a layer of turbulence that prevented airships from flying down to the Dragon Empire. The great thing about the Overworld, though, is that it is loosely defined and not based on established conventions from other games and novels. So, you can make it your own and make it as weird and as eccentric as you like, drawing inspiration from the Dreamlands of HP Lovecraft, stories like Stardust, anime such as Nausicaä, or whatever inspires you.

Other Realms

D&D has an elaborate cosmology, and 13th Age both acknowledges parts of that cosmology and leaves you the opportunity to add in as much or as little of D&D's cosmology, realms from other sources, or ones you create yourself. This is how I've used other realms in my Dragon Empire.

- *Feywild* – 13th Age dances around whether the Feywild exists or how it relates to the Dragon Empire. The High Druid is a champion of the Wild, but the Wild itself is never described. The Overworld can be the Feywild, or you can describe it as an echo of or adjacent to the Dragon Empire.
- *Shadow* – The realm of shadow, plane of shadow, or Shadowfell, exists in the Dragon Empire. There are shadow dragons and mongooses and rogues step through it. But it hasn't been described. It could be a dark echo of the Dragon Empire, something akin to the Border Ethereal, the land of the dead, or something else entirely. It could be the home of the rakshasa. Then, there is that Prince of Shadows. There is a lot that you can play with.
- *Far Realm* – In D&D, the Far Realm is outside its cosmological Great Wheel and is the source of aberrations and alien things that man was not meant to know. Generally, the Far Realm is inspired by the Cthulhu Mythos. Intrusions from the Far Realm can be a great hook for adventures in the Dragon Empire. Is the Diabolist encouraging it? Does the Orc Lord want to weaponize it? Is it pollution caused by the Archmage? Was it unintentionally invited in by careless students in Horizon? Is the Lich King fostering it as a challenge to the Archmage? Everything about the Far Realm is mysterious and challenging.

Random Tieflings

One of my players created a tiefling. Not a standard tiefling, but a spider tiefling. With that, none of the tieflings in my campaign were locked into a set presentation. They all had the same racial ability, but their forms were not limited—perfectly appropriate for chaotic creatures. The best thing was this wasn't even his One Unique Thing. It is just an aspect of the campaign he designed as part of character generation. So, here's a table for randomly generating the form of tiefling NPCs:

1. Standard. Horns, tail, teeth, etc.
2. Bat. Ears, overbite, maybe they're nearly blind but have limited sonar or Zatoichi-like hearing.
3. Boar. Tusks, bristles, hooves.
4. Bovine. Horns, face, hooves, tail, cud.
5. Goat. Horn, beard, hooves, tail.
6. Spider. Coarse hair, mandibles, multiple eyes, extra arms.
7. Toad. Broad features, slimy skin, eats flies.
8. Vulture. Beak, bald head, talons for feet.



An illustration of two female rogues with purple hair and pointed ears, wearing dark leather armor and boots, walking through a maze of stone arches. The character in the foreground is looking back over her shoulder, while the one behind her is looking forward. The title text is overlaid on the image.

THE DARK JESTER'S MIRROR MAZE

A 1st-Level Encounter

BY JOHN MURPHY

THE DARK JESTER'S MIRROR MAZE

INTRODUCTION

The adventure *Shards of the Broken Sky* introduced me to the city of Duskvakke and the Dark Jester, a former icon. This trickster icon that once ruled a vibrant city grabbed my attention. What were his goals? What did he accomplish? After the Dark Jester was overthrown, the Archmage hid the entire city of Duskvakke. Was the Archmage an accomplice in the Dark Jester's demise? I knew one thing: his legacy would provide plenty of adventure.

I picture this encounter as part of a larger funhouse maze in the Dark Jester's grand Harlequin Palace. Escaping the maze could be as simple as beating the foes and leaving, or as complicated as finding the exit while a steady stream of twisted doppelgangers emerge and confusing terrain effects challenge the PCs' tactics.

The format of the adventure was inspired by [The Arcane Library](#). Kelsey Dionne takes efficiency in adventure presentation to a whole new level, and her 5e adventures are easily converted to 13th Age.

WITHIN THE MIRROR MAZE

The PCs find themselves in a mirror maze with carpeted floors and magical lights that a modern viewer would describe as fluorescent tubes. Faint carnival music can be heard, but the PCs can't identify where it's coming from. Interspaced with the regular mirrors are funhouse distortion mirrors.



DRAMATIC QUESTION:

Can the PCs find their way out of the mirror maze?

TERRAIN EFFECTS:

Give the PCs bonuses for clever attempts to spot foes and avoid targeting reflections.

- When making a ranged attack against PD or AC, PCs must roll an easy save (6+) or the attack targets a random creature.
- When a PC attacks a target they were not previously engaged with, they must make an easy save (6+) to attack the actual creature. On a failure, they break a mirror and take 1d8 damage.
- A rogue can use Sneak Attack against a creature they were not previously engaged with.

TRAVERSING THE MAZE:

Once the PCs enter the maze, have each player roll 1d4 and consult the corresponding entry below. Ask the players to describe the twisted version of their PC before each image emerges from the mirror and attacks.

1. **Thick** – A squat, wide image
2. **Long** – The image appears much taller with a disproportionately long torso and arms, but short legs
3. **Four Legs** – The torso appears shorter, but the legs are longer and there are four of them
4. **Thin** – The image is impossibly thinner

When the escalation die is 4, the players roll again and new opponents spawn. If the PCs succeed on a DC 20 skill check, they notice which mirror an image came from and can smash that mirror before the image materializes.

A DC 25 skill check is needed to find the exit to the maze, which the images can't leave. The PCs receive a +1 bonus to the check each time they defeat an image.

TRANSITION:

Once the PCs defeat all the images or find the exit, they escape the funhouse or enter the next part of the maze.

If a PC is killed by one of the images the PC can opt, instead of death, to have their body change to match the image. The characters are adjusted as follows.

- **Thick:** You gain +3 Strength, but -3 Dexterity.
- **Long:** You gain the Reach Tricks feat, but it takes twice as long to move (moving to a nearby enemy with a single move action requires a Dickey Move).
- **Four Legs:** You gain a +2 bonus to disengage, but a -1 penalty to AC.
- **Thin:** You lose 3 hp per level, but gain +2 AC.

Distorted Images

Distorted images have the following nastier specials.

Nastier Specials

Mirror image: The image has a talent, class feature, or spell from the PC.

Now it's mine: For this fight, remove that ability from the PC.

Thick

Slow and heavy.

1st level troop [Construct]

Initiative: +1

Pounding fist +6 vs. AC—7 damage

AC	14	
PD	12	HP 40
MD	8	

Long

You're never quite out of its reach.

1st level archer [Construct]

Initiative: +5

Long-reaching fist +6 vs. AC (one nearby or far away enemy)—5 damage

AC	17	
PD	15	HP 27
MD	11	

Four Legs

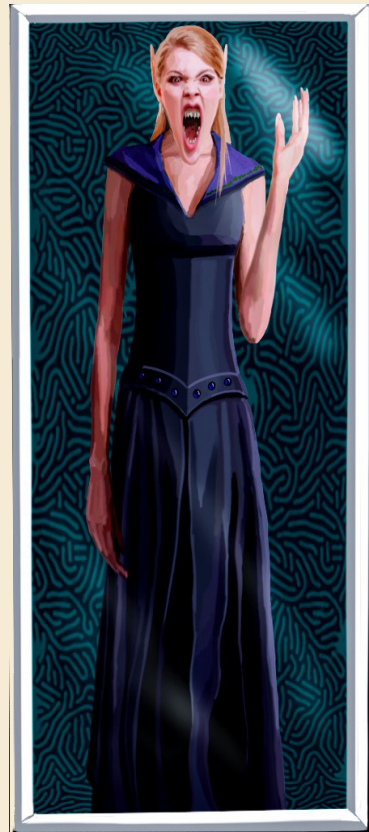
Short, stout, with four legs and an angry, distorted face, constantly kicking at anyone in its way.

1st level wrecker [Construct]

Initiative: +5

Kick +5 vs. AC (2 attacks)—4 damage

AC	14	
PD	12	HP 27
MD	12	



Thin

She is so narrow as she turns, it's tough to get a bead on her.

1st level spoiler [Construct]

Initiative: +4

Thin, gangly, whipping arms +6 vs. PD (one nearby enemy)—5 damage

Natural 16+: The arm lassos the opponent. The target is stuck and takes 4 ongoing damage until they disengage. Thin cannot attack another opponent with this arm until the target disengages.

AC	20	
PD	15	HP 18
MD	11	

Escalation!

WILL RETURN

