

HAPPY FREE RPG DAY 2024!



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BETTER MONSTERS

Greetings, peoples of the daylit realms! I'm Isaac and I make monsters; contained herein are literally thousands of them, and I conjure roughly 50 more each month to post to my [subreddit](#) and [patreon](#).

I frequently make the strident declaration that I make "better monsters", by which I mean only "creatures more in line with my own taste and design sensibilities", but here seems like a good space to go into a little more detail regarding what sort of things I find distinguish a good monster from a bad or mediocre one.

What you find you want from a monster design may depart from the goals laid out here, but with any element of game design it is essential to have a clear sense of what you are trying to achieve with it, and whether you accept or reject the principles set forward here, I hope you find them helpful in refining your own ideas as to what constitutes a well-crafted monster.

A BETTER MONSTER MANIFESTO

- **Fit for Purpose.** A stat block is a tool for running combat; it should contain everything you need to run that monster in combat and a minimum of other things; elements that aren't directly helpful to that goal should be included outside the stat block where possible.
- **Comprehensible.** It should be easy to understand what any given trait or ability does mechanically, what it represents in-world, and how it is meant to be used, both for the DM and the players. Stat blocks should aid DMs inspiring unique and compelling combat descriptions
- **Engaging.** It should help the DM to engage the players; it should present them with meaningful decisions to make, should reward them for paying attention and should encourage them to suspend disbelief and experience their character's perspective.
- **Memorable.** A monster stat block should aim to produce unique and memorable moments characteristic of the monster's core fantasy.
- **Surprising.** A monster meant to be used alone should have enough abilities to continue presenting players with new situations to react to for as long as it is likely to live.
- **Active.** The status quo should be meaningfully changed after a monster takes its turn. They should feel present in combat even outside their turns.
- **Evocative.** Stat blocks should have mechanics and flavor that reinforce the monster's core fantasy and aid GMs in improvising colorful and specific combat descriptions.
- **Balanced.** A monster should be as dangerous and tough as any other monster of its CR to aid GMs in forming reasonable expectations about combat difficulty. Monsters available as player options through transformation or summoning have been balanced against the best available options in the PHB, and the rest have been balanced against the CR guidelines in the 2014 Dungeon Master's Guide.

MONSTER LORE

Most of the monsters here contain lore with attached knowledge checks, meant to suggest to the DM a starting default for how rare that knowledge may be, and what skills might best be suited for it.

Some of the knowledge in these checks is directly useful to the players, some merely suggests or inspires an interesting course of action or further inquiry, and some is mere trivia. The weaknesses of monsters in this catalog are rarely crippling and it is not essential that you make them difficult to discover. '

Given the varying usefulness of the information available and the lack of any real downside to doing so, it is this designer's recommendation that GMs allow for knowledge checks to be made using a bonus action in combat.

MINIONS

The monsters in this catalog use the minion rules from MCDM's [Flee](#), [Mortals](#), which you can find detailed [here](#).

EXPANDED CONDITIONS

These stat blocks make use of an expanded list of conditions that you can find [here](#). These are primarily things that existed in the 2014 Monster Manual as common effects, which are here keyworded for brevity and ease of use.

MONSTER SPELLCASTING

Unless otherwise noted, assume that monsters require both Verbal and Somatic components to cast any spells, of whatever manner the monster is customarily able to produce. A worm-wizard may simply wriggle and slurp to cast spells, but they should still be impacted by a zone of silence; a back-and-forth of counterplay makes combat more fun.

Though the spellcasting monsters in this catalog typically don't use spell slots, their spells do include levels so they can be dispelled, countered, or learned by player characters.

OTHER MONSTER RULES

You can find a more comprehensive annotated guide to the terms and mechanics you encounter in these monster stat blocks [here](#).

USING THIS CATALOG: A CAVEAT

Some of these monsters were written by a past version of me with thousands of monsters less experience than the present me. As a general rule, things that lack art and lore are quite old, though I am continuously revisiting old work to bring it up to my current standards.

If you see something that seems unfair or poorly designed to you, don't use it as written (even better, alert me so I can change or explain it). "A professional wrote this!" means less than nothing to a player on the wrong end of a bad design.

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