

## AUTHOR'S SPECIAL THANKS

I'd like to thank Chris Hind and Stephen Elliott, gaming companions for more than twenty years, for their assistance in writing this book. In addition to coming up with numerous ideas which I un-shamefully borrowed, they gave endless advice and were always there to encourage and support. I'd also like give a tip of the hat to Owen K.C. Stephens, who wrote the spiritual predecessor to this project, *Bastards and Bloodlines* for d20 (Green Ronin Publishing), and to those authors whose monster design-work provided so much inspiration. It proves that writing a roleplaying book, just like the act of playing, is an interactive and communal experience.

## INTRODUCTION

I've always been drawn to the unusual. I remember making up my first character back in the days of AD&D. Why, I asked myself, would I play a normal elf when a Wood Elf was so much more distinctive? Thus was born Tanis Greenwood, and a love affair with new and exotic player character races. I lapped up each new half-breed or humanoid with relish. Eventually, it became obvious to me that the possibilities were endless; just as mythology was rich with monsters like chimera and sphinx that were the amalgam of several animals, so too could a campaign world boast any number of half-breeds based on standard races blended with other creatures. Why stop at half-orcs and half-elves, when you can have half-harpies and half-trolls?

*Castoffs and Crossbreeds* introduces 12 new half-races, and gives you the tools to introduce countless others of your own devising into your campaign. In a world with divine magic, arcane lore, strange laws of probability, curses, gods and fiends that dabble in the realms of man, and natural shapeshifters it seems perfectly natural that one might on occasion encounter

individuals of unusual heritage. Shunned by society, these bastards might take up the wandering life and seek homes among adventuring parties. Perhaps even yours.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

*Castoffs and Crossbreeds* is arranged in four modular chapters.

### Chapter One: Half-breeds in your Game

This chapter explores the opportunities that come with using half-breeds in your campaign, and discusses general issues that should be considered before introducing a half-breed.

### Chapter Two: Half-breeds

The meat of *Castoffs and Crossbreeds* is this expansive chapter in which twelve new half-breeds are introduced, ready to play as a PC race. The widest possible variation is provided, to demonstrate the ways in which nearly any monster can be the genesis of a half-breed with a little forethought and imagination.

### Chapter Three: The Demiurge

This short chapter ties the book together by introducing an alien race from beyond the stars with a mysterious agenda of abduction and crossbreeding. The Demiurge, as these malevolent beings are known, can be used the source for any number of half-breed races in your campaign. In addition, they serve as powerful and frighteningly sinister villains.

### Chapter Four: New Monsters

In this chapter we find two new monsters upon which a two of the half-breeds are based. The gorilla and the giant cockroach are creatures that will find a fast home in most games. They're presented here.

# CHAPTER ONE: HALF-BREEDS IN YOUR GAME

## PROBLEMS WITH HALF-BREEDS

Just as a GM should carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of introducing a new character class, spell, or magic item into his game, he must also consider which half-breeds to allow in his game world. Any new crossbreed that's adopted will have repercussions on the game that, like opening Pandora's Box, may be difficult to undo once that step is taken. As a result, when a player approaches the GM with an idea for a unique crossbreed, the matter should be carefully weighed.

## WORLD DESIGN

In some cases, the introduction of a half-breed may have an effect on world design. Depending upon how common the half-breed race is, there might by necessity need to be communities or even homelands for them. In a home-brew setting this might be accommodated fairly easily, but it does impose itself upon the GM and his creation. In a publishing game setting this can be a bit more problematic, perhaps even requiring substantive changes. Even then, the GM must determine how a half-breed community or homeland affects the dynamics of the region. Are they persecuted? What are their relations with neighbors? What is their collective relationship vis-à-vis the relevant parent races?

Even if a half-breed race doesn't exist in numbers requiring they have their own community or homeland, they may be common enough---even in a specific locality---to form a minority population in a town or province. How have they integrated themselves into society? What strata of society do they inhabit?

Are they slaves or relegated to eking out an existence in ghettos? Or maybe just the opposite, their uniqueness resulting in wonderment and awe that translates into privileged status.

In any event, it's clear that the introduction of a half-breed race that exists in any significant number results in more work for the GM as he tries to present a believable and exciting world for his gaming group. Of course, handled deftly, it could also result in opportunities for adventure and role-play, and a uniquely textured world.

## SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF

Half-breeds typically appear as exceptions to the norm, and yet even in a high fantasy setting with prevalent magic, dungeons underfoot, dragons and other monsters lurking around every corner, and epic quests that determine the fate of the world, players have a threshold for what they consider plausible and realistic. Some players have little trouble accepting anything in a fantasy setting. Others, however, like to be grounded by some sense of continuity and for them the suspension of disbelief may be strained by the appearance of half-breeds in any large number. If players find it difficult to accept the concept of half-trolls existing in urban ghettos and half-wight reavers doomed to continue their pillaging ways for all eternity, then you should probably limit the number and frequency in which crossbreeds appear in your campaign. Save them for important NPCs or dramatic moments.

It's important to establish a tone and flavor for your campaign vis-à-vis half-breeds, and maintain it consistently. This will help characters believe in the setting and enable you to predict what players will accept and what they will balk at. If you think introducing a particular half-breed will compromise the tone of the game, resist the temptation to use it; once a player's suspension of disbelief is undermined, it's extremely difficult to restore.

### GAME BALANCE

In *Castoffs and Crossbreeds*, we've attempted to provide the broadest range of potential half breeds, and have in fact stretched the traditional definition in many ways. This was an intentional design decision. We wanted to demonstrate the infinite possibilities that arise with the application of a little creativity, and hope to inspire GMs to try their hand at creating their own unique half-breed races.

When introducing a half-breed, every effort must be made to ensure they balanced mechanically with the core D&D player character races. It's inevitable that some races will be better in certain aspects of the game than others, but you must carefully examine half-breeds to ensure they do not unbalance the game. Nothing could disrupt a party and sow dissension among the players faster than a PC who is more powerful than his companions simply because his player had the good-fortune of convincing the game master to allow him to play a half-demon lord or some other ludicrously powerful crossbreed.

### BENEFITS OF HALF-BREEDS

Half-breeds offer great opportunities in a role-playing game. While the standard races are a long-standing staple of fantasy gaming and literature with good reason (they tend to be archetypal, and because elves and dwarves appear, in one form or another, in most cultures are readily identifiable), the introduction of new races can add a dramatic new spark that sets the campaign setting apart.

### VARIETY

Half-breeds are invaluable for adding variety into your game, allowing players a wider range of options upon which to base their character concept. The benefit of a half-breed as opposed to simply introducing a new PC race is that it doesn't, by definition, alter the game setting in any fundamental way. If a player decides he wants to make up a half-troll character (in this book, named Thule), it doesn't by definition follow that the world must feature half-trolls in any significant number. Instead, the half-troll PC may be unique. In short, half-breeds allow greater variety while keeping the number of sentient races in a game world to a believable number.

Each half-breed is described in the following easy-to-use format.

#### NAME

Just as in the real world people of mixed black and white heritage (by way of example) are known as mulatto or creole, few beings in a fantasy world would identify themselves as "half-elven" or "half-orc". Instead, they would likely have a distinctive racial name. In some cases, these names are insults or slurs given to them by bigoted individuals. In others, they are embraced by the half-breed as a sign of their lineage.

### ROLE-PLAYING POTENTIAL

Half-breeds tend to be filled with angst, and from that springs great drama and exciting role-playing opportunities. This is particularly true if the individual is unique or part of a very, very rare species. The Golem from Eastern European lore and Frankenstein's Monster are memorable characters were shaped by the notion that they were singular beings who wanted nothing more than to fit in with humans. There's a lot storylines can be based upon such emotions.

Answering the question, 'where did I come from', is more difficult for half-breed characters than those of a standard race, and potentially more rewarding. Was the character the product of rape, magical experimentation, or a powerful love spell that brought beings of two disparate races together? Perhaps some half-breeds are the result of a familial curse laid upon the bloodline by a bitter priest, or worse yet, a demon or evil deity. What if Thules are a naturally occurring though extremely rare and deeply embarrassing genetic mutation amongst dwarves that reminds them of a joint ancestry between them and trolls? Would these unwanted mutants be killed at birth or cast into slavery? Answering these questions opens up a rich and varied background for any new player character.

In addition to being saddled with origins laden with drama, half-breeds must exist in a world where they are a distinct minority. Even if Thules were relatively numerous and not instinctually hated, they would still be grossly outnumbered by elves and dwarves, to say nothing of humans, and therefore likely be the subject of prejudice or bias. Does the character struggle to fit in, or accept being marginalized by society and embrace the life of a vagabond or even an outlaw? Of course, keep in mind that not all bias are negative, but they still come with a burden. Moon Maidens are viewed as the offspring of celestial beings and are almost revered by elves. Living up to vaunted expectations and existing under the microscope that comes with hero worship can be just as difficult as being dismissed by society at large.

### PLAYER AID

Each of the half-breeds presented herein comes complete with a suggested background and detailed notes regarding the race's personality, possible motivation for adventuring, and views towards other races and classes. This information can be an invaluable aid in fleshing out a player character (or, for GMs, non-player characters). Within minutes and with little thought, a fully realized and nuanced character can be created and ready for use at the gaming table. While most players would find this character-creation crutch of value when time is of the essence, and perhaps also find inspiration in the half-breeds themselves, novice gamers in particular will appreciate the assistance and reap the greatest rewards.

## CHAPTER TWO: HALF-BREEDS

### APPEARANCE

This section details the physical characteristics of the half-breed. Where applicable, the entry touches upon physiology as well. Finally, we might find here information on preferred style of dress or other ornamentation relevant to a character's appearance.

### DEMEANOR

Here we discover prominent personality traits typical of members of the half-breed race in question, as well as delve briefly into collective psychology to learn what makes them tick.

# CHAPTER THREE: THE DEMIURGE

What if a game masters feels the need to explain the presence of an unusual crossbreed, to rationalize the existence of a humanoid that blends two creatures that would not or could not naturally reproduce? He might turn to magic or divine intervention, or perhaps the mysterious machinations of the demiurge, visitors from the blackness of space with a propensity for abduction and experimentation.

## INTRODUCTION

The adventurer's life is full of challenges and threats, ranging from dangers as basic as a pit trap or a bear protecting its cubs, to something as sinister in nature as a legion of undead lead by an evil priest attempting to take over a realm. Some threats are man-made, others are naturally occurring. A rare few are even completely alien in origin, extra-planar or extra-terrestrial in nature.

The demiurge fall into the last category of malice. They come to us from unknown parts of the galaxy in their citadel-like comets, and are responsible for strange lights in the sky, gruesome cattle mutilations, and mysterious disappearances. Most kidnapped victims never return. Some suddenly and inexplicably return, having only vague and horrifying memories of their missing time. They speak of bizarre experiments, painful tortures, and an ever-present blinding light. They are never the same, tortured by nightmares and debilitating illnesses for the remainder of their lives. Perhaps those that do not return are in fact the lucky ones.

## HISTORY OF THE DEMIURGE

Little is known about the origins of the Demiurge as it relates to where they come from and how they developed as a race. What is known is that they are able to travel across the universe in completely sealed comet-shaped citadels. No one knows exactly why they come, but coincidentally with the arrival of the floating citadels (rarely seen, except as lights in the sky) comes an increase in missing persons and creatures, abductions if you will. Few have been inside these citadels and fewer still have ever come out again. Many of those abducted are altered, turned into various forms of half breed mutants, the likes of which have never been seen on the planet before the Demiurge's arrival. Is this genetic tampering the result of child-like curiosity, or a reflection of far more sinister motives? The truth has yet to be determined.

## MYTHOLOGY OF THE DEMIURGE

Bedtime tales are told to young children of hideous creatures that swoop down from the skies in the dead of night, stealing away travelers caught out late and without the common sense to seek shelter for the evening. These tales are meant to scare children into not sneaking out at night or wandering too far from home. However, there is more truth to these tales than most people would like to believe. Travelers, livestock, monsters, even innocents sleeping snugly in their beds are snatched away by the demiurge.

Other stories are spun relating the Demiurge to evil gods that have come from their own plane of existence to punish those that have beliefs of an alternate nature.

The following table depicts the result of a Knowledge (arcana or nature) check as it relates to the Demiurge. Individuals living in or near areas where a floating citadel has appeared may be able to impart some or all of the information found within the table below. Note that the target numbers are higher than normal due to the obscure and limited knowledge of the Demiurge.

## KNOWLEDGE (ARCANE OR NATURE)

**DC 20** Strange lights seen in the night sky hail from floating citadels descended from the heavens and are not of this world. Abducted individuals and cattle mutilations often accompany these sightings.

**DC 25** The denizens of the citadels are red skinned floating semi circles with multiple eyes and a set of upper teeth that are both jagged and sharp.

**DC 30** These denizens are known as the demiurge and are never seen outside of their citadels. They are masters of levitation, flight and teleportation. Their floating comet fortresses are air tight with no visible entrances or viewing portals. The only known method of entry into the citadels is via teleportation

**DC 35** Demiurge are experts at crossbreeding but the exact nature as to why they do these is unknown. It is speculated that they are attempting to "design" the perfect warriors so that they can create an army of these individuals and then begin a reign of conquest across the world

**DC 40** The demiurge have a collective mind and are able to communicate with each other via telepathy. Their one known weakness is their inability to breathe an oxygen rich atmosphere

## PHYSIOLOGY OF THE DEMIURGE

The demiurge themselves appear to be large semicircular floating orbs covered in red leather like skin that hangs down below their eye clusters. They are about 4 feet in diameter with one greenish central eye and two additional eyes on either side of the main ocular orb. The secondary eyes appear to be blind as the pupils of these are milky white and if they are able to "see" through these eyes, it is unknown. Located below the eye clusters appear to have been the remnants of a mouth. The demiurge has a top jaw and set of sharp teeth but no lower jaw is present. If they eat or digest any form of sustenance, it is not through a conventional mouth.

It would appear that at one point in their existence the demiurge may have actually had a full "head" including lower mandibles and maybe even a body of sorts but perhaps through evolution these anatomical features have disappeared. The demiurge's means of personal travel is through levitation, flight or teleportation. They never speak but they are able to communicate through thoughts and telepathy which they can project into another's mind. As well, they can read the thoughts of others to allow for two-way communication with other races is required. They have a collective consciousness and instantly know the thoughts and condition of any of their shipmates. Some demiurge are believed to have developed the power of psionics. Fewer still are believed to have the ability to wipe a creature's memories and experiences from their mind.

## PSYCHOLOGY OF THE DEMIURGE

Demiurge are creatures of few words, both literally and figuratively. That doesn't prevent their sinister motives from being understood; their malicious actions speak louder than any words possibly could, clearly voicing their disdain for all life forms save their own. They seem to be driven by one main objective: to produce crossbreeds wherever they roam.

Whenever the shadow of a floating comet citadel should appear over an area, its presence betrayed only by eerie lights at night, two things are certain to occur. First, creatures of all kind, but in particular humanoids, will mysteriously disappear. In some cases, they are taken from along deserted roadways, their