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[Anyone who's been following the Creature Codex for a while probably realizes I love transformation, shapeshifters and body horror. So the zern tick off a lot of my boxes. I also like them being mad science types who are collegial and social, like real scientists. I worked in academia for several years, and am pretty sure I met a few zerns in my day.]

Zern

This humanoid creature has dark rubbery skin, and its muscles appear to be woven out of cables or ropes. A short tuft of tentacles grows from its head as if it were hair. It clutches a spear in its hands.

The zerns are a race of arrogant fleshwarper, who view other living things as slaves and test subjects. They take credit for the creation of many of the stranger creatures in the world, such as otyughs, chokers and gricks. Some of this credit may even be deserved. Zerns have altered their own bodies so much over the ages that they can warp and transform their own shapes at will. The ropery, rubbery forms of modern zerns are likely not their original shapes, but instead reflect a current trend; records indicate that the “default” form of the zern was different in the past.

Zerns like warm, wet climates like swamps and tropical rainforests, although some are found underground near magma chambers and water reservoirs. Most of them spend their time in experimentation, vivisectioning other creatures, transforming them into strange new forms, and otherwise exploring the malleability of flesh. They are social creatures, living in small enclaves and engaging in friendly competitions amongst themselves to create the most radical revisions of form. These enclaves operate as a hideous parody of a university or scientific institution, and most zerns inflate their importance with titles and certificates.

Some zerns infiltrate humanoid cities in disguise, and others work openly, especially in evil-aligned societies. Their monstrous minions make for strong slaves, and they gladly will trade their “finished” specimens for new chattel to experiment on. They have a fractious relationship with the drow—both species consider themselves to be the masters of fleshwarping, and are jealous and spiteful towards the accomplishments of the others.

A zern’s body is extremely dense for its size, making them weigh about three hundred pounds.

They typically advance by character class, favoring classes with a focus on transformation such as wizard or alchemist.

Zern CR 7

XP 3,200

NE Medium monstrous humanoid (shapechanger)

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Perception +12

Defense

AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 16 (+3 Dex, +6 natural)

hp 84 (8d10+40); fast healing 3

Fort +7, **Ref** +9, **Will** +9

Immune paralysis, poison, stunning; **SR** 18

Defensive Abilities adaptive defenses

Offense

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

Melee masterwork spear +12/+7 (1d8+4/x3) or warping +12 touch (4d6)

Ranged warping +12 touch (4d6)

Spell-like Abilities CL 8th, concentration +10

3/day—*disfiguring touch* (DC 15), *reduce person* (DC 14)

1/day—*baleful polymorph* (DC 18), *gaseous form*

Statistics

Str 17, **Dex** 17, **Con** 20, **Int** 18, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 15

Base Atk +8; **CMB** +11; **CMD** 24

Feats [Fleshwarper](#) (B), Iron Will, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Spell Focus (transmutation)

Skills Climb +11, Craft (alchemy) +15, Escape Artist +11, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +12, Heal +9, Sense Motive +9, Perception +12, Stealth +14, Swim +11

Languages Common, Draconic, Undercommon, Zern

SQ change shape (Small or Medium monstrous humanoid or humanoid, *alter self* or [monstrous physique I](#)), malleable form, transmutation affinity

Ecology

Environment warm marshes and forests or underground

Organization solitary, pair or enclave (3-8)

Treasure standard (masterwork spear, other treasure)

Special Abilities

Adaptive Defenses (Ex) A zern’s physiology is carefully tuned to physical threats. If it succeeds a Fortitude saving throw against an attack or effect that has a reduced effect on a successful save, it instead avoids the effect entirely.

Malleable Form (Ex) As a move action, a zern can warp its body to grant it one of the following abilities. This effect is permanent until the zern chooses another move action to change its form. A zern can use this ability even when it has used change shape. The zern above is benefiting from the improved mobility ability.

Adrenal Surge: The zern’s muscles swell, granting it a +2 on all attack and damage rolls with weapons, natural weapons or its warping touch.

Boneless: The zern becomes exceptionally malleable, gaining a +8 racial bonus to Escape Artist checks and the compression special ability.

Impervious: The zern grows bony overlapping plates on its skin, granting it an additional +3 natural armor bonus and DR 5/piercing

Improved Mobility: The zern gains a climb speed and swim speed equal to its land speed.

Size Shift: The zern becomes Large, granting it a +2 size bonus to Strength and 10 feet of reach, or becomes Small, granting it a +2 size bonus to Dexterity. In either case, it gains the appropriate size modifiers to its Armor Class, CMB, CMD and skill checks.

Speed Surge: The zern's legs become long and muscular, granting it a 30 foot bonus to its land speed.

Transmutation Affinity (Ex) A zern applies any feats that improve its transmutation spells, such as Spell Focus, to its spell-like abilities as well. A zern with class levels treats its caster level as 1 higher for all transmutation spells.

Warping Touch (Su) As a standard action once per round, a zern can channel disruptive energy through its hands. It makes either a melee touch attack or a ranged touch attack with a range of 60 feet and no range increment. A creature struck by this takes 4d6 points of typeless damage. A zern with class levels or extra Hit Dice deals an additional 1d6 points of damage from this ability for every extra 2 HD it has.