

# THE MAKINGS OF A MONSTER

**T**his document provides a high-level framework for creating novel monsters for 5th Edition **Dungeons & Dragons**, or quite frankly any tabletop role playing game. The document was created by **Pete & Jeremy's DnDTime** for **Monster Mash**, a donation incentive on our homebrew workshop, **Fantasy Labs**. Tune in every Sunday at 6 PM Pacific on [Twitch.TV/DnDTime](https://www.twitch.tv/DnDTime)!

## THE ESSENTIAL ASPECTS OF EVERY MONSTER

Every monster, whether meek, or mountainous, or dependable, or depraved, or anything in between, can be categorized into a series of categories. Categories help us to think about and understand the defining characteristics of the monster and its place in the universe.

As we discover our monster, determine one absolute fact about the creature before moving forward. This step is meant to give us a building block to ask the questions "How", "Why", "When", "What", or "Where" as we move through our categories. Generally, the fact should be something that the monster *does*, not what it *is*. Examples include:

*This monster kills humans at night;*

*This monster disturbs graveyards; or...*

*This monster holds prisoners for ransom.*

## MONSTER TYPE

In 5th Edition **Dungeons & Dragons**, monsters have a type, and while that is not always true in other settings and game systems, thinking about what type your monster might be can help to learn more about its origins or motivations. These types are: **Aberration, Beast, Celestial, Construct, Dragon, Elemental, Fey, Fiend, Giant, Humanoid, Monstrosity, Ooze, Plant, and Undead**.

Choose a type for your creature, to inform and inspire you as you discover more about it. Consider the following descriptions of each creature type as stated in the 5th Edition **Dungeons & Dragons Monster Manual**.

### ABERRATION

Aberrations are utterly alien beings. Many of them have innate magical abilities drawn from the creature's alien mind rather than the mystical forces of the world. The quintessential aberrations are aboleths, beholders, mind flayers, and slaadi.

### BEAST

Beasts are nonhumanoid creatures that are a natural part of the fantasy ecology. Some of them have magical powers, but most are unintelligent and lack any society or language. Beasts include all varieties of ordinary animals, dinosaurs, and giant versions of animals.

### CELESTIAL

Celestials are creatures native to the Upper Planes. Many of them are the servants of deities, employed as messengers or agents in the mortal realm and throughout the planes. Celestials are good by nature, so the exceptional celestial who strays from a good alignment is a horrifying rarity. Celestials include angels, couatls, and pegasi.

### CONSTRUCT

Constructs are made, not born. Some are programmed by their creators to follow a simple set of instructions, while others are imbued with sentience and capable of independent thought. Golems are the iconic constructs. Many creatures native to the outer plane of Mechanus, such as modrons, are constructs shaped from the raw material of the plane by the will of more powerful creatures.

### DRAGON

Dragons are large reptilian creatures of ancient origin and tremendous power. True dragons, including the good metallic dragons and the evil chromatic dragons, are highly intelligent and have innate magic. Also in this category are creatures distantly related to true dragons, but less powerful, less intelligent, and less magical, such as wyverns and pseudodragons.

### ELEMENTAL

Elementals are creatures native to the elemental planes. Some creatures of this type are little more than animate masses of their respective elements, including the creatures simply called elementals. Others have biological forms infused with elemental energy. The races of genies, including djinn and efreet, form the most important civilizations on the elemental planes. Other elemental creatures include azers, invisible stalkers, and water weards.

### Fey

Fey are magical creatures closely tied to the forces of nature. They dwell in twilight groves and misty forests. In some worlds, they are closely tied to the Feywild, also called the Plane of Faerie. Some are also found in the Outer Planes, particularly the planes of Arborea and the Beastlands. Fey include dryads, pixies, and satyrs.

### FIEND

Fiends are creatures of wickedness that are native to the Lower Planes. A few are the servants of deities, but many more labor under the leadership of archdevils and demon princes. Evil priests and mages sometimes summon fiends to the material world to do their bidding. If an evil celestial is a rarity, a good fiend is almost inconceivable. Fiends include demons, devils, hell hounds, rakshasas, and yugoloths.



## GIANT

Giants tower over humans and their kind. They are humanlike in shape, though some have multiple heads (ettins) or deformities (fomorians). The six varieties of true giant are hill giants, stone giants, frost giants, fire giants, cloud giants, and storm giants. Besides these, creatures such as ogres and trolls are giants.

## HUMANOID

Humanoids are the main peoples of the D&D world, both civilized and savage, including humans and a tremendous variety of other species. They have language and culture, few if any innate magical abilities (though most humanoids can learn spellcasting), and a bipedal form. The most common humanoid races are the ones most suitable as player characters: humans, dwarves, elves, and halflings. Almost as numerous but far more savage and brutal, and almost uniformly evil, are the races of goblinoids (goblins, hobgoblins, and bugbears), orcs, gnolls, lizardfolk, and kobolds.

## MONSTROSITY

Monstrosities are monsters in the strictest sense-frightening creatures that are not ordinary, not truly natural, and almost never benign. Some are the results of magical experimentation gone awry (such as owlbears), and others are the product of terrible curses (including minotaurs and yuan-ti). They defy categorization, and in some sense serve as a catch-all category for creatures that don't fit into any other type.

## Ooze

Oozes are gelatinous creatures that rarely have a fixed shape. They are mostly subterranean, dwelling in caves and dungeons and feeding on refuse, carrion, or creatures unlucky enough to get in their way. Black puddings and gelatinous cubes are among the most recognizable oozes.

## PLANT

Plants in this context are vegetable creatures, not ordinary flora. Most of them are ambulatory, and some are carnivorous. The quintessential plants are the shambling mound and the treant. Fungal creatures such as the gas spore and the myconid also fall into this category.

## UNDEAD

Undead are once-living creatures brought to a horrifying state of undeath through the practice of necromantic magic or some unholy curse. Undead include walking corpses, such as vampires and zombies, as well as bodiless spirits, such as ghosts and specters.

## MONSTER ECOLOGY & ORIGINS

Where a monster resides and how it does (or does not) fit into the natural ecology of an area is critical when discovering your creature. Consider your creature's actions and its type when answering the following ecological questions:

*Where can you typically find the creature?*

*Is it disruptive to the natural cycle there?*

*If there are telltale signs of its presence, what are they?*

*Is it commonly found with or near other creatures?*

*If not native to an environment, what are its origins?*

*How does the creature do what it does in its environment?*

## MONSTER TACTICS

By this point, you should have a pretty decent idea of the creature you're creating. You should understand what the creature does and how it affects its environment and the other creatures within it. Its time to start developing its tactics.

Tactics might include how a creature hunts, and any special abilities it has. Tactics might also include the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the creature and how the creature copes with those weaknesses. These tactics will often be directly reflected in a creature's stat block, so once you have a strong idea of your creature's tactics, move on to actually creating the creature!

## STAT IT OUT!

Congratulations, you've made it to the final step: statting out the creature! At this point, you can actually start statting out the creature you've just conceptualized. Start by developing the tactics-related features of the creature. Then create any features related to its origins or ecological niche. Finally, check out some of creatures that share a type with the creature you're creating and consider including some of the common features of those creatures.

When statting out a creature, don't worry all that much about creating the exact armor class, hit points, or damage values of a creature's attacks and abilities. Exact balancing of a creature is as much an art as it is science. Consider utilizing the monster balance guidance in the 5th Edition **Dungeons & Dragons** *Monster Manual* for determining the monster's final stats.