

Wormfood

SURVIVING THE AGE OF WORMS ADVENTURE PATH

BECOMING EPIC HEROES

While the pages of *DUNGEON* present everything a DM needs to run the Age of Worms Adventure Path, every month *DRAGON* gives the players of that—or any other campaign—tools to enhance their gaming experience.

In “Dawn of a New Age,” the final adventure in the campaign, your heroes stand an excellent chance of transcending the boundary between high-level and epic-level play. Certainly the villains you’ll be facing in this final battle are epic-level threats. As the campaign comes to a close, your heroes join the ranks of the greatest of the land, and in some cases, might even be the most powerful members of their classes in the campaign world.

What does this mean, exactly? What is the difference between high-level play and epic-level play? Where do you go to level up your character once you gain your 210,000th experience point? What kind of benefits tailored specifically for the Age of Worms campaign should you seek out? This article provides you with what you need not only to face the Age of Worms endgame, but to carry on beyond the campaign into new regions of heroism and glory.

EPIC RESOURCES

The first thing you should do when your character becomes 21st level is to check out pages 206–210 of the *DUNGEON MASTER’s Guide*. Here, you’ll find a bare-bones primer for advancing into epic levels; these rules explain how your class features progress and give a small handful of feats to choose from.

The Complete books (*Complete Warrior*, *Complete Divine*, *Complete Arcane*, and *Complete Adventurer*) each feature sections at the end that expand this information, including numerous new feats to choose from.

Of course, the best place to go to for guidance and options with epic-level play is the *Epic Level Handbook*. If you use this book, be sure to check out the 3.5 rules update that Wizards of the Coast has available on their website at wizards.com.

YOUR FIRST EPIC FEAT

When you reach 21st level, you qualify for your first epic feat. Unless your group intends to carry on the campaign after finishing “Dawn of a New Age,” the feat you select will be your character’s only epic feat. So choose wisely!



It goes without saying, in this case, that you should avoid selecting “gateway” feats that exist primarily to serve as prerequisites for higher-level feats. Likewise, certain feats have little to no use in the limited span of time you have remaining to play your character. For example, there’s no sense in selecting Augmented Alchemy, since you probably won’t have time to create many alchemical items during this last adventure.

Breaking down the types of classes into the classic four archetypes, the following epic feats (taken from the Complete books and the *DUNGEON MASTER’s Guide*) are your best choices.

Warrior: Barbarians, fighters, paladins, and other classes focused on combat who qualify for Overwhelming Critical might be tempted to take this

feat, but since it only triggers when you make a critical hit and a lot of the foes in Age of Worms are undead, you should look to *Complete Warrior* for better epic feat choices. Feats like Armor Skin, Epic Prowess, and Epic Weapon Focus might seem minor, but that extra point to your Armor Class or your attack roll might save your life. Ranged weapon specialists should definitely check out Combat Archery, if only because a lot of high-level monsters have exceptional reach with their attacks, and being able to fire your weapon without worrying about attacks of opportunity is really nice. Perfect Two-Weapon Fighting is an excellent choice if you qualify, since it’s always best to add a new attack to your full-attack actions.

Divine: Improved Spell Capacity is probably your best bet if you’re a divine spellcaster, especially if your

key ability score is high enough (30+) to grant you a bonus 10th-level spell. Being able to cast a quickened *greater dispel magic* or a quickened *heal* gives you a great advantage. Of course, if you don’t have any metamagic feats, this feat is still useful since you can apply it to any spell level. There’s quite a few evil outsiders left to fight as well, so Planar Turning isn’t a bad choice (especially if you’ve picked up a lot of other feats to augment your turning checks). Bonus Domain is a good choice only if the granted domain is particularly useful at high level—gaining a larger spell selection really only makes things more complicated. And finally, although it’s not an epic feat, you certainly can’t go wrong with Persistent Spell from *Complete Arcane*, especially with spells like *aid*, *divine favor*, and *resist*

energy just begging to be augmented in this way.

Arcane: As far as spellcasting goes, arcane spellcasters benefit from Improved Spell Capacity and Persistent Spell as much as divine casters. If you have a familiar, Familiar Spell is a handy way to increase the number of spells you can effectively cast in that all-important first round of combat. If your spellcaster is into damage spells, Enhance Spell isn't a bad choice either.

Adventurer: Not every encounter in Age of Worms is built for combat; there are several places where characters with high Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, and similar skills can turn the tide of battle with a single skill check. Feats like Epic Reputation or Epic Skill Focus can be invaluable to roguish characters. Feats like Improved Sneak Attack aren't that great (again, since many of the villains in Age of Worms are undead)—an adventurer who focuses on combat is better served by delving into some of the epic feats a combat class might take.

EPIC STUNTS

Of course, keeping track of your character's newfound power can be an epic stunt in and of itself. Note that in many cases, the use of these tactics applies even to standard high-level games, not just epic-level games.

Astral Projection: The ultimate in exploration spells. With *astral projection* you can engage your enemy with little to no risk to yourself, since if your astral body is killed, it vanishes and you awaken in your real body unharmed. This is also an excellent spell to use when you're heading into environments or up against enemies who can ruin your valuable gear. Astrally projecting characters really have only four major disadvantages. First, they can't enter areas warded by antimagic. Second, they can be dispelled. Third, you can still be ruined by effects that immobilize you without killing you (*flesh to stone*, *imprisonment*, and even *hold person*). Finally, if you use this tactic too much, you can bet your

enemies come to expect it. Make sure to leave your real bodies in a well-defended place (such as Magepoint) so if the enemy tracks them down you'll at least have a few rounds to get back there to save them.

Death Ward: If you're buying magic, you can't go wrong with a wand of *death ward*, especially in an adventure that features a lot of undead.

Free Enhancement Bonuses: If you find yourself shopping for new weapons and armor, keep in mind that at high level paying for enhancement bonuses is wasting money if someone in your group can cast *greater magic weapon* or *magic vestment*. These spells take up lower-level spell slots that generally aren't as useful in high-level combat, so dedicating several spell slots to these spells can really make a difference if you and your friends are armed with +1 weapons loaded with all sorts of other abilities.

Heroes' Feast: This spell is invaluable for the immunity to fear and poison effects it grants.

Maze: This spell is great for getting a monster out of the way, but it doesn't work as well against really smart creatures. That said, it's also an excellent defensive spell. Cast on yourself or an ally, it whisks away your target from danger, giving him all the time he probably needs to recover from a near-death situation.

Mind Blank: Once you can cast this spell, you might as well simply reduce the number of 8th-level spells you can cast per day by one: you should *never* go out without this spell active. If you don't have *mind blank* handy, an excellent poor-man's alternative is *protection from evil*. It doesn't grant you the sweeping immunities *mind blank* does, but it does keep you from being controlled via dominate effects.

No Save Allowed: Focus on spells that don't allow saving throws. *Maze*, *forcecage*, and *Otto's irresistible dance* are the classic examples, but spells like *gate* and *summon monster* are also effective ways to use magic to damage creatures with really good saving throws.

FOR THE DM

With this Wormfood, the Age of Worms Adventure Path comes to a close. While you might wish to continue the campaign into the epic levels, you might be interested in a change of scenery. Far to the south, in the exotic port city of Sasserine, trouble is brewing. A noblewoman's parents lie dead, her brother has gone missing, and greedy creditors haunt her doorstep, ready to steal away her ancestral home. Yet in providing aid to this desperate woman, your PCs might unwittingly entangle themselves in a sinister plot to spread madness across the globe—a plot destined to send them to the infamous pirate city of Scuttlecove, the notorious Isle of Dread, and deep into the Abyss itself. Look for the first adventure of Adventure Path III: *Savage Tide* to begin in issue #139 of *DUNGEON*.

Suit Up! Before you head in to the last adventure, remember that you probably won't have a chance to fully utilize any magical gear you find. Put another way, make sure you're as well-equipped as you can be. Take a moment to look over your character's magic item body slots, if you see one that's empty, put something on! If you've got the money to spare, you can even pay double the normal price for an item that normally takes up a slot to make it a "slotless" item. Your DM might limit access to such items, and it's perfectly reasonable to assume that such non-standard items must be crafted to order, which might take up more time than you are willing or able to wait.

Time Stop: This spell's use for mid-combat recovery is unparalleled. A character with *time stop* can take his 1d4+1 rounds of free actions to heal himself, re-apply defensive spells, or simply find better ground to continue the battle. Spending those 1d4+1 rounds to summon monsters around your enemy is also a good idea. ■