

# Metamorphosing Monsters:

## Adapting D&D Creatures to TFT by Steve Jackson



A lot of you RPG fans out there are laying *The Fantasy Trip*; according to *Name Merchandising*, it's currently the second most popular role-playing game in the U.S. But one thing TFT lacks, compared to almost every other major fantasy system, is a "monster book." GMs are limited to the creatures in the original *In the Labyrinth* book, plus a few introduced in various supplements.

However, TSR's *Dungeons & Dragons* does have a monster book — in fact, it has several. In addition to the official *Monster Manual*, there have been any number of privately published collections of beasties. The Manual itself has over 350 different creature descriptions... and while some of them are trite (giant frogs) or repetitions of standard fantasy material (men, dwarves, elves, orcs) there is also a lot of original material. Such creatures as the ankheg, bullette, gelatinous cube, and rust monster are purely *D&D* creations.

True, the descriptions in the *Monster Manual* are incompatible with TFT. But this is easily dealt with. This article will offer a system for "translating" beasts to the TFT system. The translation is not exact; creatures from the Manual may be more or less deadly when converted to TFT. But it's fairly close, and it will certainly provide you with a horrid new batch of beasties.

Note that I've written this treatment in terms of *Original D&D* and variants; armor classes and hit dice may have to be modified for stats in *Advanced D&D*.

To take the characteristics in the order they're listed in the Manual:

*Frequency* is self-explanatory. Page 5 of the Manual gives "official" percentage chances for each frequency classification, but there's no real reason for you to be bound by these if the structure of your world demands otherwise. If a certain swamp is crawling with catoblepas, so be it! But remember that any thick concentration of a normally-rare monster would probably be known to natives of the area, and would not come as a total surprise to adventurers who had bothered to inquire about local conditions.

*Number Appearing* is also a general guideline; use it or not, as you see fit. As a guide to the "social" habits of the creature, it's good. If you're slavishly rolling dice, that's not so good. Use your judgment!

*Armor Class*, in the *D&D* system, is a catch-all for physical protection, magical defense, and the innate difficulty-to-hit caused by a creature's small size or high dexterity. TFT handles this concept by using two different numbers: a subtraction from the attacker's DX (for a target that is hard to hit) and a subtraction from damage done (if the target is tougher than unprotected human flesh). To translate a creature's "armor class" into the two TFT stats, proceed as follows:

(1) Compare the creature's natural armor with the list below to get a "natural armor class." This is the armor class the creature would have if it had no magical defenses and did not move about. Read across from the natural armor class to the "hits stopped" column. This shows how many hits, in TFT terms, that sort of armor absorbs from each blow that strikes it.

NATURAL ARMOR CLASS	HITS STOPPED IN TFT
AC 9: soft body without protection	0
AC 8: thin chitin or light fur or shield only	1
AC 7: leather armor, medium fur, or light scales	2
AC 6: leather + shield, or heavier fur or scales	3
AC 5: chainmail, or heavy reptile scales	3
AC 4: mail and shield, or medium dragon scales	4
AC 3: plate armor, or a shell	5
AC 2: plate and shield, heavy shell, or old dragon scales	6

(2) Take the difference between the creature's *natural* armor class and its *actual* armor class as given in the Manual. If the difference is only 1, ignore it. If it is more than 1, it will probably be due to either magic powers or great elusiveness on the part of the creature. Example: the Morkoth is shown as being vaguely octopoid; this would imply soft skin (AC 9). However, it is described as AC 3, which is much harder to hit. This difference of 6 must be accounted for. We do this by assessing a DX- on any attack against the creature. For every 2 points difference between the natural armor class and the "real" AC from the Manual, subtract 1 from the DX of any attack against it. Thus, the Morkoth, with its AC 9 skin and a "true" AC of 3 has a 6-point differential. Half of 6 is 3; any attack against a Morkoth in a TFT adventure will be at DX -3. However, the AC 9-equivalent skin means that no hits are stopped; if a sword hits home on a Morkoth, it's in trouble.

*Move* gives a distance in inches representing the creature's speed. The listings



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in the Manual may be considered suspect; for instance, a human moves 12", a dwarf only 6". Are dwarves only half as fast as humans? Not likely . . .

For any humanoid type, use MA 8, 10, or 12, depending on whether the creature seems as though it should be generally slow, average, or fast when compared to a man; ignore the "Move" listing entirely.

For animals, use the MA for a comparable creature from TFT: ITL.

For peculiar and unique monsters (which is what you should be using the Manual for anyhow) allow 1 MA for each inch of movement. All MA should be even numbers. A ground MA of more than 16" is very unlikely except for a riding creature. Note that some creatures will have ground, water, and/or air speeds listed, all of which may be different.

*Hit Dice* refers to a creature's vulnerability; it is a measure of how many hits it can *take*, not how much damage it does. However, it can function as a guide to the range of strengths appropriate for creatures of that type. A 6-sided die (which is the type used for "hit dice" in the Manual) has an average roll of 3.5; therefore, a "6-die creature" can take an average of 21 hits, but could conceivably take as few as 6 hits, or as many as 36. In TFT terms, this would mean an average ST of 21, with a range of 6 to 36.

However, the range of hits in the *Monster Manual*, figured this way, is greater than in TFT. The *strongest* beginning human character in a *D&D* game can take only 8 hits — but he will soon advance to levels where he can take 60 or more hits. Contrast this with TFT, where a beginning character is likely to start with a ST of at least 10 — possibly up to 18! — but is unlikely to get much past 24. The disparity in the abilities of creatures is equally wide. In TFT terms, creatures from the Manual are very puny — until they begin to get strong, when they are very strong indeed.

Therefore, to derive a reasonable TFT strength from the hit points of a creature from the *Monster Manual*:

If a creature has 1 or 2 hit dice, multiply its average hit points by 3 to get an average TFT strength.

If a creature has 3 or 4 hit dice, multiply its average hit points by 2.5.

If a creature has 5 or 6 hit dice, multiply its average hit points by 2.

If a creature has 7 or more hit dice, multiply its average hit points by 1.5. Again, we are talking about averages. The maximum hit points (i.e., TFT strength) of any creature will be nearly twice the average for that type!

% *in Lair* is not a statistic you'll need

at all, unless you're generating your whole adventure by die rolls. You're not, are you?

*Treasure Type* refers the Manual user to a series of lists. Check these to see what general sort of treasure the authors intended the creature to have — then scale it up or down to fit your own campaign. Most of the time these lists are much too generous.

*Number of Attacks* may be taken as written. Note that many creatures will be surprisingly powerful because they have several attacks.

*Damage/Attack* gives the amount of damage a creature does when it hits. (A creature with multiple attacks may do different damage with each one.) The *Monster Manual* gives this in terms of "ranges" — for instance, "1-6" should be read "1 to 6," or "1d6." Unfortunately for the TFT player, some creatures attack with 4-sided dice, some with 6-siders, some with 8-siders . . . and so on. You



have two options here: you can either acquire polyhedral dice and roll them as per the book, or you can work out probable damage done and translate it to d6 terms. Example: A creature is listed as doing "2-16" hits damage. A range of 2 to 16 is achieved only by rolling 2d8 (a pity the authors couldn't have used that nomenclature). An 8-sided die has an average roll of 4.5, so two of them have an average result of 9. This can be approximated by rolling three 6-siders and subtracting 1 from the result; 3d6-1, or simply "3-1" gives an average result of 9.5 and a range of 2-17, which is close enough.

Some monsters, especially those from "unofficial" sources, will do a truly astounding amount of damage. You have

three choices with these: leave them out of your campaign, scale them down to a reasonable level, or save them for those players who have built up very strong and well-equipped characters. It's a matter of the GM's personal style.

*Special Attacks* are too numerous to describe individually, and most of them tie in to magic spells, etc., in the *D&D* game system. The general solution should be to find a TFT magic spell that approximates the effect of the special attack. This may then be assigned to the creature, either as an innate ability (like the TFT basilisk) or, for an intelligent creature, as a spell known and used in the normal fashion. Innate abilities may or may not require use of ST points or the making of a DX roll; let the description of that particular special attack be your guide.

Translation of special abilities requires the most care and creativity of any part of this process. Be sure to cover all the bases — duration and area of effect, defenses if any, range — or there'll be an argument in the middle of the game.

*Special Defenses* should be handled as for special attacks. Most can be treated as magic spells, increased difficulty to hit, or extra armor protection.

*Magic Resistance* is a concept not found in TFT at all, except in certain very rare cases (i.e., demons) which are *completely* resistant to hostile magic. Therefore, ignore it! This will help balance certain creatures that are otherwise much too powerful for the average TFT world.

*Intelligence* as given in the Manual, translates roughly as follows:

Non-intelligent: IQ 0.

Animal: IQ 4 for reptiles

IQ 5 for most mammals

IQ 6 for intelligent mammals

Semi-intelligent (i.e., apes): IQ 7

Low intelligence: IQ 8 or 9

Average human intelligence: IQ 10 or 11

Very intelligent: IQ 12 to 14

Highly intelligent: IQ 15 to 18

Genius, supergenius: IQ 19 and up

*Alignment* is not used at all in TFT, but can still be used as a guide to "personality." Chaotics may do anything they please; true chaotics are rare. Lawfuls will follow a strict code of behavior, though you may not agree with it or even know what it is. Evils will behave selfishly and attack if they can. Goods will not attack unless they perceive you as evil; anything that threatens them is likely to be considered evil. Neutrals will act for their own convenience, which will usually mean letting others alone — but many "neutral" creatures are *hungry*. The average party of player-characters, incident-

ally, considers itself to be lawful good and is actually chaotic neutral.

*Size* may be given either in height or length. This will tell you how large the counter should be. Allow one hex of size for each 3 feet of length or width. If a creature's size consists mostly of height, it may be a two- or three-hex counter anyway, like a standard giant in TFT.

*Psionic Ability* may be ignored entirely, or treated as an innate magic ability of the appropriate type (usually telepathy). If you take the latter course, "psionic" spells should cost the user no strength, but require the standard roll vs. IQ.

This completes the roster of characteristics listed in the Manual. It also gives us all the characteristics needed to play TFT, with one important exception: dexterity. Although the *D&D* system has a "dexterity" characteristic, it is not used to determine the hit probability; the success of attacks is determined by a complicated matrix, involving "levels" and monsters' hit dice.

Therefore, the best way to assign a dexterity to any given creature involves an assessment of that creature's overall formidability, rather than any one characteristic. Imprecise though it may be, the best solution is simply to assign a DX that *seems* right for that creature, by

comparison with known creature types and the following guidelines:

DX	Probability of Hitting	General Assessment
3	.5%	<i>Worst possible DX.</i>
4	1.8%	
5	4.6%	
6	9.2%	<i>The lowest DX at which a creature has any reasonable chance of hitting in a combat of normal length.</i>
7	16.2%	
8	25.9%	<i>Clumsy human.</i>
9	37.5%	<i>Beginning to be dangerous.</i>
10	50.0%	<i>Hits exactly half the time.</i>
11	62.5%	
12	74%	
13	83.8%	<i>Formidable.</i>
14	90.7%	<i>Deadly, if it does any damage at all when it hits.</i>
15	95.4%	
16	***	<i>A roll of 16 or more is an automatic miss, so a DX of 16 or more is only significant in a situation where subtractions will apply.</i>

Some typical animal comparisons: bear DX 10, ape DX 12, wolf DX 14. Some "imaginary" monsters are likely to be strong but very clumsy, balancing high damage with low hit probability. An important note: In TFT, dexterity is probably the single most important factor de-

termining how dangerous a creature is. A beast that does, for instance, 3 dice damage is laughable at DX 7, and murderous at DX 12. A creature with DX 14 or more is formidable even if it does very little damage! If a monster has a DX higher than that of the fighters that face it, those fighters are in *trouble*.

The other important thing to keep in mind when "translating" monsters — and this holds true no matter what game systems are involved — is to *work them out beforehand*. If you're working straight from a book, you can tell your players, "You see three Whatsits," look up Whatsits on page 34 of your Beastie Book, and go from there. You *shouldn't* play that ignorantly, but you can. But with translated creatures, you have to do your homework. Adapting the statistics *does* take time; do it beforehand, and write everything down. (A 3 x 5 card for each creature type is good for this.) That way you won't waste time during play — and you can be sure that your translation is a complete one, and that oddball factors like special attacks have been fully covered.

So . . . the next time your players are wandering through Cidri, and they spy an orange-brown, armadillo-like creature and rush in with swords swinging . . . surprise, surprise! Happy monstering.



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