

# Cosmic Chronicle

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COSMIC CHRONICLE

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## TIME ESCAPES THE AEONIC SPIRE! FAMOUS OGRE CHEF REDUCED TO A MERE BABY!



Magic Items by Adrián Ibarra

### Don't Put Magic Items on Monsters: A Cautionary Tale

By Jayce Jones

Monsters across the multiverse are well known for hoarding shiny loot. When such a creature possesses both intelligence and a magical artifact of suitable construction, it may wield the object with all the potency and skill of a heroic adventurer. Thankfully, such combinations are rare.

We conducted interviews with mighty heroes from across the realms to learn more about this strange phenomenon and to answer the burning question: Should you be scared of ogres with magic staves?

Read More on Page 2

### Ravages of Time Escape the Aeonic Spire

By Jayce Jones

We Nexians are no strangers to the routine calamities erupting from the Towers of Thul. But as the events of this week have shown, things are getting out of hand. Once, we believed the horrors of the Aeonic Spire were contained within the temporal paradoxes wrought by experimental magic. But no longer. Just yesterday our fair city was subjected to the ravages of a temporal entity, recently escaped from the time-locked tower. Three souls perished

and dozens more were magically aged before the sheriffs were able to wrangle the creature. This author will never forget the sight of an ogre chef reduced to a mere baby before my eyes. How much more must we endure before the Towers of Thul are subjected to proper regulation? Surely this tragedy is another strong case for the City Council to bring these "scientists" to heel!

Read More on Page 18



Buried Alive  
by Jason Strutz

### Burrowers: The Problems beneath Our Feet

By Jayce Jones

Every adventurer has a story about some daring adventure deep underground. Countless horrors lurk within such darkness, destined to never be illuminated by the light of the sun. Many of these beings are so adept at surviving below ground they can burrow through the earth as easily as I walk down the street. For inexperienced heroes, these fearsome foes present a terrific challenge. The enemy can emerge nearly anywhere, strike, and then retreat below ground before one has a chance to retaliate. We took to the streets and got answers from Nexus's greatest heroes to find out more!

Read More on Page 15

### Behind the Foundation: Thrill of the Unknown

By Jayce Jones

The citizens of Nexus are no strangers to the fantastical and wondrous. However, even among our city's greatest minds there are things we still do not understand. With infinite possibility comes an unlimited number of mysteries, each stranger than the last. While some of these enigmas are seemingly harmless, it is foolish to trust what you cannot understand. Thankfully, there are a dedicated few pledged to defend us from the unknown. This strange organization, recognizable by their navy-blue cloaks and silent demeanor, refuses to give itself a name. This author has encountered these agents on more than one occasion and, in the interest of public understanding, I have titled them "The Foundation," and I am dedicated to shedding light on these strange enigmas.

Read More on Page 14

### There's More to Life than Killing

By Jayce Jones

Heroes come in many forms. The melodious talents of a bard have won battles before they have even begun. The faith of a devout cleric has swayed the hearts of millions toward building a better world. These champions deserve as much acclaim and renown as those who slay dragons and save worlds. I recently spoke with an esteemed warlock who established a school to teach disadvantaged youth in their patron's name. Assuming this is not some nefarious scheme I do not yet understand, they will have provided an education to tens of thousands of students. Quite the heroic feat!

Read More on Page 10



Death Knight by Jason Strutz

### Death Knights: Inherently Evil or Just Misunderstood?

By Jayce Jones

If you were asked to describe a knight, I imagine words like "honor," "selflessness," and other flattering adjectives would fly from your mouth. However, while we can all appreciate the dignified countenance of a holy paladin, we must remember not all knights serve a righteous cause. Indeed, this author has encountered an order of knights so fearsome and dreadful that I still have

nightmares to this day. They call themselves "death knights," and their path is a dark one. Should you meet such a "hero" in a dark alleyway, I recommend showing them the highest degree of respect, lest you run afoul of some of the darkest magic Nexus has ever seen.

Read More on Page 5

# Don't Put Magic Items on Monsters: A Cautionary Tale

By Jayce Jones

DMs are always on the hunt for ways to punch up their monsters. With a vast arsenal of magical items at one's disposal, it can be tempting to equip your goblin king with a suite of magical equipment. Don't do it. Resist the urge to bestow your monster with magical bling. The costs far outweigh the benefits in almost every circumstance. However, we at 2CGaming would never expect you to follow such advice without an explanation, so let us explore exactly why we make such a recommendation.

## Inefficient Improvements

We have said this before, but it bears repeating: 5th Edition design principles hold that a piece of design should be *as simple as possible* to accomplish its objectives. The desire to customize your monsters, especially story-significant ones, is understandable. Everyone enjoys the occasional twist on a familiar creature that forces the players to approach the challenge in a refreshing way. We agree! However, bequeathing your dragon with magical equipment is one of the worst ways to do this. Open your MM and peruse its pages. How many monsters can you find that rely on a specific piece of magical equipment to do anything? The answer is shockingly few. Even for those that do, notably the balor and solar, their magical equipment is inaccessible to the characters and is there mostly for flavor. This overwhelmingly demonstrates that many awesome designs are possible without including magic items.

Who says you need to justify why your monster has a +1 bonus to its AC and saving throws? Sure, a *ring of protection* will do the trick, but nothing says you can't just give the critter a trait that accomplishes the same thing, and most magic items are not so simple. Many have paragraphs of text and a suite of abilities that are unnecessary to your monster's design. Why account for this when you could just take the parts you like most and make them inherent to your monster? This helps avoid unforeseen consequences, which are detailed later in this article.

For an example of just how badly things can go, compare the statistics of an ordinary lich with those of that same lich wielding a single magic item: a *staff of the magi*. The latter is an atrocity of a design that would frustrate even the most hardened DMs. Consider the stat block created here

to see just how much effort is required to operate this creature on top of the already tricky nature of the lich.

## Unforeseen Consequences

Characters in 5th Edition are not balanced around the possession of magic items. This is a design departure from older systems, and it is reasonable to say most DMs ignore this aspect to reward their players with lots of shiny loot. However, giving out magical equipment should be a story-significant and impactful moment in the game. That is a discussion for another time, but suffice it to say we like that 5E doesn't make the acquisition of magic items a core part of its balance. However, this means that *every* magic item the DM provides unbalances the game in the characters' favor.

When you equip a monster with a magic item, you *must* account for the imbalance you're creating. 5E is plagued by worrisome tales of DMs who accidentally handed out a magic item that torpedoed their game. Every time you give a monster a *flametongue* sword or *adamantine armor*, you need to be certain that doing so won't make your life miserable down the road. While it is impossible to perfectly predict the future, ask yourself: is it worth risking the comfortable balance of my game just to make my monster more formidable? Generally, the answer is no. It is unfair to expect the average DM to predict the influence of a magic item on a campaign, so why take the chance?

## Disastrous Designs

Just because a magic item is powerful does *not* mean it's good for your monster. 5E is notorious for questionably labeling an item legendary when its value is situational at best. What is worse, many magic items pale in comparison to the innate abilities of a monster. The *helm of brilliance* may be a powerful very rare item, but on the head of a red dragon it is nearly useless. Its features are redundant and its action economy terribly inefficient relative to the dragon's impressive suite of options. By giving your monster a piece of equipment, you may inadvertently introduce a design trap and actively make your monster worse. To top off this disastrous scenario, your characters then have a chance to loot the item, adding insult to injury (or injury to injury) as the item proves far more useful on at least one of the party members.

# Lich

**Medium undead, typically any evil alignment**

**Armor Class** 17 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 135 (18d8 + 54)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

**Saving Throws** Con +10, Int +12, Wis +9

**Skills** Arcana +18, History +12, Insight +9, Perception +9

**Damage Resistances** cold, lightning, necrotic

**Damage Immunities** poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

**Senses** truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 19

**Languages** Common plus up to five other languages

**Challenge** 21 (33,000 XP)    **Proficiency Bonus** +7

## TRAITS

**Legendary Resistance (3/Day).** When the lich fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

**Rejuvenation.** If it has a phylactery, a destroyed lich gains a new body in 1d10 days, regaining all its hit points and becoming active again. The new body appears within 5 feet of the phylactery.

**Special Equipment.** The lich wields a *staff of the magi* (included in its statistics).

**Spellcasting:** The lich is an 18th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 20, +14 to hit with spell attacks). The lich has the following wizard spells prepared.

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand, prestidigitation, ray of frost*  
1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, magic missile, shield, thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *acid arrow, detect thoughts, invisibility, mirror image*

3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead, counterspell, dispel magic, fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *blight, dimension door*

5th level (3 slots): *cloudkill, scrying*

6th level (1 slot): *disintegrate, globe of invulnerability*

7th level (1 slot): *finger of death, plane shift*

8th level (1 slot): *dominate monster, power word stun*

9th level (1 slot): *power word kill*

**Staff of the Magi.** The *staff of the magi* wielded by the lich has 50 charges and regains 4d6 + 2 expended charges at dawn. If the last charge is expended, the lich rolls a d20. On a 20, the staff regains 1d12 + 1 expended charges.

Additionally, while the lich holds the staff, it has advantage on saving throws against spells.

Finally, while the lich holds the staff it can take an action to expend some of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it using its spell save DC and spellcasting ability: *conjure elementals* (7 charges), *dispel magic* (3 charges), *fireball* (7th level, 7 charges), *flaming sphere* (2 charges), *ice storm* (4 charges), *invisibility* (2 charges), *knock* (2 charges), *lightning bolt* (7th level, 7 charges), *passwall* (5 charges), *plane shift* (7 charges), *telekinesis* (5 charges), *wall of fire* (4 charges), or *web* (2 charges).

The lich may also cast one of the following spells from the staff without expending any charges: *arcane lock, detect magic, enlarge/reduce, light, mage hand, or protection from evil and good*.

**Turn Resistance.** The lich has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

## ACTIONS

**Paralyzing Touch.** *Melee Spell Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) cold damage. The target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

**Staff of the Magi.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage or 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage if using two hands.

**Retributive Strike.** The lich breaks the *staff of the magi*. The staff is destroyed and releases its remaining magic in an explosion that expands to fill a 30-foot-radius sphere centered on it. When this occurs, the lich has a 50 percent chance to travel instantly to a random plane of existence, avoiding the explosion. If the lich fails to avoid the effect, it takes force damage equal to  $16 \times$  the number of charges in the staff. Every other creature in the area must attempt a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes an amount of damage based on how far away it is from the point of origin, as shown in the following table. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage.

Distance from Origin	Damage
10 ft. away or closer	$8 \times$ the number of remaining charges in the staff
11 to 20 ft. away	$6 \times$ the number of remaining charges in the staff
21 to 30 ft. away	$4 \times$ the number of remaining charges in the staff

**Staff of the Magi Spells.** The lich casts a spell using its *staff of the magi*.

## REACTIONS

**Spell Absorption.** As a reaction while the lich holds the *staff of the magi*, the lich can absorb the magic of a spell that targets only it. When it does so, it cancels the spell's effect, and the staff gains a number of charges equal to the spell's level. If doing so would bring the staff's total number of charges above 50, the staff explodes as if the lich used its Retributive Strike action.

## LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The lich can take 3 legendary actions, chosen from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time, and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent legendary actions are regained at the start of each of the lich's turns.

**Cantrip.** The lich casts a cantrip.

**Frightening Gaze (Costs 2 Actions).** The lich fixes its gaze on one creature it can see within 10 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. The frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, it is immune to the lich's gaze for the next 24 hours.

**Paralyzing Touch (Costs 2 Actions).** The lich uses its Paralyzing Touch.



*Magic Items* by Adrián Ibarra

## Too Much Work

You may have read all the arguments above and thought, “Well, I don’t have these problems.” That is great! It means you have excellent skills as a DM that help you navigate these issues. However, remember this mantra: all design problems in *any* game can be navigated by a skilled DM. Just because you know how to solve the problem doesn’t mean it isn’t a problem. And even when you do, it takes time and effort to do so. Preparation and game time are precious resources. Is tracking down the perfect magic item, flawlessly integrating it into your monster,

and accounting for all potential abuse factors down the road really worth it? Think of what else you could be doing with all that time. You could be tightening up your narrative, fine-tuning a challenging encounter, or inventing an exciting new location for the characters to visit. A good DM knows how to solve most problems. A great DM knows which problems are worth their time to solve. While we never deal in absolutes, we promise that avoiding giving magic items to your monsters and focusing on other areas of your game will net far better results.

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