

Adapting “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved”

By Rodney Thompson

I love continuity. While working on the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*, I learned to master it (as well as anyone can master the continuity of such a vast fictional universe). Even before then, I tried to make different aspects of the same universe work together. Back in the days of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* 2nd Edition, I reworked old Greyhawk modules to fit the continuity of my AL-QADIM campaign. Later, I adapted elements of my 2nd Edition FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Setting adventure for use in 3rd Edition. In the last year, I’ve run two epic-level 4th Edition games that are direct sequels to the Age of Worms adventures from the WORLD OF GREYHAWK campaign setting by having my group convert their characters from 3rd Edition D&D. I’ve even included references to the Ghost Tower of Inverness, another WORLD OF GREYHAWK location, in the most recent D&D ENCOUNTERS season.

Conquering the challenge of connecting two seemingly disparate elements is rewarding, both as a creative exercise and as a source of interesting ideas. The imagination involved in bridging concepts is what makes character creation in the D&D GAMMA WORLD *Roleplaying Game* so appealing: When you

give me “android” and “yeti” as character options, putting them together challenges me in an entertaining way.

Some months ago, I decided to bring my FORGOTTEN REALMS game to its climax, but I wasn’t sure how to wrap things up. I was leafing through old issues of *Dungeon* magazine when I came across issue 100, featuring “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved”—a famous adventure pitting the players against the githyanki lich queen Vlaakith. If you don’t already have the original adventure, you can download it as a companion piece to this article.

I had never had the chance to run the adventure in 3rd Edition, so converting it to 4th Edition to use as my campaign capstone excited me—especially after I discovered that none of my players had ever run, played, or even read the adventure. This conversion would help my players, who had been my gaming group only for 4th Edition, experience a classic part of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS tradition, while tying my campaign into the larger DUNGEONS & DRAGONS experience.

I knew that playing a Chris Perkins adventure, filled with great lore, would mark a high point in

our game. What I couldn’t predict was how this conversion would shape my view of adventures and adventure design in 4th Edition.

CONVERSION PHILOSOPHY

After my initial reread of “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved,” I made a few basic decisions. First, I would reproduce the original experience as faithfully as possible: Killer traps would remain as deadly as ever, and powerful spell effects would pack their same punch. Second, I would adapt mechanics with more precision and less “re-envisioning” than usual. Third, I would convert the monsters over using a direct correlation between challenge rating (CR) and level; thus, the CR 16 tl’a’ikiths (more on them later) would become level 16 soldiers. I did more redesign during monster conversion than I did anywhere else, because I wanted the levels to match the CRs so that the monsters would present about the same challenge as before. Finally, I would not alter the number of monsters in a given encounter. If three githyanki guarded a door in the original, three githyanki

would guard that door in my 4th Edition conversion. Effectively, I decided to ignore much of the advice from the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master’s Guide*® regarding building encounters and instead let the chips fall where they might, using the same assumptions Chris Perkins had used when designing the adventure for 3rd Edition.

With these three guiding principles in mind, I set out to begin the conversion.

PUTTING IN THE HOURS

The conversion process went more smoothly than I expected. For one thing, I already had a sizable stable of monsters converted. When I wrote the githyanki section of *The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea*™, I had relied on “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved” for source material, so all I had to do now was to update the damage numbers to bring them in line with post-*Monster Manual*® 3 expectations. That approach took care of a lot of the rank-and-file githyanki the players would run into, allowing me to substitute them where appropriate for the githyanki troops that had class levels. In other cases, I took the equivalent creature from the appropriate book and adjusted its level. To convert the red dragon Holocaust, for example, I used the red dragon from *Monster Vault*™ and removed levels from it to match Holocaust’s challenge rating.

Later in the adventure, the characters end up face to face (to face) with Dessakrul, a two-headed red dragon. Again, I began with a stock red dragon. After adjusting the level, I added a few powers from the new hydra to give the dragon a more two-headed feel. This approach illustrates my first lesson of conversion:

Kr’y’izoth		Level 16 Artillery	
Medium shadow humanoid (undead), githyanki		XP 1,400	
HP 122; Bloodied 61			Initiative +10
AC 30, Fortitude 26, Reflex 30, Will 28			Perception +13
Speed 7			Low-light vision
Immune disease, poison; Resist 10 necrotic; Vulnerable 10 radiant			
TRAITS			
☼ Heat Mirage ♦ Aura 1			
Any enemy that attacks the kr’y’izoth from outside of the aura rolls its attack twice and keeps the lower result.			
STANDARD ACTIONS			
⚔ Blackflame Touch (necrotic) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. Reflex			
Hit: 2d10 + 6 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of the kr’y’izoth’s next turn.			
⚡ Lightning Bolt (lightning) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Reflex			
Hit: 4d10 + 3 lightning damage.			
⚡ Scorching Ray (fire, force) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature, or two creatures adjacent to each other); +21 vs. Reflex			
Hit: 2d10 + 13 fire and force damage.			

Whenever possible, use the tools you already have—it’s a big time-saver.

Of course, I still had plenty of work to do on the more involved conversions. I made the 4th Edition versions of the kr’y’izoth (undead githyanki spellcasters whose life essences Vlaakith drained) and the tl’a’ikiths (their martial counterparts) my top priority. Because these two creatures show up multiple times throughout the adventure, I knew that their conversions would go a long way. After finishing them, I had taken care of most of my monsters. I’ve included two of them here as examples.

⚡ **Flesh to Stone** (force) ♦ **Recharge** ☼ ☼ ☼

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 4d12 + 10 force damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

First Failed Save: The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends).

Second Failed Save: The target is instead petrified (save ends).

MOVE ACTIONS

⚡ **Telekinetic Leap** ♦ **Encounter**

Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the kr’y’izoth or one ally within 10 squares of it gains a fly speed of 5.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

⚡ **Blackflame Shield** (fire, necrotic) ♦ **At-Will**

Trigger: An adjacent enemy touches the kr’y’izoth or hits it with a melee attack.

Effect (Opportunity Action): The triggering enemy takes 2d12 fire and necrotic damage.

Skills Arcana +20, Insight +18

Str 16 (+11)

Dex 14 (+10)

Wis 21 (+13)

Con 20 (+13)

Int 25 (+15)

Cha 8 (+7)

Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Deep Speech, Draconic

Tl'a'ikith			Level 16 Soldier		
Medium shadow humanoid (undead), githyanki			XP 1,400		
HP 157; Bloodied 78			Initiative +14		
AC 32, Fortitude 29, Reflex 27, Will 28			Perception +13		
Speed 6			Low-light vision		
Immune disease, poison; Resist insubstantial; Vulnerable 10 radiant					
TRAITS					
☀ Attractive Whispers ◆ Aura 3					
Any enemy that starts its turn within the aura is pulled up to 2 squares to a square adjacent to the tl'a'ikith.					
Insubstantial					
The tl'a'ikith takes half damage from attacks. Any time the tl'a'ikith takes radiant damage, it loses this trait until the end of its next turn.					
STANDARD ACTIONS					
⊕ Silver Sword (psychic, weapon) ◆ At-Will					
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC					
Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage plus 10 psychic damage.					
⊖ Violent Slash (psychic, weapon) ◆ Recharge when first bloodied					
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC					
Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage plus 18 psychic damage, and the target is removed from play (save ends). When the target saves, it appears in an unoccupied square of the tl'a'ikith's choice adjacent to the tl'a'ikith.					
MOVE ACTIONS					
Telekinetic Leap ◆ Encounter					
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the tl'a'ikith or one ally within 10 squares of it gains a fly speed of 5.					
TRIGGERED ACTIONS					
Intercession of Will (weapon) ◆ At-Will					
Trigger: Any enemy within 3 squares of the tl'a'ikith makes an attack that does not include the tl'a'ikith as a target.					
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The tl'a'ikith shifts up to 3 squares and makes a melee basic attack against the triggering enemy as a free action.					
Str 24 (+15)	Dex 18 (+12)	Wis 20 (+13)			
Con 21 (+13)	Int 12 (+9)	Cha 10 (+8)			
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Deep Speech					
Equipment +4 githyanki silver longsword (Manual of the Planes™)					

The next step of the conversion process entailed adapting traps and magical effects from the 3rd Edition adventure to my 4th Edition game. Fortunately, Chris did me a big favor when he based his array of traps on the tir'su glyphs of the githyanki language and then reused the glyphs within his adventure. Rechristening them “a dialect of Deep Speech,” I converted each glyph as faithfully as possible. Because the originals glyphs mostly dealt damage, I could replicate them by having mine deal about the same damage as the encounter power of a monster of equivalent level. When I was finished, I had seven traps that I could use throughout the adventure.

With the monsters and traps handled, I could now tackle the tricky part: the other miscellaneous magical effects.

Much of the adventure takes place in the Palace of Whispers, home to *the whispers of the damned*, an effect disquieting enough to shake the nerve of even the bravest warrior. In 3rd Edition, a player failing the initial saving throw took a -2 penalty to attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks while in the palace. I decided to keep the same effect, with one exception: I changed the Will save to an attack against Will that triggered when the character first entered the structure.

My players soon discovered that they were no longer in the same “appropriate challenges with limited durations” game we’d been playing. Although this approach initially frustrated them, I decided not to budge because I wanted to see what they would do. To my (pleasant) surprise, my players reacted to the new dynamic by becoming more creative. During their first retreat from the Palace of Whispers, for example, they asked a wizard to deafen

them magically so that the palace’s disquieting susurrations could not affect them.

The strange doors that filled the lich queen’s palace also challenged the adventurers in various ways: One type required psionic powers to open, another dealt tons of damage to living creatures when they passed through, and still another kind, seemingly composed of undead flesh, refused to open for anyone other than Vlaakith. I converted these perilous portals faithfully, but I also added a few elements because I did not want my players to feel stymied; after all, the adventure proceeds through these doors. In my new version, items scattered throughout the palace enable characters to open certain doors or pass through them harmlessly; for example, one potion turns a character temporarily undead, whereas another provides a small amount of psionic power points. I placed these items in logical locations that would also require the characters to circumvent the doors a few times before finding them.

It worked. Although the players initially felt frustrated by the doors, they soon grew more and more resourceful. This adjustment gave rise to an interesting pacing dynamic: The early stages of exploring the Palace of Whispers consisted of a constant struggle against the palace itself, but, as the characters progressed—battling denizens and finding treasure caches along the way—they gained the means to move on to different challenges. The players became better at navigating the palace and, as its challenges faded into the background, the dangers posed by the monsters (and, eventually, Vlaakith herself) took center stage.

END RESULTS

In the end, a conversion succeeds or fails at the game table. This one went surprisingly well, even though its design sensibilities were so different from those of the campaign that preceded it. Up to this point I had designed my adventures by the book, worried that deviating from the *Dungeon Master’s Guide’s* advice would produce a game different from the one other people were playing, and therefore useless to anyone but me. It turns out that my fears were unfounded.

Running “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved” using 4th Edition mechanics (while keeping the 3rd Edition flavor) added amusing new dynamics to the campaign’s climax. I enjoyed watching my players relearn lessons from earlier editions, such as the caution they began exercising after they started running into things they couldn’t overpower. I’m no big fan of the “your players should constantly fear for their characters’ lives” philosophy, but that doesn’t mean I didn’t enjoy seeing my group exercise a bit more prudence (on the other hand, perhaps they had grown so cavalier because I had failed to instill a true sense of danger earlier in the campaign). I also enjoyed how the adventure’s complexity drove the players to return to old roleplaying standbys, such as mapping the dungeon themselves and keeping track of what they encountered and where.

With a few exceptions (such as the tricks for bypassing the doors), I resisted the temptation to provide ways around problems. This decision ran counter to my usual style of adventure design, in which a character overcame a noncombat test by making a skill check or passing a skill challenge. As soon as the players saw that they couldn’t just make a skill check to design a spell to counter *whispers of the damned*, they

realized that they needed to become more creative. The way they rose to the occasion made me realize that I had underestimated them when I designed my old adventures.

If making challenges harder on my players taught me something, so did making encounters easier. I discovered that it was OK for players to face only two opponents in one fight, even if neither of them was elite. The encounter went faster, and the players enjoyed occasionally rolling over the opposition. This taught me an important lesson: Attrition still means something in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. Taking a little damage in a fight might be no big deal, but taking a little damage in five straight fights carries a toll because daily abilities run out and unspent healing surges dwindle.

When I looked at the pressure placed on the party’s resources over an entire adventure instead of a string of encounters, I found the results liberating. I realized that I did not need to balance every encounter to fall within an “acceptable range,” because, over a long enough period, the characters would end up drained of the same resources anyway. Even better, this approach made the hard fights feel harder. Retreating to preserve resources became viewed as a necessary and acceptable tactic, because the players knew that more challenges awaited, and they couldn’t count on having the resources needed to tackle them otherwise.

In the end, I learned a few things about both adventure design and 4th Edition that I’ll carry forward into future games. First, I found that my players face challenges more creatively—and feel more satisfied afterward—when I deprive them of an easy way out. Second, I learned that spikes of high tension and periods of low tension are good, and that having

a wider variance in encounter difficulty works out because of long-term attrition. Third, I realized that I could include “unfair” elements—such as instant-kill traps or ongoing effects that messed with characters—as long as I used them to punctuate the dangers of the adventure and not as constant beat-downs. Fourth, I learned that exploration is essential to the classic DUNGEONS & DRAGONS feel, and that traps and hazards are more than set dressing—they constitute an important part of the exploration and discovery process. The weird doors in the Palace of Whispers aren’t just obstacles; they are something to investigate—dire entryways that reinforce the alien feel of the adventure’s setting.

Finally, my greatest lesson was that my players were better equipped to handle challenges than I thought. Even when they failed, they found ways to continue the adventure as long as I gave them enough freedom to execute their own plans.

CONVERTING TO OTHER EDITIONS

Here is my quick take on converting “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved” to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* 1st or 2nd Edition.

The 1st Edition *Fiend Folio* provides basic information on githyanki that we can use to populate our dungeon. That’s half the battle. We also need a way to convert the rich variety of githyanki variants that make “The Lich-Queen’s Beloved” so memorable. Luckily, we can summarize 1st Edition monsters in just a few lines, so we can convert many of these terrific monsters quickly.

From the original adventure, we know that the lich queen rarely allows her servants to grow

powerful enough to threaten her. Instead, she drains their life essences as a part of her plan to achieve apotheosis. The *Fiend Folio* tells us that the supreme commanders of the githyanki top out at 11th level, and Tiamat, whom Vlaakith serves, has 16 Hit Dice, so it follows that Vlaakith herself is around 13th or 14th level. Here is Vlaakith’s entry in *AD&D Monster Manual* format.

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*

NO. APPEARING: 1

ARMOR CLASS: 0

MOVE: 6”

HIT DICE: 13 (104 hit points)

TREASURE TYPE: 100% H, S, T, U

NO. OF ATTACKS: 3

DAMAGE/ATTACK: 2-12/3-18/3-18

SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Magic use*

SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Magic weapons to hit; not affected by charm, cold, electricity or fire*

INTELLIGENCE: *Genius*

ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic evil*

SIZE: M

PSIONIC ABILITY: 250

Attack/Defense Modes: *All*

CHANCE OF:

Speaking: 100%

Magic Use: 100%

Sleeping: 0%

Vlaakith’s multiple attacks come from her *paralyzing touch* (any creature hit by this attack must make a saving throw against paralysis, with failure indicating permanent paralysis) and her *dancing sword*. Vlaakith can cast two spells of each level, up to and including 6th, and she knows every magic-user spell.

Now let’s take a crack at converting the creatures that populate the lich queen’s palace.

Duthka’gith: Because these creatures are half-githyanki/half-red dragon hybrids, the easiest approach is to start with githyanki and then layer on a few red dragon traits (AC: 3; MV: 6”; HD: 10; HP: 45; # AT: 1; D: 1-8; SA: *Breath weapon per red dragon*; SD: *Unaffected by heat*).

Tl’a’ikiths: For these undead githyanki warriors, begin with a basic githyanki and add a few traits similar to a lich. Because tl’a’ikiths are incorporeal, you can adapt the requirement of needing magic weapons to hit (AC: 4; MV: 6”; HD: 9; HP: 41; # AT: 1; D: 1-8; SA: *Psionic ability 150*; SD: *Unaffected by charm, sleep, enfeeblement, polymorph, cold, or electricity; +1 or better weapons to hit*).

Kr’y’izoths: Much like tl’a’ikiths, you build kr’y’izoths by starting with a githyanki and adding undead defenses. Since these creatures were spellcasters in life, give them magical ability, as well as *blackflame shield*. (AC: 5; MV: 6”; HD: 9; HP: 41; # AT: 1; D: 1-8; SA: *Magic use, psionic ability 150*; SD: *Cannot be affected by charm, sleep, enfeeblement, polymorph, cold, or electricity; any creature that touches the kr’y’izoth or hits it with a melee attack takes 3d6 damage from blackflame shield*).

For the conversion to 2nd Edition, start with the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* stats above and convert the movement to a standard 2nd Edition movement rating. Otherwise, much of what’s in the stat block still applies. The *Monstrous Manual* lists statistics for the rank-and-file githyanki, so it is a good starting point for building the typical githyanki found in the adventure. You will need the optional psionics

rules from *The Complete Psionics Handbook* to finish Vlaakith and her minions.

Obviously, these are the bare bones. It’s up to you to flesh them out by picking spells and psionic abilities for your monsters. After that, equip a few githyanki with class levels to add variety to your player’s enemies. The system already includes equivalents of the traps and magic items that lie scattered throughout the adventure. Then again, you might find creating the glyph traps from scratch in your system of choice to be worthwhile—not to mention fun.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game include *Monster Manual*® 3, the DARK SUN® Campaign Setting, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*™, and *Monster Vault*™.