On Arcanomechanical Beings

Back to Fantasy Hero

by Jeffery Keown

In securing one's stronghold against the incursions of long-haired, knee-biting, puppy-kicking adventuring types and their ilk, the vile delver subculture, Minions have ever been a staple. They are, at best either very expensive or very stupid. In short, good help is hard to find.

Privacy is at a premium in the would-be Dark Lord business, you understand. In the old days, before the union of technology and magic which all of decent, civilized Serantia now enjoys (we do not count Ogres and Zarku in this effort) one might have constructed a castle, pimped out a ruin, modified a cave system or even excavated a so-called "dungeon" to have a bit privacy in which to work miracles of intellect and/or evil. Balance pits, crushing walls, counter-weights, falling blocks and spring loaded darts were all the rage in those days; in actuality not all that removed from our modern times.

Minions were handy in those days, especially if your familiar weren't of the sort of material or brain power up to such tasks as resetting traps. You would have to reset the damn things on your own. Some of those fallen blocks were heavy.

Pressure plates and trip wires gave way to simple motion detection spells. As nice as these were, they needed to be accompanied by special amulets, or foul-smelling extracts. If the trap couldn't tell you from some band of layabout "adventurers," you spent all your time healing from run-ins with your own security measures.

Outfitting a decent staff with identifying magics was not only expensive, but if intruders figured out your focus system, they could walk right in on you at the climax of some dark, hoary ritual of ineffable evil. This is at best inconvenient.

Enchanting a trap was expensive in both time and power, it drew too much from important world domination initiatives. So, each morning, or night depending on your species, you would go out about your complex, casting the same target detection spell over and over. If you missed one pit, one trip-wire fired crossbow or one collapsing ceiling, you had quite the mess on your hands.

Refinements in those days came slowly, and at great cost in minions, personal injury or even the death of several very promising would-be conquerors. This is a tough field to break into, and competition is fierce, to be taken out by one's own lair is embarrassing to the career as a whole. Something would have to be done.

Shortly after the invention of the Selective Target Modifier (STM) in Tamarlaan's Songs of Fire and Darkness (required reading for wizards of questionable morals) traps of all sorts began production that could tell your minions from intruders. This was a vast improvement, and well worth the extra spell energy. Coupled with refinements in power drawing techniques (given the proper ambient magic flow level) traps could now not only reset themselves but fire off indefinitely using only locally available magic. This freed many a sorcerer up to develop greater and greater evils. It is no coincidence that Dark Essence Channelling took off like it did at the same time as the STM! It was a good time to be evil.

Progress after this was slow, and with the Serantian Empire in ruins, many wizards could set up shop in old fortresses, towers, and, enviably, entire lost cities; every square inch diligently watched over by

clever enchantments and death-dealing mechanical devices. Adventurers soon learned the devious trick of throwing a dispel or suppress down a seemingly innocent rubble-strewn hallway.

Parallel to the development of the magical trap were several important advancements in Golem Methodology. For reasons not entirely understood, minion-gathering had always focused on orcs, goblins and the occasion ogre tribe. Trolls, being very noble, rarely worked for anyone, let alone a wizard plotting the fall of civilization. Golems were hard to create, but in terms of survivability, they rivaled entire orc and goblin communities. In addition, greenskins can be bribed whereas a golem has no concept of monetary gain. Talking to one very often led to severe bodily harm, so graft was almost never an option for intruders.

Between golems and magical traps, adventurer's efforts were stalemated for hundreds of years. The dark age of the Interregnum were soon at an end. The rise of the Rumallan Empire at the start of the Third Age was the result of a lessening of pressure by the Dharzooni, that immortal race of wizards who had for so long meddled in the affairs of "lesser races." Whatever the cause of their withdrawal, it had the effect of allowing eccentric ideas on steam power, gun powder and greater and greater magics to gain footholds at universities and private schools. This was especially evident in the schools of the Nissarn and the Red-Headed Mages League.

Some schools began sponsoring new courses in engineering. Often, a student would have a double major in both magic and technology. A potent duality, that, when combined with the usual cruelty and hazing common to academia, produced a positive boom of villainous wizards in the early Second Century of this Age.

Golems require magical coding to guide them when verbal commands are not available or tactically unsound. Some degree of autonomy was gained by increasing the "command density" of the golem animation magics. As commands became more and more complex, the golem's own decision making ability rose in proportion. Soon, heuristic logic structures formed in the spell matrices. A kind of "artificial intelligence" developed. Combined with illusion-magics, short-term almost self-aware magical phantasms resulted. These creatures were ephemeral, as soon as a wizard turned his back, they faded away.

It was not until 3A 468, in the years just before the Troll Wars, that golem code was incorporated into magical security devices. Now, one could sit back and let golem-traps identify invaders, fire on them, reset or reload and wait for the next wave of meddling kids with cheap swords and ill-fitting armor.

An unanticipated problem arose in 3A 511. A poison arrow trap became bored and started taking pot-shots at the guards near the entrance to Heinous Sump near Imlach. While initially humorous, the device had to be shut down by use of force. (That scene itself was hilarious.) In North Dungeon beneath Chalkcliff, several pit traps and gas dispensers stopped functioning altogether in the first labor dispute in the animated object field.

Dark Wizards had to go back to the books and either return to the days of detect and reload, or come up with a new technique to prevent upstart traps from letting invaders waltz right in to the lair. While few evil wizards cooperate on any level (the are, after all, out to control the same planet) several promising workgroups formed and began earnestly working out solutions. One group threw up their hands, halted work on the whole project and rededicated themselves to demonology. While the Black Summoners of Doom were for a while a credible threat to the Imperial Orders and the Red Headed Mages League, an incident involving a Halfling and a hang-glider ended their cabal somewhat fatally.

Magical self-guided illusions were made possible by several very lucky research groups, some even

had spell-casting ability and decent predictive powers to enable them to hold back invaders. Turning these techniques to golems once again resulted in faster, far deadlier golems than ever before. It was the dawn of the Siege Golem. These massive engines of war were built with vast destructive capabilities and very weak wills, as having a five-storey armored tank with a stubborn streak was just asking for trouble.

Cleophar Lasthatta returned from his famous Journey in the East with improved steam power and subtle magics for controlling such machines. After his band of well-paid loot-takers finished off the Black Mage of Koosfall Glade, he used all of the Mage's research against him. Now, magical trap-making was in the hands of not only an adventurer, but one smart enough to actually make something of it!

It was a dark day indeed.

Setting up shop beneath Uffa Keep, Lasthatta began work on what may yet turn out to be the final iteration of golem code and artificial intelligence. His assistant, Kastaboondarfanok, had soul-caged an infiltrator working for House Arkus. A closeted necromancer, he knew a few SoulWind channels and bound the captured soul into one of Cleophar's unfinished golem bodies.

The beast rumbled and clanked to life. After a few seconds of reflection, it went totally mad, wrecking one wing of the complex before destroying itself. Lasthatta considered killing Kastaboondarfanok, but the magnitude of this discovery stayed his hand. Learning as much as they could from the incident, they wove necromantic theory, illusion magic and golem code into a kind of hybrid soul. Part summoned spirit, part magical spell, the new beings often rejected their new bodies, but progress was being made.

In an experimental offshoot during this period, they tried an animal spirit; merging a cat's soul with a Siege Golem. It was a huge failure. To this day, the beast is still stalking around Lake Farkin, chasing birds and sleeping sixteen hours a day.

Kastaboondarfanok suggested summoning a demon to inhabit a golem. Enraged, Cleophar banished him. While history shows that this was a grave mistake, it freed the necromancer to experiment on his own. More of him, later.

Lasthatta created a new golem code matrix but did not insert the little bit of code at the end that tells it where the code stops. Instead, he read to it, talked to it. Set its copper and platinum vessel nearby during dinner conversation. Treated it to musical performances and was, in general, just all-around nice to it.

Eventually, he installed the vessel in a golem body. Nothing happened for hours. Depressed, Cleophar sat and stared at the massive failure he'd created.

"What exactly was Emperor Zoot looking to avoid in siding with the Trolls at the Battle of Carmoly?" the golem asked.

"Simple," Lasthatta explained. "He knew how important pacification of that region was and…"

Stunned, he simply stared at the new life for several very long seconds.

"You're alive?" he asked.

"I suppose I am. I remember a fog lifting from me, much as Emperor Adon I described in his autobiography," it rumbled, "Have I been so long?"

"I do not know" the creator replied.

And so was Cleophar Lasthatta credited with the first self-aware golems, the Created.

Kastaboondarfanok went on to perfect demonic fusion, and coded the first Open Matrix Illusion for True Evil years later. His creations, the vile, swarming Necrostriders and the Demonic Created, Rust Lord and the Custodian, are proof of his intellect and madness.

Such things do not stay secret for long, however, and these days, the Created, Illusionary Beings and self-aware traps are in the arsenal of every government, church and Dark Lord for thousands of miles.

Created Package Deal

3 Artificial Muscles: +3 STR 1
50 Mechanical Body: LS (Eating: Character does not eat; Immunity: All terrestrial diseases and biowarfare agents; Immunity: All terrestrial poisons and chemical warfare agents; Longevity: Immortal; Safe in High Pressure; Safe in High Radiation; Safe in Intense Cold; Safe in Intense Heat; Safe in Low Pressure/Vacuum; Self-Contained Breathing; Sleeping: Character does not sleep) 0
2 Mechanical Mind: +1 EGO
3 Superior Reflexes: +1 DEX
4 Mechanical Body: +2 BODY
18 Mechanical Body: Armor (6 PD/6 ED) 0

Options

5 Aspect Phlange: +5 PRE
3 Auspice Doohicky: Detect A Single Thing 11- (Unusual Group) 0
15 Augry Thingamabob: Danger Sense (self only, in combat) 11-
9 Bonus Plating: Armor (3 PD/3 ED) 0
10 Claws: HKA 1/2d6 (1d6+1 w/STR) (standard effect: 2 BODY, 4 STUN) 1
15 Claws, Scythe: HKA 1d6 (1 1/2d6 w/STR) (standard effect: 5 BODY, 10 STUN) 1
5 Claws, Small: HKA 1 point (1/2d6 w/STR) (standard effect: 2 BODY, 4 STUN) 1
5 Companion Link: Mind Link , Machine class of minds, Companion Created 0
10 Creator Link: Mind Link , Human class of minds, Creator, Any distance 0
1 Damping Filter: Sight Group Flash Defense 0
14 Eogann Armor Plating: (Total: 14 Active Cost, 14 Real Cost) Armor (3 PD/3 ED) (Real Cost: 9) plus Damage Resistance (3 PD/2 ED) (Real Cost: 2) plus Power Defense (3 points) (Real Cost: 3) 0
5 Heat Scope: IR Perception (Sight Group) 0
4 High-Grade Optics: +2 PER with Sight Group 0
14 Illusory Thingamabob: Shape Shift (Sight, Hearing, Touch and Smell/Taste Groups), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2) (28 Active Points); Only to Appear as a Member of Creator's Choosing, One form only (-1) 0
4 Improved Suspension: Running +2" (8" total) 1
3 Internal Compass: Bump Of Direction
9 Mecha Doodad: +3 with any Inventor, Mechanics, System Operations
2 Mana Coprocessor: +1 with Magic Roll
20 Mechanical Override: Aid STR 3d6 (standard effect: 9 points) (30 Active Points); Side Effects, Side

Effect occurs automatically whenever Power is used (3d6 DRAIN after-effect; -1/2) 0
5 Nightvision: Nightvision 0
3 Pinion: +1 with HTH Combat (5 Active Points); OIF (Enchanted Quill; -1/2)
15 Ping-Sense: Active Sonar (Hearing Group) 0
5 Reciprocating Overdriven Arm Actuator Gadget: Rapid Attack (HTH)
10 Repair Gubbins: Healing 2 BODY, Can Heal Limbs (25 Active Points); Extra Time (Regeneration-Only) 1 Minute (-1 1/2) 2
22 Spell Check: Detect Magic 12- (Unusual Group), Discriminatory, Increased Arc Of Perception (360 Degrees), Range10 Spell Gizmo: 10 Real Points in Spells (10 Active Points) 1
2 Superior Artistry: +4 COM
3 Timing Gizmo: Absolute Time Sense
4 Timpanic Oscillation Amplifier: +2 PER with Hearing Group 0
3 Twin-Linked Motor Functions: Ambidexterity (-2 Off Hand penalty)
10 Tentacle: Stretching 2" 1

Value Disadvantages

15 Distinctive Features: Mechanical Device (Concealable; Always Noticed and Causes Major Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
10 Social Limitation: Curiousity (Frequently, Minor)

Projections

A hybridization of Illusion magic and Golem programming theory, free standing, willful illusions become possible after Zard, Hero of Another Story, raided Cleophar Lasthatta's laboratory.

They tend to become wizards themselves, being made of magic. Dispels , drains and supress effects are deadly to them.

[This method is very expensive and on seriously shaky ground from a game-mechanical standpoint. I'd welcome refinements to it. One possible avenue is a non-Desolid version that is simply vulnerable to Adjustment spells. That would cut 90 pts of fat out of the build.]

Cost Powers

90 Illusory Form: Desolidification (affected by Magic), Inherent (+1/4), Reduced Endurance (0 END; +1/2), Persistent (+1/2) (90 Active Points) END: 0
40 Illusory Form: Life Support (Eating: Character does not eat; Immunity: All terrestrial diseases and biowarfare agents; Longevity: Immortal; Safe in High Pressure; Safe in High Radiation; Safe in Intense Cold; Safe in Intense Heat; Safe in Low Pressure/Vacuum; Self-Contained Breathing; Sleeping: Character does not sleep) END: 0
16 Focus: Affects Physical World (+2) for up to 10 Active Points of STR (20 Active Points); Concentration (1/2 DCV; -1/4) END: 2

Value Disadvantages

30 Susceptibility: Magical Dispels and Supress Effects 3d6 damage per Phase (Common)
20 Distinctive Features: Semi-Transparent (Not Concealable; Always Noticed and Causes Major Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
15 Social Limitation: Magical Construct (Frequently, Major)

NECROSTRIDER

For now, the Necrostriders are confined to Kastaboondarfanok's citadel in Chalkcliff. This vast tower has been infiltrated numerous times, at least two of these incursions have been successful. It is a near certainty that they will begin appearing in other parts of the Empire, or farther afield. The necromancer himself is missing, so it is entirely likely he has relocated, perhaps working on his own, or for some dark master who has yet to reveal himself.

To use necrostriders in your games, use the basic 'strider below, and add gubbins to taste. Some options are obviously very powerful, so caution must be observed.

Val Char Cost Roll Notes

13 STR 3 12- Lift 151.6kg; 2 1/2d6; [1]
15 DEX 15 12- OCV 5 DCV 5
10 CON 0 11-
13 BODY 6 12-
8 INT -2 11- PER Roll 11-
0 EGO 0 9- ECV: 0
15 PRE 5 12- PRE Attack: 3d6
0 COM -5 9- 2/8 PD 3 Total: 2/8 PD (0/6 rPD)
3/9 ED 6 Total: 3/9 ED (0/6 rED)
4 SPD 15 Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
5 REC 0
20 END 0

Movement: Running: 6" / 12"

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        Swimming: 2" / 4"\\
        Leaping: 2" / 4"
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Cost Powers END
60 Automaton (Takes No STUN) 0
54 Armor Plating: Armor (6 PD/6 ED) 0
55 Small, Horrifyingly Efficient Steam Engine: Endurance Reserve (50 END, 50 REC) (55 Active Points) 0
5 Sense Life: Infrared Perception (Sight Group) 0
10 Necrowave Field Coils: Radio Perception/Transmission (Mystic Group) 0
30 Sight Group Flash Defense (10 points) 0

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 214
Total Cost: 260

75+ Disadvantages
25 Physical Limitation: No Manipulators (All the Time, Fully Impairing)
25 Psychological Limitation: Obey the Orders of the Master of the Citadel (Very Common, Total)
25 Distinctive Features: Necromech Horrors (Not Concealable; Extreme Reaction; Detectable By Commonly-Used Senses)
10 Vulnerability: 2 x BODY Electricity (Uncommon) *Edit: This can also be a form of Holy or Healing Magic from your campaign– We break things down by "Magic" Element and "Elemental" Element around these parts.*
100 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 260

NecroStrider Optional Bits

Cost Powers END
Golem Code
15 Badass Programming: +3 with Ranged Combat
15 Evil Dogma: +3 with HTH Combat
Bolt-on Evil
81 Anti-Essence Coil: Dispel Essence-Based Magic 12d6, Area Of Effect (8" Radius; +1 1/4) (81 Active Points) 8
80 Barrage Bomb Launcher: Energy Blast 8d6, Area Of Effect (4" Radius; +1) (80 Active Points) 8
52 Bombard: Killing Attack - Ranged 2d6, Indirect (Same origin, always fired away from attacker; Only with Sufficiently High Ceilings; +1/4), Explosion (+1/2) (52 Active Points) 5
22 Bone Saw: Killing Attack - Hand-To-Hand 1d6 (1d6+1 w/STR), Armor Piercing (+1/2) (22 Active Points) 2
9 Extra Plating: Armor (3 PD/3 ED) 0
28 Force Field Projector: Force Wall (4 PD/4 ED; 3" long and 3" tall) 3
60 Glop Thrower: Entangle 5d6, 5 DEF (Stops A Given Sense Group Sight Group) 6
20 Lightning Bolt Coil: Killing Attack - Ranged 1d6+1 2
160 Mind Field: Ego Attack 8d6 (Human class of minds), Area Of Effect (8" Radius; +1) (160 Active Points) 16
52 Ooze Generator: Drain Running 3d6, Area Of Effect (3" Radius; +1), Two-Dimensional (-1/4) (52 Active Points) 5
75 Shooty Bit: Killing Attack - Ranged 2d6, Armor Piercing (+1/2), Area Of Effect (10" Cone; +1) (75 Active Points) 7
30 Unlight Aperture: Drain BODY 2d6, Ranged (+1/2) (30 Active Points) 3
Arachnoarcanomechanical Gubbins
5 Arachnoarcanomechanical Suspension: Extra Limbs (6) 0
12 Spider Grip: Clinging (15 STR) 0
45 Web Projector: Entangle 5d6, 4 DEF 4

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