



# Dragon Kings

by Timothy B. Brown

This incredible addition to the DARK SUN™ campaign setting presents the most powerful characters, magic, and psionics ever!

For intermediate through advanced players, ages 10 and up.



# DRAGON KINGS



High-level characters, psionic enchantments, armies, war vehicles, rogue skills, psionic disciplines, advanced beings, and campaign material for Athas and other AD&D® worlds.

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## Foreword

As I put the finishing touches to this volume, it occurs to me that it has been more than two years since design on the DARK SUN™ campaign began in earnest. For two years, pretty much every day saw a new idea pop up, another fall by the wayside, and a dozen questions get answered. In this book, I'm committing to paper the last of the original concepts we envisioned so long ago. For Athas, it is the end of the beginning.

But where is the DARK SUN setting going, and how does this book fit into that scheme?

The overriding design philosophy for support products is simple: concentrated campaign development. If you're waiting for maps of the entire world of Athas, or campaign supplements that take us to the far side of the Sea of Silt and beyond, don't hold your breath, 'cause they're not coming. Not for a while. We're concentrating on what's in the boxed set: the Tyr Region and its seven city-states. We've barely touched that plot of sand, game development-wise, and it will take quite a while to fill it up with slave tribes, merchant houses, elven raiders, and more. The DARK SUN campaign's future is bright, but for now it's strictly bounded within the existing campaign map.

Then why a hardbound rules book devoted to higher-level characters? *Dragon Kings* serves two purposes—one obvious, one not.

First, *Dragon Kings* lets characters advance as high as 30th level in all classes. They get wondrous new abilities, possibly even new bodies, when they reach such heights of experience. We originated all these concepts early on in the design of the DARK SUN universe, but we kept them out of the original rules for two reasons. First, they wouldn't all fit. Second, we didn't want to give away the secrets revealed in the first DARK SUN novel, *The Verdant Passage*. (If you haven't read the novel yet, be warned that this book spoils its surprises!)

The second, less obvious reason to present rules for the highest-level characters is rooted in overall campaign development. I'm a firm believer that the

macro-forces of a campaign world should set the tone for even the lowliest adventures—sort of a “trickle-down” theory, if you will. In a science-fiction world, the ambitions of powerful corporations, star-spanning empires, and malevolent alien races set the stage for adventure. In the DARK SUN world, the sorcerer-kings, advanced beings, and other powerful characters set the tone. Characters beyond 20th level are the movers and shakers of Athas—their every move leaves a wake of adventure possibilities. To present a plausible DARK SUN campaign, a DM must understand that world's most influential NPCs and their incredible powers.

Why more powerful magic? Well, why not! Massive spells can help drive a campaign just as easily as powerful characters. I think of fantasy novels I've read that are centered on the casting of a single, incredible magical spell, one that takes years to prepare and wipes out entire cities or nations. Whole adventures can revolve around casting such magic or preventing its casting.

The existing 9th-level AD&D® game wizard spells do the same old stuff, just bigger and better: They protect the wizard from being killed by a bigger monster. To me, it's just not epic. Casting a spell that erases a mountain range—now that's magic!

Do I expect lots of DARK SUN campaigns to become high-level campaigns? Do I want player characters unleashing 10th-level spells at one another as soon as they open this book?

No. But I do expect players to have something more to strive for, and I expect DMs to have everything they need to evolve a complete array of powerful NPCs for their little corner of Athas.

Obviously, use of player characters who have advanced beyond 20th level dictates a somewhat different role-playing style. These characters are usually people of great reputation who have many fantastic accomplishments to their credit and can challenge any foe or situation. More mundane adventures, such as searching for small treasures or taking jobs as mercenaries, become less important to the mega-characters.

## Foreword



Their attentions should instead turn to more city- or region-sweeping epics, such as the search for lost ancient civilizations, struggles between large armies or nations, or quests for lost magical knowledge that can win a throne! Encourage high-level characters to use their talents toward lofty ends—what's the point of advancing to 25th level if all you're going to do is pen scrolls all day?

Note, though, that in the DARK SUN™ world, no one gains fantastic levels anonymously. In the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign setting, a wizard might go from 20th to 30th level and hardly be noticed by the general populace, but I wanted something different for Athas.

No DARK SUN world character can escape the consequences of superior experience. With the exception of the rogues, high-level characters become victims of their own success. Fighters find themselves heading huge armies, like it or not. Fledgling dragons and avangions have nothing but enemies, and psionics must either join an exclusive organization or be hunted by it. In terms of game balance, is this fair? Given that each class has unique advantages, it all evens out in the end. And if not, well, nothing on Athas is particularly fair!

It has been a massive undertaking. I thank Zeb Cook, William W. Connors, and J. Robert King for their valuable input, and Troy Denning and James Lowder for literary advice. Thanks also to Jim Ward for his assistance and to Allen Varney for his editorial expertise.

Let the games begin!

Timothy B. Brown  
January, 1992

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Athas has no gods, but despite this—or perhaps because of it—it has legends and myths aplenty. Every village, oasis, and city-state neighborhood spawns its collection of tales. Most carry valuable lessons for survival, such as ways to survive with little water or avoid predators. Some, propagated by the templars, give instruction in polite conduct. Many more, whispered in secret, tell how a hero gained revenge against a templar or sorcerer-king.

A few legends are even funny, for when not struggling to survive, every Athasian enjoys laughter. The humor, though, is almost always cruel, a jest at the expense of some detested rival race or class.

Some typical legends follow.

## The Drunken Half-Giant

In a village south of Raam lived a half-giant named Junnai, a youth of great size whose sole love was ale. His fellows knew him as a drunkard. But the pleasant half-giant pulled his weight in a fight, so no one bothered him about his constant inebriation—no one but his brother, Trundai.

“Stop your drunken ways, brother,” Trundai said.

But Junnai replied, “I drink two tankards of ale at the inn every evening, brother. And I shall do so until the inn runs dry!”

“Then at least cut down, dear brother, and drink but one this evening,” Trundai suggested. Out of love for his brother, Junnai agreed. That evening he drank just one tankard of his beloved ale before heading home.

But when an elven runner found Junnai sitting, sobbing along the road back to his village, he stopped briefly to enquire. “Normally I can find my way by taking the middle road of the three blurry roads I see,” Junnai said. “But this evening I drank but one tankard of ale, so I see only two fuzzy roads before me.”

“I see,” said the elf. “I can help you see the third road, friend. Here, drink this.” The elf handed

Junnai a bottle of brew. The half-giant quickly and gratefully downed the elf’s gift, squinted along his path, and continued home.

The next morning, Trundai searched for the missing Junnai. He found him face down on the road, poisoned, his possessions stolen, the tracks of an elf all around.

## Drake and Maiden

Outside Makla village stands a temple ruin, burned during one of many elven attacks. All that remains is the charred statue of the small sect’s founder. Worshippers abandoned the temple, all save one, an old man of great wisdom. When he died, his daughter continued to visit the temple daily out of respect for her father.

One day, as she visited the temple, a great sandstorm blew up. Hating to see the statue damaged further, she wrapped her own shawl around it while waiting out the storm. A drake happened by, and (as this was back in the days when drakes were quite intelligent and polite) he stopped to observe.

When the storm let up, he inquired of the daughter, “Damsel, why do you give your own robes to the image, an image of simple stone, that cannot feel the sting of airborne sands?”

The daughter was startled but composed herself before replying. “If it were but stone, mighty drake, then how could it answer my prayers and those of my father?”

Never had the drake heard such wisdom, not even from the spirits that counseled it. The drake returned often to visit the daughter on her daily trips, and in time came to love her. So taken was he that he sought out a wizard to alter his form. Then he went to visit the daughter as a human.

The daughter shared his love, and the two founded a village of their own beyond the mountains. Their offspring, it is said, share the wisdom of their mother and the ferocious strength of their father. To this day, any child who displays both attributes is

often termed a “drake’s child.”

## Arkhold’s Devastation

The dwarves of Balic say the ruins of Arkhold were once a farming village. Its troubles started in a Year of Priest’s Vengeance, when Thorlin, a ruler of uncommon power and cruelty, claimed to hear “the high voices from the moons.” He said the two moons, Rul and Guthay, commanded him to visit them and receive their wisdom.

Thorlin flew into the sky with a magical device of some kind—variously, a jozhal-drawn chariot, a net carried by air elementals, or (one of the most bizarre touches in Athasian mythology) a spoon. He returned a year later with “a wild and burning eye.”

Thorlin urged the villagers to burn their crops in great bonfires, then sacrifice all livestock. This, he said, would bring prosperity to the village. So it was done.

After the devastating famine that followed, survi-

vors left for all parts of Athas. Nothing remains of the village of Arkhold except ruins. So say the dwarves.

## Uncle Tontor: A Wurm’s Tale

Elf merchants around the Lost Oasis believe (or claim to believe) that no one has ever seen young or small silk wyrms. No one, they say, has ever seen them breed or reproduce, despite repeated (usually fatal) attempts. The mystery has prompted many tales. One concerns Old Uncle Tontor, a mythical old human known for nosiness about other people’s affairs. As the elves tell it, Tontor grew curious to learn how silk wyrms reproduce. None too bright, he tried to disguise himself as one, dyeing his skin green and wearing limp cloth wings. Then he crept out to “a fearsome deep cavern” where wyrms roosted.

Uncle Tontor entered the cavern, trying as far as possible to look and sound like a wurm. His bum-





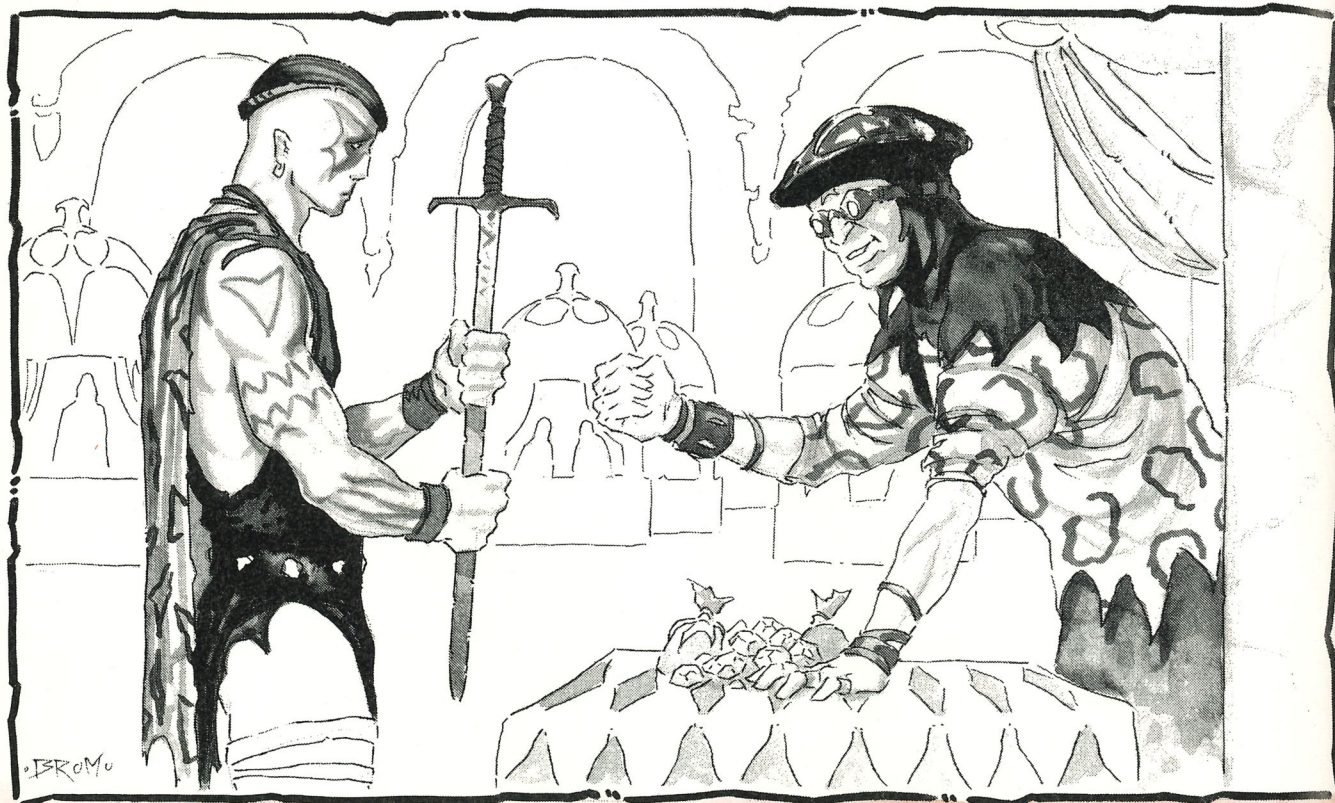
bling attempts attracted the attention of "King Snakewing" (in village folklore, monarch of the wyrms). Ordinarily the wyrms would have killed the old man on the spot. But King Snakewing had recently fed well on a hundred humans and was feeling tolerant. He ordered his minions to carry the old man away into the sky.

Despite the human's whining protests, "a hundred silken snakes" lifted Uncle Tontor and carried him to the moon Guthay. There Uncle Tontor saw that the moon was really a colossal egg, from which all the silk wyrms hatched, fully-grown.

Then the wyrms deposited Uncle Tontor unceremoniously on the underside of Athas. (Elven folk-

lore once held that Athas is flat.) He had to swing hand-over-hand to the edge of the world, crawl up over the side, and walk all the way home; this journey lasted a whole king's age, 77 years. When Tontor arrived back in the village, even older and more irascible than before, his descendants did not recognize him. Always nosy, Uncle Tontor asked them, "What happened to your renowned ancestor, the great Tontor?"

They replied, "What, that old coot? Our grandparents said he went mad and thought he'd turned into a snake. He slithered into the hills, and nobody ever saw him again."



This book gives rules that allow existing AD&D® game characters to advance to 30th level in all classes; new spells for wizards and priests; and new psionic disciplines. *Dragon Kings* also covers important campaign matters like the role of followers and the sensory effects of magic. All this material is meant for the DARK SUN™ campaign, but it adapts easily to any AD&D campaign.

The book also offers much material specific to the world of Athas, like new vehicle types, new BATTLESYSTEM™ armies, and the debut of a shadowy organization of powerful psionics: the Order. You need the DARK SUN campaign set to use this information.

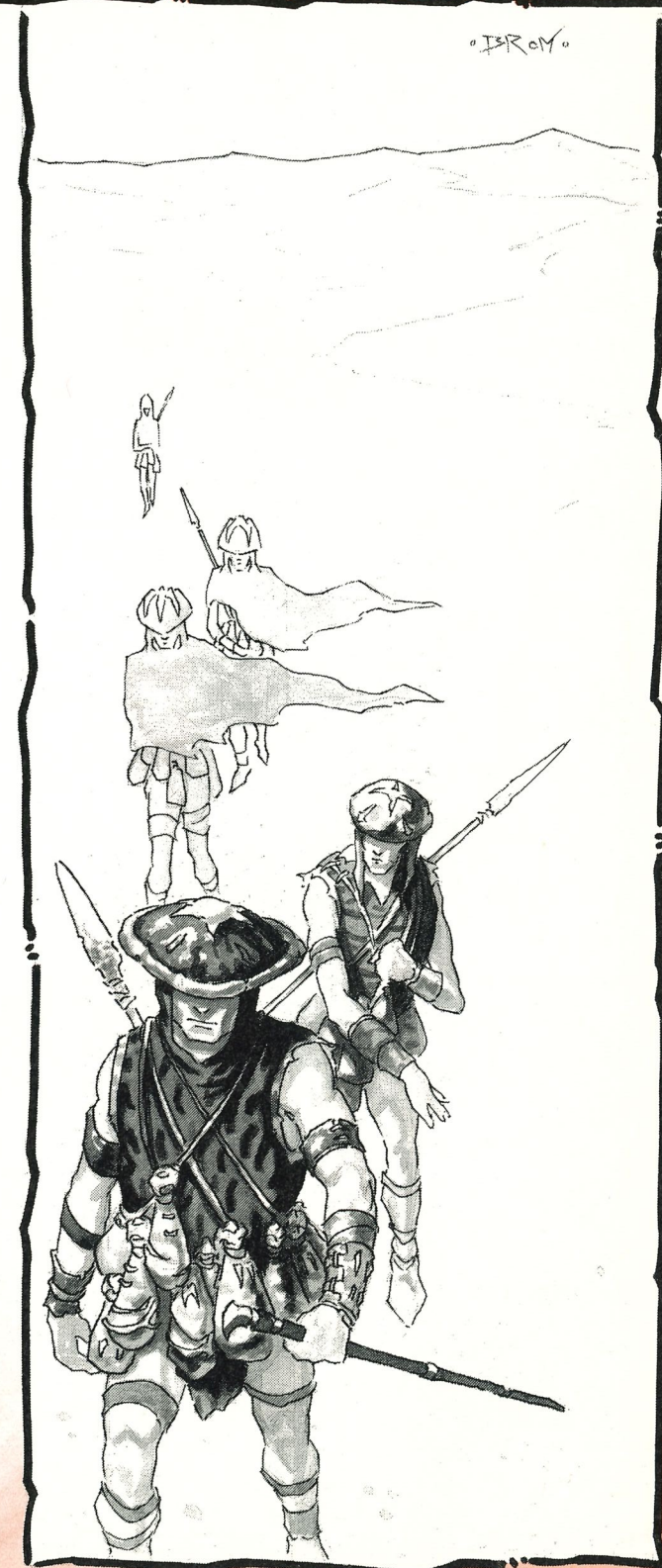
This Introduction summarizes two systems specific to the DARK SUN world that apply to both wizards and priests: psionic enchantment and advanced beings. More information appears later in this book in the sections devoted to these classes.

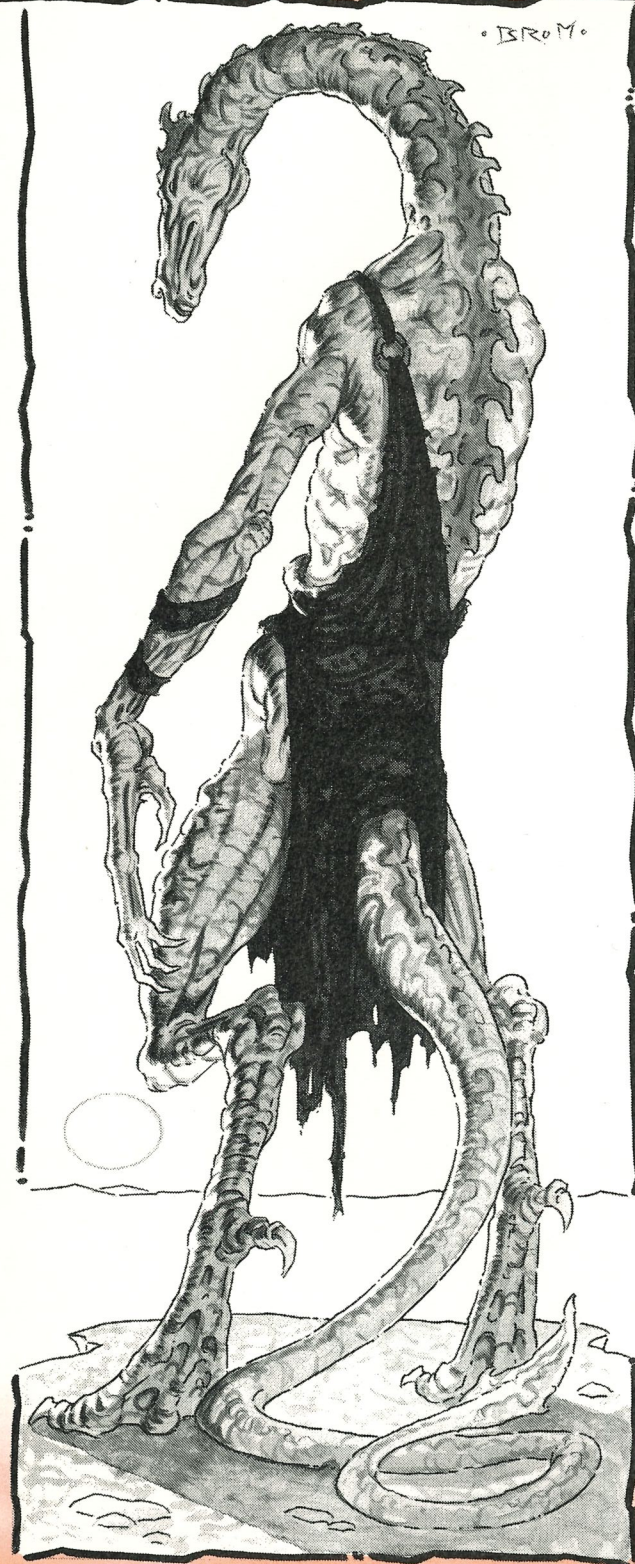
### Psionic Enchantment

Beyond the horizons of routine magic are whole seas of power that cannot be tapped naturally. The unaided mind, regardless of intelligence, cannot comprehend, let alone command, such tremendous energy. But psionics can "tune" the mind for greater mastery of magic. The combination produces the most powerful magic available in a DARK SUN campaign.

*Psionic enchantment* is magic, not psionics. As stated in the *Complete Psionics Handbook*, "Magic is the ability to shape, control, harness, and utilize natural forces that infuse the game world and surround the characters. . . . Psionics is the complete opposite of this. The psionist shapes, controls, harnesses, and utilizes natural forces that infuse his own being." Psionics and magic are separate forces.

In psionic enchantment, psionics is a means toward an end, a catalyst in the magical process. Wizard spells beyond 9th level and priest spells beyond 7th level are too difficult for the unaided mind to





comprehend. Only through psionic disciplines can the mind handle this magic.

In game terms, psionic enchantments are new spells for the highest-level wizard and priest characters who are also psionists. For wizards, psionic enchantments are 10th-level spells. For priests, psionic enchantments are 8th-, 9th-, and 10th-level. These spells become available based on the character's level, given on spell progression tables later in this volume.

There is no separate science or discipline for use of psionic enchantments. A spellcaster who reaches 20th level as a psionist is always ready to negotiate psionic enchantments.

The enchantments are spells of great scope, at times dwarfing the effects of those normally available to wizards and priests. Whereas existing spells focus on the individual and immediate surroundings, psionic enchantments can affect entire cities or armies or alter the face of Athas itself.

Such extraordinary magic requires careful preparation for weeks, months, and even years as the spellcaster puts the magical wheels into motion. Gathering components becomes an exacting task in itself, often calling for grand and dangerous quests. The caster must become intimately familiar with the target, be it a tract of desert he wishes to make bloom or the personal background of an army he wishes to erase from existence. Many spells have durations directly proportional to preparation time. Psionic enchantments have a separate "Preparation Time" line in their game statistics.

Characters can research new psionic enchantments beyond those listed. Often, a wizard performs such research amid ancient ruins, studying old tomes and tablets, building on the work of long-dead sorcerers. Such research takes at least one year, though a lifetime can pass without results.

### The Advanced Beings

In addition to the awesome magical spells they



can wield, the highest-level spellcasters also undertake a drastic mental and physical change. These advanced beings are among the most powerful creatures on Athas, devoted to either good or evil, foci of dramatic events and epic struggles.

In game terms, many spellcasters leave their human forms behind when they advance beyond 20th level, slowly transforming until at 30th level they complete the change into an advanced being.

Only defilers, preservers, and clerics may transform into advanced beings. To do so, the character must achieve 20th level in both the spellcasting and psionist classes. At this high level, the character abandons the distinction between the two classes, becoming 21st-level in an advanced form. Details appear in the class chapters in this book.

Each class metamorphoses into a different advanced form. Defiler/psionists become dragons. Preserver/psionists become avangions, extremely delicate creatures of tremendous magical power. A defiler or preserver cannot advance past

20th level without becoming an advanced being.

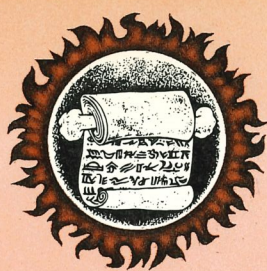
Cleric/psionists can become elementals. Having united with the powerful magics of an elemental plane, the cleric slowly eliminates the three other elements in the body in favor of the purest forms of the fourth. At 21st level, the cleric is, in effect, an elemental, who grows in magical and psionic power at higher levels. Unlike wizards, the cleric can instead choose to retain a human body when advancing beyond 20th level.

**Racial level limits:** Most player character races cannot achieve the highest levels in the spellcasting classes. Human characters, unlimited in their advancement in any class, can advance to become dragons, avangions, or elementals. The only demihumans that can do so are the half-elves, and even they can become only dragons.

### Catching Up

A character must achieve 20th level in both the





spellcasting class and the psionicist class before transforming to an advanced form. Coordinating the two classes works differently for dual-classed and multi-classed characters.

**Human dual-classed:** Only human characters may be dual-classed. In order to become an advanced being, the human first achieves 20th level in either class, then switches from that first class to the second, advancing in it to 20th level. The human must then adventure for 500,000 additional experience points beyond 20th level to become a 21st level advanced being. The human must abide by all rules regarding dual-class advancement presented in the *Player's Handbook*.

**Half-elf multi-classed:** A half-elf character who wishes to become a dragon must begin play as a defiler/psionicist. Upon earning a total of 6,500,000 experience points, the character can become a 21st-level dragon.

Having become an advanced being, the character can never again opt for a dual-class; the advanced classes can never be combined. He can never freely reduce experience to zero and begin the campaign again in a new character class. For the advanced beings, there's no going back.

### The Sorcerer-Kings

The sorcerer-kings of the Seven Cities are, in game terms, defiler/psionicists who have begun the transformation to dragon form. Each sorcerer-king's ambitions and approach to changing physical form are unique. Each is described here in broad terms.

**Balic:** Andropinis of Balic is, in fact, a 21st-level dragon. He retains enough of his original human form, however, that he can be seen in public without drawing suspicion. Those who have suspected his true nature have been executed.

**Draj:** The more pompous Tectuktitlay of Draj is actually a 22nd-level dragon, having used his own blood-soaked arena to further his metamorphosis.

Tectuktitlay's form is markedly inhuman—he retains human appearance through a vigilant psionic illusion.

**Gulg:** The oba is a 21st-level dragon, though still virtually human in appearance. With her attentions fixed on her city's ancient enemy Nibenay, Lalali-Puy has not metamorphosed further.

**Nibenay:** The Shadow King secludes himself for a reason—he is a 23rd-level dragon. In his rare appearances he masks his form with illusion, then steals away to continue his transformation. Nibenay's senior templars know of their master's true form.

**Raam:** Abalach-Re, herself a 21st-level dragon, is confused by her situation. The nature of her powers has lead the Great Vizier to a mistaken conclusion about their source—thus her invention of the fictitious "higher being" whom she compels skeptical citizens to worship.

**Tyr:** The tyrant Kalak has been slain. His unique approach to dragon status is discussed below.

**Urik:** Hamanu is a 21st-level dragon who sees himself as the ultimate ruler of the Tyr region. By force of arms, he may succeed, but not without further power gained through metamorphosis.

### Ancient Origins

Essentially, the seven sorcerer-kings are the first defilers who matched their great magical skills with ultimate psionic power. When they attained this level of magic is unclear—though rumors about their age range into the thousands of years, they are probably much older than that. On attaining the first stage toward dragon form, the seven delved deeper into research to understand what they had begun.

Each had mysteriously become the focus of unlimited elemental magic. Though they couldn't tap this power themselves, the sorcerer-kings could impart that power to their followers, the templars. The end result was clear, but why this transference of power



became possible remains a mystery, even to the sorcerer-kings.

In actuality, with the casting of their first metamorphosing spells, the sorcerer-kings each attracted the attention of a very powerful and rare creature—a living vortex. With spidery fingers firmly anchored in all the elemental planes and the prime material plane, the living vortex is a continuous conduit of magical energy. The sorcerer-kings are, until their deaths, a source of elemental magical power funnelled directly to them by their living vortex, a creature they don't even realize exists.

With the passage of centuries, the living vortices have become extinct. Therefore, no future dragons will gain the ability to transfer elemental magic to templars. The original sorcerer-kings will take that privilege with them to their graves.

Having achieved magical mastery, the sorcerer-kings began their suppression of other wizards. They reserved wizardly magic for themselves, and fledgling mages were hunted and killed. In the centuries since they took power, no other mage has risen in power to challenge the sorcerer-kings.

### Kalak's Gamble

Kalak was certainly the most ambitious of the sorcerer-kings. As such, he wasn't satisfied with the possibilities of staged metamorphosis toward dragon form. Impatient, he sought ancient tomes and magical texts that might afford him a shortcut. Kalak wanted to attain pure dragon form in one grand action.

Essentially, Kalak attempted to condense all the destructive force that would normally be parcelled into ten smaller steps into one gigantic deed. He built the great ziggurat to focus his powerful spell, with its attached arena where he would trap the life energy of thousands of spectators.

Would Kalak's scheme have worked? Nearly slain at the arena by a halfling spear through his chest, the sorcerer-king's plans were cut short. Since the survival of a single stage of dragon metamorphosis is uncertain, Kalak might have died anyway. Events have robbed us of that knowledge, which is probably for the best.

**Game terms:** In game terms, Kalak tried to go from 21st-level to 30th-level dragon all at once. He failed. No magic allows another DARK SUN™ game character to attempt this feat. The only path from human to dragon form has ten distinct steps.