

WE ALL WEAR MASKS

Faces of the Grotesque

MONSTERS HAVE CONFOUNDED and terrorized the free folk of civilized lands for as long as there've been lands to "civilize." Humans and halflings contend with dire wolves around their woods, elves lay traps and wards against the goblins at their kingdom's borders, dwarves rose up against their giant overlords, and dragons are considered a calamity to all. Every fantasy culture has its monstrous boogie men, and all of them have been immortalized in masks.



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Masks of monsters serve purposes beyond just scaring small children. To fashion a mask out of a monstrous creature's visage is to take on its totemic power and symbolism. Some monster masks have become magical over generations of use, imbued with the powers of the monsters they depict. These powers can be a tremendous boon to adventurous sorts, but none should be used lightly, lest the wearer become monstrous themselves.

This article features five new magic items: five masks inspired by monsters and mythical beasts. These masks are for characters of any level, race, or class. Each mask lets its wearer wield a different monstrous but useful power, perfect for any kind of campaign.

Each mask features the following rules and worldbuilding details, useful for both players and Game Masters:

- The history of the mask.
- The mask's powers and benefits to the wearer.
- Places where the mask might be encountered, and NPCs who might be wearing them.
- Optional curses or drawbacks for Game Masters to use.
- The resale value of the mask for games that allow magic items to be sold.

All of these magic masks are considered very rare wondrous items. Each requires attunement to use. A character cannot be attuned to more than one of these masks at a time. They each take an action to don or wear, as the character putting on the mask adjusts the eyeholes or fit. They can be removed as a swift action.

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NEW MAGIC ITEMS

GOBLIN MASK

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

Your vision shifts into a sickly yellow tint. Your muscles tense up and contract inside you, made twitchy as new sensory information floods your brain. You gain the following benefits and powers while wearing the goblin mask:

- **Darkvision.** You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light.
- **Goblin Tongue.** You can speak, read, and write Goblin as a language.
- **Nimble Escape.** This mask has 5 charges. While wearing it, you can use an action to expend 1 of its charges to take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action during your turn. The mask regains 1d4 + 1 charges daily at sunrise. If you expend the mask's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the mask shrivels away and is destroyed.

Appearance

The *goblin mask* looks like a parody of a goblin's face; made from leather and burlap its ears and nose bulge out comically. While most other creatures can easily tell it's a mask, goblins seem to have a hard time distinguishing the mask's wearer from other goblins.

Background

The *goblin mask* was the hasty creation of a wily and charismatic adventurer trapped underground amid a clan of goblins. Her companions were taken captive by the goblins, and only she remained free. In a brazen gambit, she fashioned the *goblin mask* out of a backpack and scraps of clothing, and used it as a disguise to sneak into the goblin's camp and rescue her friends. That the mask worked is a miracle, one that imbued the makeshift disguise with magic.

The mask is often found in areas where goblins live, in a treasure chest or on the bodies of its previous wearer. It is currently in the possession of

Deelia Kinsberg, a half-elf anthropologist and researcher for a museum. She is out on assignment, studying goblin clans in the wild.

Optional Drawback

The mask holds within it the essence of goblinkind, and it seeks to make its wearer more goblin-like, starting with their height. The mask has a cumulative effect upon a Medium or larger creature who wears it: the wearer shrinks in height by 1d4 inches each time the mask is worn, until the wearer is Small in size (around 3 feet tall). Small creatures are not affected by this drawback.

DIRE BEAR MASK

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

While wearing this mask your sense of hearing and smell heighten, and you are filled with the primal urge to hunt. You have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing and scent, and unarmed attacks with your hands and teeth deal 1d10 bludgeoning or piercing damage plus your Strength modifier. You also gain the ability to speak with beasts as if the *speak with animals* spell has been cast on you.

Appearance

This half-mask is fashioned from wood, carved to look like the face of a monstrous, overgrown bear, held around the face by a bear fur strap. It covers the face and eyes of the wearer, leaving the mouth exposed to bite and roar. Red flecks of dried blood stain the wood around its mouth opening.

Background

Long ago, the mask was created by a tribe of druids devoted to the bear. The bear was a powerful totem for them in their worship and their daily lives. The druids' imbued the mask with their devotion and their reverence for the bear, and over decades that devotion manifested itself as magical power within the mask. How the mask fell out of the druids' possession is unknown.

This mask has been traded amongst or passed down by hunters, druids, and rangers of woodland

areas. It is often found in woodland cairns or among ordinary goods in borderland trading posts. Currently it is in the possession of Micah, a mad druid who dresses up as a bear and hunts humans and elves who hunt and forage in his forest.

Optional Drawback

The mask contains the primal spirit of a vicious dire bear, and it concerns itself with animalistic violence and the hunt. Language and higher thought are not priorities for the mask, so it secretly seeks to shed them from its wearer. Every time the mask is worn, you must roll a d20. On a roll of 1, you lose the ability to speak, read, and write in one of your known languages (randomly determined). This effect can be removed with a *greater restoration* spell.

MASK OF THE DRAGON

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

While wearing this ornamental paper mask you are imbued with the knowledge, greed, and fiery wrath of the red dragon. You can now speak, read, and write in Draconic. While wearing the mask you can breathe fire as an action to create a 60-foot cone of flames. All creatures within the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 12d6 fire damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. Once you have used this feature, you cannot use it again until the next time you complete a long rest.

Appearance

The mask is made from lacquered red crate paper, folded and cut into the shape of a dragon's face and snout. Gold leaf has been delicately applied to the paper, creating layers of streaks that give the mask the appearance that it has scales. It smells strongly of burning wood.

Background

The mask was made by a trio of warlocks devoted to elder dragons, seeking to capture some of their raw draconic power into a physical item. The end result is the mask of the dragon. Unfortunately, the covetous nature of dragons was captured as well,



and the more the warlocks used the mask, the more they quarreled with each other for its possession. It was ultimately their undoing.

This mask is currently in the possession of a tribe of kobolds, worn by their shaman during rites of passage or during times of trouble. The kobolds won't part with the mask willingly.

Optional Drawback

The mask takes its appearance and powers from red dragons, but with that power comes the avarice of a red dragon. Using the mask's fire breath power more than once gives you Dragon's Greed, a form of long-term madness: whenever you are presented with gold of any kind, you are compelled to claim it for yourself and must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom check to resist doing so. Curing this madness ends the wearer's attunement to the mask.

Hill Giant Mask

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

While wearing this mask you are imbued with the height and strength of a hill giant. While wearing this mask you can speak, read, and write in Giant. This mask has 3 charges. While wearing it

you can use an action to expend 1 of its charges to gain the following benefits for 10 minutes: your size becomes Huge and your Strength score becomes 22. The mask regains 1 expended charge daily at sunrise. If you expend the mask's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the mask crumbles to dust.

Appearance

This mask is a small sheet of slate with the visage of a hill giant drawn onto the front of it with chalk. It is meant to be held against the face, causing it to meld onto the wearer's face and disappearing from sight. It can be removed from the face as an action. The more the mask is worn, the more the chalk visage of the hill giant resembles the face of the wearer (if they were a hill giant).

Background

This mask was created by dwarves during a period of ancient history when they were the slaves of giants. It was used as a means of revolt; granting a dwarf the strength and size to battle a giant head-on in direct combat.

This mask is often found in dwarven halls and mountain treasure holds, or amongst the hordes of monsters who prey on dwarves, like dragons and drow. It is currently in the possession of a drunken, sullen milkmaid named Sue who lives in the country. She found it in the bottom of a trunk in the cellar of an abandoned cottage, and has been using it to wreak havoc in her community. When Sue gets drunk, she dons the mask and stomps around her farming town, smashing the belongings of people who she thinks have wronged her.

Optional Drawback

The mask grants the strength and size of a giant, but also a hill giant's meager intelligence. Every time the mask is worn, you must make a DC 12 Intelligence saving throw. On a failure, your Intelligence score is decreased by 1. This effect is cumulative. This Intelligence loss can be recovered with a *greater restoration* spell or a similar cure.

OCTOPOID MASK

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

While wearing this mask you are imbued with the great and terrible knowledge and powers of an aquatic aberration. This mask has 3 charges. While wearing it you can use an action to expend 1 of its charges to use any one of the following powers:

- **Telepathy.** You can read the thoughts of other humanoid creatures within 20 feet of you. Non-humanoid creatures are unaffected. Fey, fiends, and aberrations can tell their minds are being read. This effect lasts 1 minute.
- **Telekinesis.** You can move objects and creatures around with the power of your mind, as if you had cast *telekinesis* upon yourself, except its duration is 1d4 rounds with concentration.

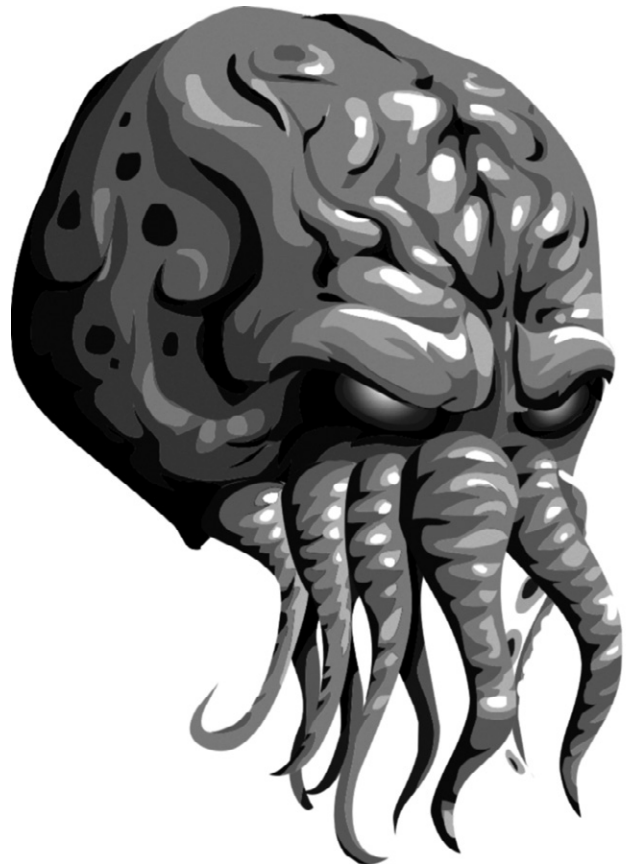
The mask regains 1 expended charge daily at sunrise. If you expend the mask's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the mask disappears in a cloud of purple smoke, gone forever.

Appearance

This mask is a mass of octopus tentacles and bulging eyeballs, covering the entire head. It has been fashioned out of a strange rubbery material unlike anything else. Wearing the octopoid mask is a hot and stuffy experience, as its eye and nose holes are very small.

Background

This mask was created by aberrant creatures from another plane of existence. It was made as part of an experiment to imbue an object with their powers over the physical and mental worlds that could be shared with lesser beings. This was less a benevolent gesture and more of an experiment to see how such beings would react to being granted such power. Whatever the experiment's purpose,



this mask was lost on the material plane, and has been passed around by merchants and adventurers ever since.

This mask currently rests in a treasure chest hidden inside of a secret waterfall cave, just waiting to be uncovered.

Optional Drawback

The mask's original creators are still psychically linked to the mask. Any information learned while wearing the mask is learned by its aberrant creators as well. If enough specific geographical information is learned, these monstrous aberrations slip into the Material Plane to recover their mask—and abduct the creature wearing it! 🐙