

# THE BUDGET BESTIARY



**BY JAMES HOLLOWAY**

**6 NEW MONSTERS MADE FROM TOYS AND JUNK**

**WITH INSTRUCTIONS AND ADVICE FOR MAKING YOUR  
OWN CHEAP AND CHEERFUL CREATIONS**

DESIGNED FOR USE WITH

**OLD-SCHOOL  
ESSENTIALS**

# The Tragedy of the Owlbear

The early generation of fantasy role-players grew up in the wargaming hobby, specifically in the branch of it that used miniature figures. For their early games, they didn't have access to many fantasy models, so they had to get creative. In 1972, future Dungeons and Dragons co-creator Gary Gygax wrote a letter to Wargamer's Newsletter in which he outlined the improvisation needed to make models for fantasy games. Gygax discussed using figures in different scales to make creatures of different sizes, using toy dinosaurs to create dragons, and even clipping hair from his daughters' dolls to make a suitable coiffure for a giant.

*The Balrog has caused considerable problems, and right now we are using a giant sloth from an assortment of plastic prehistoric animals, which (converted) makes a fearsome looking beast, albeit not quite as Tolkien described it. - Gary Gygax*

Once fantasy wargaming had given birth to fantasy role-playing games, this search for suitable fantasy figures continued. Historical figures, toy dinosaurs, and more were pressed into service, as were a group of cheap plastic "prehistoric animals," known to toy collectors today as "Chinasaurus." Some of these were recognisably dinosaurs, others ... not so much. The ones that didn't look like anything else became the inspiration for creatures like the Owlbear, the Rust Monster, and the Bulette.

Today, fantasy figures are everywhere. Official models, unofficial models, pre-painted models, metal models, plastic models, resin models ... in many ways, it's never been easier to get the miniatures you want for your games. You can buy an owlbear if you want – indeed, you can buy a huge range of different owlbears from different manufacturers. And that's fine. Nothing wrong with buying a \$9.95 owlbear. But to me, it would be nicer if the lesson of the owlbear was "it's fun to make monsters using cheap things." If we give up on the fun of making things, if we get too concerned about doing fantasy "right" – that's the tragedy of the owlbear I'm always talking about.

We don't want – I don't want, anyway – to lose the spirit of creative improvisation. The lesson of the owlbear is that inspiration comes from unexpected places and that working to make game content out of disposable junk is fun. In this collection, I've used whatever I could find or buy cheaply to create some monsters, and provided (I hope) some inspiration for using them in games. But even if you never use the strange inhabitants of Ultraterra in your own games, I hope you have fun using toys and trash as inspirations for your own creatures.

# Here's What I Used

We're going to try to do this as cheaply as possible, but you will need a few bits of equipment.

**Miniature bases:** Flat discs about an inch across, or bigger for bigger models. Do not buy these from Games Workshop or anything like that. Just go on eBay and search "wargame bases MDF 25mm" or similar. You can get 50 of these for a few pounds.

**Glue:** You'll want both cyanoacrylate glue (superglue) and PVA glue (white glue or wood glue). Honestly, the plastic some of these toys are made from takes superglue poorly, but we'll just do our best.

**A knife:** You can get away with a utility knife, but a good sharp craft or hobby knife with a replaceable blade will come in handy. You may see this called a scalpel or an X-acto knife (after a common brand). Use care; cut on a safe surface like a cutting mat or similar, not right onto your dining room table etc.

**Paints:** If you don't have miniature paints, just use craft acrylics like you can buy at any stationery or hobby store. You will want a primer to prepare the models for painting. In the UK, I recommend Halfords grey auto primer.

**Sticky tack:** Called Blu-tac in the UK. If you don't have modelling putty and just need to fill a hole or something, stick a blob of this on, run some superglue over it, and paint when dry.

**Wire:** Floral wire or similar will come in handy. We want something to pin disparate parts of models together. You can make guide holes for the wire with a small drill (called a pin vice), by poking the model with a thumbtack or by twiddling your knife blade, although you'll break a lot of blade tips that way.

**Plastic army men:** These army men come in a big bag at Poundland. The sculpting and casting quality is wretched and the plastic is a pain to work with, but they're very cheap. The nice thing about them is that they're about the size of a typical gaming model.

**Toy dinosaurs and other animals:** The cheaper the better.

**Beads, cocktail sticks, toothpicks, junk:** Small things with interesting or generic shapes.

# Precious Baby

A plastic spider from a big pack bought the day after Halloween combines with a lamb from a set of farm animal toys to create a monstrosity.

This kind of hybrid creature works really well with the leftover animals in your collection. Bears, wolves, lions and so on get a lot of use in RPGs, but this can mean that you wind up with a big pile of gazelles, ducklings and other non-threatening animals that are surplus to requirements. These work ideally for horrid beings like Precious Baby, partly because there's something extra revolting about a monster made from an animal that's supposed to be sweet and lovable.



To build the body structure, I just clipped off the lamb's legs, not even bothering to cover up the obvious blank spots where I cut them off. I could have cut them a little more smoothly if I thought this monster would turn up in a game more than once, but there comes a point of diminishing returns: in a wargames army, where you're going to be looking at this creature's behind game after game, you might want to take a little more care. For a single fantasy encounter? It's up to you, but I was in a rush.

I trimmed the legs off the spider's body and tried to find a place where they would fit neatly onto the now-legless lamb. After I glued them on, I filled the spaces with poster tack and then covered it in cyanoacrylate glue to harden it. It looks really crude up close, but it'll do.

I wanted to make the creature a little more than just two parts, so I added some eyes on stalks. The eyes are beads on the ends of bits of wire, with the big holes in the beads serving as pupils.

I wanted to give this unnatural creature some unnatural colours, so I painted it with the blue-and-magenta tones of Ultraterra. The drybrush carries the magenta onto the legs, helping the transition look smoother.

# Precious Baby



This horrid fusion of animal parts might be the result of Ultraterran experimentation – for the Lords clearly do not understand the life of mortal beings – or simply what happens when magical radiation from an Ultraterran Gate strikes nearby organisms.

Creatures like this one are not inherently hostile, but they are as bewildered by their surroundings as you would be if somebody made you twice as big and gave you spider legs. If provoked, they are as likely to flee as attack.

Each hybrid form is unique; lairs contain a mixture of mutated forms.

AC 6 [13], HD 3\* (13hp), Att 1 × bite (2d6) or 1 x energy bolt (1d6), THACO 17 [+2], MV 60' (20'), SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (2), ML 8, AL Neutral, XP 50, NA 1 (1d3)

- **Adhesive coat:** Precious Baby's wool has taken on the adhesive qualities of a cobweb. A successful melee attack against the creature has a 1-in-6 chance of the weapon becoming stuck to the coat.
- **Energy bolt:** If not in melee combat, Precious Baby emits an agonised scream and discharges a bolt of shimmering magical energy from its eyes at a random target.

# The Beast Legion



I picked up a handful of animal toys at a car boot sale (that's a swap meet or flea market for my US readers) for less than £1. I knew that I wanted to do something with a kind of beast-man or *Island of Doctor Moreau* kind of theme, so I looked for animals that had good-looking, expressive heads, but also I didn't really look that hard.

For bodies, I decided to use some of my Poundland plastic army men. These come in a big bag for £1, but many of the poses are not very useful. Looking at those rejected poses, I thought of doing something with a kind of sense of shambling, uncoordinated motion.

I cut the heads from some of the animal toys, then did the same for the heads of the army men. I pinned them with wire, because superglue hates curing on these figures. This left me with a pretty ugly join, so I decided to cover the gap and lend the figures more of a sense of motion by giving them cloaks. These are just made from torn-up bits of paper napkin. I soaked the paper in thinned-down white glue and wrapped them around the shoulders. This is a bit of a fiddly process and can take a while to get the hang of, but one of the benefits of doing it is that you can shape the tissue and make it look like it's flowing out behind the figure to help give it the impression of movement. The raggedy texture of the cloaks gave me the idea that these were lowly creatures. They started to make sense to me.

I made the weapons out of beads, sticks, and bits of card. The figures got a very dull paint job with muted colours to emphasise their lowly status.

# The Beast Legion



Ultraterra's incursions into the mortal world are limited, at least at first. When the Lords need soldiers, they use their magic to fuse mortals with animals. These hapless victims become Beast Legionnaires. Armed with the simplest weapons, they spread out in advance of the Guards, revealing the locations of local defenders almost inadvertently. Some attribute their fury to their animalistic nature, others to the pain of the transformation.

Horribly transformed, the Legionnaires may yet retain their intelligence and personalities. Perhaps the right person could get through to them – but would they be willing to listen?

AC 6 [13], HD 1 (4hp), Att 1 × weapon (1d6 or by weapon) or claws, horns, and teeth (1d3), THACO 19 [+0], MV 120' (40'), SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (1), ML 5, AL Neutral, XP 10, NA 1d6 (1d4x10), TT U

- **Unwilling conscripts:** Beast Legionnaire patrols are led by Ultraterran Guards or Knights. If Guards are present, the Legionnaires gain +2, to morale; if Knights, +3. The death of the leader causes the Legionnaires to make an immediate Morale roll regardless of other casualties.
- **Animal fury:** If threatened or provoked (not if just fought), Legionnaires enter a frenzy, gaining +1 to hit and damage.

# Ultraterran Guards



I decided to give these guards some kind of geometric shapes as their heads, an idea that would later recur in the Knights of Ultraterra. This was partly because the heads of the army men were not only boringly human but also pretty badly sculpted, with weird, soft detail and pretty crude faces. I decided to give them gem-heads, which then made me think about the idea of them being some

kind of artificial creature or maybe an extradimensional entity animating an artificial body. It also lined up with the figure I was originally going to use as a Lord of Ultraterra – but then I didn't end up using it in the end. Still, I think it looks not too bad.

Looking at the army men's poses, I decided to work with different starting poses from the ones I had used for the Beast Legion. While those were very mobile and animated, these were quite upright and rigid. This gave me the idea of them being some kind of disciplined military force. I imagined them guarding doors in a castle or similar – this is where the name Guards came from, even though now it feels more like the fancy title of a military unit, like the Coldstream Guards.

If they were going to be static soldier-types, they needed shields. As a die-hard minis gamer, I have a big box full of spare shields, but I wanted to stick to the theme of the project. One figure has a shield made from the Knight's original base, while the other has a shield made from a bead and a stick-on gem from the craft store.

The capes, like the capes of the Beast Legion, are made of tissue paper, but I was a little more careful with them because I wanted them to have a neater appearance. They add detail while concealing how flat and hollow the figures are. They also had a little decorative pattern on them, which I turned into detail on the cloaks. The spears are straws from a broom; the hands are poster tack and superglue.

# Ultraterran Guards



The foot soldiers of Ultraterra, the Ultraterran Guards are artificial constructs animated by arcane crystals, consciousness-imbued manifestations of the enigmatic energies of their home plane.

They can be found as individuals leading packs of Beast Legionnaires, as squads guarding important locations, or as companies or larger formations assaulting enemy positions.

The Guards have no ranks, officers, or hierarchy, at least not in a way visible to outsiders. They communicate telepathically, and individuals seem to know their orders intuitively. Most Guards are ruthless toward mortals, not considering them worth sparing.

AC 3 [16], HD 2 (9 hp), Att 1 × weapon (1d8 or by weapon), THACO 19 [+0], MV 60' (20'), SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (F2), ML 9, AL Neutral, XP 20, NA 2d4 (1d4x10), TT U

- **Rigid formation:** Achieve surprise on 1 only. Travel in squads (2d4), companies (12d6) or larger armies. For every 8 Guards, 50% chance of a Knight.
- **Military discipline:** Morale increases to 10 if led by an Ultraterran Knight or 11 if near a Lord of Ultraterra.
- **Crystal consciousness:** Can be resurrected if allies retrieve crystal. Immune to poison and disease.

# War Monument



A lot of toy soldiers are larger-scale than the miniatures you get for RPGs, but that doesn't mean you can't use them in games. A typical "toy soldier" scale model is a little less than twice the height of an RPG or wargame figure, which makes them good for ogres and similar creatures; a little too small for giants. A lot of them also have somewhat static poses, which makes them good for statues – in this case, an animated statue. I just stuck the figure onto an MDF base, snipped its head off and replaced it with a bead. The head went into the "bits box" for future use.

Attaching the head was actually a little bit of a hassle. Superglue works best on certain kinds of materials, and this glossy plastic isn't one of them. Additionally, the thin wires making up the bead didn't give a lot of surface area for the glue to bond. When you have a situation like this, a hot glue gun is really useful. You can push the bead down into the hot glue and seat it firmly. If you don't have a hot glue gun, use some kind of anchoring point for the bead. Drill or carve a hole into the neck area of the model and then use a matchstick or piece of wire to connect the hole and the bead.

Because this figure is meant to be a statue, I didn't have to worry much about the scale – it's an artificial thing intended to be literally larger than life. If you want to use toy soldiers as ogres or similar, though, it helps to add some details that give a sense of scale. For instance, I have a toy viking who serves a giant in my games, and he looks fine given that I paid £1 for him. Still, it bothers me (if no one else) that he is wearing a cloak made from the world's biggest bearskin, that his shield is made from absolutely huge boards, etc. It makes him look like a figure of the wrong scale, rather than a huge creature.

One way to do this is to add some detail to the base – cobblestone texture, foliage, whatever. I didn't do that here because I was trying to make the bases as simple as possible. But even a dropped sword or a perched bird in the correct scale will help the viewer to "read" the figure as being the size you mean it to be.

# War Monument



Despite the name, these creatures were not constructed by the Ultraterran military. Instead, they seem to be statues which have had arcane crystals added to them, animating them with Ultraterran consciousness. Some speculate that this means that these statues were left behind by Ultraterra's original – now extinct – inhabitants.

War Monuments often defend fortresses, as they are too slow for field warfare. Their minds are as slow as their movements, but capable of deep and complex thought.

AC 2 [17], HD 4 (18hp), Att 2 × weapon (1d8), THACO 16 [+3], MV 30' (10'), SV D10 W11 P12 B13 S14 (4), ML 11, AL Neutral, XP 75, NA 1 (1d4), TT None

- **Crystal consciousness:** Can be resurrected if allies retrieve crystal. Immune to poison and disease.
- **Advanced processing:** Highly intelligent, thoughtful, and reflective. Surprisingly open to negotiation and compromise.

# Knights of Ultraterra



The plastic dinosaur is probably the most ubiquitous cheap toy; I grabbed a fistful from a box at a car boot sale and selected this one from among them.

Making the rider was much more of a challenge. I had to cut the base off this army man, then dunk him in hot water to make him flexible enough to bend his legs. I then immersed him in cold water to fix his legs in the new position. To be honest, it was kind of a hassle and didn't have as much of an effect as I'd hoped. Next time I will build a little card howdah for the dinosaur and just have him stand on its back. His saddle is made from card, air-drying clay and tissue paper, while his shield is a sequin. The sword is made from a length of some kind of zip tie, and his banner pole is a cocktail stick. The reins of the dinosaur are some wire I found on the ground.

The banner and shield designs provide a great opportunity to personalise models that don't otherwise have a lot of detail. You can paint designs yourself or print out an image; it's a good way to distinguish models from each other. These are pretty simple, but they're eye-catching and let me add some colour and detail that the model doesn't support.

# Knights of Ultraterra

The elite of Ultraterra, these cavaliers seem to have a more developed sense of identity than the foot soldiers of the Guards. Single knights or pairs range across the lands, riding on quests given to them by the enigmatic Lords, while squadrons support the Guard.

Although their lack of faces makes them seem uniform to mortals, the Knights are distinct individuals with unique personalities and consciousnesses, a fact that opponents sometimes forget.

Their behaviour gives some clues about Ultraterran attitudes toward the world of mortals. The Knights, at least, seem to see the mortal world as a sort of adventurous playground, full of foes against whom to test their steel and challenges to overcome. It might be quite charming if it weren't for the fact that they're also the tip of the Ultraterran spear.

The Knights ride a variety of strange steeds, but all seem to be living animals and they tend to lack the distinctive colouration and behaviour of Ultraterran beings. Perhaps they were imported from another plane?



**Knight:** AC 2 [17], HD 7 (31hp), Att 1 × dimensional blade (1d10), THACO 13 [+6], MV 60' (20'), SV D8 W9 P10 B10 S12 (7), ML 10, AL Neutral, XP 850, NA 1d4 (1d6), TT T, L

- **Crystal consciousness:** Can be resurrected if allies retrieve crystal. Immune to poison and disease.
- **Wild charge:** If the Knight moves at least 60' while mounted, its attacks do double damage. However, it suffers a +2 [-2] penalty to AC.

**Steed:** AC 5 [14], HD 3 (13hp), Att 1 × bite (1d8), THACO 17 [+2], MV 120' (40'), SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (2), ML 9, AL Neutral, XP 35, NA 1 per Knight, TT None

# Lords of Ultraterra



This is one of the simplest models in the whole project. It's a little rubber figurine, part of a line that were really popular when I was a kid. An old school friend sent it to me. When I was younger, the thing that I really loved about these little guys was their weird designs, which varied from cartoon parodies of popular characters to strange science-fantasy characters.

Looking at these designs reminds me of a feeling that I felt a lot when I was younger, in the pre-internet days: the feeling of *incompleteness*, of confusion about

what something meant. These little figures came in plastic tubs from the toy shop, and we had no idea what they *meant* and no real way to find out. They were clearly part of a system of references that we didn't understand.

That feeling suggested a big part of the Ultraterran hierarchy to me. The whole thing should feel like it made sense in a way that the players couldn't quite understand, and the highest ranks of the hierarchy should be the strangest. This figure, coming as it did from a part of my youth that evoked that feeling for me, seemed like a natural choice.

This figure doesn't have any of the complicated conversions of the other ones. I mounted it on a base and gave it a simple paint job; no other work necessary.

Knowing when you can just use a figure as-is can be a challenge. Part of it is knowing how well the material will take paint. In general, bendy plastic or rubber won't hold a paint job well; as the material flexes, the paint can crack or flake off. However, with a good primer you can make things work surprisingly well. Hard plastic or metal figures are usually fine, of course.

Also, it's OK if you lose some paint: I painted a huge dragon toy for a game once, and it did lose a lot of paint after a while because the paint and plastic weren't right for each other. But I wasn't going to have an enormous black dragon turn up more than once or twice anyway, so it did what it needed to do.

# Lords of Ultraterra



These are not beings at all, but energy projections created by the unknown beings who rule Ultraterra. What the true form of the Lords is, none know. Still, even bringing one of these projections to the mortal plane requires complex magical rituals. The manifestation of one of the Lords of Ultraterra is a sign of great danger not only for mortals but for the Ultraterran invaders, as the effort required for the ritual can leave their defences weakened. Ultraterrans do this only when the final phase of an invasion – the transformation of Terra to Ultraterra – is near.

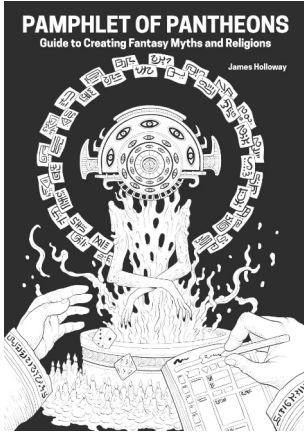
The Lords have unique powers; this example is equal parts leader and trickster.

AC 3 [16], HD 10\* (45hp), Att 1 × weapon (2d8) or magic, THACO 11 [+8], MV 240' (80') flying, SV D4 W5 P6 B5 S8 (15), ML 12, AL Neutral, XP 1,600, NA 1 (1), TT B

- **Arcane projection:** Immune to nonmagical attacks.
- **Arcane transformation:** Gradually transforms the world around it into Ultraterra.
- **Magic powers:** (3/day each):
  - Charm Person
  - Confusion
  - Dispel Magic
  - Invisibility
  - Illusion
  - Magic Missile

# More Things by Me

If you enjoyed *The Budget Bestiary*, I have some other things you might like to read or listen to.



[The Pamphlet of Pantheons](#) is my system-neutral guide to creating a pantheon or religion for your fantasy RPG. It's full of tables, idea prompts and suggestions to help you create a pantheon that feels real without spending too long preparing.

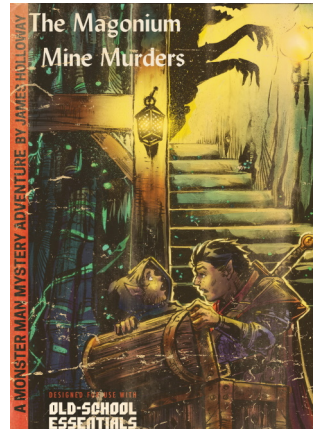
You can find *The Pamphlet of Pantheons* on Itch.io or DriveThru in digital form, or buy it in physical form from my Gumroad store.

*The Pamphlet of Pantheons* is 20 pages, with a black and white cover by Tim Molloy.

[The Magonium Mine Murders](#) is a murder-mystery scenario for *Old-School Essentials*. In it, the player characters explore a region full of suspicious characters, mysterious disappearances, crooked fight promoters, forgers, labour unrest, and, y'know, *murder*.

*The Magonium Mine Murders* isn't a linear "trail of clues" scenario. Instead, it's a cluebox: a collection of plot hooks, locations, and characters for your players to engage with.

*The Magonium Mine Murders* is 24 pages, with a colour cover by Ed Bickford.



If you liked this zine, you might like to hear more about monsters old and new on my podcast [Monster Man](#). Episodes are short and come out twice a week. In addition to reading through the gaming books of yesteryear and digging into the history and mythology of their monsters, I also interview game creators about their favourite creatures.

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