

A Primer on faux Henchmen

The *create faux henchman* spell from *Ravenloft Gazetteer Vol. 1* has interesting potential for the creative DM who may wish to elevate a humble familiar into an NPC parties can interact with without realizing the unusual nature of the being they're dealing with. The spell description, unfortunately, only describes the basic workings of the spell with no discussion on how the new NPC's skills and feats may be assigned to better flesh out the character. This primer was written to give DMs a step-by-step breakdown of the process.

Note: this primer is based on the ruleset as given in *Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition*, and page references are based on those edition's core rulebooks.

The example familiars are Zaglaive and Lurzed, the familiars of (respectively) Eleni of Toyalis and Hazlik the Red Wizard: since they're already "canonical" NPCs, they make good candidates for further development, and are likely intermediaries for PCs to deal with should they attempt to contact their masters, who are, after all, high-ranking Hazlani officials and very busy.

First determine the familiar's intelligence based on its master's level. Zaglaive is a hawk with an Intelligence of 9 based on Eleni's spellcasting level of 8; Lurzed is a toad with an Intelligence of 12 based on Hazlik's spellcasting level of 14. Since the faux henchman can only be a commoner, expert, or warrior, its base ability scores are Strength 11, Dexterity 11, Constitution 11 and Charisma 10; the Intelligence and Wisdom scores of the original familiar are used. Apply racial modifiers accordingly (since both Lurzed and Zaglaive have human forms, they get no racial bonuses or penalties) and add +1d3 to Charisma (for ease of calculation, a +2 modifier is used).

Familiars keep the hit points of their original form regardless of their new form's Constitution or hit dice type; Constitution bonuses, if any, do apply to the Fortitude save of their new form.

Once the race and class of the faux henchman is chosen, calculate the number of skill points and feats allotted for a character of its level, race, and intelligence: the level of the henchman is the same as the level of its master, as given in the spell description. Zaglaive, as an 8th-level human warrior, gets

$$\begin{aligned}(2 + (-1) \times 4) + 4 \text{ points for being human} &= 8 \text{ points at 1st level;} \\ + (2 + (-1)) &= 1 \text{ point} + 1 \text{ point for being human} = 2 \text{ points for his remaining seven levels;} \\ 8 + 14 &= 22 \text{ skill points}\end{aligned}$$

and 4 feats (2 at first level for being human, plus 2 more at 3rd and 6th levels); Lurzed, as a 14th-level human expert, gets

$$\begin{aligned}((6 + 2) \times 4) + 4 \text{ points for being human} &= 36 \text{ points at 1st level;} \\ + (6 + 2) &= 8 \text{ points} + 1 \text{ point for being human} = 9 \text{ points for his remaining 13 levels;} \\ 36 + 117 &= 153 \text{ skill points}\end{aligned}$$

and 6 feats (2 at 1st level plus 1 each at 3rd, 6th, 9th and 12th levels). Familiars also get ability score improvements as a character of their level, but cannot put them into Intelligence or Wisdom (since those scores seem to be dependent on their original familiar form); Zaglaive gets 2 points (for 4th and 8th level) and Lurzed 3 (for 4th, 8th, and 12th).

Base attack bonuses and saving throws are the better of either the familiar's (according to its new race and class) or those of its master: Zaglaive would normally have Eleni's Fortitude save of +4, but as an 8th-level human warrior he benefits from a Fortitude save of +6— but only in his human form.

Familiars have access to their master's skills at their master's rank, but can also spend their skill points to buy skills at ranks higher than their master; however, they must do this as if they didn't have the skill. Hazlik has the skill Intimidate at +6, but if Lurzed wants to have it at +8 he can't just spend 1 (or 2 if it's a cross-class skill) points; he'll have to buy the skill as if he never had access to Hazlik's levels in it, costing him 8 or 16 points!

Expert characters can pick any 10 skills as their class skills, while warriors and commoners use the class skill lists given in their entries in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Here's where the real fun (and, for spellcasters, a possible benefit of the *create faux henchmen* spell) arises: the familiars have access to skills according to their classes even if the skill is forbidden to their master! As an expert, Lurzed is fully capable of taking exclusive skills like Decipher Script, Read Lips or Use Magic Device as class skills even though Hazlik cannot learn these skills at all. (For this primer, Decipher Script and Read Lips were assigned as two of his class skills— skills which Hazlik might want a close and trusted henchman to have.)

Familiars speak the languages of their masters, though there is nothing forbidding a familiar from spending skill points to pick up extra languages. Masters might even encourage this, depending on the situation.

As noted in the *create faux henchman* spell description, familiars also keep all special familiar abilities in their new form except for the species-specific one they grant their masters.

Changing henchman type

The *create faux henchman* spell has a duration of Permanent, but it's possible that a spellcaster might wish to re-cast the spell and reshape his familiar into a new sort of henchman (say, wanting a warrior instead of a commoner, or wanting a henchman of a new race). According to the *Player's Handbook*, a character's new skill point allotment is based on his Intelligence over his previous level (p. 145). If for some reason a familiar has the spell recast on it at a later level, when its Int has improved, the faux henchman's new skills should probably be bought as if the familiar *always* had that improved amount of intelligence. For NPCs, it would probably be easiest to leave them in their current henchman form, with their masters either disguising them with other spells or giving them the benefit of multiple faux henchman castings (as was done for Zaglaive and Lurzed). Should a player character spellcaster wish to reshape their familiar's henchman form, excellent roleplaying potential can arise as familiars are, after all, intelligent creatures—and they may have their own opinions about being altered!

Humanoid and monstrous humanoid forms

Familiars can be given the forms of humanoids that do not belong to the standard player character races, or monstrous humanoids. Use the basic statistics for such creatures giving them the Intelligence and Wisdom of the familiar (plus +1d3 to Charisma), and the Hit Dice and hit points of the familiar (see the sidebar in the *Player's Handbook*, p. 51). They gain the feats of the original humanoid or monstrous humanoid (such as Flyby Attack for a winged creature), but have access to their master's skills. They also get the benefit of the best of the base attack bonus and saves of either their familiar or humanoid form. Skills and feats should be bought based on the *Monster Manual* table "Creature Advancement by Type".

Zaglaive and Lurzed have both fully-human forms along with their humanoid forms through use of the *control shape* spell (*Ravenloft Gazetteer Vol. 1*). Since the *control shape* spell description explicitly mentions that the target "retains its own mind and alignment", they have access to the skills they have in their human forms in their humanoid forms, when applicable. These skills are adjusted based on the statistics and/or size of the new form: for instance, Lurzed's Dexterity-based skills actually go down by one in his toad-man form, as he loses the bonus for his Dexterity of 12.

In the final examples, skills and feats possessed by the original familiar are marked with an asterisk; cross-class spells have the “(cc)” designator. Note also that, as per the original spell description, the characters are always considered magical beasts. Equipment is handled as under the *polymorph other spell*: if it cannot be used by the new form it is melded into the form and nonfunctional.

Zaglaive (Eleni’s familiar)

Male “human” War8: CR 8; Size M magical beast (6 ft tall); HD 8; hp 17; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft; AC 13 (touch 13, flat-footed 10); Atk +7/+2/+3 melee (1d6+1, bladed gauntlets) or +9/+4 ranged (1d6+1, javelin); SQ grant alertness, improved evasion, share spells, touch, empathic link, speak with birds; AL NE; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +9; Str 12, Dex 12, Con 11, Int 9, Wis 14, Cha 12

Hawkman form: Size M; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 20 ft, fly 90 ft (average); AC 13 (touch 12, flat-footed 11); Atk +7 melee (1d4-1, talons) or +3 ranged (1d6-1, javelin); SA bite +1 melee; SQ grant alertness, improved evasion, share spells, empathic link, speak with birds; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +9; Str 9, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 9, Wis 14, Cha 12.

Hawk familiar form: Size T; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 10 ft, fly 60 ft (average); AC 21 (touch 15, flat-footed 18); Atk +7 melee (1d4-2, claws); SQ grant alertness, improved evasion, share spells, touch, empathic link, speak with birds; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +9; Str 6, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 9, Wis 14, Cha 4.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +6 (cc), Climb +4, Intimidate +12, Jump +4, Listen (cc) +6*, Spot (cc) +6 (+8 in daylight)*, Flyby Attack (as hawk-man only), Weapon Finesse (claw)* (as hawk or hawk-man), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bladed gauntlet), Quick-Draw, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse (bladed gauntlet)

Languages: Vaasi*, Balok, Mordentish, Draconic

Signature Possessions: 2 masterwork bladed gauntlets, 6 masterwork javelins

Zaglaive, when encountered in his warrior form, appears to be an unusually tall Rashemani man with dark brown hair, dark eyes, and a larger-than-average, aquiline nose. He does not wear armor (fearing it might weigh him down if he has to change shape), but carries several javelins strapped to his person and wears a pair of bladed gauntlets—he likes the way they remind him of his own natural talons, and Eleni doesn’t mind indulging her dear and useful pet. He would love to have them enchanted if his mistress can spare the time and resources (an interesting possibility for DMs would be enchantments along the lines of the *khopesh of the loyal minion* or *sickle of talons* in the *Arms and Equipment Guide*). He is far more belligerent than most Rashemani, both from his exceptional status and duty to his mistress, and has few qualms about harshly punishing those who cause his mistress trouble. Mulan already scandalized by Eleni think little better of this “uppity” bodyguard of hers.

In his hawk-man form Zaglaive resembles an aarakocra (*Monsters of Faerûn*, p. 11), though his plumage is the speckled brown of his hawk self rather than the male aarakocra’s usual bright colors. He’s been known to make night raids on livestock, particularly on the estates of Mulan who have offended (in his opinion) his mistress. Eleni tries to discourage this—a little bit...

Note: While Zaglaive’s Weapon Finesse (claws) should really only apply to his hawk form, he does get the benefit of his better base attack bonus in his hawkman form.

Lurzed (Hazlik’s familiar)

Male “human” Exp14: CR 14; Size M magical beast (5 ft tall); HD 14; hp 31; Init +0; Spd 30 ft; AC 10 (touch 10, flat-footed 10); Atk +11/+6 melee (1d6, halfspear); SQ grant alertness, improved evasion, share spells, touch, empathic link, speak with amphibians, scry, SR,19; AL CE; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +11; Str 11, Dex 12, Con 11, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 12

Toad-man form: Size M; Init +0; Spd 20 ft, swim 30ft; AC 13 (touch 10, flat-footed 13); Atk +1 melee or ranged (1d6, halfspear); SQ marsh move, grant alertness, improved evasion, share spells, touch, empathic link, speak with amphibians, scry; SR 19; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +11; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 12.

Toad familiar form: Size D; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 5 ft; AC 22 (touch 15, flat-footed 14); Atk -; Face/Reach 1 ft by 1 ft/0 ft; SQ grant +2 to constitution, grant alertness, improved evasion, share spells, empathic link, touch, speak with master, speak with amphibians, scry; SR 19; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +11; Str 1, Dex 12, Con 11, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 4.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +13, Decipher Script +13, Forgery +13, Gather Information +13, Hide (cc) +9 (+21 as toad*, +16 in marshes in toad-man form), Innuendo +14, Intimidate +13, Listen (cc) +10 (+5 as toad*), Move Silently +13 (+12 in toad-man form), Read Lips +14, Search +13, Sense Motive +14, Spot (cc) +10 (+5 as toad*), Swim (cc) +8 (as human only), Endurance, Jaded, Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Hide), Unseen, Weapon Finesse (halfspears)

Languages: Vaasi*, Abyssal, Balok, Darkonese, Draconic

Signature Possessions: Masterwork halfspear (actually a walking stick with a retractable blade built in; see *Van Richten's Arsenal*).

Lurzed has devoted himself to being a spy and information gatherer for Hazlik; his uncanny knack for staying out of notice plus a skill at reading lips has made him invaluable for investigating potential danger to his master (though he is just as often sent on wild-goose chases when sleep deprivation triggers Hazlik's paranoia). When not spying for his master, he is often found (if one bothers to look for him) poring over texts (magical and mundane) or checking on prisoners in the Tables.

In his human form Lurzed appears to be the ugliest Mulan a person will ever set eyes on. Along with his lumpish build, gangly limbs, and profusion of warts, Lurzed's mouth is unusually wide and thick-lipped, and his eyes seem to bulge from their sockets. His tattoos, while not as distastefully effeminate as his master's, look more like simple mottled patterns than the usual crisp geometric designs favored by Mulan men (they are in fact the skin patterns of his toad form). His distasteful appearance is hardly helped by an attitude that somehow manages to be simultaneously cringing and arrogant. Many Hazlani have made scornful remarks (out of earshot) about "Hazlik's toady" not suspecting how unusually apt their choice of words is.

Lurzed seldom assumes his toad-man form (based on the bullywug, *Monsters of Faerûn*, p. 25), although when he does he enjoys taking long swims in the garden pools in Venificus and even occasionally venturing into the rivers south of Hazlik's estate (when given permission). Wild Rashemani tales of an occasionally-spotted "horrible *frødyr*" are generally ignored by the Mulan.

Generally Lurzed avoids combat, though his retractable-bladed stick has gotten him out of the occasional tight spot.

Special Qualities: *Marsh Move (Ex):* In his toad-man form, Lurzed suffers no movement penalties in marshes or mud. *Unseen (Ex):* This feat is listed in *Van Richten's Arsenal*, p. 79. Lurzed also gets a +6 racial skill bonus to Hide in marshy areas when in his toad-man form.