



NEW CHARACTER RACES FOR SAVAGE SPECIES

A *Savage Species* Web Enhancement

The *Savage Species* book offers new templates, prestige classes, spells, and feats. In addition, it contains a wealth of information about how to build and advance monster characters, and even how to transform a standard-race character into a monster character. As if that weren't enough to make it cool, it even presents entirely new player character races—anthropomorphic animals and half-ogres. But those races have level adjustments and starting Effective Character Levels (ECLs), so they aren't appropriate for creating 1st-level characters.

This web enhancement presents two new character races, one of which has a +0 level adjustment, so it can be used to build a 1st-level character. The notes about how these races were built provides a great demonstration of how to evaluate and tinker with level adjustments. That information will prove invaluable when you design new races for your own campaign.

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PREPARATION

To understand the notes on level adjustments, you need a copy of *Savage Species*. Copies of the *Monster Manual* and the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide* are helpful, but not necessary.

CANINE

I love dogs, so let's try to create a humanoid wolf or dog. We already know that we want a +0 level adjustment, so that the race will be usable for making a 1st-level character. From *Savage Species*, we know that avoiding a level adjustment means:

- Balanced ability scores. Refer to Table 2–7: Ability Score Equivalencies from the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide* to determine what constitutes balanced ability scores.
- Medium-size. If some other ability gives a +1 level adjustment, however, it can be cancelled out by making the race Small.
- Speed 30 feet. The creature can have no special mode of movement.
- Natural weapons (and manufactured weapons, if desired). Since our new race is canine, it should have a bite attack, but it cannot have a multiple natural attack routine, and its bite must do damage less than or equal to that of a comparable melee weapon.
- Reach 5 feet.
- Up to two racial skill bonuses
- Up to one racial bonus feat.

A special attack or special quality is almost always worth at least a +1 level adjustment, so we should try to avoid giving our new race any of those. That seems a shame, though, because those abilities are what make a race special. Dwarves and gnomes both get saving throw bonuses and abilities such as stonemasonry that are, essentially, special qualities. Perhaps reviewing those races might spark an idea that would make our race unique without imposing a level adjustment.

So far, we've decided on a humanoid with canine features, probably Medium-size, with balanced ability scores and a bite attack. We could easily envision members of this race as hunters, perhaps nomadic, who spend much of their time in the wilderness. They must be tough, hardy creatures, and their equipment should be useful to hunters.

Next, let's move on to creating a statistics block in the *Monster Manual* style.

LAIKA

Laika was the first dog to orbit the Earth, and her name meant "barker" in Russian. It seems an appropriate name for our new race.

We can just fill in the information we've already decided on in the appropriate spots in our stat block, modifying them for ability scores and other factors as needed. Where a new decision must be made, I'll lay out the available options and then explain my selection.

Medium-Size Humanoid

Hit Dice: 1d8+1 (5 hp)

Humanoids use d8 Hit Dice, so that's already settled. I want a laika to have a single racial Hit Die, so that it can choose to trade that in for a class level, thus gaining all the same benefits that a character would get at 1st level.

Initiative: +0

Speed: 30 ft.

AC: 12 (+2 leather armor, +0 Dexterity)

I assigned typical equipment to laikas, then determined their AC from that and their Dexterity. I chose leather armor because it has no armor proficiency penalty, and no hunter wants a penalty on Move Silently checks.

Attacks: Bite +0 melee, or short sword +0 melee, or composite longbow +0 ranged

Damage: Bite 1d4, shortsword 1d6/19–20, composite longbow 1d8/x3

A humanoid has the same base attack bonus progression as a cleric, so a 1-HD humanoid has a +0 BAB. The laika's bite damage is standard for a Medium-size humanoid, and its weapons are those of a hunter.

Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Qualities: Laika traits

As much as I would love to give laikas the scent special quality, doing so would mean that a 1st-level laika character could detect and possibly pinpoint invisible creatures. Such an advantage would certainly be worth a level adjustment. I could go back and change the race's size to Small, but even a normal wolf is Medium-size, and a Small dog-like humanoid seems sillier than I had in mind. See Laika Traits, below, for what I do want to give them.

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +0, Will +0

Humanoids get one good save. Usually that's Reflex, but we want laikas to be particularly tough and hardy, so I made Fortitude the good save and applied the Constitution bonus to its hit points.

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 11, Con 13, Int 8, Wis 11, Cha 10

These scores give the laika ability adjustments of +2 Con and –2 Int. I think the bonus to Constitution is particularly powerful for a player character race. Every time a laika gains a class level, it benefits from the higher Constitution. However, the benefit isn't not as powerful as a Strength bonus, so I'll penalize only one other ability score. I could reduce Dexterity to balance the bonus, but a hunting creature would surely want the ability to use ranged weapons without penalty. I could also penalize Charisma, but then I would be duplicating the dwarf racial ability modifiers. Therefore, I chose to penalize Intelligence.

Skills: Knowledge (nature) +2, Listen* +4, Spot +2, Wilderness Lore* +3

As a humanoid with an Intelligence score of 8, the laika is entitled to 4 skill points. First I chose the class skills that I figured were appropriate for the laika—the four given above. Then I spent its skill points, purchasing 3 ranks of Knowledge (nature) and 1 of Wilderness Lore. Because it's canine in nature, I also assigned it a +2 racial bonus (see below) on Listen and Wilderness Lore checks. I already plan on giving it Alertness as its first feat, so the bonuses on Listen and Spot checks are included here as well.

Feats: Alertness, Track (B).

A laika is entitled to one feat, and I chose Alertness. I also gave it Track as a bonus feat, since it's a hunting race.

The rest of the stat block is meaningless for characters, but I've included it here for the sake of completeness. To create this section, I copied the information from the wolf entry in the *Monster Manual* but improved the treasure to Standard (reasonable for a humanoid) and set the advancement to "By character class."

Climate/Terrain: Any forest, hills, plains, and mountains

Organization: Solitary, pair, or pack (7–16)

Challenge Rating: 1

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Any neutral

Advancement: By character class

Laikas are explorers, adventurers, and hunters. Laika packs claim territories without regard for conventional political borders, and they roam throughout their lands



in search of game. Although laika bards are uncommon, ordinary laikas love to sing together as a pack after their evening meal.

A laika is the same height and weight as a human, and it ages approximately as fast as a half-orc. Its body is covered with silver, white, black, brown, or reddish fur, and its eyes are blue, yellow, or brown. A laika has a pronounced muzzle, triangular ears set high on its head, and a fur-covered tail.

Laikas are very gregarious among their own kind, but they tend to be aloof when dealing with other races. Once a creature earns the trust of a laika pack, however, it can be informally adopted by the pack and treated as family.

Laikas generally speak Common. Those with high enough Intelligence scores learn the languages of friends or foes in their territories.

Combat

Laikas prefer to attack in numbers and use cunning tactics. Often a few laikas distract their enemies with bow-fire while others slip into ambush positions. Laikas regard biting as uncivilized, so they use their impressive teeth only in ritual combat for pack hierarchy, or when no other weapon is available. A solitary laika usually attempts to escape confrontation unless its opponent is clearly outmatched.

Laika Traits (Ex): Laikas benefit from a number of racial traits.

Balanced Ability Scores: A laika gains a +2 bonus to Constitution and a -2 penalty to Intelligence.

Medium-Size: A laika gains no size bonus to Armor Class, attack rolls, or skill checks.

Base Speed: 30 feet.

Low-Light Vision: A laika can see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, and similar conditions of poor illumination. It retains the ability to distinguish color and detail under these conditions.

Speak with Animals (Sp): Once per day, a laika can use *Speak with Animals* to communicate with canine animals such as wolves and dogs. This ability is innate to laikas. It has a duration of 1 minute (the laika is considered a 1st-level caster when it uses this ability, regardless of its actual level).

Skills and Feats: *A laika gains a +2 racial bonus on Listen and Wilderness Lore checks, and it receives Track as a bonus feat.

Automatic Languages: A laika speaks Common.

Bonus Languages: Dwarf, Elf, Giant, Gnome, Goblin, Halfling, Kobold, and Orc.

Favored Class: A laika's favored class is ranger. A multiclass laika's ranger class does not count when

determining whether it takes an XP penalty (see XP for Multiclass Characters in Chapter 3: Classes in the *Player's Handbook*).

Laika Characters

A laika's level adjustment is +0. Build laika characters just as you would using any standard race from the *Player's Handbook*.

EVALUATION

Evaluating the level adjustment for laikas is pretty easy. As a fighter, a laika gets Track as a racial bonus feat and two more class skills (Knowledge (nature) and Wilderness Lore), but its low Intelligence score combined with a fighter's low skill points balance that out. As a ranger, the laika already has those skills as class skills and the Track feat is redundant. Many laikas probably take levels in rogue, gaining that class's high skill points and using several of the rogue's class skills (Climb, Hide, Move Silently) to hunt. In short, the laika doesn't seem particularly better or worse than the standard races in the *Player's Handbook*, just different. That arrangement was our goal when we set out to create a 1-HD race with a +0 level adjustment.

BUGS

Now let's build a race with a moderate level adjustment. We want the starting ECL to be roughly 4, so that a member of the race with one class level is equivalent to a 5th-level character. Thus, we'll have to balance starting Hit Dice and level adjustments to reach that point.

Most people are either fascinated or repelled by insects, so an insectlike humanoid seems like an exciting vision for this race. It seems reasonable that the creature would have an insect carapace (and thus a natural armor bonus), and perhaps a flying speed. A natural armor bonus of up to +5 is worth a +1 level adjustment according to *Savage Species*. Flight with a maneuverability of average or worse also merits a +1 level adjustment. If we stick to these aspects, keep the ability scores balanced, and look for some small, clever qualities to assign, then this race could start with 2 Hit Dice. If we make the race Small, we can increase the Hit Dice, improve one of the two existing aspects, or unbalance the ability scores. After evaluating these possibilities, I decided to give the creature a poison that affects Dexterity (for a +1 level adjustment).

After assigning these qualities, I came to picture this race as being something like a spider eater or carnivorous hornet. Quick and agile, it prefers to strike quietly from above with its stinger and then withdraw to finish



its now-clumsy opponent with ranged attacks. Being able to visualize the creature and its tactics helps me with the other decisions I have to make while creating the stat block.

After performing the Evaluation (see below), I changed the imago slightly from the description above. If you notice a difference in the stat block, see the Evaluation for why that change was made.

IMAGO

Small Humanoid

Hit Dice: 3d8 (13 hp)

Initiative: +5

Speed: 30 ft., fly 40 ft. (average)

AC: 17 (+1 size, +1 Dexterity, +5 natural)

Attacks: Sting +3 melee, or claw +3 melee, or shortsword +3 melee, or composite shortbow +4 ranged

Damage: Sting 1d4 plus poison, claw 1d4, shortsword 1d6/19–20, composite shortbow 1d6/x3

Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Poison

Special Qualities: Imago traits

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +2

Abilities: Str 11, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 9, Wis 12, Cha 8

I know I want the imago to have a high Dexterity score. According to the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*, I could penalize Strength, Constitution, or some combination of Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma to balance that bonus. A flying creature already has a limit on how much encumbrance it can carry while airborne, so I don't want to penalize Strength. Wisdom controls perception through modifiers on Listen and Spot checks, so I don't want to penalize Wisdom. So I opted to penalize Intelligence and Charisma.

Skills: Hide +8, Listen +3, Move Silently* +8, Spot +3

My vision of the imago as a stalker and a stealthy hunter not only means it needs a high Dexterity score, but also that it has some ranks in Hide and Move Silently. Since it doesn't have many skill points to spend on those skills, I also decided to give the imago a +4 racial bonus on Move Silently checks.

Feats: Alertness (B), Improved Initiative

I assigned Alertness as a racial bonus feat because I feel strongly that all imago characters should have it.

Climate/Terrain: Temperate and warm land and underground

Organization: Solitary, pair, swarm (3–5), or hive (11–20)

Challenge Rating: 3

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Any

Advancement: By character class

Imago are industrious, no-nonsense creatures. Many races find them brusque or out-right rude, but the imago are simply too focused on their current tasks to pay much attention to social niceties. That very focus on work makes them prized laborers in many parts of the world. Imago encountered outside their hivelike villages are often working on contracts in order to bring money back to their homes. On the rare religious or political holidays when they do relax, imago enjoy drinking mead and singing. Bards are always welcome in imago hives.

Imago speak their own language, which is called Imago. To most outsiders, it sounds like the drone of a hornet, amplified to suit the imago's proportionately larger size. An imago that deals with other races learns the corresponding languages if it possess a high enough Intelligence score.

Combat

Imago usually attack on the wing, swooping down on opponents and stinging them. They then fly off, peppering their foes with arrows while their poison takes effect. Imago do not retreat, but they may withdraw from combat long enough to gather reinforcements.

Poison: An imago delivers its poison (Fortitude save DC 11; Constitution-based) with each successful sting attack. The initial and secondary damage ratings are the same (1d6 points of Dexterity damage).

Imago Traits (Ex): Imago benefit from a number of racial traits.

Balanced Ability Scores: An imago has a +2 bonus to Dexterity, a –2 penalty to Intelligence, and a –2 penalty to Charisma.

Small: As a Small creature, an imago gains a +1 size bonus to Armor Class, a +1 size bonus on attack rolls, and a +4 size bonus on Hide checks. However, it must use smaller weapons than humans use, and its lifting and carrying limits are three-quarters those of Medium-size characters. Imago cannot fly when carrying more than a light load.

Skills and Feats: *An imago gains a +4 racial bonus on Move Silently checks, and it receives Alertness as a bonus feat.

Automatic Languages: Imago.

Bonus Languages: Common, Dwarf, Elf, Giant, Gnome, Goblin, Halfling, Orc.

Favored Class: An imago's favored class is rogue. A multiclass imago's rogue class does not count when

determining whether it takes an XP penalty (see XP for Multiclass Characters in Chapter 3: Characters in the *Player's Handbook*).

Imago Characters

An imago has a +2 level adjustment. Thus, an imago character's Effective Character Level (ECL) equals its starting Hit Dice (2) plus its level adjustment (2) plus its class levels.

EVALUATION

The imago's initial level adjustment was calculated as follows:

- +1 for natural armor bonus
- +1 for flight with maneuverability worse than good
- +1 for poison that doesn't reduce Constitution
- 1 for size Small
- +2

Thus, an imago character with no class levels, copied directly from the stat block, should be equivalent to a 4th-level character. I opened up my *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide* to Chapter 2: Characters and found Table 2-41: NPC Rogue to make comparisons. I built the following table for comparison.

Attribute	Imago, No Class Levels	4th-Level Rogue
HP	9	20
AC	17	17
Initiative	+5	+7
Speed	30 ft.	30 ft.
Fly Speed	40 ft. (average)	None
Melee Attack	+2, 1d6 damage	+5, 1d6+1 damage
Ranged Attack	+3, 1d6 damage	+8, 1d6+1 damage
F/R/W	+1/+4/+2	+3/+8/+2
	+8	+10
Listen	+3	+7
Move Silently	+8	+10
Spot	+3	+7
Poison	1d6 Dex/1d6 Dex	None
Racial Bonus Feat	Alertness	None

Even assuming that an imago character would have equipment equivalent to that of any other 4th-level character, it seemed clearly inferior in most ways to a standard-race character of that level. The following options for bringing it into balance occurred to me.

- Raise its Hit Dice. One more Hit Die would improve its BAB and its non-good saving throws, in addition to increasing its hit points. Because of rounding, the poison's Fortitude save DC would be

unaffected. That additional Hit Die would also provide another skill point, but it would not provide another feat.

- Increase the racial bonus to Dexterity. This option would improve the creature's ranged attack rolls and Reflex save. If I made Weapon Finesse (stinger) its racial bonus feat, that attack roll would also improve.
- Add other ability bonuses, or remove the penalty to Intelligence or Charisma. A bonus to Strength would improve melee attacks, a bonus to Constitution would improve hit points, Fortitude save, and the poison's Fortitude save DC. A bonus to Intelligence would increase skill points, and a bonus to Wisdom would increase the Will saving throw bonus and the racial bonuses on Listen and Spot.
- In the end I decided on a combination of increasing the Hit Dice and adding a +2 racial bonus to Wisdom. The resulting comparison was close enough to be worth the +2 level adjustment and the starting ECL of 4.

SUMMARY

I hope you enjoy including laikas and imago in your campaign. I also hope this treatment clarified the process of creating a new player character race. While it is fairly simple, keep in mind the following points.

- A player should never create a player character race without the DM's permission at the beginning and his or her critical review at the end. In general, only DMs should create new races.
- It's much easier to balance races with low or nonexistent level adjustments than it is to do so with higher ones. The greater the level adjustment or starting ECL, the more arguments there are over what the level adjustment and starting ECL should be.
- Always compare your race with others in the game, and with NPCs whose level matches your race's starting ECL. The NPC tables in Chapter 2: Characters of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide* are extremely useful for this.
- Creating a player character race is only the beginning. Once you have the race, you should decide whether it has a patron deity, what its society is like, and whether it uses any race-specific equipment. You may also want to provide some background information or even create a prestige class peculiar to that race, such as the arcane archer and the dwarven defender.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Before Rich Redman came to Wizards of the Coast RPG R&D department, he had been an Army officer, a door-to-door salesman, the manager of a computer store, a fundraiser for a veterans' assistance group, and the manager of Wizards of the Coast's Customer Service department. Rich is a pro-

lific game designer, having worked on the *Dungeons & Dragons* game, the *d20 MODERN™ Roleplaying Game*, the *Marvel Super Heroes™ Adventure Game*, and *Dark*Matter*. When he's not working as vice president of The Game Mechanics, a d20 design studio, Rich does freelance game design, cooks, and performs yoga.