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# Thick-Headed Mage

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Taste the Magic  
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What are they doing in here? An upscale mage's emporium is not the place one would expect to see a couple of goblins. Oh, look at them. They're perusing the wares as if they have a clue as to what any of this is for. I chuckle to myself and continue picking up the components on my list. I give the awful duo no more thought... Until I happen to catch a couple real words among the gibberish they spit and bark to each other. "Echo magic."

You know, the reason that I understood those words is because goblins have no magic lexicon of their own. They steal our words and, as I suspect, they just steal our spells as well. They can hardly figure out how to use a fork and knife, let alone how to channel and convert mana into magical matter. I guess if they were to stumble upon some arcane secrets, they would end up foolishly buying into echo magic too.

Back at the Institute, we call them "dog spells." You see, echo magic is like a dog, you feed it once and it keeps coming back for more attention and table scraps. In the long run, it's a complete mind and mana hog. Of course, in the short term, the spells require very little skill or connection to the land. Now that I think about it, "dog spells" are perfect for goblins – who are just as likely to grovel and bark for table scraps.



You know, there was a time when a goblin mage was a rare thing. These days it seems like they're running about all over the place, lighting things on fire, pretending to be real wizards. The good thing about goblin mages is that they're blundering hacks. Since I am pretty sure that goblins have not evolved mentally, I can only assume that magic has evolved, evolved into something much more accessible – too accessible, if you ask me. Then again, with the timeline looking more like a scribble these days, it could just be that many versions of the same two or three goblin wizards keep popping into the now from one of the infinite thens. I don't think about it too hard; goblin wizards are as unworthy of thought as treefolk sprinters.

But then I walk by the pair and, ugh, the stench. There they are, huddled over the frozen lava beads, stinking up the place. One of them, the one that seems to be the "brains" of the pair, gives the other a sharp smack in the head. I quickly shuffle by with my nose in the air to avoid catching the waft as I pass. You know, if I were to conjure a deathly cloud of noxious gas, it would be because I had made all the proper incantations, traced the proper runes upon the earth beneath my feet, and channeled the power of land and æther to bring forth a controlled plume. All goblins have to do is eat and then wait a few minutes. I am a wizard. Goblins are scum.

As I make my way by, I put them out of my mind. I have work to do and I need not be distracted by their comic wretchedness. Before I can turn to the next aisle, they scurry past me, actually bumping against my leg with their foul, callused skin. What's worse is that they swipe the last of the diamond powder! I quickly recheck my list. Diamond powder. I feel my muscles begin to clench up and my mind cloud with rage. What could these two jokers need mana powder for? Oh, of course, to "feed the dog." There is no way I am going to let them foil my plan just to waste the powder on echo

spells.

"Excuse me, sirs," I say, choking back the bile that slithers up my throat upon uttering the words. "I was just about to obtain this diamond powder when you barged into my leg, keeping me from it."



"Too bad. Too slow," one replies. Then it whacks the other on the top of the head with the pouch of powder. Take a breath, take a deep breath, I tell myself. Control. Intelligence. Success. Rage is for... well, for their kind. I gather my thoughts.

"I am working on a very important summons for a study at the Institute. Without that powder, I cannot complete it. Please," (I want to tear my own tongue out). "Please, let me purchase the..."

About the point where I have a vision of myself gripping a hand saw and raking it across my own outstretched tongue I realize that the foul little duo has already slithered away to pay.

"Sir," I call out to the proprietor. "Please, you must allow me to buy the diamond powder! I will pay double."

"Sorry, sir. I have already taken payment for the powder."

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**RULES**

RULES

Control and intelligence are not bringing me success right now! I pay for what I have already gathered and huff out the door. I see the goblins shambling off down the street. Perhaps control and intelligence did not bring me success here in the mage's shop... my eyes pinch, my brow furrows...but they would undoubtedly do so in a contest of spellcraft. My eyes widen. Yes. I will take the diamond powder from the lowly goblins once I soundly swat them with the power of high magic. I will teach these dogs a lesson about magic you don't find in reeking mountain warrens.

I hustle down the steps and out into the street. I don't want to lose sight of them – they could easily get lost in a crowd of much larger, and less stinking, folk. I take heart in the fact that, should I lose sight of them, I can always follow my nose. The thought was worth a chuckle, but was, ultimately, unnecessary.

They make their way straight out of the center of town and toward the hills in the distance. At this point, I assume that the goblin that keeps smacking the other is the “wizard” and the one with all the scars is the unfortunate pupil. I consider which one I will focus my attention upon once the duel gets heated. In the end, I guess it doesn't matter. The two of them together do not amount to a single human wizard. I have a little chuckle at the thought of how many goblins brains it would take to equal my own. It would be a pile as big as a wumpus, I bet – and that's working on the assumption that their brains are the size of tomato seeds.

When I finally walk them down we are a good mile or so out of town. This is good. I do not want to draw any attention to my little revenge duel. It would not go over well with the others at the Institute.



“You, stop where you are!” I bellow. “I will have my diamond powder now. I challenge you!” These words of challenge are common for wizards – real wizards. They are not hostile, but rather just the invitation to a test of skills. The goblins will probably not understand, requiring a little more provocation. Again, I laugh at myself as I treat these animals as if they were actual learned mages. No matter, this duel will be over soon.

Surprisingly, they seem to understand the challenge. I am spared the humiliation of “speaking their language,” the language of rage and savagery. I delight in the fact that they give me this opportunity to show how a noble mage conducts himself in challenge and in victory.

In pure Institute fashion, I make no aggressive move. Instead, I ready a simple unsummons. The Institute teaches, as I have stated earlier, that control and intelligence lead to success. **Countermagic**, they teach, is the perfect early move. In one simple spell I control the magic on the field *and* I learn what sort of spells my opponent aims to use against me. Control and intelligence. Still, I ready the unsummons. I feel a little sly, given that I already know what sort of spells these hacks plan to use against me. Dog spells. Ha! A simple unsummons can thwart all the plans of an echo mage. While they are busy minding their mana and the spells they have already cast, I can create threats of my own or just sit back and ready another control spell.

I see the two of them bickering at each other. They keep pointing off in the distance then back at me. Finally, the other one gets a whack in the head and he produces a small stick and some other trinkets from a leather pouch. Then they get to work. As they prepare their “magic,” they keep looking over at me, scowling and growling. I am not worried. I assume that it will take these two wickless candles a long time to get to where I have been since moment one. I am sure they are puzzled by the fact that I have not come out and summoned an attacker – aggression and violence are all they know, after all. Besides, I already have the answer before they even produce the question. Still, I watch in amusement as they labor over a summoning circle. I do cringe at the fact that they immediately use up the diamond powder to draw it upon the ground. Strangely, I do not mind. The powder, as it turns out, is not my quarry after all.

They draw the circle, and then another circle inside of it. Then, here's the best part, the one starts jumping and bounding about performing the most crude and, quite honestly, embarrassing summoning ritual I have ever seen. The other one stands close by, shouting... something. Encouragement? Ridicule, most likely.



There is a flash within circle. It burns away to reveal...I'll give you one guess – another goblin. This one is armed with a pointed stick. Ooooh, very frightening. It just goes to show how stupid goblins are. You give them access to magic and the wide world of possibilities it opens and what do they create but the same dumb thing they would be creating on a boring night down in the warrens. I stand tall and show no fear. The new goblin glares at me, then charges as the summoner barks out some buffoonish goblin command. I move not a muscle. I pay the attacker no mind. Instead I watch the mage, waiting for him to jump and bound about again, calling up more mana to feed his attacking dog. Once he does, I will flick my unsummons from the tip of my finger and send it whimpering back to its hole. A-ha, there he goes.

Just for fun, I wait until the goblin gets close enough to really taste its rage. Then, just... when... he... lifts... his... stick. Poof. That was too easy. Maybe I should consider a different tactic for his next

spell. Hmmm... What! Another summoning flash takes me by surprise! I turn my attention to the summoning circle and... how? Another goblin materializes from the flame. How did they channel enough mana? How did they feed both dogs? It must be the diamond powder! That powder should have been mine!



I backpedal quickly. This one does not bother to wait for an attack order. I try to come up with a simple spell I can cast on the run – something that could keep this goblin at bay while I get more powerful magic ready. Before I can think of a proper defense, plain old defense is all I can come up with. I quickly recall my first basic summon spell and, against my better judgment – I speak the word and put my hands together, making the trivial little flapping motion. With little fanfare, it appears. I should be safe for a moment while I find a real answer. The contraption manages to click and grind and flap its wings once or twice before the goblin smashes headfirst into it.

The ornithopter shatters and falls to the ground. Almost without thinking I snap off another unsummons, but not before I feel the heat of another summoning flash. Somehow the goblins are accessing enough mana to stay one step ahead of me. I have to look away a moment, to call up another spell. My mind washes and

I see the faraway seas. I feel their power and I look into their depths. I do not trust what I see. It is not countermagic. It is not divination. It is not even a formidable denizen of air or sea.



With two more goblins barreling toward me, I question not the vision and begin summoning the a **wall of ice**. Before I can cast the spell, before I can even begin feeling the humiliation of summoning a wall, I feel upon my face another flash of heat, and then another. Through the ice's rippling translucence I can see the two goblin forms streaking off to find a way around the wall with two more following closely behind. Then, all too clearly, I see a fifth goblin – a rabid, weathered looking creature wielding a most peculiar implement. I see every detail of the iridescent, multi-lashed scourge it snaps back and forth. I do not fear the creature so much as the fact that my view of it is not diffused by a thick slab of ice. It does not bother to attack me. Why should it, when the other four goblins have just cut straight toward me... now that I am unprotected. I run.



It is a good thing for me that goblins should have such short legs. I outrun them easily. Or maybe they decided to turn to some easier prey, or on each other. Goblins are bullies and cowards like that. Whatever the case, I make it back to town and am clear of danger.

I catch my breath and begin to collect my thoughts. Control. Intelligence. Control. Intelligence. Yes. Yes, I must use what I have learned to take command of my situation. I must take what I have experienced and use it to achieve success. Today I saw the power of echo magic. The others at the Institute will never believe me, not until I can prove it. I will get to that later. For now, I must find some diamond powder. I am sure that it is the key to unlocking this mystery. The goblins stumbled upon something. They bumped into a discovery. Diamond powder has some natural affinity for echo magic. Of this I am sure.

I will study the relationship between echo magic and the diamond powder. I will find and master the secret upon which the goblins stumbled. Then, amid much fanfare and adulation, I will unveil my discovery to the Institute. But first I will seek out the two stupid goblins and use their own trick against them. They will see how a real mage does his work. They will see how a real mage crushes an opponent. They will see me, a man, do this how a real mage does it – alone. Without some sniveling little sidekick to carry my things and feel the back of my hand.

Ah yes. I can see it now. Success.



*Matt Cavotta has always been a fantasy goober. At various points in his gooberhood, he has used his nerdy knowledge to become a professional goober. He went from scribbling pictures of his own D&D characters to illustrating books and cards for his two favorite games; D&D and Magic. Then he channeled his inner 7th level Illusionist/3rd level Bard and landed himself a job at Wizards as a writer. He continues to cast his illusion spells each morning, lest they find out he's just another goober.*



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