A FREE CREATURE KEEPER · LONG ISLAND DUNGEON MASTER

Kes-Trekel

A free CR 1/8 carrion bird of Athas. The flock knows who has lost half their hit points, and it waits for the first one to fall.

CR 1/8 · levels 1 to 3 · one stat block and a d12 · fifth edition (SRD 5.1)

The kes-trekel is the carrion bird of the Tablelands. It stands a foot tall on short taloned feet, with black feathers the sun has turned grey, a wingspan of three feet and a head as red as a fresh cut. One bird is a nuisance at a campsite. A flock follows a wounded party for days.

A kes-trekel finds the dying by the smell on the wind and by eye over the last mile. Inside 120 feet it needs neither, because it knows where every creature is that has half its hit points or fewer. It leaves a creature that can stand alone. It sits where it can watch, and it comes down when somebody falls with nobody above half beside the body.

After 30+ years of running games, I would sooner put a bird that waits in front of a table than a beast that charges.

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The flock

For a party of four, put four birds on the table for each level of the party: four at 1st level, eight at 2nd, twelve at 3rd. A flock picks the party up on any road or flat where something bled in the last day, and it stays.

By day the flock sits 60 feet off, on rock or on a dead tree, and takes what is left lying. Kes-trekel do not fly in the dark. At dusk the flock roosts where it is and is found in the same place at dawn.

How it waits

While every creature in the party has more than half its hit points, the flock keeps its 60 feet and steals.

When a creature falls to half its hit points or fewer, the flock moves to within 30 feet of that creature and keeps within 30 feet of it wherever it goes. The referee tells the table how many birds moved and which character they are sitting round. Nothing is rolled.

When a creature falls to 0 hit points, every bird flies to it on its next turn and attacks, unless a creature with more than half its hit points is within 5 feet of the body. A flock at 30 feet reaches the body in one turn. A flock at 60 feet needs two.

The birds attack an unconscious creature with advantage. A hit on an unconscious creature from within 5 feet is a critical hit, and a critical hit on a creature at 0 hit points is two failed death saving throws. Two hits kill the character.

A bird on the ground flies from any creature that walks at it and settles again 40 feet away. The flock leaves when half its number is dead and does not come back that day.

How to run it

1. Say the number. Count the birds aloud when the party first sees them, and say where they sit. Nothing attacks.

2. Take one thing. At the first rest one bird uses Snatch on whatever was set down. The DC 12 Dexterity save is the first roll of the encounter.

3. Move the birds when the hit points move. The first character to fall to half brings the flock in to 30 feet. Give the count again and name the character.

4. Bring them down on the first body. A character at 0 hit points with nobody above half within 5 feet is attacked by every bird that can reach.

5. Let them go. A flock that has lost half lifts for the day. A flock that has lost nobody is there at dawn.

The stat block

Kes-trekel

Small beast, unaligned. A carrion bird a foot tall, grey-black, with a red head. Challenge 1/8 (25 XP).

AC 12	HP 7 (2d6)	Speed 10 ft., fly 50 ft.
STR 6 (-2) DEX 15 (+2) CON 10 (+0)	INT 3 (-4) WIS 14 (+2) CHA 7 (-2)	Passive Perception 14 (see Death Sense).

SKILLS

Perception +4.

DRAWN TO

The dying, before the dead.

DEATH SENSE

The kes-trekel knows the location of every creature within 120 feet that has half its hit points or fewer.

PATIENT

The kes-trekel attacks only a creature that has 0 hit points, and only while no creature with more than half its hit points is within 5 feet of that target.

BEAK

Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage.

SNATCH

The kes-trekel takes one item of 5 pounds or less within 5 feet of it that is not held or tied down, and flies off with it. If a creature is within 5 feet of the item, the nearest such creature makes a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, and on a success the bird gets nothing.

TACTICS

The flock sits at 60 feet and steals, closes to 30 feet of any creature at half its hit points or fewer, and comes down on a creature at 0 hit points. It leaves when half its number is dead.

Who it's for

Levels 1 to 3. The budget line, run at the encounter calculator: target band levels 1-3; four kes-trekel are raw 100 and adjusted 200 at the multiplier of 2 for a group of three to six.

Four birds against four 1st-level characters are 200 adjusted against thresholds of 100, 200, 300 and 400, a **Medium** encounter. Eight against four 2nd-level characters are 200 raw at the multiplier of 2.5, so 500 adjusted against 200, 400, 600 and 800, which is **Medium**. Twelve against four 3rd-level characters are 300 raw at the multiplier of 3, so 900 adjusted against 300, 600, 900 and 1,600, which is **Hard**. Each figure counts the flock alone against a fresh party. The flock comes down in the round a character falls in some other fight, so run the calculator again with the birds added to whatever put the character down.

It needs no new subsystem. The flock reads a number that is already on every character sheet, and the death saving throw is in the book. It runs on any road in a Dark Sun campaign and under any carrion bird in another.

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What the Party Reaches For

The standard kit against a flock that waits, and the ruling on each.

Standing over the fallen. One creature with more than half its hit points within 5 feet of the body keeps every bird off it. A creature at half or fewer standing there keeps off none.

Walking at them. The birds lift and settle 40 feet farther off. They are back at 60 feet within the minute.

Arrows and sling stones. A bird has AC 12 and 7 hit points, and at 60 feet it is inside the normal range of a shortbow. When a bird is hit the flock lifts and settles 120 feet out, which is long range for a shortbow and a sling, and it returns to 60 feet within the hour. Every bird killed counts toward the half.

A rope and a closed pack. An item roped on or inside a closed pack is tied down and cannot be taken. Securing the whole party's kit takes one minute. A full waterskin weighs 5 pounds: on a belt it is tied, and set down to drink from it is not.

A torch or a campfire. Kes-trekel have no fear of fire. A camp is safe from them from dusk to dawn because they do not fly in the dark, with a fire or without one.

A mount or a pack beast. A kank or a crodlu at half its hit points or fewer is sensed like anyone else, and at 0 hit points it is a body. The flock comes down on the nearest body.

A carcass left behind. It holds the flock until the next dawn, but only when no creature within 120 feet is at half its hit points or fewer. The birds take the dying before the dead.

A tent, a wagon bed. Death Sense finds a character under cover. The beaks do not reach one inside a closed tent or under a wagon, and the birds sit on top.

***Cure wounds* and *healing word*.** A character with 1 hit point is no longer attacked, whether a spell or a potion put it there. A character above half is no longer sensed, and the flock goes back to 60 feet.

***Spare the dying*.** A stable character still has 0 hit points and is still a target. The healer's kit does no more.

***Sleep*.** An average roll of 22 hit points takes three birds. A sleeping bird is not a dead one and does not count toward the half.

***Burning hands* and *thunderwave*.** The birds on a body are all within 5 feet of it, and the body is in the area with them. The damage is one failed death saving throw for the fallen character, or death outright if it equals or exceeds the character's hit point maximum.

***Invisibility*.** Death Sense gives a location. A hidden or unseen creature at half its hit points or fewer is found.

***Speak with animals*.** A bird answers. It says where every creature within 120 feet at half its hit points or fewer is, the party's own and anyone else's.

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The Bird-Keeper

Dreva Kott hatched nine kes-trekel from eggs she took off a crag, and she hires them to caravans as night sentries at 2 gp a night. A wild bird cannot be tamed. A hatched one stays with the wagon it was raised on and squawks at any stranger who comes within 60 feet of it. At dusk hers roost in a row along the wagon tongue, and the drivers sleep. She has a white scar across the back of each hand, and she buys eggs from anybody.

Her line, to a party with a flock behind it: *"They can count. See who they sit by."*

The roost and the trade

The roost. A crag or a dead tree within a mile of where the flock was first seen. Each nest is used for one clutch. Everything the flock has taken this season lies under it, the party's own goods among the pecked waterskins and the bone combs.

The eggs. A nest holds three to six. A cook in Nibenay pays 10 gp for an egg less than two weeks laid and nothing for an older one, and a bird-keeper pays 5 gp for any egg that may still hatch. At the roost the flock attacks any creature that touches a nest, whatever its hit points.

Hooks. A caravan master's watch-birds went quiet two nights ago, and all nine now face the same wagon. A templar's cook wants forty eggs on a table in Nibenay inside twelve days and has paid half the price in water. A flock has sat three days round a well where nobody has been seen.

Where the flock is sitting

Where the birds are when the party first sees them. Roll once, or pick one.

D12	WHERE THE FLOCK IS SITTING
1	**A cairn** of flat stones beside the road, one bird on each stone.
2	**The rib cage of an inix,** picked white, with a bird in every gap.
3	**A dead tree** with no bark, nine birds on one branch and none on the others.
4	**A cart with one wheel,** the water cask gone from its cradle.
5	**The rim of a dry well,** the rope cut and lying in the dust.
6	**A man sitting against a boulder** with his hat over his face, and the birds in a ring ten paces out.
7	**A kank under a saddle** with no rider, three birds on its back.
8	**A road marker of fired clay,** the glaze flaked off the side that faces the wind.
9	**A waterskin lying in the open,** slashed, with birds all round it and none on it.
10	**The air** over a dune a mile to the north, where the whole flock is turning.
11	**A bone spear** driven into the sand, a red rag tied to the haft and a bird on the rag.
12	**The ash of last night's fire,** a mile back, with the flock walking through it.

Long Island Dungeon Master. 30+ years of real tables.

LONG ISLAND DUNGEON MASTER

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