

I have worked myself into a corner

By Holly Lisle

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I've set up this stunning, world-spanning, world-changing disaster, and now I'm looking at the people I have on hand to fight it, and I don't know what they're going to do. It's a game of "Monkey Wins," –humans outnumbered, outgunned, and outsmarted who have to come back and pull it out of the fire or all is lost – only so far I don't see how the monkey wins.

Humans have to find ways to convert their enemies' strengths to weaknesses, while finding ways to use their own weaknesses as strengths, because, frankly, humanity's strengths in this world at this moment are that their cause is just and their hearts are more-or-less pure, and if they have nothing more going for them than that, I can write, "And then they all died badly. The End."

Well, brainstorming time.

The enemies:

1. **Klaue**

Strengths:

- Ruthlessness
- Flight
- Heightened senses and predator genetics
- Ability to breed replacements by class and type at extraordinary speed

- Incredible intelligence of the leader class and top warrior class
- Shared overall goal
- Shared culture, and within classes, shared beliefs
- Deceptiveness, cleverness, and ability to plot far ahead of the game.

Weaknesses:

- Cannot use magic
- Some deviousness between classes
- Cannot breed without a steady food supply

2. **Fleshmages**

Strengths:

- Strong magic that gets stronger as numbers grow
- Shared overmind
- Ability to absorb and convert humans into their ranks, thus adding to their strength
- Obsessive growth/expansion meme linked to individual “downline” power
- Ability to infiltrate human settlements without causing undue notice
- Alliance with the klaue

Weaknesses:

- Druglike side effects of this form of magic – addiction, soma changes, etc.
- Impossibility of getting out once you get in unless your whole upline and downline dies

- Guys at the bottom of the pyramid are very weak
- Guys at the top of the pyramid make juicy targets, and if anything happens to the top guy, power struggles in the downlines can ensue, and defections are theoretically possible

Allies of the human heroes:

3. **Gehrua**

Weaknesses:

- Just about wiped out in klaue genocide
- Torn from Long Sleep (which they needed) in order to save the few survivors
- Emotionless, utterly inhuman, and utterly lacking in honor, gratitude, etc.
- Deadly to their own allies in certain situations
- Vulnerable to klaue predation
- Fickle and untrustworthy, driven only by their needs at all times
- Slow breeders
- Numbers currently too low to perform magic cap spell that once kept the fleshmages in check

Strengths:

- They can change from flesh to spirit forms and back
- They know ancient and powerful magics
- They know a way to keep the fleshmages in check
- Share a single goal and a single culture
- Share the Long Sleep and the Long Dream

And finally, the heroes:

4. **Humans**

Weaknesses:

- Puppy-dumb and trusting at all the wrong times
- Greedy, fractious, squabbling
- Divided in beliefs, cultures, regions, races, languages
- Physically weak, slow, awkward, ground-bound and in other ways limited
- Easy to kill
- Tasty
- Slow-maturing

Strengths:

- Pure of heart and on the side of right
- Not dead yet
- Can do magic
- Have vivid imaginations

And there it is. I see how the monkey wins.