5

Knock!



An Adventure Gaming Bric-a-brac

Being A Compendium of Miscellanea for Use with Old School Role Playing Games



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Knock!

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An Adventure Gaming Bric-a-brac



Art by **Bertdrawsstuff**

by **Josh McCrowell**

Foreword

It is weird (and wonderful!) to be writing an introduction to a magazine that I was in awe of when I read the first issue.

What I like about *KNOCK!* is the same thing that I like about the OSR scene: it's an energetic place where genuinely new and genuinely strange ideas are born. Underpinning the rise of the adventure gaming play style are a hundred mad monks called "bloggers" who have the freedom to throw out weird ideas to see what works and what doesn't. They take each others' ideas, build on them, critique them, and improve them. *KNOCK!* captures this frenetic work.

Indulgently, I included some articles about the state of the OSR union itself in this issue. Forgive my navel gazing; this isn't a permanent new section. But the "classic debates" of the OSR are part of its identity (is the OSR dead?, what does the R stand for anyway?).

If the OSR is dead, it is at least still active (like a shambling corpse or a re-surrected adventurer). New blood has entered the hobby. The adventure game movement has become generational. And with new generations, hybridisation occurs. Novel species of games appear. And the space is expanding! Germs from OSR blogs have infected the far-flung yeast of other game styles.

Ah, you got me monologuing again. All of this only matters only in so much as it helps us play together. The game is the thing. But what a wonderful space to play games, where so much creativity is bubbling.

So let us keep playing together, friends. I hope this book will inspire you to create, to share your creations, and to play.

Thank you all! You're great!

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***The Well of Big Stompa* Postcard by Christopher S.**

Knock! is published by The Merry Mushmen
& Kamchatka Publishing
103 Chemin de Nin, 64240 Urt - FRANCE
www.themerrymushmen.com - olivier@themerrymushmen.com

PROUDLY PRINTED IN EUSKADI!



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The classes and monsters in this issue use formatting borrowed from Necrotic Gnome's excellent retroclone of the B/X rules, **Old-School Essentials**. We cannot recommend this game enough. The OSE SRD at oldschoolessentials.necroticgnome.com/srd/ is a handy resource if you don't have the books.

by **S Christopher Strahm**
Art **François Maumont**

The **Absurd** Heart of OSR Gaming



Let's be honest: old-school roleplaying is ridiculous.

A ragtag group of adventurers—most of them one bad die roll away from catastrophe—dive headfirst into some ancient, trap-laden labyrinth, built by a long-forgotten civilization for no discernible reason other than to be a murder funhouse. They plunder, they bicker, they barely survive, and yet, for some reason, modern gaming insists on treating this setup with an almost reverential seriousness. But if we go back to the roots of the hobby, we find something else lurking beneath the cobwebs and gold pieces: humour.

The OSR's Forgotten Birthright: Chaos and Comedy

When people talk about the OSR, they focus on player-driven problem-solving, deadly combat, and rulings over rules. But the best-kept secret of the old-school era? It was funny. Early gaming wasn't some grimdark, high-stakes saga—it was a chaotic mess of dungeon hijinks, improbable solutions, and characters with names like "Sir Reginald the Flammable."

Dungeon crawls were unpredictable, and the best ones embraced that spirit. Magic items with completely impractical abilities, traps that made zero architectural sense, and henchmen who ran at the first sign of danger were part of the charm. It wasn't a flaw—it was the point. The early days of roleplaying had as much in common with *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* as they did with *The Lord of the Rings*.

But then, somewhere along the way, fantasy gaming got...serious. Worlds became meticulously planned, encounters balanced, and jokes frowned upon in favour of "deep narrative experiences." And while there's nothing wrong with that, it sometimes forgets what made the early days so much fun.

Encounters Should Be More Than Just a Fight to the Death

In old-school play, combat is something you avoid, not the main event. And when things do go wrong, they go spectacularly wrong. Unlike modern editions with their carefully balanced encounters, OSR play thrives on unexpected and, at times, completely absurd situations. Think less tactical warfare, more "we are in way over our heads, and our only chance is to convince the troll we're health inspectors."

Consider these scenarios:

- The party finds a sleeping dragon. Instead of fighting it, they try to recruit it for a multi-level marketing scheme.
- A legendary treasure lies ahead—but first, they must deal with the existential nightmare of explaining it at customs back in town.
- A group of bandits challenges them to a limerick contest instead of a fight.

These aren't just jokes; they're opportunities for creativity. The best OSR campaigns don't just allow for this kind of improvisational chaos—they thrive on it.

Bringing Back the Fun

OSR gaming, at its best, isn't about nostalgia for old mechanics—it's about reviving an attitude, one that embraces chaos, creativity, and, most importantly, fun. The greatest gaming moments don't come from min-maxing the perfect build. They come from the time your wizard pulled a flashlight out of his pack instead of casting light, or when your fighter tried to bluff his way past a horde of goblins by pretending to be their long-lost HR representative.

So the next time your players do something ridiculous, lean into it. Let the dungeon be weird, let the encounters be unexpected, and for the love of Gygax, let yourself laugh. Because if you can't appreciate the absurdity of it all, you're missing half the fun.

by **Ben Laurence**

Ben is the head and hands behind the *Through Ultan's Door* adventure series, of which we Mushmen are **huge fans**. We asked him to share his secrets...

My Process for creating adventure locales

I'm pretty sure my way of doing this is idiosyncratic. For reasons I will explain, it could never work for a "professional" TTRPG writer, someone who mainly writes on commission for other people or who produces game material outside of extended play.

The most important thing to say about my process is that all my writing arises from material that I prepare for play in my own campaigns. This means that when I create adventure sites, the question I'm asking is what sort of adventure site would go in a setting like that? It also means that everything I make is designed for play and arises from the actual necessities of my gaming table.

With these preliminaries out of the way, here are the stages of creation for me. I'm presenting them in faux chronological order, although the process is never so linear.

1. Generate a concept

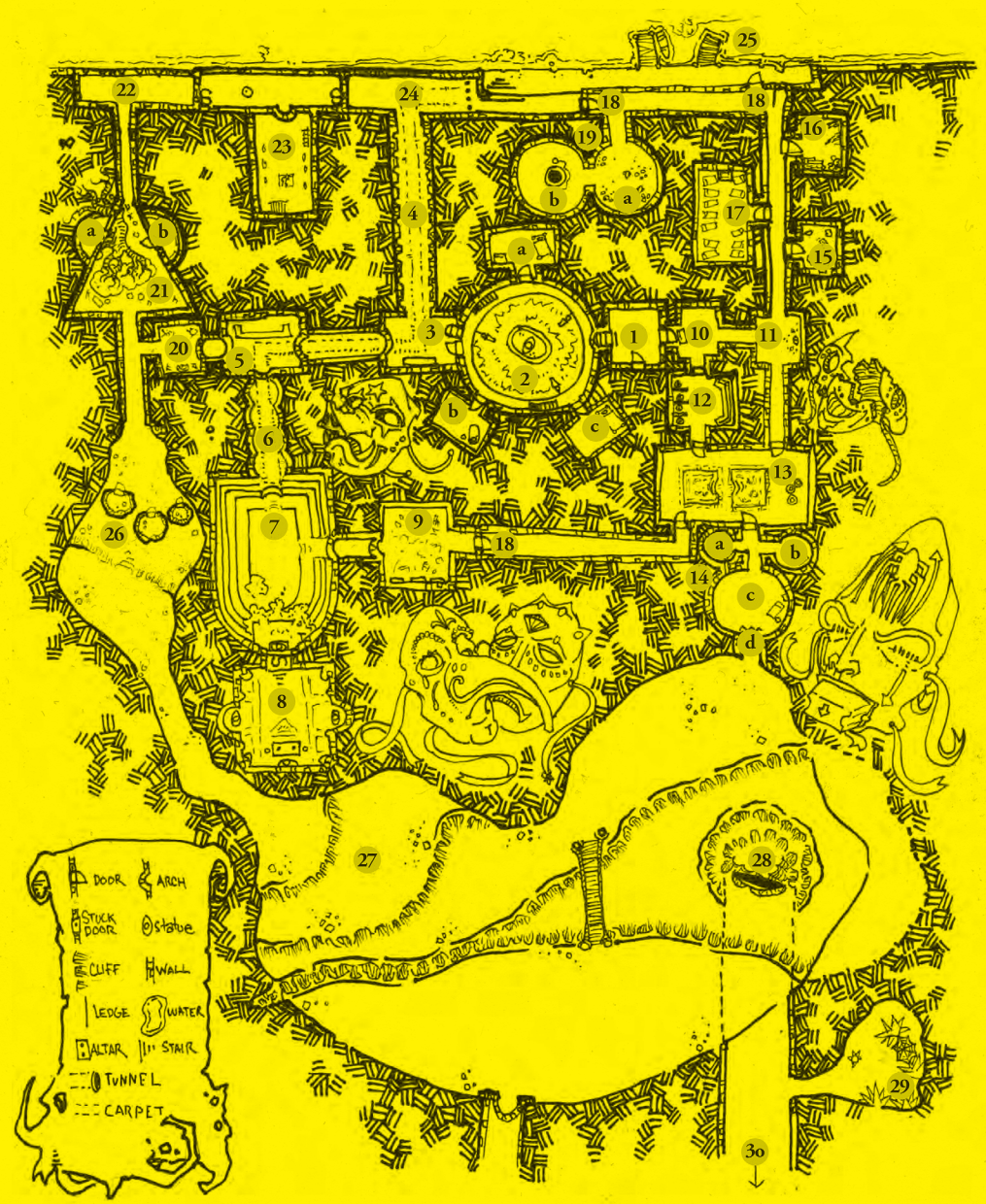
All my adventure locales have a high concept around which they are strongly themed.

The ruins of a puppet theatre where people were punished with trial by puppet. Museum tombs of the butcher priests. The drowned castle of a biomancer. An upside-down jungle teeming with alien life.

If I have two adventure locales, and they remind me of one another in concept, then I work hard to change one of them until they are thoroughly distinct.

Everything is organised around this concept. The concept helps me to imagine the dungeon: its nature, contents, and factions. **It's because I have the concept clearly in view that I can begin to create the locale.** Without it, I'm lost. How do I come up with these concepts? Well, the concept of an adventure locale comes to me as a flash. To that extent, there is no way I come up with them.

Usually, at first, I imagine one or two kernels around which the pearl of the adventure locale forms. For



Find Ben's adventures and zines at throughultansdoor.bigcartel.com/

example, it might be a vision of the approach to the location. Take the chum spouts at the entrance to the Catacombs of the Fleischguild, where effluvia of the endless sacrifices the butcher priests perform in Zyan is disgorged from grimacing stone faces into the sewer river. Jewelled flies swarm across the red slick of chum in which viscera bobs. This was the first thing that came to me when I thought of the concept of the catacombs of the Fleischguild.

Or perhaps I start with the idea of one or two set-piece rooms, like the ruined stage of the theatre infested by white swine, which I think was the first idea I had about the Ruins of the Inquisitor's Theatre.

In each case, this vision came to me because I had a strong concept that suggested them. If there's going to be an abandoned punishment theatre, then of course there's going to be a ruined stage. So that stage needs to be something special and big. Around these starting ideas, thoughts begin to coalesce.

This part is a little embarrassing to admit. But I know that things are going well at this stage if I fall in love with the idea of the place. There is something almost adolescent and melodramatic in this experience for me: I fall into reveries where my mind exults. This is, if I'm going to be frank, the main pleasure I get in prep—and it's a substantial one. When combined with the pleasures of play, it's enough to keep me hooked on running TTRPGs.

2. Draw a map

Since dungeons, certainly, and adventure locales in general, are usually spaces to be explored, for me the map is crucial. I like to draw the map with only the concept and a few rooms in mind. I try to make the map properly Jaquaysed, with multiple looping paths, changes of terrain, and so on. This creates interesting spatial relations between different locations, suggesting locales and tensions between factions, harder to access areas, etc.

Although I'm no artist, I try to make it look visually interesting. I end up drawing a lot of rooms that look kinda weird without knowing yet what exactly might be in them. Sometimes I draw some contents for the rooms, although since I key the map later, many things keyed aren't represented on the map. There's something about these handmade maps that really provides a scaffolding for my imagination. I often colour them using my children's art markers.

If it's a hexmap, I do much the same thing, but this time using Hex Kit. I own ALL the tilesets, so I have a huge array of visually arresting material to work with. Again aesthetic considerations dominate. Since Hex Kit is a digital tool and so easily altered, I find that this process involves a lot more revision as I go.

3. Look at visuals

Often when I'm preparing to stock the map, I gather a trove of images to help me with room dressing, architecture, and encounters. Sometimes I select a real-world artistic movement, e.g., Egyptian Revival architecture or Art Nouveau pottery, to set the tone of the place. Sometimes the work of a single artist is the guiding star of the adventure locale. I also perpetually squirrel away repositories of images, trawling Pinterest or Tumblr or Artstation to add to my different troves. For example, in one trove, I have thousands of images of unique treasure that I have built up for years, so that when I need to place treasure in a dungeon I never have to say something quotidian like "1274 sp and a golden ring.".

4. Draw on memories of place

Besides media, another resource I draw on sometimes to conjure the feel of a place are memories of different places I've been. I suppose the ultimate exercise in adventures rooted in place is Patrick Stuart's *Silent Titans*, that presents a fantasy version of the Wirral. Zedeck Siew has written about this as well in the context of *A Thousand Thousand Islands*. In my own case, my childhood wandering the odder corners of New York City provides a sense of many locales. Even richer material is provided by my decade exploring the labyrinth of fallen splendour vulgarly referred to as "Pittsburgh." I can give an example from my published work: The Catacombs of the Fleischguild is infused with the eerie vibes of visiting the Museum of Natural History with my father as a child. The strange stillness of those dioramas behind glass. The cool air and quietness. The weird greenish, dim lighting. The hall of totem poles. Artefacts of unknown religious significance displayed on velvet cloths. The datedness of the place, as though it had come out of another time. The colonialism that infused it all without context.

5. Key in preparation for play

So far, everything I've described is fun. But I find the initial keying of a dungeon and the initial creation of random encounters to accompany the key just awful. I can usually only do it under the yoke of necessity, desperately, as the players approach. I run out of imaginative steam very quickly. Usually I can do four or five new keyed rooms per session, which is often just enough to stay ahead of the players.

I write up full room descriptions. I try to mention only salient, observable things in the first paragraph. I think of this as putting things on the menu that then players can follow up by asking questions or observing the things more closely. So I keep the descriptions very brief in that first paragraph, only naming the thing, or perhaps mentioning what would first strike you looking at the thing. I save additional information for later paragraphs, following the same order of presentation in the initial paragraph. If I mention the bookcase first in the opening paragraph, then I discuss the bookcase first in the second paragraph.

This structure works for my brain at the table. I can scan the first paragraph easily and describe the room to my players. I can then look down to remind myself what comes next when they follow up on things. Here's a dirty secret: I often literally use the first paragraph as read-aloud text to my players. Yes, I sometimes employ the much-hated read-aloud text. I think it works in my game because the descriptions in that first paragraph are very short and to the point. I try to make them evocative, employing turns of phrase and adjectives that paint a vivid picture where I can, but I keep them very brief. For the great majority of rooms that I don't manage to fully key for a session, I maybe just jot down a few words or a sentence.

When I'm stuck keying, which I very often am, I find it helpful to go for a run. It doesn't work on an exercise machine, which is monotonous suffering that makes thinking impossible. Something about running a route I know well draws me inward and allows my mind to turn creatively. It's almost the only thing that I can consciously do to "force" the issue. I actually do a lot of philosophy when running too, so it works for me for anything that requires creative thought.

My encounter table is similarly created in fits and starts. It begins with four pitiful entries. Maybe the second session it bumps up to five. Finally, four sessions in, I get it up to a semi-respectable six so that I can finally use a six-sided die.

I find this whole process quite stressful. Although I love playing, I hate the prep for playing at this point because it always feels like I'm running something half-baked and I so often come up imaginatively empty. It's primarily this stress, when combined with a couple of sub-par sessions that leave a bad taste in the mouth, that have caused me to back away from running games in those periods where I felt that I needed to take a break. So prep is a double-edged sword.

6. Run it again

At the end of that process, I usually have a dungeon that's about 2/3 written up. Now that I have a rough draft of the key for most of the dungeon, I often run it again for a different group. (I've had three Dreamlands campaigns, two of which are currently running.) At this point, the prep is more leisurely. Each session, I "finish" three or four rooms that are unfinished, or polish something else up, or expand the encounter table by a couple of entries. Since I can just run it without doing much work, this second time through is relaxing and basically stress-free. Prep here is fun again, since I can fill in keys at my leisure and expand on things when it suits my fancy. I also know the dungeon very well and have it at my imaginative fingertips. This is part of the reason that I run my stuff more than once: I get the fun without the stress.

7. Rewrite it for publication

After some time has passed since the second run, I ask myself what would be required to make the adventure location publishable. The main goal of this process is to dial up what's neat about the adventure location to 11. In other words, I try to lean into the concept of the location and what is unique about the adventure. I take the opportunity to remove the things that don't fit with the theme. I also replace the bits that sagged in play with something more exciting that better fits the concept and fix any problems. Often unique mechanics that would support this concept in play occur to me at this point. I also take the opportunity to pep everything up a bit, swapping whatever small bits are mundane with something evocative. There are many little flourishes and new ideas that work their way in here. This part is fun too.

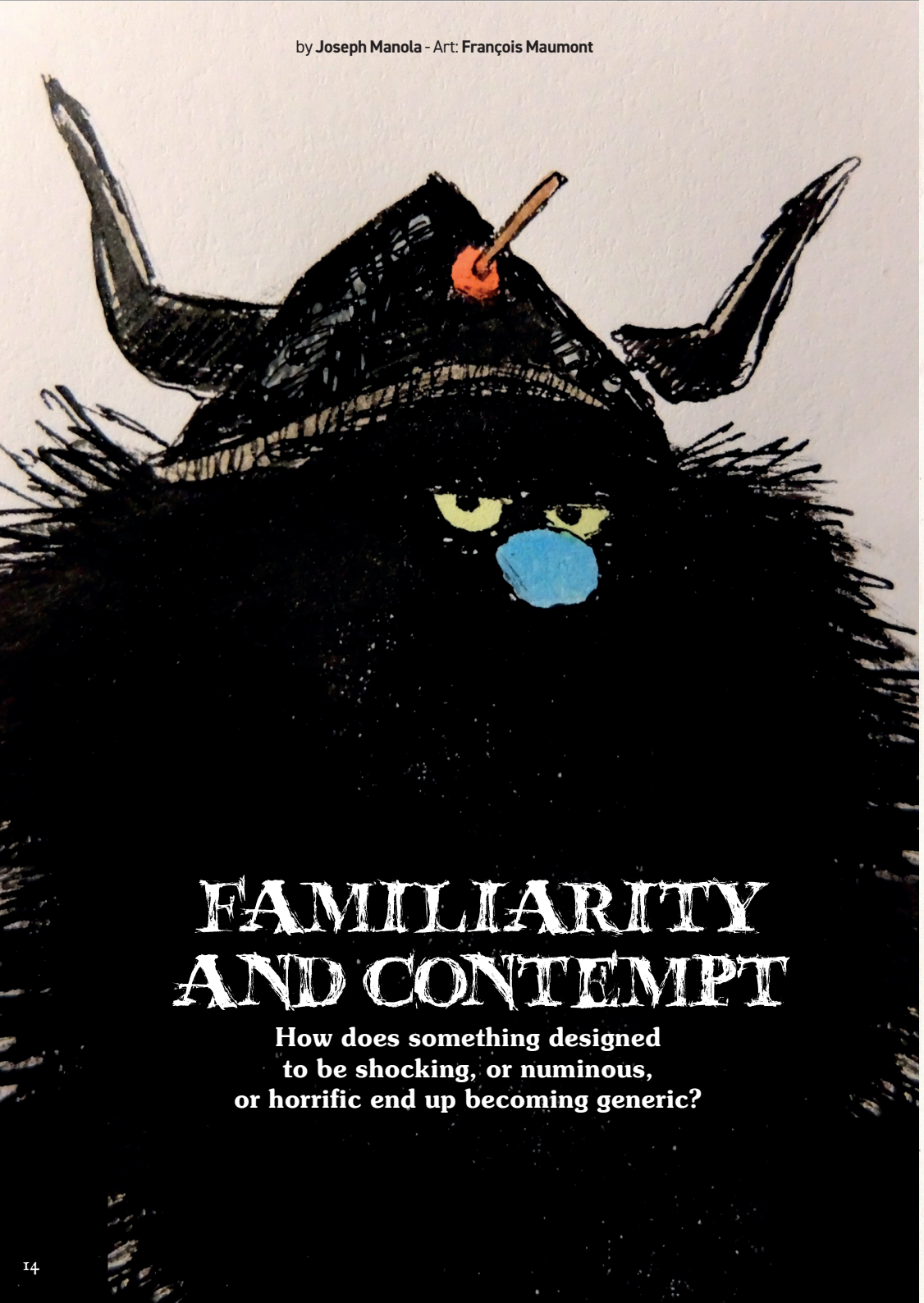
When I start commissioning art, there's also some real creative synergy that emerges. It was Gus L's map of the sewer river that inspired me to really do up the sewer river properly for *Through Ultan's Door* Issue 3. His map threw down a creative gauntlet. Similarly, Huargo's art has led me to subtly shift course many times.

8. Playtest the finished product

Ideally, I playtest it again at this point for a third group. If I were a real professional, I would have other people playtest it for me, since that's obviously the best practice: seeing how well it runs at other people's tables. But I've never done that. Chalk that up to my being a DIY solo author.

That, in a nutshell, is my process.

by **Joseph Manola** - Art: **François Maumont**



FAMILIARITY AND CONTEMPT

How does something designed to be shocking, or numinous, or horrific end up becoming generic?

IT'S ODD HOW QUICKLY WE GET USED TO THINGS.

How the fantastical becomes mundane. How the strange and exotic becomes something we take for granted. Think of the tapestry of wonders which make up a generic fantasy world: beautiful forest-dwelling immortals inhabiting hidden cities of living wood and crystal, clans of industrious craftsmen carving out underground kingdoms beneath the earth, blood-crazed tribes of monstrous green-skinned savages who eat the corpses of their enemies, and so on. These figures are the stuff of dreams and nightmares… and yet if the first line of someone's setting write-up starts talking about how the elves are wise and graceful and the eldest of all peoples, I'll drop it in a heartbeat. It's boring. I've seen it a thousand times before.

The trouble is that this applies to everything. I catch myself sometimes talking about "generic fantasy gods" or "generic elder evils" or "generic horror monsters", and I think: how does something designed to be shocking, or numinous, or horrific end up becoming generic? And yet it does: if I open an adventure module and read about a band of insane sorcerers sacrificing victims to the primordial tentacle-covered slime monster who lives beneath their prehuman temple of black basalt, I don't think *"Gosh, how awe-inspiringly terrible!"* I just think: *"OK, so they're generic fantasy Cthulhu cultists. What else have you got?"*

I distinctly remember the moment I fell out of love with World of Warcraft. My quest required me to obtain some bottles of ice water, and the only way to get them was to kill ice elementals, who sometimes dropped them when they died. So there was my gnome assassin, leaping about with her enchanted daggers, hacking her way through gigantic, roaring monsters of living ice in the depths of a frozen chasm beneath a twilight-purple sky, and it was…boring. The game had taken something fantastical and turned it, through sheer force of repetition, into an interaction with a glorified vending machine. All I cared about was whether or not each murdered ice-beast was going to give me a bottle of cold water. I stopped playing the game shortly afterwards.

It's sometimes suggested that the solution to this problem is simply to be more original: to replace your orcs with walrus-men and your dwarves with miniature robot dinosaurs and so on. But as soon as something like this catches on, it can go from being excitingly new to feeling played-out and predictable within just a handful of years. Look what happened to steampunk: it started to really take off around 2005, and by 2012-ish, it had already hardened into an almost completely predictable list of visual clichés. (Goggles! Corsets! Top hats and bowlers! Clockwork robots! Airship pirates! Gears on everything! Why aren't you excited yet?) Hell, look at what happened to D&D itself: many of the monsters that people now complain about as "boring" and "generic," such as gnolls or drow, were completely new and original back in the 1970s. Originality is a treadmill. Yesterday's shocking new idea is today's mainstream default and tomorrow's tired cliche.

In his 1821 *Defence of Poetry*, Shelley wrote:

[The language of poets] is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension, until the words which represent them, become, through time, signs for portions or classes of thoughts instead of pictures of integral thoughts; and then if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganised, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse.

This, I think, is more or less what tends to happen to fantasy elements. They start off as fresh and vivid symbols for urgent realities, or what Shelley calls "pictures of integral thoughts": orcs were Tolkien's way of articulating the brutalising effects of industrial capitalism, Cthulhu was Lovecraft's symbol for the way in which the cosmos fundamentally doesn't care about humanity, and so on. Then they get popular and become "signs for portions or classes of thought": so Cthulhu gets used as a kind of shorthand for "A BIG SCARY THING THAT MAKES YOU GO CRAZY," because thanks to Lovecraft, we've all somehow come to accept that a giant dragon-man with a squid for a face is an appropriate symbol for that, without it necessarily being connected to any of the things which originally provided the reasons for it to mean that. Soon they become almost entirely symbolic, so a game which features zombies and werewolves and vampires instead of orcs and ogres and dragons will get labelled as "Gothic horror" instead of "high fantasy," even if the horror-monsters never actually do anything horrific, because werewolves and vampires are understood to be symbolic of horror in general. And then we play the game and stab all the vampires and wonder why it doesn't actually make us feel afraid.

When fantasy fails to feel fantastic, I think it's often because its creators use these fantastical elements as shortcuts or placeholders, relying on their inherited symbolic associations to do all the imaginative heavy lifting. They rely on an audience which is going to find the very idea of dragons so awesome that they'll love your story just for having dragons in it, even if your dragons never actually do anything very impressive, or very dragon-like, or even very interesting. But the more familiar your audience is with the genre, the less credit they're going to give your work just for including orcs and elves and whatnot, because for them those figures will be part of a symbolic system which has been drained of all its inherent power by overuse.

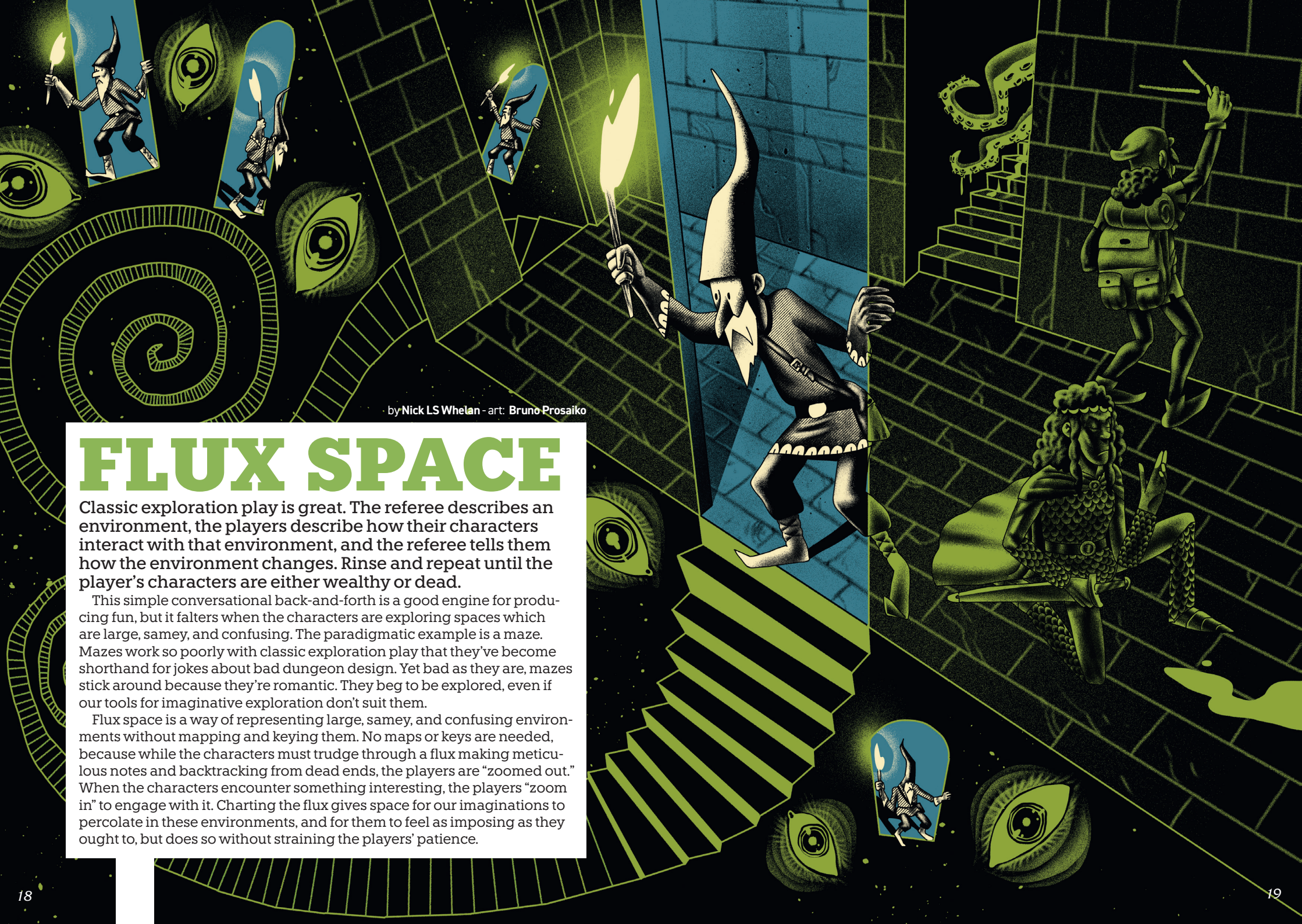
So don't do that. Don't just rely on the fact that something is a troll to convey the fear and the power of it: maybe that would have worked a hundred years ago, but now they've been so drained of significance that your players are just going to see them as big bags of hit points with annoying regenerative abilities. Instead, you have to reconnect them with whatever it was that gave them force and meaning in the first place. "A goblin" is a three-hit-point irritation. A giggling thing with too-long arms and a too-wide mouth and far too many teeth that comes squirming out from under your bed at night to cut you up with knives is fucking terrifying. "An ogre" is a big dumb lump for your PCs to kite around a battlefield. An eight-foot giant who comes clambering from her cannibal larder, her hot breath reeking of carrion, her long hair matted with human gore, still retains some level of nightmarish power. At this point, the names have probably become active liabilities: the howling abhuman beast that roams the wastelands, larger and more savage than any man, becomes much less threatening once it has been identified as "an orc" or "a bugbear" or "a troll." You don't need to wear yourself out trying to come up with totally original, never-before-seen ideas in every damn adventure: after all, the classics are classics for a reason. You just need to make sure that, when you use the classics, you go right back to the source.

Because the stories never truly lost their power. Not really. There's still something magical about the glimpse of the path through the woods at twilight, or the huge figure unfolding itself from the cavern in the hillside, or the whispering and scurrying of swift and unseen creatures in the dark. The shining city on the distant hilltop. The sound of something slow and heavy moving through the forest by night. It would be a shame if we let the overuse of our shared shorthand of fantasy iconography stand between us and the very real wellsprings of awe and terror which are, at base, still represented by those symbolic figures with which we have become so painfully over-familiar.

Orcs. Elves. Ogres. Giants.

eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnéäs
swylce gígantas þá wið gode wunnon
lange þráge· hé him ðæs léan forgeald.





by **Nick LS Whelan** - art: **Bruno Prosaiko**

FLUX SPACE

Classic exploration play is great. The referee describes an environment, the players describe how their characters interact with that environment, and the referee tells them how the environment changes. Rinse and repeat until the player's characters are either wealthy or dead.

This simple conversational back-and-forth is a good engine for producing fun, but it falters when the characters are exploring spaces which are large, samey, and confusing. The paradigmatic example is a maze. Mazes work so poorly with classic exploration play that they've become shorthand for jokes about bad dungeon design. Yet bad as they are, mazes stick around because they're romantic. They beg to be explored, even if our tools for imaginative exploration don't suit them.

Flux space is a way of representing large, samey, and confusing environments without mapping and keying them. No maps or keys are needed, because while the characters must trudge through a flux making meticulous notes and backtracking from dead ends, the players are "zoomed out." When the characters encounter something interesting, the players "zoom in" to engage with it. Charting the flux gives space for our imaginations to percolate in these environments, and for them to feel as imposing as they ought to, but does so without straining the players' patience.

FLUX SPACE PROCEDURE OF PLAY

The party's goal is to work together to find a path through the flux. They do this by **charting**. Each turn spent charting represents about four hours of the company moving carefully, dropping breadcrumbs, taking measurements, making notes, and backtracking from dead ends. This causes **resources to deplete.** Note that, from here on, the word "turn" means a four(ish)-hour travel turn, as opposed to the familiar 10-minute exploration turn. Flux space assumes the game is using an **overloaded encounter die*** . After each turn, the referee rolls the die to represent time passing. At the end of a successful charting action, the company discovers **a point of interest**. Play zooms in for classic-style exploration to resolve the point of interest, after which the players choose how to spend their next turn. Thus **the basic play loop is**:

Chart → Deplete Resources → Resolve Encounter Die → Point of Interest →Choose Next action

Each flux has only a finite number of points of interest. Once all have been discovered, the flux is fully charted and may be moved through more easily.

DEPLETE RESOURCES

A flux is generally a dark place which requires the company to carry portable illumination. Each turn burns down light sources, requiring four hours of torches or other light sources.

Additionally, some fluxes may have special resources the PCs are required to spend in order to chart them. For example, a flux space defined by cliffs or other vertical traversal challenges may require them to deplete a length of rope each time they chart, since they must strategically leave ropes behind in order to create pathways for themselves. Likewise, a flux space that is filled with water might require potions of water breathing to be consumed for each charting action. And so on.

RESOLVE ENCOUNTER DIE

While in a flux space, the referee rolls an encounter die each travel turn. The roll determines what occurs during this turn:

Encounter. While the company is in the midst of their declared action (see below), they run into something. Determine the encounter, as well as surprise and disposition, as you normally would. Play zooms in until the encounter is resolved.

Rest. The company is fatigued and must make a choice: do they rest or press on? Resting means they're unable to perform the action they declared at the end of last turn. Forcing themselves to press on causes characters to suffer a penalty of -1 to hit and damage rolls until they have rested for one full day.

Deplete. Everybody needs to eat! Deplete rations and animal feed for every member of the company. Any ongoing effects or conditions, and perhaps intangible resources such as an NPC's patience, dwindle.

Local Effect. An effect occurs that is particular to this flux. This is discussed in greater detail in "Construction of a Flux."

Encounter Sign. The company receives some clue as to what their next encounter might be. Footprints, the sound of beating wings, a figure spotted at the end of a long corridor, etc. The players might want to track this creature down, or they might wish to take special effort to avoid it. Otherwise, the next time an encounter or encounter sign is rolled, it's an encounter with the creature presaged by this sign.

NPC Chatter. Nothing of note happens, which means that any NPCs currently travelling with the party get bored and express themselves in some way. Perhaps they talk with one another, sing a little work song, or try to wrangle better wages for themselves out of their employers.

POINT OF INTEREST

A notable location within a flux, comparable to a dungeon room. A point of interest might be as simple as a statue the players can choose to ignore, or it might be as involved as a small series of challenges that must be overcome in order for the company to reach the exit. Each flux has two types of points of interest: **shallow** and **deep**.

At the end of each charting action, the referee rolls on a table of the flux space's shallow areas. These are closer to the entrance, and thus are much more likely to be encountered early. After each area is found it can be crossed off the list.

As the company continues to chart, eventually the referee's roll will point to one of those crossed out areas, and the party will discover a deep area instead. Deep areas are not rolled. They are encountered in order from first to last. Once all points of interest have been discovered, the flux is solved, and need not be charted any further.

CHOOSE NEXT ACTION

Aside from charting, parties can also perform other actions in the flux:

Peregrinate — The company moves to any previously discovered point of interest, even from the entrance to the very deepest of the deep areas, if it has been found. Their meticulous charting allows them to travel more efficiently, so they do not need to deplete resources on this trip. They still have to roll the encounter die, though.

Make Camp — Spending more than four travel turns per day on heavy activity counts as a forced march, and characters begin to take penalties. When the company makes camp, one of the players makes a Wisdom check (or equivalent) to find a suitable campsite. Failure means the players must choose between a site that is either exposed or uncomfortable. Each PC then decides if they **sleep** or **take watch**.

- **Take Watch.** If no characters keep watch, all encounter die rolls of 5 (encounter sign) are instead treated as rolls of 1 (encounter). If only one character keeps watch they take a -1 penalty to their hit and damage rolls until they get a full rest. If two characters keep watch together, no penalty is incurred by either.
- **Sleep.** Characters who spend two full turns (eight hours) sleeping may regain spells and remove penalties incurred by not resting.



*Read more about the overloaded encounter die on p. 39!

CONSTRUCTION OF A FLUX

A flux needs a **theme** which describes the space the characters are moving through; NPCs for the company to **encounter**; some **local effects** that can occur; and **points of interest** to discover. As with any aspect of play, it's worth looking for opportunities for **special** considerations, though these are not obligatory.

THEME

Hopefully your flux space is not simply a series of grey corridors. Perhaps it's a maze of stairs which zigzag up and down, or abandoned mines dripping with acidic slime deposits, or a massive clockwork mechanism built by the gods which controls the movement of the stars in the sky. The theme will inform everything else you develop for your flux, and it will also give you something to riff off of at the table. Instead of saying *"After hours mapping corridors and dead ends you find...,"* you can more easily come up with stuff like *"After hours of climbing spokes and avoiding being crushed by the teeth of titanic cogwheels, you find..."* It's a little thing, but it's one of the little things that makes moment-to-moment play enjoyable.

ENCOUNTER

Create a random encounter table for your flux space, using the methods that you usually use to populate it. Rely on your flux space's theme to invent an appropriate environment for your encounter when you describe it, or have suggestions listed along with your encounter entries.

***My Flux Encounters**. I recommend creating a table for each flux space of 2d4 encounters. A wizard should be encountered at a roll of 2. A dragon should be encountered at a roll of 8. (It is always wise to have a wizard and dragon on your encounter tables.) This leaves only 5 unique encounters to concoct. Because encounters will occur in a nonspecific environment, it may be useful to include a location along with the encounter (e.g., "d6 skeletons on a narrow staircase").*

LOCAL EFFECT

This is how the theme is expressed most directly and how the environment resists the company's attempt to control it. Because flux space is explored from a zoomed-out perspective, local effects must have clear zoomed-out consequences. I've been able to come up with four different types of local effects that work well in a flux space:

➤ **Altered Circumstances.** A change that affects all future turns. It might alter what resources are depleted after a charting action or prompt the party to adjust their marching order. For example: *"A fierce wind begins to blow, strong enough to send someone tumbling over the cliffs. Anyone who doesn't tie themselves to the rest of the party needs to make a saving throw each turn to avoid falling to their death. Does the scout rejoin the main group, or do they risk it?"*

➤ **Minor Choice.** Some sort of obstacle which requires the players to choose between two or more costs. For example: *"The corridor ahead is filled with noisemaking traps. If you set them off, a creature encounter is rolled immediately. The company can avoid them all by moving carefully, but this will slow you down and you'll have to roll two encounter dice and take the lower result on your next travel turn. Alternatively, one character can attempt a test to quickly and silently disable all the traps—though failure will count as setting the traps off!"*

➤ **Attrition.** The flux space takes an extra toll on the company. For example: *"A flame trap goes off! Everyone in the vanguard of the party takes 2d6 damage, but can make a saving throw for half."*

➤ **Flavor/Hint**. Something about the environment draws the company's attention without doing them any harm. What they learn may or may not be useful. For example: *"Everyone hears a mysterious voice inside their head. It mumbles something about how red is the colour of vitality, then fades away."*

Local effects ought to be reusable, so having one to three is plenty.

POINTS OF INTEREST

In general, 6 shallow and 3 deep points of interest are usually adequate. This is large enough for a flux space to pose a significant obstacle, without wearing out its welcome. Any bigger and it feels to me like all these areas would be put to better use in a traditional dungeon.

Points of interest are just dungeon rooms. They ought perhaps to have a higher conceptual density than standard, since the flux itself serves in place of empty rooms. All points of interest can accommodate monsters, tricks, traps, treasure, and special contents if you so desire.

SPECIAL

Does charting this flux space deplete any special resources? Is there anyone outside the flux space who might want the party to do something for them while there? Is there any danger which might follow the company when they leave? Do any of the creatures on the encounter table constitute a faction? If so, which point of interest do they live in, and what do they want?



by **Lars Huijbregts** - Art: **Alexey Gorboot**

Why venture into the Dungeon?

Roll d66

Or choose between selfless and selfish before rolling d36. Or select a subheading in yellow and roll d3. Or...

Selfless Motivations

– Honour & Redemption –

11. Traversing the dungeon would restore your clan's honor.

12. A friend of yours perished in the dungeon, and survivors claim their death was a coward's one. You seek the truth.

13. By completing the challenges of the dungeon, you aim to atone for a grave mistake that brought shame upon your community.

– Duty & Punishment –

14. A loved one was condemned to an expedition into the dungeon. You've taken their place.

15. Evil is seeping out of the dungeon. It is your duty to protect the world above and fight.

16. A powerful entity demands reparation for a misdeed done by your ancestors. The dungeon's completion is the price.



Selfish Motivations

– Knowledge & Discovery –

21. A deadly disease ravages your homeland, and ancient texts speak of a cure found within the dungeon.

22. Scholars believe an artefact in the dungeon can bring plentiful harvests and end the community's famine.

23. There are whispers that the dungeon hides the blueprints of forgotten technology that could uplift society.

– Religion & Destiny –

24. A vision from your deity tasks you with retrieving a sacred relic from the dungeon's depths.

25. Prophecies speak of a chosen one entering the dungeon to avert a looming catastrophe.

26. Pilgrims speak of a sanctified chamber within the dungeon, a place of great power, needing a guardian.

– Survival & Protection –

31. An encroaching threat from another realm focuses on the dungeon. You go in defense of your home.

32. Loved ones have been taken hostage, and the kidnappers demand an item from the dungeon as ransom.

33. The village's protective barrier is waning, and the dungeon is said to house its power source.

– Love & Relationships –

34. Your beloved went in search of the dungeon's wonders and has not returned. You go in search of them.

35. An old friend's letter spoke of the dungeon's challenges. Concerned for their safety, you follow their path.

36. Reconnecting with a lost family member hinges upon a task tied to the dungeon's many rooms.

– Fortune –

41. Rumours suggest a gemstone of immense value rests in the dungeon's heart, enough to make anyone fabulously wealthy.

42. You've discovered an old debt contract that promises vast lands and titles in exchange for a unique treasure from the dungeon.

43. An anonymous tip hints that the dungeon hides a pool filled with golden coins, a treasure many deem a myth.

– Fame & Reputation –

44. Stories of the few who've returned from the dungeon alive are legendary. You crave that same notoriety.

45. A group of elite adventurers often boast of their dungeon feats. You intend to outshine them.

46. A famous bard promises to immortalise in song the one who uncovers the dungeon's deepest secrets.

– Knowledge & Discovery –

51. Legends state that an ancient spellbook, granting immense power, is locked away within the dungeon.

52. The dungeon is said to be the final resting place of a lost civilisation. Unearthing their secrets could grant significant influence.

53. Whispers abound that deep within the dungeon lies the knowledge to manipulate time itself.

– Revenge & Justice –

54. A nemesis who wronged you has sought refuge in the dungeon. You'll brave its dangers to settle the score.

55. A group of bandits who harmed your family is rumoured to be using the dungeon as a hideout.

56. The mastermind behind a plot that tarnished your reputation is believed to be seeking power within the dungeon.

– Survival & Protection –

61. You've been cursed, and the only antidote is an herb found in the dungeon's darkest corner.

62. A relentless hunter pursues you, and the dungeon's perilous reputation makes it a good place to hide.

63. Rumours say that a fountain of youth exists within the dungeon, and you seek its rejuvenating waters.

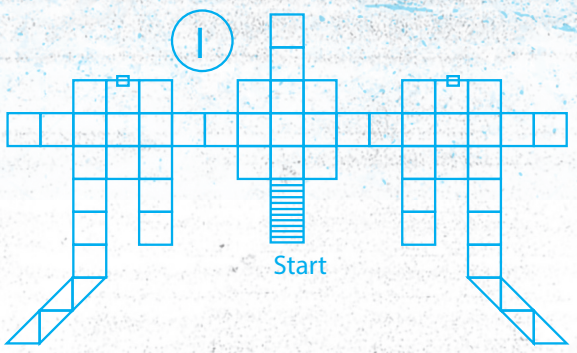
– Love & Relationships –

64. A former lover claims they'll only return to you if you bring them a specific trinket from the dungeon.

65. Winning the heart of someone you admire requires presenting them with a rare artefact said to be in the dungeon.

66. Estranged from your family, you believe that a successful dungeon expedition might earn back their respect and love.

by John Ben Heinl



What Makes a Good Dungeon Entrance

The only thing more important than the dungeon entrance (be it to the mythic underworld or some place more realistic) with regards to setting the right impression is its entrance chamber.

After all, that first chamber sets the tone for the rest of the dungeon. But that raises the question: What makes up a good entrance chamber?

Among the many gems buried in the AD&D Dungeon Master's Guide is an image of suggested start areas for a random dungeon from Appendix A. The one thing each of these starting areas have in common is multiple directions for delvers to choose from.

The first thing that a good entrance chamber should have is **immediate multiple exit options,** be they open corridors, closed doors (locked, stuck, or just closed), or even something else, such as shafts or stairways heading to deeper levels.

The second thing that a good entrance chamber should contain is **something for the PCs to interact with**, such as a pool, statue, shrine, crates under the stairs, or a trap. These options may also provide useful treasure or tangible clues regarding what is to come.

The third and final thing that a good entrance chamber should contain is **evidence of past explorers and/or current inhabitants.** Veteran dungeon delvers know that information is crucial to dungeon mastery, and this opening chamber provides the referee a legitimate place to provide such information to attentive players.

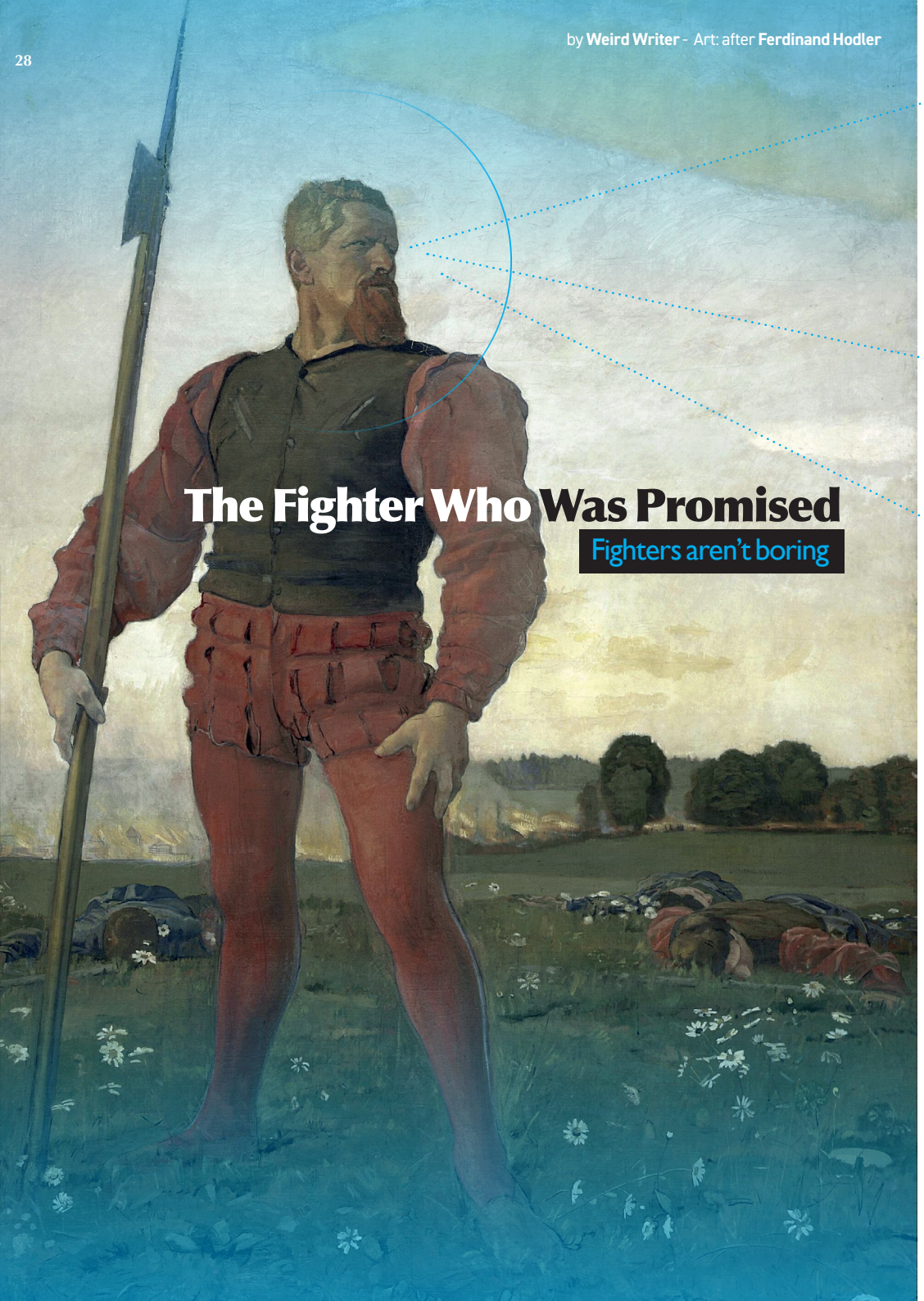
This evidence can be in the form of tracks, graffiti (my favourite), trash, discarded gear, (partial) corpses in various states of decay, odours, sounds, or anything else the referee can imagine—or the dice suggest. Monsters and explorers leave sign or spoor, just like real animals do. And just like real animals, such spoor can be used to track or evade such monsters. All of this shows the players that their PCs are assuredly not alone in the dark tunnels.

For example, I had a dungeon where drag marks and footprints led to an otherwise solid wall, signalling a secret door without actually opening it.

Alternatively, the PCs enter into a chamber to find a shed snakeskin at least 20' long and probably 5'–6' in diameter blocking one of the corridors (the snake used the door jamb as a scrape). Do they harvest the snakeskin, move it and head down that corridor, or go the other way entirely?

In short, use that opening chamber to impress the players and make them want to return next week to explore more of the megadungeon.

by **Weird Writer** - Art: after **Ferdinand Hodler**



The Fighter Who Was Promised

Fighters aren't boring

The Fighter, at first glance, doesn't have specific flavour. They don't seem to have specific worldbuilding implications like the Magic-User or Cleric (although they do). Everyone can fight, but only one is a Fighter. But who's the Fighter, actually? The Fighter is a mixture of many characters. You need to see all of them at once to get why perceived blandness is usually an adventure-design problem, not something that needs to be fixed through extra rules.

The Fighter is Beowulf and other figures of mythological prowess. They reflect that in their stats and saves, as a monster-slaying hero. By level one, the Fighter is already a Veteran, not a random person who picks up arms to face horrors. The greatest comparison regarding this fragment of the Fighter's identity besides mythology is not even Conan, but John Carter of Mars and his eternal pride of swordsmanship.

The Fighter is King Arthur and other figures who seized a throne and domain. They are destined for the game of thrones, represented by their ability of starting a stronghold at any point while other classes must wait. The Fighter goes into the dungeon because the treasure will be channelled into their base of operations from day one, even if it's an old inn, to manage the many hirelings and mercenaries. While the Fighter doesn't need any mechanical changes, you can better reflect this by fixing a bonus for Morale or more followers than other classes.

Why should the hirelings listen to the Cleric's service while they rest, or trust the Thief, or keep close to the Magic-User who performs weird research? The Fighter is their trusted reference because D&D is a storybook world. Why does the fairy-tale protagonist become ruler, bypassing all political considerations? Because that's their prerogative while they exist in the story. Why does the Fighter establish a stronghold even at first level with enough resources? Because they are the ruler that was promised and the campaign is their song of ice and fire.

The Fighter is Elric. Elric's tragedy is the Fighter's class feature: the magic sword. If I could, I would rewrite every rulebook so there's a small note saying, "At level one, Fighters can receive messages in dreams as to where the closest magic sword is." Stormbringer is the clearest model for how magic swords are presented in old D&D. The Fighter is a magic-using class like the Magic-User, the Cleric, and the scroll-reading Thief; they just have their sword cast spells for them instead. Any spell can be a sword power. Elric's pacts can be reproduced by agents of Law/Chaos serving and following the party led by the swordbearer. The sword may indeed be put near places where PCs come from, as a plan by the cosmic forces to grab an agent from that place where warriors seem strangely fated to rule. If alignments are wargame football teams, the swords are scouts looking for talent.

The point being, adventure design for Fighters may expect them to be in a position to represent the party politically (including to monsters from dungeons), be a person of interest to cosmic and planar struggles by retrieving swords (and magical armour to take advantage of that plate thing, and why not a weird mount), and be the figure that hirelings look to for leadership.

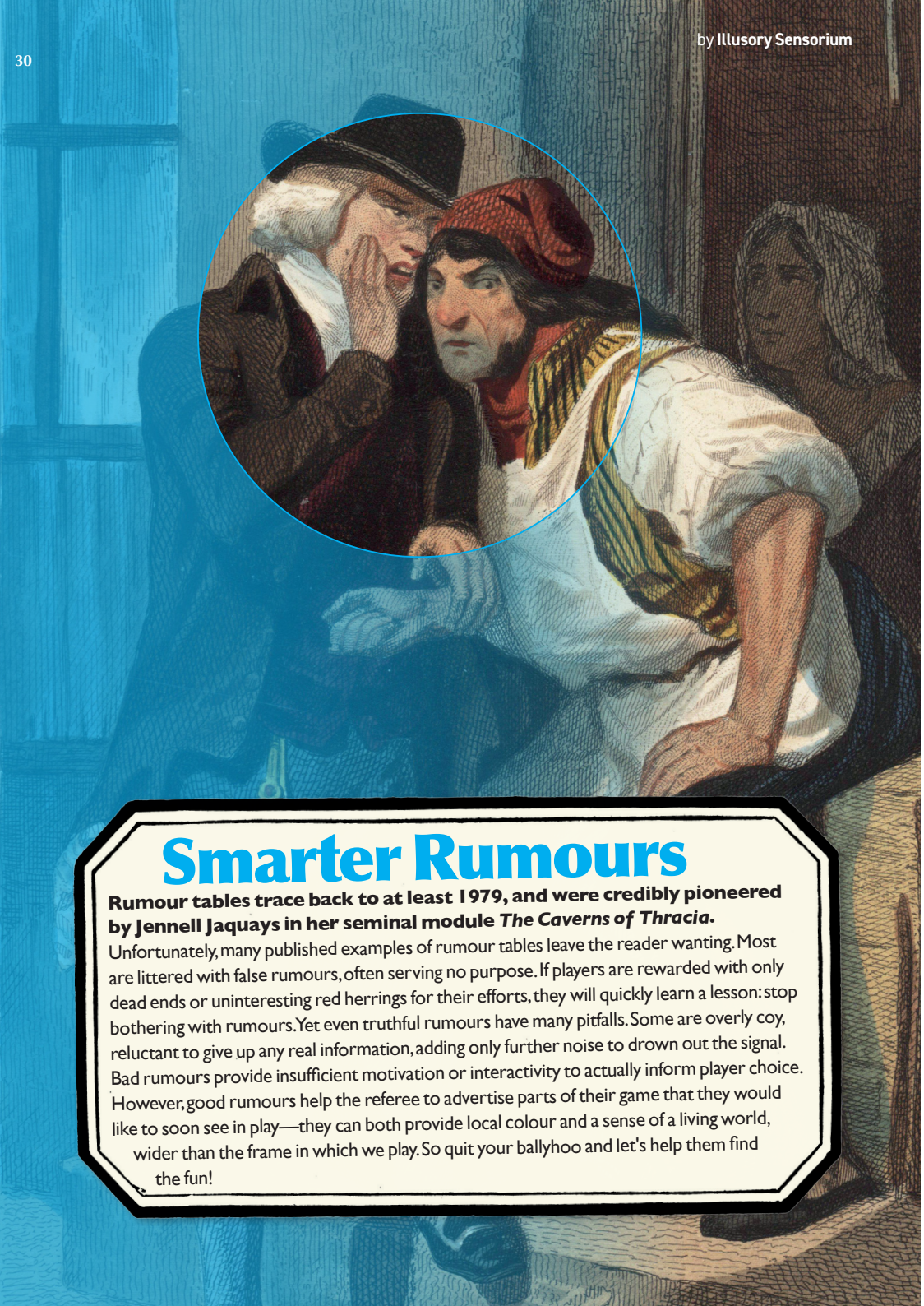
We can structure this as a checklist through levels:

By second level, the Fighter should already have a magic sword and maybe magical armor. The Fighter's level title by third level is Swordmaster in B/X. The course of the second to third level seems enough to master, or at least become famous by carrying, a specific sword. The Fighter should therefore try to obtain it by level 2, ideally. D&D PCs are not level 0, but level 1. It's perfectly feasible to believe the nearby magical sword in a level one dungeon wasn't claimed until a bunch of PCs arrived. Put your plane-aligned big murder knife close to your players.

By third level, the Fighter should be running a stronghold and doing service to a patron who heard of the party's reputation—and naturally approached the warrior with the supernatural blade as the party's representative. If by fourth level they are Heroes, they should already have performed outstanding feats that include some service to big patrons in the region, especially related to alignment issues the patrons themselves have.

Following this, you will have a strong grasp on the Fighter.

by Illusory Sensorium



Smarter Rumours

Rumour tables trace back to at least 1979, and were credibly pioneered by Jennell Jaquays in her seminal module *The Caverns of Thracia*. Unfortunately, many published examples of rumour tables leave the reader wanting. Most are littered with false rumours, often serving no purpose. If players are rewarded with only dead ends or uninteresting red herrings for their efforts, they will quickly learn a lesson: stop bothering with rumours. Yet even truthful rumours have many pitfalls. Some are overly coy, reluctant to give up any real information, adding only further noise to drown out the signal. Bad rumours provide insufficient motivation or interactivity to actually inform player choice. However, good rumours help the referee to advertise parts of their game that they would like to soon see in play—they can both provide local colour and a sense of a living world, wider than the frame in which we play. So quit your ballyhoo and let's help them find the fun!

SMART RUMOURS

Rumours should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timed. Fleshing out a few good rumours ahead of time is far more useful at the table than having twice the number of anaemic and undercooked rumours.

Specific - Consider the journalistic questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? You don't need to give the game away and provide all of these for every rumour, of course, but you need enough of these details that the players aren't left guessing how to pursue it further. We are prone to make rumours terribly vague, but one or two points of specificity helps the rumour come to life and still seem perfectly natural.

Measurable - Ensure rumours lead to a recognisable scene or location, so the source of the rumour is identifiable when encountered. It is generally very satisfying for players to reach a sense of conclusion and be able to "cross-off" a rumour when it has been encountered and resolved.

Achievable - Ensure the rumour affords interaction at the current power and scope of the players' characters, even if it also deals with the matters of monarchs and nations. You absolutely can have tales of an ancient red dragon be uttered in the village tavern, but perhaps the details are that a thief has extracted a sum and lived to tell the tale, and the players could seek the thief out instead (for now). If a rumour leads to an overwhelming threat, make sure that the danger is well-telegraphed, as you would when presenting any dangerous monster or trap.

Relevant - Why would this rumour be known in this place, to these persons, and how and why are they bothering to retell it? Make sure there is a credible means of transmission of the rumour to the town gossiper to help ground your players in the reality of your game world.

Timed - Consider if the opportunity the rumour presents should be time-limited. If the players dally, iteratively re-write it to reflect how the world has dealt with it in their absence.

PUSH AND PULL

Time for the second trick: try pushing these SMART rumours and leads onto the players, rather than just waiting for them to pull on them. Any person they now meet (including monsters with a favourable reaction) is an opportunity to relay one of our rumours; small talk and gossip are grist to the rumour mill. Try keeping your rumour table ready-to-hand, scan it when introducing a character, and provide whichever jumps out as most salient in the moment.

And now that we are pushing anyway, we can go harder: the rumour can become an intrusion. Think about what could be happening locally that doesn't just wait for the players to find it—it comes looking for them first:

- Rumour of increased crime because of a change in thieves' guild leadership? The party gets robbed overnight, but the thief leaves a clue to catching them.
- Rumour of a man-eating giant in the woods? He's just chased a woodsman back to town, and the town is presently in dire straits trying to drive him back off.
- Delectable night-tomatoes grow in the warrens beneath a nearby oak? A pushy peddler accosts the party to buy the last one of the season (he claims) at an outrageous price.

These intrusions should, by no means, constitute a railroad, as we still keep player agency forefronted. Even in a riptide, we should afford them every opportunity to direct themselves.

However, if the players drop the reins and stop actively driving towards their goals, they shouldn't just come to a gentle stop. Rather, they should get swept up in the eddies and whorls of current affairs, entangled in debts and obligations and opportunities.

by **John Ben Heinl**

Magic Items: Quirks & Flaws

Adding flaws, quirks, and imperfections to certain powerful magic items can be fun and interesting if it makes their owner think twice before using them. Either as part of a custom item or merely attached to something from a published source, the following twenty options provide the referee with an imperfect method of balancing otherwise potent magic items.

***Remove curse* spells do not remove these traits** because they are not curses—they do not bind the cursed item to the user, they merely affect the user when the item is used. Successfully unbinding one of these traits typically destroys the item in the process.

Some of these suggestions work better with certain types of items than with others. Mixing and matching these effects can also make for some entertaining items.

1.Exhaustion. Each use of this item causes the user to become exhausted, suffering a -2 penalty to attacks, damage, and Armour Class.

2. Footprints. For the next several hours, the user's footprints glow, sear, form chalk outlines, steam, or otherwise make it readily apparent which way the user went. These footprints remain for the rest of the session.

3. Glow. Using this item places a faerie fire upon the user. This particular version lasts until the next session. The colour of the glow might be dictated by the wielder's alignment.

4. Volume. Using this item either makes the wielder mute or forces them to shout everything. This effect lasts until after the user sleeps for 8 hours.

5. Synesthesia. Activating this item affects the user's voice, and their words come out and appear above them in glowing letters. These words are visible to anyone with eyes, and, of course, the words can still be heard. Shouted words are LARGE AND IN ALL CAPS, while whispered words are far smaller. All of the words glow bright enough to see by.

6. Addictive. Using the item forces a save vs magic item or the user must immediately use it again, even if not a tactically sound move. Each successive save is made at a -1 penalty. The next time at a -2 penalty, and so on. Even when the user successfully saves, the penalty remains. This is how stories of berserkers begin…

7. Senseless. Using the item renders the user temporarily blind or deaf until after they sleep for 8 hours.

8. Reduces stat. This item is powered by its wielder's Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma. Activating the item reduces the appropriate stat by 2d4+1 (or a fixed amount, as you prefer) for the rest of the session.

9. Vulnerability. When carried, this item makes the carrier vulnerable (taking double damage) to 1d6: 1 silver, 2 iron, 3 wood, 4 fire, 5 water, 6 truth. Alternatively, when activated, the user becomes vulnerable to that substance for the rest of the session.

10. Spell immunity. The user is immune to all spells of specific levels (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.). All spells—whether they're helpful or harmful—fail to work on the PC. Discarding the item helps, but the immunity takes a month to wear off.

11. Enraging. All living and unliving things that encounter you are enraged and want to ruin you (physically or in reputation, if they cannot reasonably win a fight). Even allies are affected, but their familiarity allows them a save vs magic item to not attack. Alternatively, this magic item might just enrage beings of a certain race or species.

12. Draws fire. The user mystically draws the attention and anger of all opposing combatants, so when in doubt, they attack the user and try to kill them dead.

13. Magic surge. When used, a blue sphere of light surges out from the user for 60' in all directions. This light sticks to people, and casters bathed in this light not only glow blue, but find that their spells are maximised. They also find that casting a spell causes additional spells to be cast at random, beginning with the highest level spell known by the caster and working downwards. The effect ends after 24 hours.

14. Lucid dreaming. Using this item guarantees strange dreams or visions during the next long rest; even creatures that typically don't dream are affected by it. Some of these dreams are oracular in nature, providing a hint or answer to a current problem. Others are hellish nightmares, forfeiting regained HP.

15. Unlucky. This item is powered by fate. Activating it makes the user roll at disadvantage for the rest of the session.

16. Vampiric. This item is powered by allies' spell slots, luck, or hit points. Never the user, though. Just their allies. If there are no allies to drain, the item fails to function.

17. Magic-draining. This item is powered by other magic items or spell slots. When used, the nearest item loses a charge or becomes useless if a single-use item. If no items are available, the wielder loses their highest spell slot for a month. Should the wielder not have an item or spell, the power is leeched from the nearest such item or caster.

18. Forgotten. With each use of this item's power, a necessary NPC utterly forgets the PC's existence. Family, friends, and patrons—all are eligible. One person forgets per use. A PC utterly forgotten by everyone they know dissipates into nothingness.

19. Haunted. This item has one or more ghosts bound to it; exorcising them probably disenchants the item as well. The ghost might be the creator, the first wielder, or one or more beings slain by it, if a weapon. Of course, each ghost has their own agendas and offers all sorts of commentary on PC activities.

20. Elemental. Activating this item creates a wave of elemental energy that deals damage to all but the wielder in a 60' radius. The element type may be random or may be static due to the nature of the item.

by **Phlox**

Considerations on CURSED ITEMS

Cursed items in dungeon games have sometimes suffered due to the gradual shift of how such games tend to be played. I'm sure it made sense at the time to liberally spike treasure hoards with shields of arrow attraction and swords of *you-have-to-you-use-them and they're -1*, but for many games—even those riffing on old-style dungeoneering themes—it may be good to rethink the approach.

For this new approach, I would like to consider a quite famous magic item, the **One Ring** from Lord of the Rings fame. You could argue it's not even a cursed object at all, being an intelligent item that works as intended in the most straightforward ways possible given the few tools available to it. But that's kind of neat, isn't it? When I think about what's so cool about the One Ring, I consider:

1. It has a strong connection to an important faction
2. It has a powerful ability which turns out to be a minor byproduct of its true significance (invisibility)
3. ...and the ability is useless against powerful members of its aligned faction (Ringwraiths can see you better, in fact)
4. You can study old lore to find out more about it
5. It has a hidden identifier (throwing it in a fire reveals a cool poem that proves what it is)
6. It brings trouble
7. It corrupts the mind of the bearer and those around them
8. It must be destroyed to solve the problems it poses
9. ...but it is difficult to destroy

Generalizing from this method, we can take any useful magic item, like a cloak of elvenkind or a +2 sword or a bag of holding, and answer these questions:

1. This item is important to...
2. It is useful because... (perhaps answered by the item you chose)
3. But it is useless against...
4. You can learn more by...
5. Its hidden identifier is...
6. It brings trouble by...
7. It is onerous because...
8. You can't just throw it away because...
9. You can't easily destroy it because...

To test this out, I will apply the method to a +2 sword, a bag of holding, and, just for a challenge, a wand of light.

THE CAPRINE BLADE

A +2 scimitar of shining steel, the edge curling back like a goat horn

This item is important to the two kings of Capria, rival claimants for a nearby throne.
It is useful because it strikes truer and better than any mundane blade. But it is useless against either king if he can gather the rest of the regalia and sit on the throne uncontested. Then he will be able to commandeer the wielder. You can learn more by consulting frescos and cryptic inscriptions in the tombs of Caprine nobility. Its hidden identifier is shown when the sword is used to injure a goat. The blood turns to bright violet smoke, in which a horned face can be seen.
It brings trouble by focusing improbable and mythic events onto the life of the wielder— kidnappings, crossroad knights, prophetic dreams, affable bandits, and bridge trolls.
It is onerous because it cannot be hidden. The sword is always the most prominent thing in a crowd. You can't just throw it away because both kings' agents search for it, and if one manages to get it he will transform into a horrific goat demon.
You can't easily destroy it because the shards will always find their way to each other again, and in the meantime there will be plagues and curses upon the land.

THE FIRST BAG

A humble sack of sewn lionhide, battered and ragged

This item is important to giants and goblinoids, who consider it sacred beyond reckoning.
It is useful because it can carry any amount of unliving material, including Death himself.
But it is useless against the usurper goblin king Mabdab Boney-Face, a necromancer and warlord par horreur. You can learn more by interpreting the legends of goblinoid shamans regarding the curse Death laid on clever heroine Zheepdeep Skullbiter.
Its hidden identifier is found when it touches a corpse up to three days fresh, which will get up and flee the bag.
It brings trouble by rejuvenating long-dead giants and antediluvians wherever it is taken.
It is onerous because it isn't. When the bag is in hand, it weighs only a little. When it's not close at hand, everything else you're carrying starts to weigh more.
You can't just throw it away because those damn undead giants will seek it out and use it to flood and burn your sinful contemporaries in ultimate generational warfare.
You can't easily destroy it because the one thing you love more than anything is lost within, and to destroy the bag would destroy everything inside.

GATESTAFF

A thick wand of ancient, polished pine

This item is important to the Lightblinders, a society dedicated to freeing a star that was long ago imprisoned within the staff.
It is useful because it can fire a glow that blinds or guides, with many charges.
But it is useless against the Lightblinders, with their searchlight eyes, who ever seek it out.
You can learn more by consulting wizardly royal advisors, the students of the students of those who imprisoned the star long ago.
Its hidden identifier is glimpsed in total darkness: faint writing that glows, warning against "breaking the gate."
It brings trouble by glowing in the presence of those it thinks can bring it closer to its servants.
It is onerous because every time you actually use the wand, consuming charges, you reduce the strength of it as a prison.
You can't just throw it away because it sometimes fires a blazing beacon, using up charges and calling the Lightblinders. A wielder can contest this by strength of will.
You can't easily destroy it because that will free the horrible star from its jail and cause untold catastrophe.

As a parting note, I observe that the plan to destroy the One Ring was based on some pretty clever (dare I say OSR-compliant) reasoning, that the Fires of Mount Doom must have been able to melt the ring because they were hot enough to forge it. Feel free to design special ways of disarming these major cursed objects, but allow for good problem solving as well. These items don't need to radically redefine the aims of the PCs. It's just nice that they might.

by **Alex Dzuricky** - Art: **Gustave Doré**

THE ONLY TWO ENEMIES YOU'LL EVER NEED

I HAVE TWO TYPES OF ENEMIES THAT I FALL BACK ON IF I DON'T HAVE SOMETHING INTERESTING OR APPROPRIATE PREPARED:

A. POWERFUL BUT DUMB

B. WEAK BUT CUNNING



Between those two types, you can create nearly every type of OSR creature challenge you'll ever need. The key is that both types tell you about how the enemy thinks, which is the main thing the PCs must interact with. When you look at a big fancy statblock for some monster from a new school ‹‹Combat as Sport›› game, you don't have any idea how it thinks. Well, pick one of these two.

TYPE A ENEMY: POWERFUL BUT DUMB

I had a party of six different level 1 knaves all on a quest to go hunt down a troll. They were terrified, and the further they got into this quest, the more reasons they discovered to be terrified. The troll has a ton of HP and decent AC, does a lot of damage with a basic attack, but most importantly, is really fucking strong. A player tried chasing it down alone and got a tree thrown at him, shattering his arm. When the party tracked the troll down to its lair, they watched it being awoken by a damn fool NPC knave, whose spine was then compressed like an accordion.

But the players killed the troll with not a single tree thrown at them this time. Why's that? Because they talked to it, and they lied, and they made it angry, and they kept distracting it, and so on. They did everything they could to play on how dumb it was.

MY RULE OF THUMB FOR A TYPE A ENEMY IS THIS: ANY TYPE OF TRICKERY THE PLAYERS ATTEMPT AGAINST IT WILL SUCCEED BY DEFAULT.

TYPE B ENEMY: WEAK BUT CUNNING

The most frequent candidate I use for this type are NPC knaves, because I like to show the players a dark reflection of themselves. Other common choices are any kind of monstrous humanoid, such as frog folk or hobgoblins. The key is that each individual member is either roughly as powerful as a PC, or less.

In this example, I had three different level 1 knaves enter a dungeon that had been set up as the HQ of a band of brigands. Long story short, they had worked their way into the center of the dungeon and had either killed or scared off each NPC they'd come across, funneling all of them towards one corner of the dungeon where their leader tried to coordinate a counterattack. There ended up being a standoff in two dungeon chambers with a closed door in between them. The players were desperately holding the door shut on their side, as were the NPCs. Neither realized that the other was not trying to barge in. But that gave both sides the chance to prepare a surprise attack.

The players lost. They were simply not as clever as the NPCs. When the door swung open, they saw a brigand training a musket towards the ground, and a gunpowder horn rolled to their feet. The gun shot and hit the horn while the door was simultaneously slammed shut. One of the PCs died in the explosion.

MY RULE OF THUMB FOR A TYPE B ENEMY IS THIS: THEY PLAY LIKE AN EXPERIENCED, SKILLED PLAYER WOULD IN THEIR POSITION. RETREAT, AMBUSH, STRENGTH IN NUMBERS, LEVERAGE RESOURCES, AND NEVER FIND THEMSELVES IN A FAIR FIGHT.

by **Brendan of Necropraxis**



Overloading the Encounter Die

The nature of the random encounter check is that of a timer. While it is not a literal countdown (since random results are mathematically independent), it simulates one. It is the danger clock, always ticking, giving meaning to the decision to search (or not), investigate just one more room (or not), or engage in any other potentially fruitful exploration activity.

There are a number of dynamics within the game that seem structurally similar to the periodic encounter check. Randomising when light sources expire has also been suggested in several different places. Many systems as written specify that PCs should rest every sixth turn (though I have never once seen this in practice). *Torchbearer* imposes conditions on characters as turns pass to represent exhaustion and the abstract effects of other dungeon hazards. John B. suggests sometimes interpreting a random encounter as a monster spoor rather than an actual encounter.

Why not put all these things together systematically? Consider the following rule:

When the party moves into a new area or spends time on an exploration activity, roll the encounter die and interpret the results as follows.

1. Encounter
2. Percept (clue, spoor)
3. Locality (context-dependent timer)
4. Exhaustion (rest or take penalties)
5. Lantern
6. Torch

One might object: does this not lead to absurd results such as torches going out on the first turn or PCs needing to rest on the second turn? Well, yes, but you are an intelligent human, so ignore results that do not make sense. A result should be interpreted not as "X happens" but rather as a prompt. A result can be deferred but only so many times. The weight will naturally build up in the back of your mind as events proceed. As a guideline, ignore results above 3 for the first six or so turns.

You could have a general "light source" entry and just pick one light source randomly each time (this has the advantage of not having all torches go out at once), but I prefer to distinguish between the two main types of light sources given their differentiation on the equipment list.

"Locality" is meant to be used for area-specific events that should be kept separate from standard random encounters. Examples: water rising, the stalker drawing nearer, a prisoner losing an appendage to the torturer, doors locking behind PCs, and so forth. The possibilities are limitless and make every location potentially mechanically different in a way that is player-salient.

In addition to streamlining gameplay and decreasing intrasession bookkeeping, such a procedure also decreases null ("whiff") results. Almost every turn result means something. This may or may not always be a good thing. Maybe there is something to be said for not having something happen on every roll. However, given how dungeon exploration tends to play out in real (player) time, I suspect this is about right.

The results table could be replaced with a custom one for a given location, but the above spread seems like a reasonable default to me.

Editor's Note: This post started a very fruitful discussion in the blogosphere (for example, Dungeon Weather on p. 58)! If you're interested in seeing more of this system in action, you can also check out the Hazard System from Necropraxis: https://www.necropraxis.com/downloads/

by **Frank "Mottokrosh" Reding**

No guarantee of gainful investment.

WHAT TO SPEND YOUR HARD EARNED GOLD ON



So you've returned from your latest adventure, laden to the brink with treasure, loot, and uncountable masterwork weapons from your fallen enemies. Only, you suddenly realize that your grimdark fantasy campaign setting doesn't have magic item shops! **Oh no!** If you can't spend your gold on boring-but-solid attribute-increasing items, or exchange your +1 longsword for a +2 one, what do you do with all that cash? Does it even still hold value? Of course it does: there is more to your character than personal buffs. Consider contributing to the world they live in and how they live in it! Here are a few different ways to gainfully invest your treasure. (And yes, several of them improve your stats.)

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT - 1. Improve infrastructure. Drain a swamp, construct a bridge, build a road. Make life easier and better for your homebase. **2. Construct defenses.** Help the town. How about a defensive wall, or even a moat? **3. Clearing.** Clear and maintain explored areas for easier travel. Get to the adventure faster! Tame that nature! 4. **Renovation.** Improve your personal quarters or replace your old furniture. Or how about completely doing up old Windler House that you recently acquired the deed to? **5. Grant asylum.** Build a secret annex to harbour the exiled and wanted Rodewijn Kabouter family. **6. Attract upmarket businesses.** You don't want to wear secondhand cloaks for the rest of your adventuring life, do you? Make the area safe and attractive for Knits & Kirtles, Gowns & Galoshes, or whatever fashionista you visit when in the big city.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT - 1. Proficiencies. Learn a new tool, skill, or language. Be good at more stuff. Train in a new career. **2. Special services.** Purchase services from Halcyon's temple (if not locked in a golden veil) or else the local temple of whatever faintly-veiled Dionysian deity your referee crammed into the setting. **3. Experimentation.** Attempt to create new eldritch formulae for rituals or pancakes. **4. Training.** Get the premium levelling experience with bonuses by training with masters of their arts. Can you convince the paladin Lady Constance to tutor you? **5. Focused training.** Attempt to improve your weaknesses. It's worth a shot. Evade the one-dimensional character stereotype by increasing your dump stat. **6. Recovery.** Found yourself at the receiving end of a debilitating injury or an unexpected addiction? Perhaps the Battle Nuns of the Merciful Sepulcher can treat (or train) you.

LIFESTYLE & REST - 1. Upkeep. Live your non-adventuring life in style. Maybe your referee will speed up your recovery if you hang out in luxurious and clean surroundings. **2. Morale.** Live a comfy lifestyle, and argue that it should give you a bonus of some sort on your next outing. **3. Bribes.** Get special favours in your favourite watering hole. Get your hands on the blessed water before anyone else. Get some alone time with the evil, spellwise villain you've imprisoned. **4. Followers.** You're hiring. Someone's gotta clean that camp, polish your arrows, string your lutes, and massage those tired muscles. Or cook your delicious meals. **5. Taxes.** Pay taxes, tithes, and the local protection racket (if you know what's good for you). **6. Party.** Or party like it's *[insert relevant date and date format for your setting here]*!

EQUIPMENT & UPGRADES - 1. Consumables. Get your curing tonics from the local herbalists' guild and stock up on some of that blessed water. Try all the temples and shrines—their gods might have different interpretations of "blessed." **2. Improve equipment.** Sharpen, strengthen, or add functionality to your war stuff. **3. Poisons**. Get your poisons from the local herbalist's guild. Wait, weren't we just there for tonics? **4. Vehicles.** Purchase or build vehicles. Nothing says powerful wizard like a floating palanquin, or international orc of mystery like a rhino-mounted howdah. Perhaps even a rowboat for easy access to your getaway house on an island. **5. Pets and livestock.** Not just for seasonal holidays. If they're furry, they can keep you warm on those cold nights, or they can be an emergency meal that carries itself. Plus, they probably have a better perception bonus than you do. **6. Presents.** Buy something for your mum, or your party cleric, or the opera singer that can get you the nice seats. Or switch the stick for the carrot with your goblin laborers. Stay sweet with their union.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP - 1. Startup. Start a new business. Perhaps an import/export venture for the basajaun mountain staff and other specialist loot you've collected, and to get ahold of the rare ritual ingredients. **2. Information.** Pay for remote or local research, news, rumours. Knowing is half the battle. **3. Protection.** Ensure the safety of yourself, your business, or your town. Or hire some thugs and sell "protection." Two sides to every coin! **4. Self-publish.** Become a famous rockstar by finally getting your memoirs and/or lyrical masterpieces out to the masses. What do you mean they're mostly illiterate? **5. Museum.** Acquire or renovate a suitable building and start stuffing and mounting all those abominations you've slain, for public display. In return for money, naturally. **6. Hardcore husbandry.** Level up from mundane livestock to the rearing of basilisks or vulgranes. Don't be thrifty when it comes to shepherds, and don't settle for anything less than a tartaro.

by **Ben Laurence**

AGES OF LIFE

WHEN YOU GENERATE YOUR CHARACTER, SELECT ONE OF THREE AGES OF LIFE: YOUTH, ADULT, OR AGING. EACH AGE OF LIFE HAS ITS BENEFITS.



YOUTH – You have the vitality and hunger for experience of youth. You are adaptable and learn quickly like a sponge. But you have not done much in life yet. What you know is mainly what skills your class provides you.

➤ Lower your saving throw against death by 2. + 10% on all experience points gained.

ADULT – You had a trade before becoming an adventurer. The skills from your past life may come in handy from time to time.

➤ Choose a former profession. You are skilled in all matters pertaining to that profession.

➤ Begin with the tools of your trade, whatever those might be. These can be substantial and valuable. A trainer of horses might have a horse, a jeweller might have jewel-cutting tools and a small bag of cut gems, a midwife might carry tinctures, herbs, and other medicinal remedies.

AGING – You had another life before becoming an adventurer. It's hard to teach an old dog new tricks, but you bring more to the table than your younger comrades.

➤ Raise your saving throw against death by 2.

➤ Choose a former profession. You are skilled in all matters pertaining to that profession.

➤ Begin with the tools of your trade, whatever those might be. These can be substantial and valuable.

➤ Begin with one loyal companion. This companion could be an animal, like a hunting dog, trained monkey, or horse; or a human companion: a fastidious butler, bodyguard, thug, or sub-apprentice. If they are an animal, they are attuned to your reactions and cleverly trained to follow simple instructions the way a remarkable dog or horse might be so trained. If they are a human, they may be the equivalent of a skilled hireling. Either way, this companion is utterly loyal and need not make morale checks. Describe the nature of your character's bond with this companion. If they are human, are they your son or daughter? Or a very old friend? Someone who was in your service in the older profession?

by **Ty Pitre** - **Art:** Li-An

RINGING THE BELL

A Simple Reputation System

Imagine a character that has been through it all: hard-fought victories against deadly foes, slaying monsters of legend, delving into depths unknown, and wielding the old magics of the world in the form of their weapons, gear, or arcane trickery. One of the coolest experiences to have at the table with a character like that is when their reputation precedes them. When their titles are shouted out in backwater towns, when the lord of the land calls upon them to solve a problem, when their past catches up to them because it's been hard-won in the crucible of action. There is nothing quite as striking and commanding as a name on the lips of many. Here is a way to handle reputation that's simple to use, player-facing, and has the capacity to twist a reputation beyond the truth of the actual events or how characters want to be known.

▶ The referee sets the fame level

First, you'll need to set the fame level for your game, which will decide the reputation dice size. For a legendary-big-damn-heroes game, use a d6. For a nobodies-in-a-big-world game, use a d20.

▶ Add an exploit

When the group performs a great deed and it is known to the world, record the deed on your reputation chart. Make sure to number it.

▶ Check your reputation

When the group encounters a situation where your past deeds might be known, the referee and players pick up the dice.

The players pick up a total number of dice equal to how many exploits they have. The referee picks up a single die.

Both the players and the referee roll their dice. If the referee's die was less than or equal to the number of exploits on the reputation charter, the group is known. The exploit that matches the referee's die is the one they are most known by.

If the referee's die matches any of the player's exploit dice, one of their exploits is twisted out of truth. If multiple exploit dice match the referee's die, the exploit is permanently twisted out of truth. Erase and record the new version of it.

That's it! One roll determines everything, so the referee doesn't have to reference multiple stories, exploits, and characters.

TWIST TABLE Here's a table of twists to use if you want to randomise that aspect of the reputation. If the exploit already follows the twist, magnify it. For example, a 1 rolled on an already noble and heroic deed becomes the epitome of heroic and noble.

Roll	TWIST
1	The exploit paints the characters in a heroic and noble light.
2	An important element of the exploit is missing, substituted, or subverted.
3	All of the glory is given to a single character as opposed to the group.
4	The proper name of something is altered or changed completely.
5	The location of the exploit changes, for the worse.
6	The exploit is unchanged, but the group themselves are confused as a rival party.
7	The exploit takes on an inappropriate tone that trivialises or satirises the truth.
8	The purpose and reason that the group pursued the exploit is subverted.
9	The exploit has an element twisted that makes the local power hate the group.
10	The exploit is completely inverted.
11	The exploit paints the characters as villainous and dangerous.
12	Roll again, and the exploit is permanently changed on the group's reputation charter.

SOME NOTES: An advantage of this system is that the more exploits you have, the easier it is to be recognized, and the referee can check the reputation charter to see exactly how they're recognized and riff off of that. Also, the more exploits you have, the higher chance you have of your reputation being twisted. As fame spreads and stories spread, they begin to suffer the telephone effect. There is a chance that an exploit can be permanently twisted, and depending on how often you use this reputation mechanic, you could see an entire history of your adventuring party shift so far beyond the truth that the players themselves might forget the real story.

MAXIMUM NUMBER OF EXPLOITS (Optional): If you're running a big-damn-heroes game with a d6 exploit die, you're going to fill your reputation charter pretty fast. Only allow a maximum of 1 less than your die size in exploits on the sheet at any time. So a d6 would allow for 5 exploits max; a d12 would allow for 11 exploits max. This means that there's always a chance that someone just doesn't know who the hell you are. If the reputation charter is filled and the adventurers perform another noteworthy deed, the players can choose to replace an exploit.



by **Ben Robbins** - Art: **James V. West**

BAD TRAP BLUES

"We approach the door."
"Halfway down the corridor, you step on a trap and darts fly out of the walls! The first character in the marching order takes"
(roll roll roll) *"7 damage!"*
(scribbles damage on character) *"Okay, we keep going. Someone open the door."*

I'm willing to bet that in all the hours you've logged in dungeons, you've been in more good fights than good traps. Come to think of it, have you ever been in a good trap, a trap that actually added something to the game?

Why is that, you ask? Bad Trap Syndrome. It's a sordid tale, a dysfunctional love triangle between rogues, traps, and the referees that make them...



ARE YOU A GOOD TRAP OR A BAD TRAP?

Traps fall into two basic categories: zap traps and interactive traps. The difference isn't the kind of danger; it's how they work in play.

A zap trap is over as soon as it starts: it inflicts immediate harm on the intruders (zap!) who don't really get to do much more than make a save or hope they don't get hit. The unfortunate victim steps on something or touches something, and then something falls on them or stabs them, gases them or whatever. Done, move along.

Making zap traps is easy. Just think of what is going to do the messy bit (darts, gas, jets of fire, crushing blocks, whatever) and assign the damage, saves, etc. You can litter a dungeon with them in minutes flat.

They're easy to make, but they're also bad gaming. Zap traps are wandering damage with a pretty description, a hit point tax for walking down the hallway, or (if you prefer) a very short fight where only one side gets to do anything. Just like Action Shticks, if you can't really make any decisions–if you don't interact with the situation–it fails the "is it a game" test. No choice, no game.

Which conveniently leads us to the alternative, the interactive trap. **The interactive trap** creates a situation the characters have to react to. They're trapped in something or being threatened by impending danger or carefully navigating through something, but no matter which it is, they get to make decisions about what to do.

Even the humble 10′ pit can be a minimal form of interactive trap, since if you survive, you probably have to figure out a way of getting out of it or around it, but really juicy interactive traps have things like arrays of idols that shoot different beams out of their eyes when you step on certain squares, mazes of scything blades, etc, etc.

Interactive traps are often really puzzles, even if the riddle the players are trying to solve is just "how do we get out alive." Like any puzzle, it can take quite a bit of thought to design an interactive trap that is challenging but still solvable, not to mention stylish.

ROGUE BUSYWORK

"It's a trap!" — Admiral Ackbar, typical rogue

Now let's say you're the GM. You've worked very hard to make a complex interactive trap. It's a work of art. You've figured out how water, slowly collecting in cisterns, floods the chamber but then drains hours later after the intruders are dead and even raises the fallen block that sealed the room—because any serious trap has to be able to reset, right?

Along comes the rogue. Rogues are supposed to be the guy that finds all the traps and helps the party avoid all that damage. Lo and behold, the rogue can make a roll to find the trap and a roll to turn the whole thing off. Crap.

No referee wants to put all that work into something and then have the whole thing get cancelled by one roll, particularly if you were counting on it to fill play time. It's like skipping a major battle you prepped because someone made a diplomacy check (oh sure, you all have anecdotes about that one time that happened and how cool it was—sheesh, it was one time!). It's just bad design work vs. playtime pay-off.

So you subtly sabotage the rogue. You make it too hard to find the cool trap or you fudge the roll, and even though you are being a rat bastard GM, your instinct is correct: making a roll to skip a whole encounter isn't good game play (being clever and skipping an encounter, maybe, but just rolling clear is lame). If the encounter was interesting, you are skipping the interesting. It's a little like rolling to skip the adventure.

But now you have guilt. You're taking away the rogue's whole thing. Hmm, better give the rogue something to do. Better put in a lot of zap traps in the rest of the dungeon so the rogue can be useful. Now the rogue can remove all the lame hazards that you shouldn't have included to begin with. It's rogue busywork.

The other option is to play it straight and let the rogue bypass the trap you spent all that time on. What does that teach you as a referee? Not to waste your time building cool traps. Next game you just put in more fights instead.

CHOOSE WISELY!

You are in a room. Before you are two doors. On the floor are ancient runes that say beyond one of these doors you'll find the cure to the Bad Trap Blues.

DOOR 1
WRITING A LANGUAGE OF TRAPS

To make more and better interactive traps, we would need a language for traps. D&D has a complex language for combat and critters, but traps just borrow a little piece of it, usually to make more zap traps. When I made the traps for Death of Dr Null, I extended things a little bit and laid out how each trap would operate each round, including rules for traps surprising or not surprising each character—if you're not surprised, you get that much more opportunity to do something before the hammer drops.

A complete trap system would include building blocks for making multiple-step interactive traps the same way the rules let you build elaborate types of monsters or characters, along with a subset of the combat system specifically for traps. What are the species of traps? How do you link these building blocks together to easily construct unique interactive traps? What kind of actions are appropriate in each? What can you do each round?

The other rethink is to change how rogues or anyone else interferes with the trap. If the trap becomes a complex system like combat, then the rogue can serve a prominent role during the interaction without stealing (or cancelling) the show. Much the same way as a big armoured fighter can protect other characters, the thief could weaken elements of the trap even while the party is in the middle of it. Poison darts strafe the party as they thread the idol maze, but because of the rogue's warning, everyone gets a bonus to their save. The rogue doesn't prevent the water from filling the room, but his quick actions partially block the spigots, giving the party more time to escape before the room fills up.

DOOR 2
TRAPS AS ROLE-PLAYING

Like a lot of groups we've been getting back to our roots and playing some old-school Basic D&D in memory of Gary Gygax. We're talking a low-level dungeon crawl, 10′ poles, iron rations, the works.

When I made the dungeon I did something a little unusual: I made all the traps easy to spot.

Yep, no surprise traps. You might not know exactly *what* the trap is, but it is always pretty clear there is something dangerous. It might be the remnants of past victims (a litter of half-melted bones scattered in front of one unusual door…) or some particularly suspicious detail (Why is there an open spiked pit at the bottom of that staircase?).

Part of it is just game world logic: if there are monsters and other people tromping around, the only trap that would still be a hazard is one that resets, which means other things would have been killed before and their remains would still be there. A one-shot trap would have to literally be somewhere no one had ever gone before to still be a hazard. The other part is game balance: low-level D&D can naturally be quite lethal, since any damage roll is a potential instant kill for the average character. The thief? Yeah, he has a 10% chance to find traps.

The interesting part is that removing the surprise and basically announcing there's a trap (for anyone who's paying attention) completely changes the dynamics of play. Instead of being a hit-point tax for walking down the hall, it becomes, well, a game. The players huddle, they have their characters look around, they brainstorm possible dangers and ways to get around them. And since this is old-chool D&D and the no-Spot check rule applies, they really do have to think and ask questions to figure out the problem. Even zap traps become interactive because the players are interacting with them before they go off.

Sure, even with all the time in the world and all the evidence to examine, sometimes they come to completely incorrect conclusions about how the trap will work and walk smack into the buzzsaw anyway ("It's not a door; it's a grey ooze pretending to be a door? Crap!"), but even when that does happen, the players are engaged rather than turned off. Why? They are seeing the results of their decisions (successful or disastrous) rather than being hit with something they couldn't do anything about.



by Dan Phipps

The Monsters' Implied Adventure

As with everything, there's a sweet spot in how much to include in a bestiary entry. An over-described monster becomes unwieldy at the table and a chore to read in prep. Overly minimalist entries provide so little context that it's unclear what value they provide.

The precise location of the aforementioned sweet spot is to one's own culture of play and personal taste. This post is an attempt to provide a framework for reviewing monster descriptions to ensure that everything in ink has use.

A monster description (both in exposition and statblock) needs to be more than a repository of worldbuilding trivia to be meaningful in play. It must be dynamic, evocative, coiled like a spring and ready to launch. The player should intuitively "get it." Every detail you provide about the monster should create possibilities for play.

Below are some ways the described monster can be more than a hazard or an expression of worldbuilding, but a dynamic adventure unto itself.

The Monster as Bounty

The basic premise—monsters are dangerous and someone is willing to pay up to make things less dangerous. Easy to support by simply providing a typical value for removal or extermination that the players can adjust. What is the going rate for a vampire, hunted?

The Monster as Mystery

As a twist, describing the impact monsters have on their surrounding ecosystem and problems caused when settlements encroach on their territory allows for a proper mystery. The bestiary can tell you the wyvern has a penchant for building nests out of human bones. The townsfolk only know their cemetery is being dug up; they don't know why or by whom. It falls to the adventurers to investigate and learn the truth.

The Monster as Treasure

What about when you find the monster before you learn there's a bounty on it? Monsters can be valuable to collectors when captured, ransomed, or butchered for parts. The inclusion of this detail is one of my favourite things about the Mörk Borg monsters. It requires a slightly more nuanced menu, ideally including who wants which monsters for what, and why.

The Monster as Collector

Sure, a given monster may carry a few trinkets on their person, but are you willing to track down their amassed horde? Classic adventure games use random tables to capture this, though simply declaring "Treasure Type C" with no additional context leaves a great deal to the players to interpret. Supplementing a random treasure table with what the monster's lair is like, what they furnish it with, and why gives a much clearer way to turn a random encounter into a possible treasure hunt.

The Monster as Client

Describing a monster's wants, needs, and typical faction affiliations opens up a breadth of complex interactions and ways for an adventuring party to get paid. A monster with its own treasure horde is a monster with an operating budget, able to hire open-minded adventurers to fulfil their own goals.

Checklist

Include as many of these details as possible or appropriate when describing a monster:

- Typical values for the monster Removed, Captured, and In Parts
- Descriptions of the monster's nest, how to track it down, and the value of what you'd expect to find there
- Signs that a monster is nearby, especially common interactions with settlements
- A brief overview on what the monster likes and dislikes. If intelligent, typical faction affiliations. If it has a treasure horde, how much is it willing to trade or offer as reward to adventurers.

Example

Imagine, if you will, a corpse is discovered at dawn: a hunter, shockingly pale and curled in extreme rigor mortis with two clear fang marks near a major artery. A vampire hunter or other charlatan would be talking their way into your town's treasury already, but any competent adventurer would know to look for the signs of the mild-mannered nosferadeer. Resembling a miniature deer, the nosferadeer is a fanged herbivore with a venomous bite that causes paralysis and possibly death if not treated quickly. Skittish, they will flee from most who approach unless cornered or defending their warren.

Fortunately, the antidote for their bite is reliably close at hand—the courmond berry that makes up their preferred diet significantly lessens the potency of their venom, granting the diminutive elk protection against accidental bites from mates and playful young.

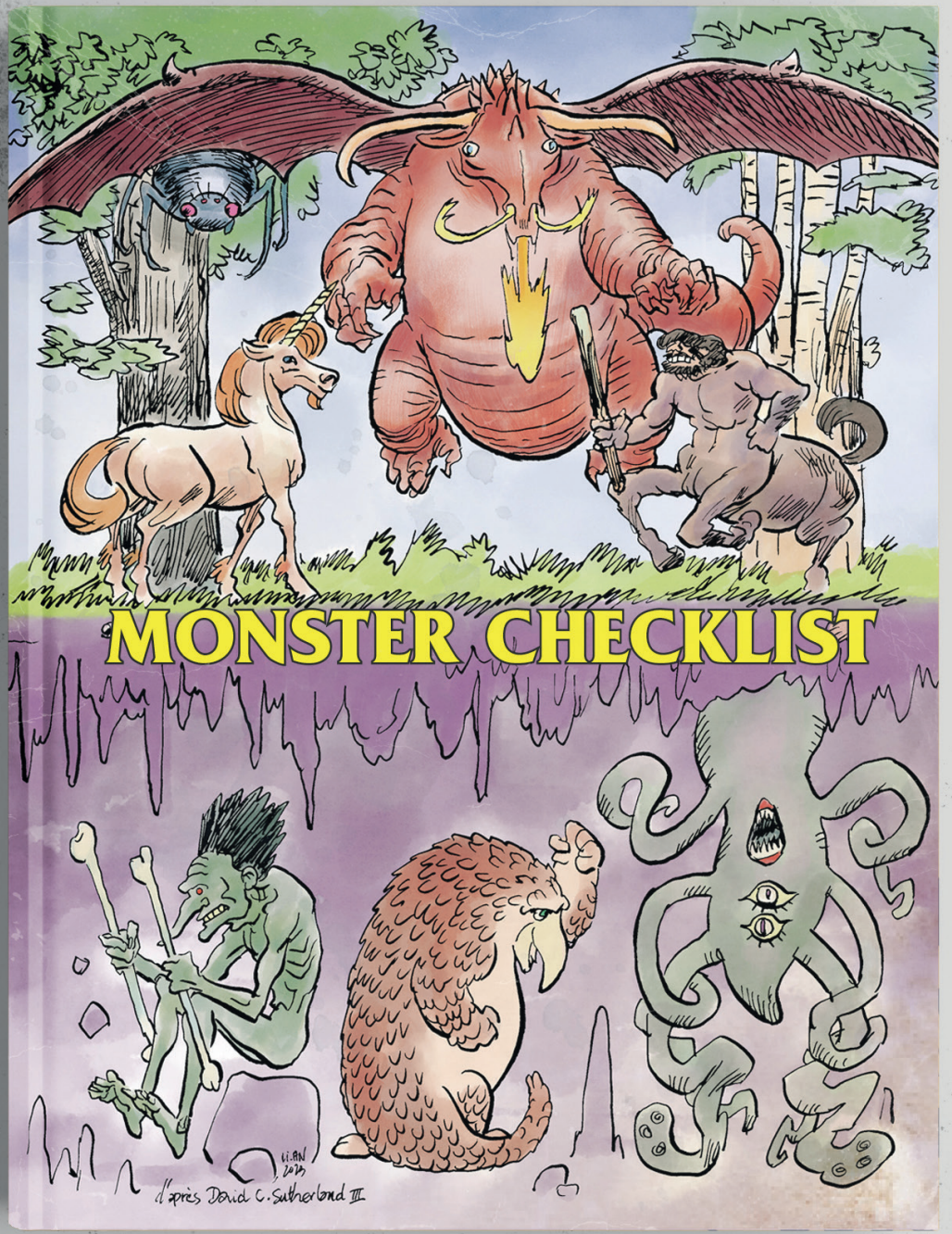
Unfortunately for the nosferadeer, the persistent trail of blood red berry juice does little to improve its perception among skittish locals. Clients will typically pay 50 gold to have a problem nosferadeer removed (1000 gold if they believe it's a vampire and you don't tell them otherwise). Fangs are usually worth 100 gold/pair to alchemists. If captured, a nosferadeer should fetch about 250 gold from a menagerie that doesn't already have one.

NOSFERADEER

AC 7 [12], **HD** 2 (9 HP), **Att** 1 x bite (1d6) + poison, **THAC0** 18 [+1], **MV** 150' (50'), **SV** D12W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 5, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 20, **NA** 1d2, **TT** None

▶ **Nocturnal:** Has darkvision.

▶ **Venomous Bite:** Save vs. poison. On failure, deals an additional 1d6 damage, and no unassisted physical activity is possible for 1d10 hours. Eating a courmond berry cures this effect and grants immunity to the venom for 1 day.



by **Arnold K.** Art: **Li-An**

So you're writing up a new monster. That's great! Here's a CHECKLIST to make sure that you've written a good one:

☐ The concept should be unique, compelling, and communicable

You probably have a lot of concepts in your head, but which ones make for good monsters?

You want something that is different from what your players have already encountered (unique), you want it to be cool enough to hold their attention (compelling), and you want it to be something that you can describe (communicable).

Like, a lot of Lovecraftian monster concepts will fulfill the first two requirements, but if you can't describe how it looks and fights, it'll just be a blob of hit points to your players. (Minis assist with, but don't negate, this requirement.)

The best monsters are the ones that can be conceptualized in a single sentence, even though you can spend additional sentences embroidering it.

☐ The monster must be fun to fight

We're talking about monsters, so combat is likely to be involved. Your monster must be fun to fight. So let's talk about the things that make combat fun: abilities, tactics, interesting environments, and weaknesses.

You don't need to have all of these, but you should try to hit most of them when possible.

▸ **Abilities should be appropriate, novel, and dynamic**

By "appropriate," I mean that the mechanical representation should match the fiction. At a basic level, fire breath should do fire damage, but does a ghost hammer deal bludgeoning or force damage? You have a lot of leeway here, so get creative. Players appreciate when a mechanic is especially, cutely appropriate, but it's not a requirement.

By "novel," I mean that you should try to give them something that they haven't seen before. If you're writing an adventure, you need to make sure that there is good differentiation between your concepts.

And by "dynamic," I mean that the abilities should push players into interesting decisions. Fire breath is cool and threatening, but it's not dynamic. The players just take the damage and keep on trucking—there's no choices to make. *Wall of fire* is more dynamic, because now the party is split and they have to make interesting choices about whether or not to jump through the wall of fire or wait for it to dissipate.

▸ **Tactics should also be appropriate, novel, and dynamic**

You don't need cool abilities to have a cool encounter. Different monsters in your dungeon should have different motivations for opposing you (food? defense?), different roles within combat (hit and run? blind aggression?), different combat goals (eat you? rob you? escape?), and different levels of commitment to combat (morale). So your goblins and your barbarians might feel very different, even though they have the same stats.

Simple things like modes of movement and attack can also suggest interesting tactics. For example, a flying skeleton archer doesn't need any special abilities because you already know that the players will have to come up with new tactics to defeat them (compared to fighting regular skeletons).

▸ **Environments should also be appropriate, dynamic, or interactive**

You could argue that this belongs in the adventure design section instead of the monster design section, but the two are interrelated. Combat should never take place in a featureless white room, and certain monsters are more likely to be found in certain locations.

The environment for flying skeleton archers might be a lonely clifftop where sky burials were practiced. Or it might be an ancient bridge where the bird cult threw down sacrifices. Or it might be deep in the catacombs, with bone "nests" built high up on the walls.

Interactivity comes from hazards and difficult terrain, but it also comes from advantages: cover, chokepoints, hiding places. Also explore verticality: stairs, levels, half-levels, ladders, pits, steep slopes, and pools.

Consider how the environment affects an encounter. A low roof makes a flying skeleton archer much easier to defeat. Conversely, if the room has a high ceiling and is bisected by a pit, flying skeleton archers are much more threatening.

▸ **Every monster needs weaknesses (either implied or explicit)**

If no monsters have weaknesses, the players will use the same offensive tactics to kill them every time. These weaknesses can be implicit, like how a flying enemy is "weak" to ranged attacks and nets, or how a stupid enemy can be baited into a trap. These can also be explicit, like scarecrows being weak to fire.

Monsters with specific weaknesses force players away from their regular tactics.

- The monster cannot be killed while it is in contact with the earth.
- This monster can only be drowned.
- This monster will only die if it is physically removed from its tomb.
- This monster cannot be harmed by anything crafted by the hands of men.

Usually, you want to tell the players the weakness early on, and then let them figure out the best way to solve the problem. If you want to throw your players at a monster without letting them know how to kill it, at least let them escape easily.

Best are versatile weaknesses that allow players the flexibility in how they are approached. These are things like: "This monster's brain is exposed, and it takes triple damage when attacked from above" or "100% food motivated" or "scared of loud noises" or "killed by falls."

The best weakness is probably just stupidity, because (1) players can "see" it right away, (2) players can immediately find ways to take advantage of it without needing special equipment, and (3) it tends to generate fun, memorable encounters. (**Editor's Note:** For stupidity being a good weakness, see p. 36, *The Only Two Enemies You'll Ever Need.*)

☐ The monster should support interesting dungeoncrawling

A monster has the potential to be a lot more than a stack of hit points and abilities: it can be a bane or a boon to the dungeoncrawling experience itself.

The monster can take part in roleplaying:

- It's a member of a larger faction with likes, dislikes, and things to offer.
- The owlbear can be bribed with food, allowing you to get past it without fighting.

The monster can control pathing through the dungeon:

- Goblins have tiny crawl tunnels they use to move between rooms. The party could block them off, or strip off their armor and crawl through themselves.
- A big, threatening monster is blocking an optional path that the party would like to take.

The monster can interfere with a resource:

- Bone needle men prevent all rest and healing in a dungeon.
- Sentient darkness causes torches to burn out quicker.
- Until you kill the mummy, all treasure reduces your maximum hp when carried.

These sorts of things can get buried in the monster write-up and can be easy to miss. This is a pity, because this is where you can get really creative, and where the most interesting OSR-style problems can be inserted.

☐ The monster should fit into the world

The monster needs to fit into the world in a way that makes sense. Think about where it eats, sleeps, and hunts.

But maybe your design is something novel, e.g., your monster is the angry anti-ghost of the unborn. Or maybe something that is too specific for the referee to just drop it in the dungeon without an explanation, like a squad of humans who fight with grenades. In those cases, you need to spend some time explaining the context for this monster.

It's tricky because you may be torn between providing a specific explanation ("These are Malthusian grenadiers, servants of Witch Mountain.") or a general one ("Grenadiers are commonly employed by mercenary forces."). Because we want our written words to sound authoritative, we often just pick one–but of course there's nothing stopping you from giving two or three contexts within the game world.

Also, consider giving your monster actionable connections to the world. A mated pair of owlbears should imply valuable babies nearby. The presence of the dandelion knight is proof of an alliance with the fairy princes (so the party should be extra wary of them).

Even something small like a group of orcs where one incongruent orc is wearing a brand new set of armor raises interesting questions (and connections) with a single detail.

☐ The monster should be threatening

Sure, your monster has attack rolls and it deals damage. It certainly poses a threat to hit point totals.

Attacking hp is the oldest and most comfortable way to threaten the players. It's also the one that is always approved by the implied social contract of the table. (Players don't object if they take 17 points of damage. But depending on the game, they might object if their sword gets rusted away, since it feels unfair.)

The mnemonic for this is "attack all parts of the character sheet." Abilities scores are usually fair game. Inventory is usually a possible target, too. XP/level drain is an option, but should be deployed with care. Character abilities and skills are usually off-limits, but you can still tamper with them in ways that are fun.

Also remember that you can attack the out-of-combat resources, too. Time is a big one. Noise can attract wandering monsters. Killing these (murderous, frenzied) dwarves might ruin your reputation with the (friendly, chill) dwarves in the next cave.

But also consider that players might "win" the combat through other victory conditions:

- Prevent the monsters from fleeing and raising the alarm.
- The monster is a sage. Every round, you can ask a question that the left head will answer truthfully. Meanwhile the right head (and the rest of the monster) is trying to kill you. Stay alive and think of good questions.
- The monster is a treasure, but only if you kill it in a specific way.

Threat is one of the biggest ways that a monster can engage your players, so think about it carefully.

☐ The monster should surprise

Okay, I lied. Not every monster/combat needs to be threatening. What's more important is that monsters/encounters need to be dynamic. It should force the players to change their plans a little bit. Ideally, you want to push the players into at least three interesting decisions.

A simple example of this might be:

- There's a giant golem in the next room. How do we kill it and/or get past it?
- The giant golem is being controlled by little dudes inside of it. How do we kill the little dudes inside this big dude? Can we make a smoke bomb? Can someone fit inside?
- One of the little dudes is running for help. Should we chase him down? Who will go?

Without any surprises, the party will use the same stale tactics.

☐ The monster should reward

XP is a boring reward. Literally the worst.

Getting past the monster is often a sufficient reward on its own if there is more cool dungeon to explore.

But also think about the other possible rewards that the players could get out of this encounter, and perhaps include some. For example:

- A new ally.
- Information.
- Delicious monster parts to eat.
- Useful weapons and tools.
- Valuable gold or monster eggs.
- A new shortcut in the dungeon.
- Weird consumables like potions and acid sacs.

by **W.F. Smith**

My Favorite Trap

Here is a simple trap I've used many times to great aplomb.

The players enter a room with a pool of water, at least eight feet deep. The water is crystal clear, and I like to pepper it with some idyllic lily pads. The glint of a sword, embedded in the lake bed, immediately catches the player's eyes (It doesn't have to be a sword, but should be something the players want. For most games in which I've played, players want swords.)

If the characters examine the sword from the surface, they might notice a green, slimy substance covering the sword, or see a skeletal hand still holding the hilt, or spot an eel struggling to free themselves from the hilt. The sword is covered in a strong adhesive that isn't soluble in water.

Ordinarily, water isn't a danger for players unless, for instance, it's quickly filling a small room in which they are locked. But when your hand is stuck to a chunk of metal embedded in the bottom of a pool of water, the realisation comes quick: Your hit points won't save you from drowning.

I don't like traps with solutions determined in advance. When you are a player facing such a trap, it feels like the referee is just waiting for us to read their mind and isn't open to creative problem solving. **To make a trap interactive, the simplest thing is to make it obvious** and give the players a chance to find their solution (**Editor's Note:** See Bad Trap Blues, p. 44).



As a referee, I want to be surprised by the players' solutions. I want to sit and listen to their ideas and determine if it works based on that amalgamation of dice rolls and common sense. But to assist in determining what solutions might work, I should consider the extent of the problem. How adhesive is the sword? The adhesive isn't water-soluble, but can something else dissolve it? How deeply embedded is the sword in the lake bed? Can a strong enough player pull it out with sufficient effort? Can it only be pulled out by the rightful monarch?

The referee should answer these questions ahead of time, or be open-minded enough and attentive enough to their players' needs to answer these questions on the fly.

The following table presents some ideas of how to make this bait a bit more tantalising.

WHAT'S SO COOL ABOUT THIS SWORD (D12)

1. The sword's blade is on fire, even under water.

2. It's actually one of the player's swords. They just now realised it's missing from their inventory!

3. The sword's blade is as dark as the night sky and flickers with distant starlight.

4. It's made of bones, which is fucking metal (but not literally).

5. It's a sentient sword but is possessed by a demon, which is itself in thrall to a vampire, who is a devoted supplicant to Cthulhu.

6. It's edible.

7. Retrieving it proves the wielder's divine right to rule in the eyes of some nearby yokels.

8. If you show it to a pretentious elf, they'll tell you about how it is the legendary such-and-such, forged in the First Age for King So-and-So and lost in the battle of yadda yadda yadda.

9. A skeleton's fist is wrapped around its hilt. The skeleton wears important-looking clothing.

10. It's one of the player's grandpop's trusty sword. Ask the player what famous foe the grandpop slew with it. Ask them what foolish bet did they make that caused them to lose it.

11. Its pommel is a fist-sized eye, blinking occasionally.

12. Two words: laser. sword.

A simple trap can be remixed easily. An easily remixed trap can be reused and reused. If you have a trap that can be re-flavoured to fit various genres, it is especially useful. Diving headfirst into a body of water to get something shiny, as a core concept, is applicable to plenty of situations. The following table is just a few of the ways to remix this simple trap.

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THIS TRAP (D12)

1. It's a deep wishing fountain in a derelict and abandoned mall. The sword is wedged in a large pile of tarnished coins.

2. A rival adventuring party arrives at the same time. Their barbarian member, oiled muscles rippling, goes wide-eyed upon spotting the sword.

3. The top three inches of the lake are frozen solid.

4. A couple of ne'er-do-wells skulk nearby. When they hear the splash of a diver, they give it a few seconds before ambushing the diver's friends.

5. Bones sit motionless in the lake. The lake is a gelatinous cube.

6. A lifeguard sits on a big chair outside the pool. They admonish any horseplay, rough-housing, or tomfoolery. No running!

7. It's a koi pond in a corporate waiting room. The receptionist tsk-tsks if they see someone jump in. The koi aren't too happy either.

8. The sword is a mimic. The pommel has teeth.

9. The lake is on the ceiling and filled with anti-gravity water.

10. Freeing the sword triggers a structural collapse of the dungeon containing the lake. The players best boogie on outta here.

11. The lake contains electric eels. Or sharks. Or electric sharks.

12. The pool contains highly flammable liquid, not water. A red dragon slumbers in the next room.

In my time running games, I've never had an entire group just shrug their shoulders at unguarded loot. **They may be suspicious and think it's a trap, but that's good. They'll scheme and try to predict what is going to happen** and how they can safely get the sword. Anything that makes players scheme together is good.

by **Chris McDowell**

(NON-) EMPTY ROOMS

AN "EMPTY ROOM" DOESN'T NEED TO BE A LITERAL EMPTY ROOM. INSTEAD, IT'S JUST A ROOM THAT DOESN'T (CURRENTLY) CONTAIN A MONSTER, TREASURE, OR TRAP.

WHEN YOU NEED AN EMPTY ROOM, ROLL D6 INSTEAD.

1 SAFE ROOM

Somewhere quiet to stop for a rest. Perhaps it can be made safe with a little work or something in here keeps enemies at bay.

Examples: *empty vault, hidden shrine, watchtower with retractable ladder*

2 DANGER ROOM

There's something dangerous in here, but it's not a monster or a trap. It's easy enough to avoid, but the danger is there if combat breaks out or the players want to set a trap.

Examples: *hazardous machinery, walkway over snake pit, geothermal vents*

3 INFO ROOM

You can get useful knowledge here, most typically about another element of the dungeon.

Examples*: scrying pool, abandoned diaries, cave paintings*

4 TONE ROOM

This is just here to set the tone of the dungeon or the specific area this room inhabits.

Examples: *mass grave, baroque chapel, filthy living quarters*

5 NATURE ROOM

Nature gets everywhere, and this room is especially overrun with it. Nothing too hazardous, just life getting on with its own business.

Examples*: bird colony, fungal patch, rock pools*

6 SUPPLY ROOM

Nothing useful or valuable enough to be considered treasure, but a room full of stuff, typically mundane things.

Examples*: ramshackle kitchen, spare parts storage, uniform wardrobe*

by Zedeck Siew

What Do Ability Scores Represent?

It is convention in roleplaying games that your ability scores / attributes / six stats determine who your character is. There is pleasure in looking at a sheet and seeing: *Oh! These are the things my character is good at.*

But you do run into problems. Does my 18 DEX rogue know they are fleeter than the 17 DEX bard? What if I have a brilliant scheme but my barbarian only has 9 INT?

How well, in other words, does the map represent the territory?

In my home game, one of my players, Aish, plays a character named CAPTAIN PHUNG.

Captain Phung does not yet own a proper sea-going vessel. Perhaps he lost his previous ship? Perhaps he never had one. (He does have a magic five-person sampan, though!) He is impulsive. He tends to make dodgy deals with hapless village folk, pick up dangerous-looking objects, and flirt with dangerous-looking men.

Mechanics-wise, here's how my interactions with Aish / Phung tend to go:

Me: *Okay, make a DEX save to duck before the hunter stabs you.*

Aish: *Damn, my DEX is only 6, guess we'll see...*

It turns out that Aish had terrible rolls at chargen. **STR 6 DEX 6 WIL 5**. Just going by ability scores, Phung is an idiot weakling.

Thing is, Phung isn't an idiot weakling.

I've got crafty players; they are pretty good at cooking up multi-part schemes.Phung is generally the face for whatever racket they've got going: he's the most obvious leader, and Aish plays him as a capable, charismatic go-getter.

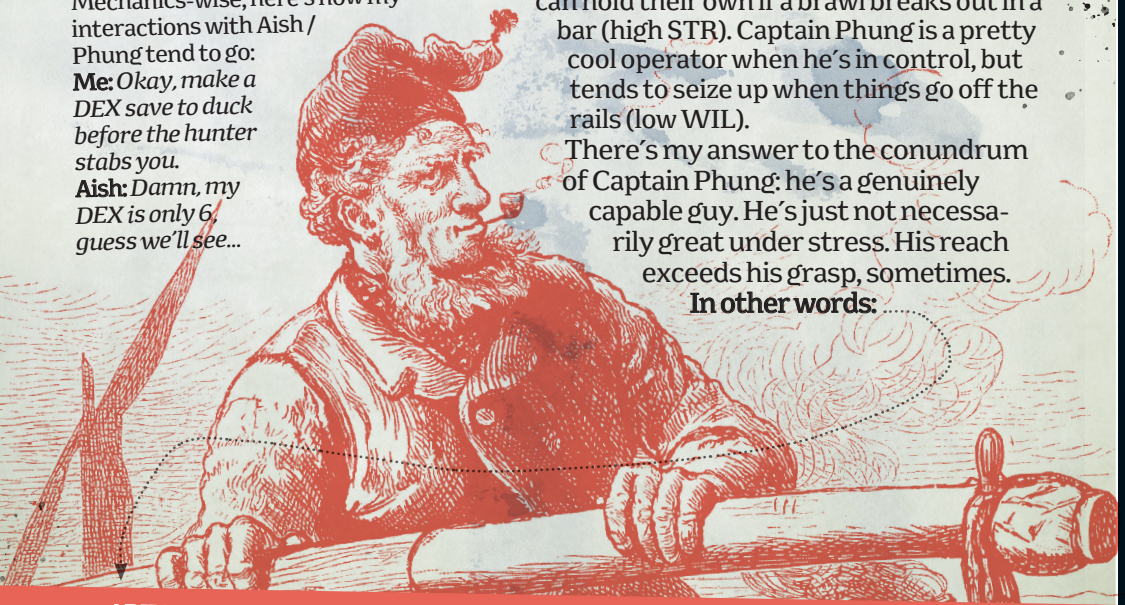
Looking at the character sheet, is Aish playing Phung wrong? Fuck that. A player cannot play their own character wrong. I reject this notion outright. What's going on?

Implicitly, and in practice: I can be sharp when I've got time and it is a subject I have experience in. But suddenly ask me to make a speech, and I'm toast (low INT).

Some folks have no martial arts training but can hold their own if a brawl breaks out in a bar (high STR). Captain Phung is a pretty cool operator when he's in control, but tends to seize up when things go off the rails (low WIL).

There's my answer to the conundrum of Captain Phung: he's a genuinely capable guy. He's just not necessarily great under stress. His reach exceeds his grasp, sometimes.

In other words:



ABILITY SCORES DON'T REPRESENT WHO YOUR CHARACTER IS.
ABILITY SCORES REPRESENT HOW GOOD YOU ARE AT ACTING UNDER PRESSURE.

In other words: Ability scores are who your character is when they are not in control. Ability scores are your character's reactions. STR isn't strength, it's toughness; DEX really means reflexes; WIS is more accurately calm or willpower; etc.

by Warren D.

DUNGEON WEATHER
FOR YOUR OVERLOADED ENCOUNTER DIE

I really love the overloaded encounter die mechanic described by Brendan of Necropraxis (see p.39)

When the party moves into a new area or spends time on an exploration activity, roll the encounter d6 and interpret the results as follows

1. *Encounter*
2. *Percept (clue, spoor)*
3. *Locality (context-dependent timer)*
4. *Exhaustion (rest or take penalties)*
5. *Lantern*
6. *Torch*

In particular, I think the entry for locality (or weather, if used in the wilderness) is a great way to further add personality to a dungeon. But what would typical «vanilla D&D dungeon weather» be?

I say «vanilla» because it helps me think about what the typical environmental changes I would want in a dungeon are and what typical character actions are complicated (or facilitated; after all some days are sunny) by these changes. It also reinforces the idea of the mythic underworld: the dungeon becomes a being unto itself.

DUNGEON WEATHER (D10)

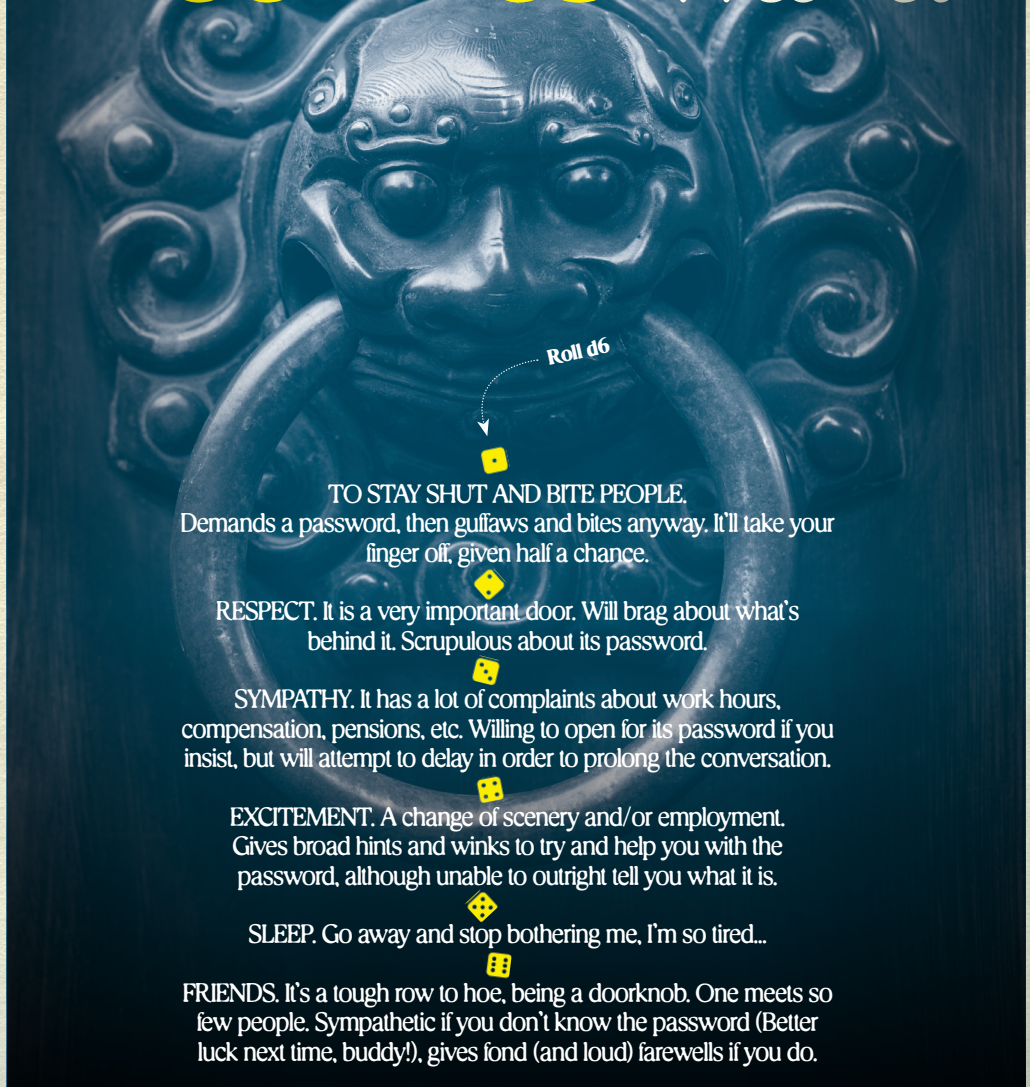
1	**SLAM!** All doors slam shut; 3-in-6 if staked; all doors are now 1-in-6 to open
2	**FOG** An ankle-deep fog appears on the floor; all floor-level room traps are triggered on a 3 in 6 instead of the normal 2 in 6
3	**SLIME BLOOMS** Green slime appears over the doorways leading to or from the rooms or hallways the party is currently in
4	**DUNGEON RIME** Armour ages unnaturally; -1 AC to non-magical armour and shields
5	**DARKNESS EXPANDS** All light operates at half strength
6	**SHADOW OF DEATH** -1 to all saving throws
7	**SPONTANEOUS GENERATION** Everyone's rations have a 3-in-6 chance of being spoiled by maggots
8	**ALTERED PERCEPTION** +1 to chance of locating secret doors
9	**EUPHORIC SPOOR RELEASE** +1 to all encounter reaction rolls; divination and illusion spells are enhanced
10	**TOO STILL** Dungeon weather effect ends

Of course, if your dungeon (or dungeon area) has a strong theme, it is better to tailor the above list to fit the aesthetics you want to convey.

by **Tom Kilian**

Fitted to a magically locked door, the talking doorknob demands a password and bites anyone who tries to open it without one (1d4 damage, no save). It hollers if anyone tries to break its door down. The doorknob has a physical face and mouth—it can be reasoned with, threatened, gagged, and so on.

What Does the Doorknob Want?



Roll d6

TO STAY SHUT AND BITE PEOPLE.
Demands a password, then guffaws and bites anyway. It'll take your finger off, given half a chance.

RESPECT. It is a very important door. Will brag about what's behind it. Scrupulous about its password.

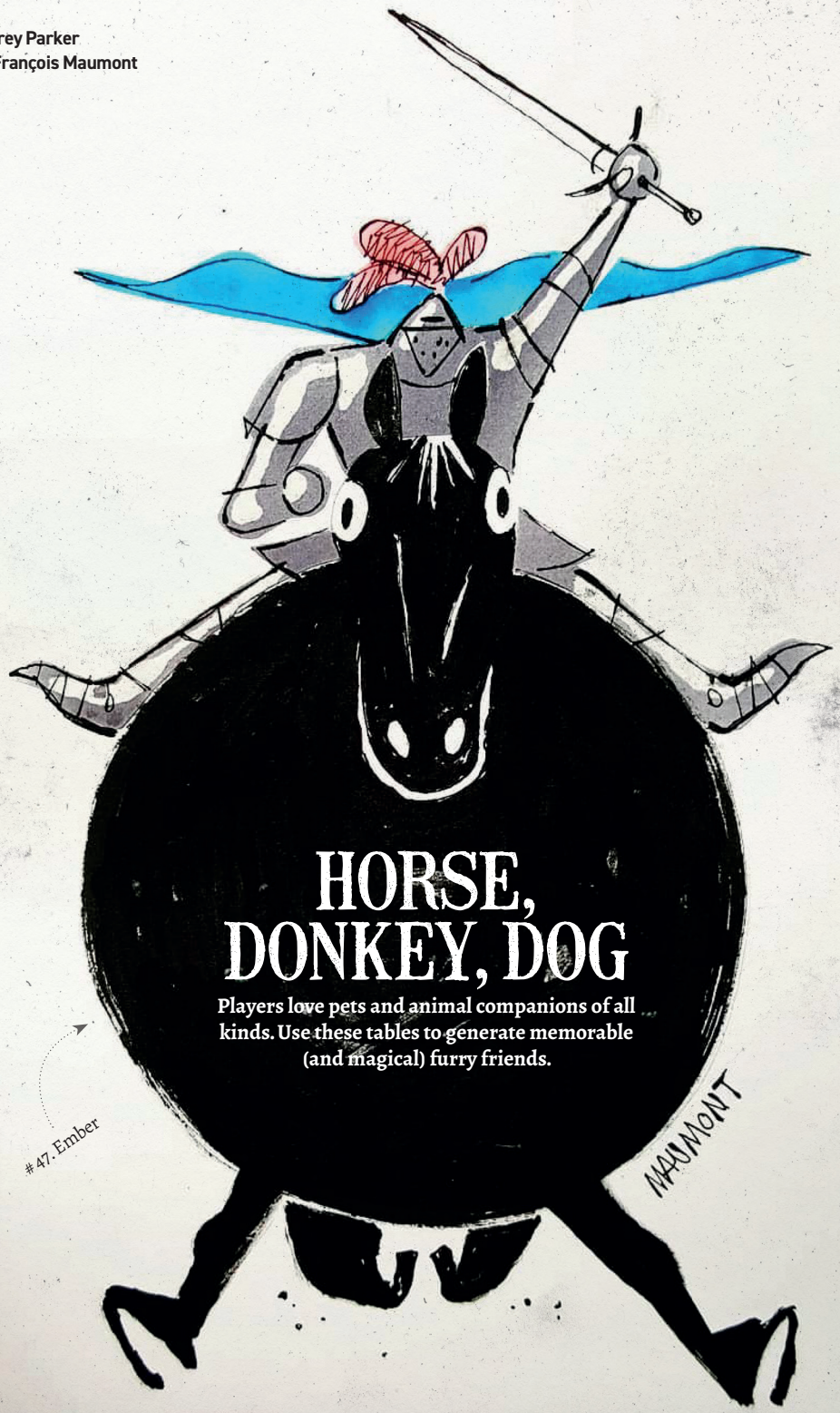
SYMPATHY. It has a lot of complaints about work hours, compensation, pensions, etc. Willing to open for its password if you insist, but will attempt to delay in order to prolong the conversation.

EXCITEMENT. A change of scenery and/or employment. Gives broad hints and winks to try and help you with the password, although unable to outright tell you what it is.

SLEEP. Go away and stop bothering me, I'm so tired...

FRIENDS. It's a tough row to hoe, being a doorknob. One meets so few people. Sympathetic if you don't know the password (Better luck next time, buddy!), gives fond (and loud) farewells if you do.

by **Ktrey Parker**
Art: **François Maumont**



HORSE, DONKEY, DOG

Players love pets and animal companions of all kinds. Use these tables to generate memorable (and magical) furry friends.

HORSES

Name ❁ Feature

1. Apple *or* Pandora ❁ Aggravating tendency to munch parchment/paper: Scrolls beware!
2. Autumn *or* Paprika ❁ Always stops at Fruit Trees, can be hard to goad away
3. Avenger *or* Partner ❁ Bane of Snakes, not afraid, and does double damage to them
4. Badger *or* Payday ❁ Barely broken and prone to buck: Unshakable Morale though
5. Bandit *or* Peaches ❁ Bears Talon marks from a Gryphon attack proudly: watches skies
6. Barley *or* Peanut ❁ Belonged to Dead Paladin, swear you see it mourning occasionally
7. Beauty *or* Penny ❁ Bony back leads to discomfort on long rides, regardless of saddle
8. Big Smokey *or* Pepper ❁ Boy howdy does this Horse not like Giant things
9. Buddy *or* Pride ❁ Charge! Doesn't have to be told twice and x3 damage instead of x2
10. Biscuits *or* Phantom ❁ Branded with a Holy Symbol, wakes owner at Prayer Times
11. Blackjack *or* Pharoah ❁ Wings lost, former Pegasus yearns for the Sky
12. Blaze *or* Piccolo ❁ Bred for the Chariot: seems to anticipate Driver when hitched
13. Bolt *or* Pirate ❁ Bristles under harsh treatment, will throw an unkind Rider
14. Boots *or* Pixie ❁ Bullies other Horses and Livestock when no one's looking
15. Brandy *or* Pocket ❁ Busybody who seems utterly fascinated with Boots and shoes
16. Brigadier *or* Poppy ❁ Can actually perform arithmetic with hoof stomps...really!
17. Bucephalus *or* Prancer ❁ Can speak, but chooses not to until it forms a bond of Trust
18. Bucktooth *or* Prankster ❁ Can't get enough Salt, positively loves the stuff when available
19. Buddy *or* Pride ❁ Charge! Doesn't have to be told twice and x3 damage instead of x2
20. Buttercup *or* Prince ❁ Chewing constantly, one time you saw rocks in it's mouth
21. Buttermilk *or* Professor ❁ Comes with a Dog (also named), the two are inseparable
22. Buttons *or* Promise ❁ Constantly testing boundaries, trying to get away with things
23. Calamity *or* Queen ❁ Could swear you saw it trying to read Road Signs
24. Carrots *or* Quest ❁ Dexterous lips can untie knots, undo straps, unlatch doors
25. Challenger *or* Rafter ❁ Digger, sometimes unearths strange things just under grass
26. Champion *or* Rain ❁ Disguised Unicorn on mission: judging Mortals before Doomsday
27. Chance *or* Ranger ❁ Eager to please and trusting to a fault
28. Charger *or* Rascal ❁ Elf-bred means 1/week can go a day without leaving tracks
29. Charlie *or* Rebel ❁ Equine Royalty and other Horses know it. They bow and genuflect
30. Chester *or* Red ❁ Exceptionally hearty breed: max HP per HD
31. Cinnamon *or* River ❁ Eyes turn Bright Blue around Invisible Beings
32. Clodhopper *or* Rocky ❁ From a long line of racers: Speed +30' when at full gallop
33. Clover *or* Romeo ❁ Get used to friendly shoulder bites and nips
34. Comet *or* Rooster ❁ Gluttonous Knight, polymorphed by Fey: Understands Tactics tho
35. Cricket *or* Rounder ❁ Guarded and territorial about personal space
36. Cutter *or* Rowdy ❁ Hair on mane and tail grow remarkably fast, but very beautifully
37. Daisy *or* Rumor ❁ Helpfully retrieves their own bridle and some tack to be ridden
38. Dale *or* Rusty ❁ Hide scarred from prior poor treatment, shame cos they're sweet
39. Dandelion *or* Sage ❁ Hooves count as Magic Weapons for some mysterious reason
40. Dasher *or* Sailor ❁ Incredible lungs, prone to take deep breaths and run long ways
41. Digger *or* Salty ❁ In everyone's business, constantly, begging for a scratch or pat
42. Domino *or* Sampson ❁ Inquisitive when it comes to Dwarfs, always nibbling their beards
43. Duke *or* Sassy ❁ Iron boned, this Horse will likely never lame
44. Dusty *or* Scamper ❁ Jealous type, dislikes other creatures getting owner's attention
45. Ebony *or* Schooner ❁ Kelpie-blooded: Excellent Swimmer, unafraid of fords/rivers
46. Eclipse *or* Scout ❁ Kicks out when being Saddled, every time without fail
47. Ember *or* Serendipity ❁ Lazier than most, but motivated strongly by food
48. Encore *or* Seven ❁ Loves small folk and children, very friendly and forgiving to them
49. Fancy *or* Shoelace ❁ Mane and Tail always immaculately groomed by Good Folk
50. Felicity *or* Silent ❁ May never make a noise or neigh, Silent as the Grave
51. Fitz *or* Sidekick ❁ Mimics whistles with astonishing accuracy
52. Flopsy *or* Skeeter ❁ Never needs to be told to do something twice
53. Freckles *or* Smartie ❁ Nightmare-blooded, loves to roll around on burning campfires
54. Frisky *or* Snickers ❁ No patience for inexperienced Riders, tends to panic
55. Fussy *or* Snow ❁ No Stable has been built by Man that can hold them
56. Gambler *or* Song ❁ Old Horse, sold cheap...seems to get younger over time?
57. Ginger *or* Sooty ❁ Once a month can teleport to the spot of a Lightning Strike seen
58. Goliath *or* Sparrow ❁ Once a year gets a day/night as Man: wants to have some words
59. Grindstone *or* Spirit ❁ Once bonded, can never be sold or they'll find a way back to you
60. Grindylow *or* Splash ❁ One enchanted Shoe protects them from Arrows/Missiles
61. Hank *or* Spot ❁ Overly fond of sauce: Keeping them away from alcohol is hard
62. Holly *or* Sprinkles ❁ Peerless jumper, breaks records for height and daring
63. Hollyhock *or* Star ❁ Pines when left alone, stops eating/drinking
64. Honey *or* Steeltoe ❁ Pins Ears, bares teeth when it smells Undead
65. Huckleberry *or* Stepper ❁ Pleasant, ambling gait that's surprisingly easy to read by
66. Invitation *or* Sterling ❁ Practical Joker: Loves to hide things from their owner
67. Jack *or* Stomper ❁ Prize-winning Show Horse and knows it, insists on daily Braids
68. Jasmine *or* Stormy ❁ Puts effort into work, often too much, can strain themselves
69. Jasper *or* Strawberry ❁ Quickly bonds with other Horses, bit of a Mother Hen
70. Jester *or* Stumpy ❁ Reacts ecstatically to being curry combed and groomed
71. Jigsaw *or* Sugar ❁ Scowls and pins ears whenever it sees a whip or spurs
72. Joy *or* Sugarfoot ❁ Scratches on their Withers never ceases to calm them down
73. Juliet *or* Sunshine ❁ See mud, roll in mud, maybe give Rider warning if they like 'em
74. Kelpie *or* Temperance ❁ Sees Fences/Hedges/Corrals as a personal challenge to Leap
75. Lacey *or* Tessy ❁ Skittish at night, likely to whinny at the most minor things
76. Lady *or* Thunder ❁ Stinky/frayed well-loved Blanket that they're never without
77. Ladyblue *or* Tilt ❁ Neighs as if laughing
78. Ladybug *or* Titan ❁ Strong aversion to Water more than withers deep
79. Ladzo *or* Titania ❁ Fears full moon
80. Lollygagge *or* Tornado ❁ Strong back: add half again to Load without issues
81. Lucky *or* Trapper ❁ Strong Flight Response calmed by singing softly
82. Lumpy *or* Traveler ❁ Stubbornly refuses to ever pull plow or cart
83. Magic *or* Treasure ❁ Such a strong Sweet-tooth, can be cajoled easily with Sugar
84. Major *or* Troubadour ❁ Super quick reflexes grants them a boon to AC
85. Maquis *or* Trusty ❁ Surefooted on snow and ice, seldom stumbles in Winter
86. Maximus *or* Tucker ❁ Surprisingly kind and Understanding, almost empathetic
87. Meadow *or* Umber ❁ Takes to Barding Well, increases AC by an additional point
88. Midnight *or* Vesta ❁ Tendency to overdrink when given Water, has to be led away
89. Midsummer *or* Victory ❁ Tends to feign a limp after a long day sometimes
90. Mischief *or* Warrior ❁ Tolerant of elevations, not a Yak, but can handle more than most
91. Misty *or* Weaver ❁ Tries to lead the Rider down paths it perceives as best
92. Moonshine *or* Whiskers ❁ Trusting and will wait where placed forever if necessary
93. Nightingale *or* Whiskey ❁ Uncannily skilled Chess Player, gingerly moves pieces with mouth
94. No-name *or* Whistlejacket ❁ Used to Desert travel, surefooted on sand, requires less water
95. Nutmeg *or* Wicked ❁ Violently swishes Tail if it smells predators
96. Olaf *or* Willow ❁ Wakes owner at remarkably consistent time in order to be fed
97. Onyx *or* Winnie ❁ Wild-shaped Druid, hiding out from a powerful foe
98. Outlaw *or* Winston ❁ Bravery extends to Rider, boons to resist Fear Effects
99. Overbite *or* Winter ❁ Years of cribbing has led to some tooth loss
100. Paisley *or* Wintergreen ❁ Changes colour every full moon, no one's sure why

DONKEYS & MULES

Name ❁ Feature

1. Apples ❁ Always settles to Sleep Eastward, even Underground, useful to intuit Direction
2. Armpit ❁ Bane of Minotaurs: No Maze or Labyrinth has flustered it for long
3. Awful ❁ Bell-cut Tail in a series of Tassels to reflect their considerable Training
4. Barosus ❁ Belonged to a Sage obsessed with Scrolls, tends to find and fetch them
5. Barthalo ❁ Bit skittish around Elfs until they warm up to them, then unflinchingly Loyal
6. Bec ❁ Bravery is Contagious: Encouraging Nickers increase the Morale of other Equines
7. Biscuit ❁ Bred for Arid Climes, doesn't need as much to Drink, but gorges given the chance
8. Blame ❁ Broodmare was a Paladin's Warhorse, Holy Symbol markings, Immune to all Disease
9. Bliss ❁ Capable of Nibbling through Walls of Force and Floating Discs: Loves the stuff
10. Blue ❁ Carpets, Curtains, Tapestry: Irresistible Nibbling for this one
11. Bracken ❁ Casually interested in Cooking, can Stir a Pot deftly, not really motivated by Food
12. Broccoli ❁ Categorically insists on being Fed three times Daily, but can carry half again weight
13. Buddy ❁ Competent Tracker, provided the Quarry hasn't bathed recently
14. Buttons ❁ Demonstrates an unusual Kinship with Rodents and Lagomorphs
15. Casey ❁ Distance Leaper: Spans of up to twice its length are no trouble with a running start
16. Champ ❁ Doesn't Bleed, investigation reveals stuffed Hide expertly stretched over a Skeleton
17. Chewy ❁ Domesticated by Kobolds, chances of Trap Activation reduced for it
18. Clyde ❁ Drank Deeply from a Magic Spring, especially erudite but wary of Speaking
19. Cob ❁ Dubious Oracle by prior Dwarf Prospector owner: Raps Hooves to answer Questions
20. Cookie ❁ Easygoing until it catches a Whiff of Fair-Folk, then Stubborn as all get-out
21. Courage ❁ Especially effective at transporting Weapons/Armour thanks to Hobgoblin Training
22. Cricket ❁ Even the most Rutted Road is no match for this one's Cart-Pulling Skills
23. Cuss ❁ Experienced Pilgrim: Can sniff out nearby Shrines and Saints, drawn to them
24. Dandelion ❁ Eye for Gambling, Whimpers if Owner is being Cheated or might Lose
25. Dangit ❁ Feigns Lameness if confronted with Statues, after a run-in with Gargoyles
26. Dawdle ❁ Filed down for quick Sale, a single Horn slowly regrows
27. Downside ❁ Finds Flowers irresistible, can be hard to move from a patch of Blossoms
28. Duchess ❁ Follows Orders well, almost too well: Easily commanded by non-Owner/Enemies
29. Fowler ❁ Fond of hiding Boots/Shoes that are left unattended. Only Left ones, strangely
30. Garf ❁ Given Chalk/Charcoal, can write a few words: Stop, Here
31. Goad ❁ Halfling-Trained Truffle Sniffer, good at digging, occasionally drops them at feet
32. Grimsley ❁ Haunting Bray, once a Week, causes other Animals to Freeze in their Tracks
33. Gripes ❁ Hearing Music, does a rather Humorous Dance and Brays Enthusiastically
34. Grom ❁ Hides (as a Halfling) in Wooded Areas/Forests, it's rather Uncanny
35. Grubs ❁ Incredibly Stealthy, puts even an experienced Thief to shame
36. Grumbles ❁ Ingesting some strange Cave Moss imbued it with the ability to see in the Dark
37. Gripes ❁ Hearing Music, does a rather Humorous Dance and Brays Enthusiastically
38. Gums ❁ Insists on Sleeping in any Tent or Structure during Inclement Weather
39. Gunter ❁ Instinctively Herds other Animals (sometimes People) toward safer paths
40. Gus ❁ Intricate Eldritch Brands and Enruned-Teeth/Hooves: Immune to all Arcane Magic
41. Hazel ❁ Keeps good Time/Rhythm, just looking for a Dog, Cat, and Rooster
42. Henry ❁ Leans up forcefully against People if not given a daily Brushing of at least an hour
43. Iggy ❁ Learned to Clink Magical Shoes to Blink 120' 1/day (carried stuff does not come with)
44. Itcher ❁ Left eye Clouded with Cataracts, but sees just fine into the Ethereal/Astral Planes
45. Jack ❁ Loves a good swig of Strong Drink after a hard day's work, gets ornery without it
46. Jenny ❁ Mane pricks up conspicuously whenever a Spell is Cast within bowshot
47. Jumpy ❁ Medicine Show Porter: Can sniff out Magic Potions for Carrots
48. Junk ❁ More at home pulling Carts than Portaging, can drag far more weight than most
49. Kicker ❁ Navigates Steep Cliffs and Narrow Ledges with the greatest of ease
50. Kimbie ❁ Nervously nibbles on the Hems of Cloaks/Tent Flaps when Predators are nearby
51. Knock-knee ❁ Never without a conspicuously Dented Pot Helm, carries it everywhere
52. Lampwick ❁ Nickers nervously when their Owner is Lied to
53. Lee ❁ Often Coughs up Pebbles/Stones, but strangely Immune to Petrification
54. Lefty ❁ Once ate a Witch's entire Gingerbread House: Saves twice vs Spells
55. Loafer ❁ Owned by a Mountaineer and fascinated by Ropes: Can hold them in his Mouth
56. Lucky ❁ Pierced Ear, housing a Magic Ring, bites Mightily if anyone tries to touch it
57. Madrina ❁ Pinhooker swears they saw it snatch Magic Missile from air with their Mouth
58. Marty ❁ Preternaturally aware of Rockslides and Avalanches, won't budge if risk is high
59. Mischief ❁ Provided Water is kept out of their Ears: Very accomplished Swimmer
60. Mojo ❁ Really, truly, completely detests Snakes: Flies into a Frenzy on seeing them
61. Moonlight ❁ Responds favorably to the Lawful tongue in Dangerous/Stubborn situations
62. Nails ❁ Riding backwards on it cures Scorpion Stings, or so the Seller says
63. Narvel ❁ Sacred to Satyrs and Fauns somehow, they obey its rather quizzical commands
64. Nibbles ❁ Saved Lives of at least 4 former Owners, 3 more to go before the Curse ends
65. Norton ❁ Scared of their own Shadow if not being led or chaperoned
66. Nosy ❁ Seemingly Allergic to the mucus of Mimics, Cloakers, Lurkers, and Piercers
67. Oats ❁ Seller insists it can Predict the Weather and convey this by Ear Twitches
68. Patience ❁ Served in a Bloody War, instinctively drags the Wounded to Safety
69. Petunia ❁ Shaggy/Thick Hair requires a lot of Brushing, but well-adapted to Colder Climes
70. Podagrosus ❁ Sharp Hooves, seem to be plated in Silver, shines them on Pant Legs
71. Prissy ❁ Shod with Cold Iron, Sprites/Pixies give it wide berth
72. Ransom ❁ Should it encounter Figs, it will not Budge until it has eaten them all
73. Rooster ❁ So incredibly Dusty, even directly after a River Crossing or Bath
74. Salty ❁ Sold with unremovable Leather Barding, claims it's Magic every other Season
75. Schlep ❁ Sole Survivor of many Expeditions: 1-10 chance they've Explored Dungeon before
76. Shakes ❁ Somehow learned to ascend/descend Staircases moving backward and forward
77. Shavetail ❁ Sometimes dozes as they Walk, can actually take a position in the Watch Order
78. Shingles ❁ Store Food far from this Inquisitive and Constantly Hungry creature
79. Snowflake ❁ Strips the Bark of Trees, creating Markers to prevent getting Lost, but also tracks
80. Spare ❁ Such strong Teeth: Chews through Iron like butter, eats Curses once a year
81. Spuds ❁ Surprisingly skilled Shoplifter, mostly Fruit/Foodstuffs, but likes Jewellry as well
82. Squealy ❁ Swamp-Bred Stock, sure-footed around Mud, Muck, and Mire
83. Stopit ❁ Tail Belled Thrice and very Experienced: Warns Owner if packed incorrectly
84. Stupid ❁ Taste for Magical Herbs and Plants, tends to wander to munch upon them
85. Surefoot ❁ Taught to fetch up to four times (no larger than a Spear/heavier than a Backpack)
86. Tattoo ❁ Trained Door-Kicker (5-in-6), if backed toward & fed Carrots, hard to Stable
87. Thirsty ❁ Uncontrollably Sneezes around Slimes/Jellies/Oozes
88. Thrifty ❁ Understands Dwarf, Halfling, Common, Elf... Haven't found one it doesn't know
89. Tishal ❁ Unfailingly finds Fresh Water, even in the driest of Places
90. Too Tall ❁ Utterly immovable if confronted with structurally unsound Bridge/Crossing
91. Toothless ❁ Very Ear-Shy: Anything touching them induces Frenzy of Brays and Bites
92. Trusty ❁ Vocally Jealous around anyone wearing a Hat until it receives one
93. Turnip ❁ Wakes Owner up at a Habitual Time with Braying that escalates in Volume
94. Vincent ❁ Wears an unremovable Copper Collar, enchanted so they require no Food/Water
95. Wallace ❁ Well-Trained Escaped Flea Circus is lying low on their Back, generous Reward
96. Weaves ❁ Whenever possible takes Messy Dirt Baths, probably a different color if cleaned
97. Whistler ❁ Whorls of Hide Hair form Holy Symbols: Undead Ignore Animal Completely
98. Wolfbait ❁ Won't volunteer to do it, but can hold a Torch in its Mouth for up to half an hour
99. Worthless ❁ Worked a rotary Mill for ages, still sometimes paces in circles at Night
100. Xato ❁ Worshipped as Divine for a Time, used to Finer things, knows 1 Cleric Spell

DOGS

Name ❁ Feature

1. Abbot ❁ Back bristles and Teeth Bare when Bugbears are afoot
2. Athym ❁ Barks up a Storm at the same time every Day, until Fed
3. Baldre ❁ Beelines for the most valuable Gem/Jewelry within a Hoard without fail
4. Barefote ❁ Big, wet "Kisses" and Muzzle Nuzzles can restore 1 hp/day
5. Beaut ❁ Blink Dog Blood, sadly only activates when Scared/fails a Morale Check
6. Belfry ❁ Booming, Resounding Bark/Howl can be heard for nearly a Hex
7. Blameless ❁ Bout with Distemper rendered them mostly Toothless. Poor thing
8. Boster ❁ Bred for Comfort: When lying down Puddles into almost a Pillow
9. Boy ❁ Can walk on Hind Legs, Dance/Reach High Objects on Command
10. Bragger ❁ Canine Equivalent of a Doppelgänger: Can alter self 1/day
11. Brute ❁ Caring and Gentle with Children and Halflings, but will Violently Defend
12. Cantor ❁ Chewed through a Rope as Thick as your Arm in less than an Hour
13. Catch-Curse ❁ Claws and Teeth count as Magic/Cold Iron: Very Intelligent Eyes
14. Catch-Fast ❁ Commanded to Speak in Gnoll, responds in kind
15. Challenge ❁ Constantly Testing Authority: Thinks they're the Master here
16. Clowder ❁ Deep abiding love of Tug-of-War makes them surprisingly good with Ropes
17. Clynker ❁ Despite Owner's best intentions: Hilariously Howls along to any Song or Music
18. Conqueror ❁ Dirt Cheap, Mangy Cur: Quick Learner Trains in half time/cost
19. Countess ❁ Drags around a thoroughly gnawed Stick, same one turns up even if discarded
20. Crab ❁ Easily cowed by Fire, must have been singed or burnt at one point
21. Creeper ❁ Eats the strangest things with no Harm coming to them
22. Curlew ❁ Ever seen a Dog Gnaw an Onion? Well, you'll be seeing lots of it now
23. Dagger ❁ Excellent Leaper: Surprising Distances and Heights achievable
24. Dowser ❁ Face Licker, needs more Training to stop Jumping up on everyone they meet
25. Dragon ❁ Fond of feigning Injury for attention, a few skritches will miraculously Heal
26. Duchess ❁ For Esoteric Reasons: Saliva counts as Holy Water
27. Ergo ❁ Former Familiar: Picked up Command Word: Sit and Summon Rabbit 1/month
28. Farewell ❁ Foul Breath has one upside: Can rouse the Ghoul Paralyzed (new Save)
29. Findwell ❁ Gaunt with Patchy Fur, Never Needs To Eat, Baleful Eyes (Undyingly Loyal)
30. Flatterer ❁ Gnawer of Wands: Can't get enough. 2-in-6 Chance gains charges/powers
31. Flit ❁ Gold Retriever: Knows their way around schlepping Small Sacks in Teeth
32. Flynger ❁ Growls at anyone wearing Hats, stops if allowed to Smell and Lick them
33. Garter ❁ Hates being Left Alone, can completely wreck a Room in d4 Turns
34. Gentle ❁ Hellhound-Blooded: Rolls around in Campfires, Flame cannot Harm them
35. Go-Before ❁ Herbalist's Friend: Keen Nose increases chances for Certain Plants
36. Gorgon ❁ Hides a certain piece of Owner's Gear every Morning, Fun Game!
37. Gwndir ❁ If set to Guard a Door, Portal, or Gate, can remain awake for up to a Week
38. Hardy ❁ Incessant Fetcher: Anything the Owner Throws, unbreakable habit
39. Harmless ❁ Instinctively drags Wounded Allies to Safety if Possible to do so
40. Harper ❁ Jingly Collar can't be Removed: It's only Noisy In Sunshine at least
41. Hayward ❁ Just the Goodest Boy/Girl: Attacks count as Holy on Evil Creatures
42. Hold-Fast ❁ Lanky-Legged but Eerily Quiet at all times: Never heard it so much as Growl
43. Hurlebucke ❁ Legendary Bone-Hoarder, free Level 1 Turning Attempt for Skeletons
44. Jester ❁ Loves Snow, never seems to be troubled by Cold or Ice (even Magic)
45. Jolly ❁ Lurching Gait, gets Worse when Wet: Clockwork Automaton covered in Fur
46. Juffo ❁ Magehound: Track Spellcasters by Scent from Spells. Bite leaves Arcane Mark
47. Kill-buck ❁ Magical Things Buried by this Dog cease to be Magical whilst Buried
48. King ❁ Melodramatically Feigns Death if someone Mimes Shooting an Arrow at them
49. Knave ❁ Missing a Leg, gambols along gamely; Seeks a Troll to Bite
50. Labor ❁ Nervous in Cities/Settlements but Loves Wild Places and Journeys
51. Lawless ❁ Nose Sensitive Enough to distinguish between Gargoyles and Statues
52. Light-foot ❁ Not Readily Apparent, but in for a Surprise in a few weeks: 2d4 Puppies
53. Lurk ❁ Once the Fleas are dealt with, very grateful Pup. Everyone itches until then
54. Merry-Mouth ❁ One Floppy Ear: Whisper a Question and get a one-word Response 1/week
55. Moraunt ❁ Only follows Commands issued in Neutral
56. Mouse ❁ Oracular Mutt: Presented with Graven Ash Rods, can do a bit of Divination
57. Nameless ❁ Pair of Collars: Owner wears one, they can share Surface Thoughts
58. Needy ❁ Picky Drinker: Avoids anything with Poison or Parasites
59. Nosewise ❁ Polymorphed Illusionist, slowly forgetting Self: Still barks at them though
60. Nosuche ❁ Potion (Any) added to Food grants this Dog Speech for 4 hours
61. Nytengale ❁ Pretty good Climber, but sometimes ends up Treeing themselves
62. Oribull ❁ Quiet, almost Reverent (even genuflects) during Prayers
63. Orlage ❁ Quite the Swimmer: Never seems to Tire (Breed from far Overseas)
64. Pander ❁ Rat-Catcher's Companion: Immune to Disease, double damage on Rodents
65. Perwynke ❁ Recognizes those who have harmed their Owner: Even through Disguises
66. Pinch ❁ Refuses to allow themselves to be touched by anyone but Owner
67. Plodder ❁ Regardless of Terrain, never seems to leave any Tracks behind them
68. Poynter ❁ Relentless Arrow Seeker in the Woods: Retrieves undamaged ones 4-in-6
69. Purchase ❁ Remarkable Paws, never a Thorn, pads across Broken Glass/Caltrops just fine
70. Quester ❁ Retired Racer, still exceptionally Fast if properly motivated
71. Quick ❁ Rockhound: Dwarf-bred, senses Cave-Ins reliably, sometimes smells Gas
72. Ranger ❁ Run-in with a Cockatrice gave them that Stone Paw, Noisy on Floors
73. Redy ❁ Seems to be able to Smell out Magic Potions, sometimes (3-in-6)
74. Rube ❁ Shadow is of a much larger, and very Vicious-Looking Beast
75. Sable ❁ Shivers noticeably around Oozes and Mimics
76. Scathelok ❁ Should Owner Die, will never leave their Grave or where they Fell
77. Sergeaunt ❁ Skittish more than a Spear-length from Owner: Halve Morale
78. Shake-shaw ❁ Snakes? This Hound finds them. Drags 'em around, Immune to Venoms
79. Somnor ❁ Sneezes Loudly and Wags their Tail around anything Invisible
80. Sparenot ❁ Somehow picked up the language of Burrowing Animals from Gnomes
81. Spowse ❁ Spectral-Blooded: Turn Ethereal 1/week for d10 Turns, Command Forgotten
82. Stalker ❁ Startled by Thunderstorms, needs coddling when these occur
83. Start-away ❁ Strange Magical Marsupial, Pouch can hold up to 50 coins worth
84. Stepfast ❁ Sure-footed and Good Balance, almost incapable of triggering Floor Traps
85. Sturdy ❁ Swamper: No Waterfowl is Safe, never seems to sink in Mud
86. Swift ❁ Swear you've never seen this Nigh Hairless Dog Drink or Pant: Loves Heat
87. Tabaryn ❁ Takes an Energy Drain Attack for their Owner, once Bonded with them
88. Talewise ❁ Tattooed with Magic Word (Hair Covers Now): Utter and turns to Figurine
89. Tardy ❁ Tendency to "Mark" Secret Doors unbidden, 2-in-6 Chance of finding
90. Terpyn ❁ This one has it out for Cats, all Sizes provoke the same Chase response
91. Tripper ❁ Trained Lycanthrope Sniffer: Natural Tracker. Collar with Silver Spikes
92. Trusty ❁ Two vastly different Colored Eyes, temperamental around Detection Spells
93. Turnetripe ❁ Uncannily accomplished Fisher: Double Catch Size in Well-stocked Waters
94. Valis ❁ Unpleasantly Pungent if not Washed Weekly; Bolts if they hear "BATH"
95. Wakedale ❁ Utterly Savages any Scarecrow it comes across, no stopping it
96. Wellyfedde ❁ Very Regal: Instant Alpha as others immediately fall in line
97. Wilmot ❁ Warg in Bloodline: Speaks Goblin, prizes its Gold Earring
98. Wodeward ❁ Wears a small Keg around neck: Can Administer Strong Drink/Potions
99. Wolf ❁ When the Elfin word for "Mouse" is spoken, shrinks to that Size for an hour
100. Wyse ❁ Whimpers and Begs around People Food without Fail

by **Frank "Mottokrosh" Reding**
Art: **Letty Wilson**

NPC

Hoozier Babgottle's Stock

There's always a need for a travelling salesman!

Hoozier Babgottle is a travelling goblin of advanced taste and decorum. With his ever changing assortment of oddities and trinkets, he travels the world in his tiny hot air balloon, made from a sewn-up hog skin and a copper bathtub

As per the law of the land, he would of course never sell any weapons. But it's not his fault if curious adventurers stumble across his small but perfectly formed selection of very personal armaments. **Here is his current stock. Exciting stuff!**

Fineries

- **Southern Linen Trousers and Shirts.** They keep you warm and cool, and are very comfortable. 5 SP a piece.
- **Black and Blue Striped Pantaloons.** The blue colour is laced with goldcloud worm thread, and lights up with half the strength of a torch at night if exposed to at least 6 hours of sunlight beforehand. 15 GP.
- **Green Velveteen Waistcoat.** It's not only very soft to the touch, but it also repels all sorts of insects. Perfect for the travelling gentleman. 5 GP.

Fine Wine

- **Artemis Artemisia.** A greenish wine inspired by elfin tales. Very strong, full of herbs. Drink diluted with spring water lest ye suffer from hallucinations. 7 GP per bottle.
- **Lech Liquor.** Overwhelmed by unwanted attention at court? Can't keep the soldiers out from under your skirt? Lech liquor instantly makes you repulsive to the opposite sex. And, well, most anyone. 3 GP per bottle.
- **Gabo's Glamour**. This fine wine encourages outrageous flirtation, stimulates the libido, and makes you a better, if salacious, conversationalist. 8 GP per bottle.



◆ **Sapphic Gold.** We don't know why, but this nectar, said to originate from Marquise de Toutehomme's vineyards, pushes everyone into scandalous experimentation. 10 gp per bottle.

Draperies

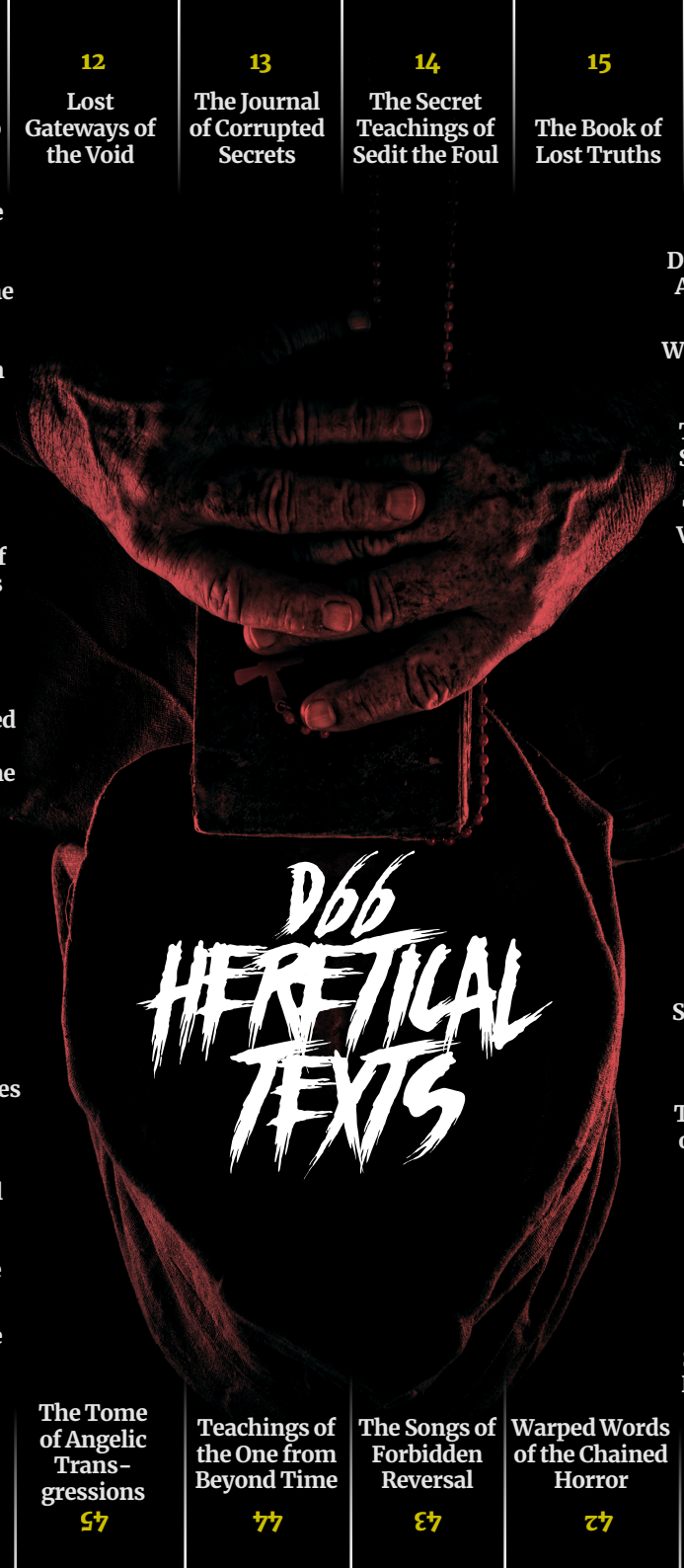
◆ **Southern Linen.** In multiple colours. 5 SP per yard, 10 yards available.
◆ **Queen's Satin.** The most luxurious purple silk weave. Evokes awe in all onlookers. 5 GP per yard, 5 yards available.
◆ **Riverbaron Brocade.** The turquoise embroidery on this green base fabric shimmers like running water. Its extraordinary ability to soak up moisture has yet to be put to solid use. 3 GP per yard, 2 yards available.
◆ **Ob-adder Scales.** This pitch black fabric, made out of rare ob-adders, resists all moisture, while encouraging air flow. Perfect for cloaks! 6GP per yard, 12 yards available.
◆ **Bonewidow Weave.** Spun by countless bonewidow spiders, this supremely light fabric is nevertheless as tough as linen. It's popular as a gossamer substitute among the very affluent on Midsummer reveries. It is so light that it is said that were one to make a gown with enough of it, one would lift into the air. Sadly, no one has ever gathered enough of it to prove this fanciful story. 50 GP per yard, 3 yards available.

Armaments

◆ **The Tri-Poker.** This ordinary looking spear has a hidden lever in its haft. Yanking it causes two backwards pointing blades to spring up from the tip. They never see it coming! 30 GP.
◆ **Flint Dagger.** Originally conceived for theatre, this jagged, dark blade shoots sparks when connecting with rough materials, sometimes enough to ignite nearby inflammables. 4 GP.
◆ **The Cuckolder.** One of these exquisite white boots has a concealed, spring-loaded stiletto (as dagger) that is released by clicking the heels together. 18 GP.
◆ **The Champion's Blade.** This magic longsword grants +1 to attack and damage. The wielder is immune to being frightened, and the first attack against an enemy gains advantage. As an action, the wielder can speak the blade's command word—*Roségard's Vigil*—to heal 3 hp per turn for 6 turns, once per day. This blade is not for sale. Instead, an interested party has to best the previous wielder in single (non-fatal) combat. If they do so, they may wield the blade for the duration of one quest, after which they must become its champion, travelling with Hoozier, until bested by a new interested party. The current champion is a young man named Theodore Valesse (statistics as 3rd level fighter in plate), who is currently traveling with his newly-kidnapped, newly-wed bride. It was a staged, mock kidnapping, but Theodore, unaware of the situation, nearly slew one of the masked "best men." Cousin Jotiel lives, but lost a leg.

Trinkets

◆ *"Baronesses, or Green Gowns & Tongue Tiffs."* Shockingly salacious prose under the nom de plume of Fabien Vabien. Guaranteed to steam up the driest larder. Perfect with a bottle or two of Gabo's Glamour and/or Sapphic Gold. 2 GP.
◆ **Wolfwhistle.** This enamelled wooden whistle doesn't work. 2 SP.
◆ **Travelling Roaster.** A fire-resistant spit poker that folds from its impressive 5 feet down to a single foot. 1 GP.
◆ **Glorymask.** These finely crafted masks cover the whole face, save for the mouth. They are usually made to resemble gawking devils, though some resemble real people. Hoozier will admit to owning one in the likeness of Queen Amélya if pressed. 2 GP for devil-or human-shaped mask, 27 GP for the queen one.



11 Tome of Deep Whispers	12 Lost Gateways of the Void	13 The Journal of Corrupted Secrets	14 The Secret Teachings of Sedit the Foul	15 The Book of Lost Truths	16 Rimmon's Study of Corrupted Time
66 Studies of the Insane Verse					Despicable Diseases of the Ancient Ones 21
65 The Loathsome Treatise of Blood Manipulation					Whispers of the Sea Spirits 22
64 Moloch's Journal of Imposed Thoughts					The Tome of Soul Erosion 23
63 The Journal of False Dreams					The Book of Vile Tongues 24
62 The Book of False Stars					The Tome of Veiled Doorways 25
61 The Prohibited Verses of St. Magdalena the Betrayer					The Book of Horrors to Come 26
56 St. Jasper's Visions of Below					The Book of Shadow Speech 31
55 The Tome of Lingering Death					Writhing Horrors of the Deep 32
54 Treatise on Abhorrent Uses of Time					Scribblings of a Shattered Mind 33
53 Abominable Verses of Hell					The Grimoire of Corrupted Tides 34
52 Treatise on the Divine Lies					The Witch Verse of Torment 35
51 The Grimoire of Forbidden Night					Calcazar's Study of the Dark Spirits 36
Algar's Treatise on Void Speech 46	The Tome of Angelic Transgressions 45	Teachings of the One from Beyond Time 44	The Songs of Forbidden Reversal 43	Warped Words of the Chained Horror 42	The Tome of Life Extension by Vile Means 41

by **Joseph Manola** - Art: **Jack Gaughan**

GAME-ENHANCING POWERS, GAME-RUINING POWERS, and MAGIC ITEMS

I've been running OSR D&D for years now, with a heavy focus on exploration, problem-solving, and diplomacy. I've tended to give my PCs access to lots of utility magic — whether in the form of magic items or spells — to enable the kind of improvisational problem-solving on which such games thrive. But there's utility and then there's utility, and a power with too few limitations can quickly break a game. Previous games, for example, taught me the hard way that giving PCs access to flight is a genie that's really hard to get back in its bottle once released, trivialising everything from obstacles (*"I fly over it"*) to tripwires and pressure plates (*"I fly over it"*) to melee-only enemies (*"I fly over it and shoot it to death"*).

Of course, these problems are context-dependent, and a more superheroic game could probably have taken such powers in its stride. But assuming you're after something resembling traditional fantasy, in which "a castle" or "a troll" is a dangerous but solvable problem to a clever and well-equipped party of adventurers, then here are my notes on the kinds of powers that make for good, enjoyable problem-solving tools, as well as the kind that can easily spoil things for everyone unless counterbalanced by significant downsides, and a handy list of magic items to go along with both...



THE GOOD STUFF
ABILITIES THAT FACILITATE CREATIVE AND INTELLIGENT PLAY

LEVITATION: Slow, vertical-only flight. Allows for all kinds of ingenious problem-solving but requires careful set-up, not particularly useful in combat, and generates hilarious mental images, especially if you allow levitating characters to be moved horizontally by party members pulling them along on ropes from below!

INVISIBILITY: This might seem very powerful, but if it genuinely is only invisibility—meaning that you still make sounds, leave scent trails, make footprints, etc.—then there are so many potential counter-measures that it's more likely to be used as an ingenious component of a cunning plan rather than as a slam-dunk victory condition. Partial invisibility (e.g., you still cast a shadow) is even better.

ILLUSIONS: The power to create intangible visual and/or audible illusions enables more demented ingenuity than just about any other ability. Endlessly flexible, and the lengths that PCs will go to in order to make sure no one reveals the trick by just touching their illusionary treasure / monster / whatever are the stuff that truly insane PC plans are made of.

TUNNELLING: Magical dig-through-stone-walls tunnelling can often short-circuit scenarios, especially in dungeon environments, but having a character with the ability to burrow through sand and loose dirt at semi-realistic speeds opens up all kinds of unorthodox approaches to break-ins, getaways, etc.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS: These are good, flexible powers with a wide variety of uses relating to stealth and detection, most of which require some set-up if PCs are going to get the most out of them. (If you're going to use darkness to cover your escape, how will you see while inside it?)

DISGUISES: Powers that let people disguise their appearance to match someone else's are a particularly interesting form of illusion, because the potential pay-off is so large but the dangers of detection are so high. I feel that these are best when they perfectly mimic appearance but only appearance: when it comes to mimicking voice, gait, mannerisms, knowledge, etc., the PCs are on their own!

MOVEMENT EFFECTS: Things like jump, spider climb, etc. Powers that let you get into places you normally couldn't reach. Allow problems to be approached from unusual angles, often quite literally.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANIPULATION: Things like creating heat, cold, fog, rain, etc. Not inherently beneficial in and of themselves, but capable of creating new situations which cunning PCs may be able to turn to their advantage!

CONSTRUCTION ABILITIES: Essentially a subtype of environmental manipulation: the ability to rapidly move earth, construct barricades, etc. Anything that lets PCs reshape an area on the fly and thus shift the spatial dynamics of an encounter.

WATER-BREATHING: Like tunnelling, water-breathing abilities open up new opportunities for getting into and out of places, and allow locations to be connected together in new ways via underground rivers, water pipes, and so on.

ENHANCED SENSES: Things like enhanced hearing, the ability to see perfectly in poor light (not total darkness), the ability to follow scents like a bloodhound, etc. These open up new and unexpected avenues for acquiring information.

COMMUNICATION ABILITIES: The more things your PCs can interact with, the better. Let them talk to monsters. To animals. To rocks, plants, corpses, water, air… As long as whatever they're talking to is not guaranteed to be useful or cooperative, giving them more opportunities for communication can only enhance their options for creative problem-solving. ("OK, how do we bribe the trees into helping us?")

TEMPORARY INTANGIBILITY: The trick is to not pair this with invisibility, by either making it ghost-style phantom projection or literal gaseous form. It then creates an interestingly asymmetric situation; you can see and be seen, but can't affect or be affected by anything you're seeing. Can be used either for scouting or for one-way infiltration—you can walk through the walls to get in, but then how are you going to get out?

VERY SPECIFIC IMMUNITIES: Complete immunity to fire, for example, or to falling damage. Abilities like these may be intermittently useful in combat, but they also allow situations to be approached in completely different ways. ("So I'll fly over the castle in a hot air balloon, jump out, drop a thousand feet down into the courtyard, and then open the gates from the inside…")

LIMITED TELEPATHY: Things like the ability to sense someone's emotions, or read their surface thoughts; just enough to give the PCs an exploitable edge in social situations without having to worry about every mystery collapsing on contact.

EMOTION CONTROL: Genuine mind control can easily become an "I WIN" button, but the ability to scale up a specific emotion requires much more care to use effectively. "I can make people feel really angry" is not, in itself, likely to solve many problems, but can easily be a component in such solutions.

THE BAD STUFF
ABILITIES THAT SHORT-CIRCUIT PLAY WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT LIMITATIONS

UNLIMITED FLIGHT: Trivialises too many kinds of obstacles and opponents, especially if it comes with perfect manoeuvrability as well. If you want to give your PCs access to flight, try to build in some serious limitations.

UNLIMITED INTANGIBILITY: Genuine walk-through-walls, at-will intangibility tends to trivialise information gathering, infiltration, escape, theft, etc.

MIND CONTROL: This includes "super charisma' powers of the "I'm just that persuasive!" variety. Anything that means PCs can simply steamroll interactions with NPCs rather than having to actually work out how to befriend or manipulate them will lead to much less interesting play.

MIND-READING AND LIE DETECTION: Short-circuits any kind of investigation or mystery and makes diplomacy much less interesting.

"SNIPER" ATTACKS: Very powerful, very accurate, very long-range attacks can make for very one-sided, non-interactive combat scenes, and thus for very boring gameplay. This can easily become an "everything looks like a nail" situation.

UNLIMITED INFORMATION EFFECTS: The ability to commune with near-omniscient beings, for example, or powerful divination effects that always return accurate answers. It's usually OK if PCs are allowed just one question, but if this is a power they have repeat access to, then it becomes very hard to maintain any kind of mystery, or even ambiguity.

SPEED/MOBILITY EFFECTS: When confronted with any kind of enemy, one question the PCs are always going to ask is "Can we just kite it to death?" This is a fair question, but if the answer is always "yes," then the temptation to resolve every possible encounter in exactly the same way becomes very strong. I'd thus advise caution in granting mobility effects that allow PCs to engage opponents without ever allowing their opponents to engage with them: speed effects, for example, that let them move at full speed while still attacking. It's fun the first time, but it can become very boring very fast.

1D20 MAGIC ITEMS FOR INGENIOUS PROBLEM-SOLVERS

1. MAT OF LEVITATION. Anyone sitting cross-legged on this threadbare prayer mat can levitate at will by concentrating. If they stop concentrating for any reason, they fall. Only vertical movement straight up or down is possible.

2. RING OF NEAR INVISIBILITY. Anyone wearing this ring becomes invisible, but still casts a shadow. The ring itself does not become invisible and may be spotted floating around by alert observers. The ring does nothing to mask the wearer's scent, sound, or footprints.

3. AMULET OF THE MOLE. This amulet permits its wearer to dig tunnels through sand or dirt (not stone) like a mole, at a rate of 5' per minute. Tunnels will only be wide enough for the person who dug them to crawl through on hands and knees. It does not grant any ability to see in the dark.

4. HATPIN OF DISGUISE. Prick someone with this pin hard enough to draw blood, and the next time you place it in your own hat or hair, you will take on their physical appearance until it is removed. (This is a visual illusion only. For example, if they have a beard and you don't, then anyone touching your chin will realise something is amiss.) Your clothes and voice remain unchanged.

5. ARMBANDS OF THE APE. Anyone wearing these chunky brass bangles gains the ability to climb and brachiate like an ape or monkey, rapidly scampering up trees or walls and swinging easily from branches, ropes, and chains. Wear them as anklets, and you can swing by your feet, instead.

6. BLIZZARD BAG. Cold to the touch, and shakes and shudders violently. When opened, a whole blizzard bursts out, filling the surrounding area with screaming winds and freezing, blinding gales of snow. Visibility drops to almost nothing, flying is impossible, and surfaces will be rapidly covered with snow and frost, making them very slippery and difficult to cross for anyone who isn't moving very slowly and carefully.

7. BAG OF EMOTION. When opened, these create a localised mood effect in a radius of 1d10x10 feet around the bag. Anyone within the affected area when the bag is opened must save or be affected by the relevant emotion for the next 1d6 hours. Would make good missile weapons as long as you can be sure of them bursting on impact. Roll 1d3 to find subtype:

- 1. Bag of anger. Anyone affected will be filled with irrational rage for the duration. The tiniest setbacks or disagreements will prompt screaming arguments and howls of fury, minor provocations will lead to fistfights, and serious insults or challenges are likely to provoke lethal violence.
- 2. Bag of confidence. Anyone affected will be filled with irrational confidence for the duration. This isn't insanity—they won't believe they can do something impossible, like fly or breathe water—but will tend to make people very, very reckless. Rank amateurs will gleefully attempt tasks that they would normally leave to trained professionals, while experts will throw all their normal caution to the wind. These effects can be helpful (for example, giving someone with social anxiety the confidence to speak publicly), but will always tend more towards "manic overconfidence" rather than "calm self-belief."
- 3. Bag of friendship. Anyone affected will be filled with warm, fuzzy, happy feelings, like the kind you get after three or four drinks with really good friends. Enmity or hostility will still be regarded as such, but any kind of friendly behaviour will be enthusiastically reciprocated, even when it comes from complete strangers. Those affected will also be much more trusting than they normally would be.

8. TREE PHRASEBOOK. This enchanted book allows you to talk to trees... sort of. Reading from it gives you enthusiastic-tourist levels of ability to understand and be understood by trees, mostly by making alarming groaning noises with your throat. It does not make trees inherently well-disposed towards you, though they can be bribed with fertiliser or threatened with fire. Similar books may exist for communicating with rocks, rivers, etc.

9. THOUGHT INTERCEPTOR EARRING. If anyone within your line of sight thinks a really big thought (e.g., "OH MY GOD I LOVE HIM SO MUCH" or "I WILL FUCKING KILL HIM") while you are wearing this earring, then you will "hear" it as though it had just been shouted into the ear to which the earring is attached. Such thoughts are "spoken" in the wearer's own voice, and it will not always be apparent whom they are coming from, though context will often make this obvious. If you're in a whole crowd of people all thinking really big thoughts (e.g., a panicking mob trying to escape a fire), then the effect is simply deafening.

10. TORC OF WATER-BREATHING. This golden torc is decorated with engraved gills. Wearing it allows the wearer to breathe underwater. It does not provide any swimming abilities or the ability to see in the dark.

11. CLOAK OF LIMITED FLYING. Once per day, this bright red cloak permits its wearer to fly rapidly for 1d10 rounds. This ability is triggered by simply leaping into the air. The user is unaware of how long the duration is, and will only know the magic has stopped when they start dropping out of the sky.

12. GHOST JUICE. Drinking this potion causes you to temporarily die and become a ghost for 1d6 hours. During this time, you are intangible, allowing you to float around and walk through walls, but you are not invisible and are clearly recognisable as a ghostly, ghastly version of yourself. You can talk during this time, though your voice is thin and tends towards wailing. You are immune to non-magical damage for the duration and cannot cause physical harm to anyone else. At the conclusion of the effect, you are sucked back into your body and return to life.

13. RUST MONSTER EXTRACT. For 1d6 rounds, every ferrous object that comes in contact with the user's skin turns instantly to rust. Can be used to rust your way through metal locks or barriers or to destroy enemy weapons and armour by touch, or can be thrown on an enemy to make their own metal equipment turn to rust.

14. DIVINE PASS NOTE. Write a single factual yes-no question on one side of this enchanted papyrus, wait five minutes, and turn it over. God will have written YES or NO on the other side. Shortly afterwards, the note will spontaneously combust. Anyone trying to use this item to learn things that Man Was Not Meant To Know will find that they spontaneously combust, instead.

15. ACOUSTIC AMULET. Wearing this amulet enhances your hearing tenfold, allowing you to listen in on conversations thousands of yards away. Any kind of loud noise that occurs nearby while you are wearing it will be painful if not deafening.

16. HAMMER OF THE SURVIVOR. This worn construction hammer is stained with zombie blood. As long as suitable construction materials are available, it allows stockades and barricades to be constructed at twenty times their normal speed.

17. MAGIC FEATHER. As long as this feather is gripped tightly, no fall from any height will cause any damage to the holder.

18. FX BOX. Looks like a complicated wind-up music box with a directional speaker. A wheel on the side can be set to any one of dozens of options ("thunder," "sounds of battle," "screaming," "birdsong," "suspicious conversations," etc.). When the crank is turned, the selected sound will be heard emanating from the place that the speaker is pointing at for as long as the user carries on turning the handle.

19. BLACK BREATH CHOKER. Wearing this onyx choker allows the wearer to exhale huge clouds of blinding darkness, which completely block all light and dissipate like smoke (meaning that they'll vanish much more quickly in a high wind or similar). Each exhalation exhausts its power for 1d6 minutes. The choker does not grant the ability to see through darkness.

20. POTION OF STONEFLESH. User's flesh becomes grey, heavy, and super-dense. For 2d6 minutes, the user becomes almost impossible to harm but also slow and clumsy. Use it to survive dangerous environments, or use it on someone standing on a flimsy bridge or walkway and watch them fall through the floor.

by **Humberto Tramujas**

The Lego Bucket Analogy

Imagine your game is like an unorganized bucket of Legos. There are no instructions included—you dump out a wide variety of pieces (rules, settings, encounters) onto the table, but there's no clear structure or instructions for what to build. The players (and the referee) are free to create and destroy whatever they like. They can use any piece, in any way, to build their own story, and often, they'll be experimenting, improvising, collaborating, and reshaping the world as they go. But here's the key: at some point in your life, you've seen a complete Lego castle and despite not knowing exactly how it got built, you knew the basic principles—how pieces can fit together, how certain shapes interlock, and how you can combine them in unexpected ways. When you sit down with that bucket of Legos, you know that certain pieces can fit together, but there are no step-by-step instructions on what to build. This is how I made players see that the world is wide open and what they build with the pieces is what is important. You might not know what you're going to build from the start, but your past experience with Legos gives you the confidence to start connecting pieces in new and creative ways. Sometimes you'll fail, sometimes you'll discover something new, but it's all part of the process.

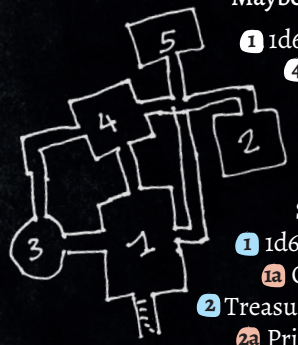
In the end, you will see the castle that you and your friends built: this is the emergent, storytelling aspect of the game.

by **Sean McCoy**

Write Rooms In Pairs

When you're working on a key for a dungeon or other location, it can be difficult to come up with all the concepts you need to round the place out. One trick I've learned to cut this in half is to write rooms in pairs.

Maybe you have a boring list of rooms like so:



1 1d6 goblins. 2 Treasure chest with some gold. 3 Empty room. 4 Orc. 5 Pit trap.

Right? It's not far from basic dungeon stocking. What we do is take these rooms and create a second room to connect them to conceptually.

So:

1 1d6 goblins.
- 1a Goblin chief served by the goblins in 1.

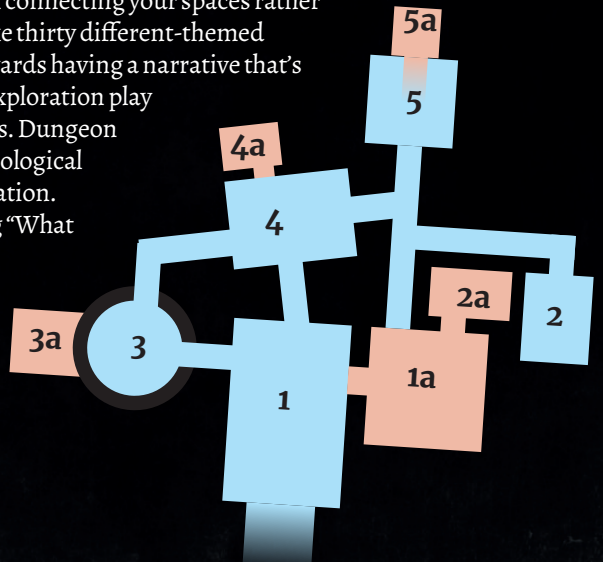
2 Treasure chest with some gold.
- 2a Prisoner who knows the location of the treasure chest in 2.

3 Empty room.
- 3a Secret room accessible from the empty room 3.

4 Orc.
- 4a Goblin hiding from the orc in 4.

5 Pit trap.
- 5a Treasure horde at the bottom of the pit trap in 5.

You can think of these rooms as sequels and prequels to the rooms you've already come up with. Setups and punchlines. This gets you in the mindset of connecting your spaces rather than thinking of a dungeon like thirty different-themed rooms. This also takes you towards having a narrative that's more conducive to dungeon exploration play than story arcs based on events. Dungeon narratives work best as archaeological delves or crime scene investigation. Your players are always asking "What happened here?" Writing in pairs builds connectivity and halves the amount of work you have to do.



1d7 Dungeon Flora

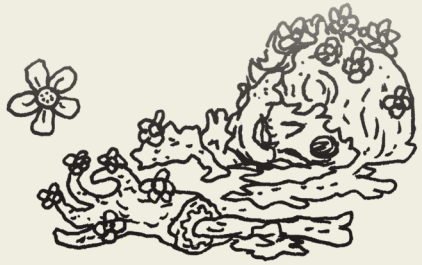
by **Eric Nieudan** - Art: **Evlyn Moreau**

If the conditions are right to harvest, consider that 1d8 doses are ripe for the taking.

1. Pudding's Envie. A seaweed-like plant that grows on puddings, oozes, and slimes. Even when the creature is immobile and camouflaged, its stalks are seen weaving as if they were underwater. Greenest Wisdom Ortorox writes that slimes, being neither liquid nor solid, make for a confusing soil to sprout from. The envie's stalks can be snapped and pressed to produce pudding milk, an acid-resistant tincture (+4 to saves vs. acid).



2. Dreamer's Moss. The detached head of a sentient being left to rot in the moonlight (and away from carrion eaters) soon grows this furry, purple lichen. In the spring, the dreamer's moss sprouts five-petaled white flowers that are taken as a decoction to allow a dreamer to commune with another in dreams (WIS check to find the right person's dream world; they can save vs. spells to evict the intruder). Do not confuse it with the ghost moss flower, which grows on undead heads and has seven petals. It is a virulent poison (-2 to save; nightmare-filled coma for 1d6 months before a painful death).



3. Doorman's Paddle. The sage Necromius discovered a use for this muddy orange, hollow mushroom growing on oak doors of tombs and barrows. Dry it, mix it with rat fat, and wear it as a mitten to open any door, in total silence, no matter how creaky. It loses its potency after three uses.



5. Cobblestone Dowry. A sky-blue flower that springs from the ground trod by dungeon delvers who are true romantics. No one has found a magical use for it yet, but a bouquet brought to a tryst or rendezvous gives +1 to reaction rolls.



4. Torchlight Hope. A vibrant yellow vine that will invariably grow from the wood of a century-old torch when it is lit for the first time. The plant feeds off the torch bearer's warmth more than the torch's light. If inside its radius for a whole hour, save versus spells or lose 1d3 points of Wisdom (recovered at the rate of 1 per week). The orange buds of the torchlight hope produce a flame when crushed or thrown (1 damage, flammable materials catch fire). If kept in hand, they burn like inextinguishable candles for 2d6 hours but drain 1 point of Wisdom.



6. Sad Knight's Lettuce. A nutritious leafy vegetable, its hue is so light it's almost white. It only grows in the deepest darkness, withering and dying when exposed to any light. As such, the lettuce takes refuge, slowly walking on its ambulatory roots, in discarded backpacks, broken chests, and the armour of slain adventurers. A handful of leaves feeds an adventurer for a day, but it must be carried in sealed containers and eaten in the dark.





7. Dragon Thistle. Produced by a bloëmdrakk (see p. 166), dragon thistle seeds follow chthonian air currents and take root at the bottom of dungeons located far from cultivated lands. Of these, one in ten seeds takes root and grows into another bloëmdrakk. The other seeds keep floating from room to hallway until someone inhales them—save versus poison or become compelled to immediately leave the dungeon and regurgitate the seed so it can drift towards a more hospitable underground habitat.



THE BASIS OF THE GAME IS MAKING DECISIONS

by **John B.**

Some people are going to find what I'm talking about **so obvious** they won't understand why I feel the need to mention it. To those people, I offer my apologies. However, the Mushmen see this as a point always worth remembering...

My point: The core activity of roleplaying games is making decisions. Every other activity feeds back into this core in one way or another.

Rules are there to:

- control and shape the field of possible decisions;
- determine the likelihood of particular outcomes of those decisions;
- structure who makes which decision.

Characterisation, party dynamics, and the world exist to:

- shape the values and tools used in decision-making;
- establish decision procedures;
- provide stakes and consequences for decisions;
- feed and guide players' imaginations.

It contrasts with the quite widespread claim that a roleplaying game is like a television show, novel, or movie that is focused on telling a captivating narrative, which I find problematic on several counts.

Explaining to a new player what the game is with "*You're like the star of a TV show going on an adventure*" or "*You're a character in a fictional world who lives out a story*" implies that the most important activity or skill is acting, and the structure of play will follow the scene-framing and development of other narratives. It is, therefore, a rude shock (the now famous "Matt Mercer effect") when they start playing a game and they are not very good at acting out their character and the flow of a session does not follow the narrative progression of other media.

In addition, this kind of understanding tends to lead to railroading, which I understand as the negation of player characters' ability to make meaningful decisions, combined with the players' knowledge that this is the case. I think **a decision-based understanding** of gameplay is superior to this narrative understanding for two reasons. The first reason is pedagogical, and the second is schematic.

Pedagogically: Focusing on decision-making is useful for that new player. They begin by making and justifying decisions with the character as a pawn (on the character's behalf), then learn how to make decisions based on the character's subjectivity (as the character). Similarly, they learn to justify their decisions to the referee or other PCs on behalf of their character (or out of character), and then how to justify them as the character to the other characters in-world.

Schematically: Rather than structuring the progression of a campaign as a series of dramatic scenes with the PCs flowing from one to the other, games are structured as a set of situations where PCs must make decisions. The development of the story in terms of decisions actually provides a clearer and more effective plan than trying to think of the next "chapter."

As a bonus, the effect of a decision-based structure is that it actually seems more like a traditional or realistic narrative than trying to plot out a story as if it were a novel, television show, or movie. Making decisions and dealing with the consequences is what happens to characters in a well-written story as well as in real life.

by **Antoine Bauza**

Dungeon Vending Machine

A convenience for adventurers, available 24/7!

Forgot something? We've got you covered!

Anywhere, anytime...and cheap!

ABOUT PRICING
Some machines have a single fixed price for all products, but some are set on a random amount (for example: 4d10 gold) to entertain customers and maximise profit.

DUNGEON INC.

Common vending machines usually proibde one kind of merchandise. Roll d4 and turn the page

DEFENSIVE SYSTEM
The defensive system is triggered if the device is jimmied, tipped, or otherwise molested.

D6

1- **Electricity discharge**
2d10 damage (x2 if metal armour). Save vs wands for half damage. Glass may shatter.

2- **Paralysing gas**
Save vs poison. Failure: Paralyzed for 1 hour. Success: Still very slowed down—disadvantage on all rolls for 1 hour.

3- **Floor trap**
Trap with spikes, falling blade, snake pit, you choose! Save vs breath or take 3d6 damage.

4- **Poison**
A filled dark flask, no label, is dispensed for free. If you drink it, save vs poison or suffer horrible death.

5- **Response team**
The two suits of armour in the room attack! Stats as an Iron Living Statue.

6- **Explosion**
The vending machine explodes. Everything in the room takes 6d6 damage. Its contents are destroyed.

1. Food

1 purchase delivers 1d4 rations of the food

1. **Rations (expired)**
Does the job, but save vs poison. Failure: Cramps give you a -2 penalty to all rolls for the next 12 hours.
2. **Rations (standard)**
Neither good nor bad.
3. **Rations (superior)**
Invigorating. Heal 1d6 HP.
4. **Rations (du «Chef»)**
Smells good. Tastes delicious. Attracts good graces if offered.
5. **Rations (purified)**
You have +2 to saves and attacks against devils and demons until the next sunrise.
6. **Rations (blessed)**
You have +2 to saves and attacks against undead until the next sunset.

Full or empty? If the PCs are wealthy and continue to put coins into the machine, consider that each machine only has 2d6 pieces of merchandise available at any time.

2. Beverages

1 purchase delivers 1d3 doses of the beverage

1. **Alcohol**
Tastes bad, but it's strong. Flammable.
2. **Healing potion**
Restores 2d6+2 hp but colours your hair permanently.
3. **Tonic**
Advantage to all tests during the next 1d4 hours. Afterwards, save vs poison or suffer disadvantage to all tests for the next 1d6 hours.
4. **Sleeping concoction**
1 dose puts a medium-size humanoid to sleep for 1d4 hours.
5. **Universal antidote**
Cures any poison. Afterwards, save vs poison or lose 1 point of Constitution.
6. **Beauty lotion**
+2 to Reaction rolls and advantage to Charisma rolls for 1d4 hours.

Nobody knows how those contraptions ended up in dank, dark dungeons

4. Tools

1 purchase delivers 1 tool

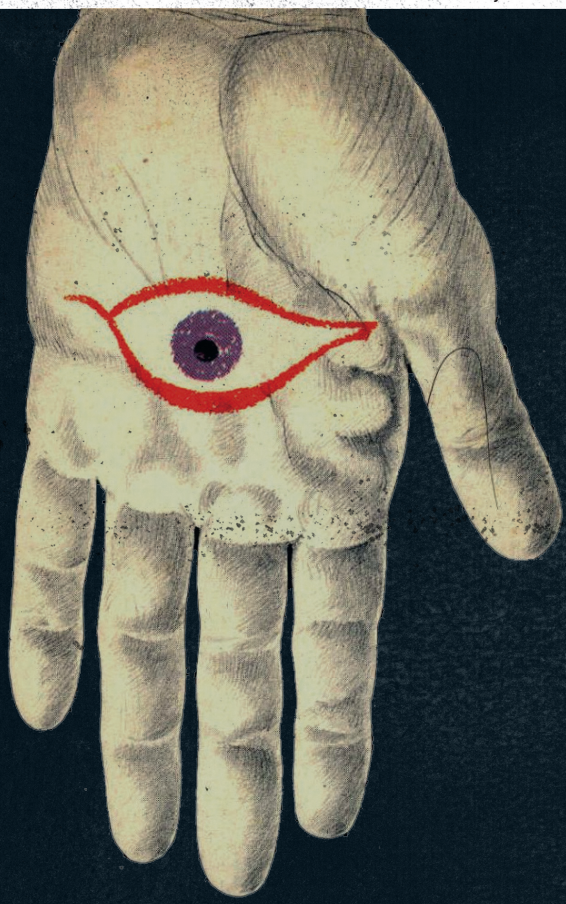
1. **Silk rope**
Dispenses a 4d6 ft. length of light, fancy rope.
2. **Bandages**
Mint smell. Restore 3d4 hp. Single use.
3. **Folding ladder.**
Unfolds in a snap up to 30' high and takes up no more space than a thick book, once folded. Supports up to 300 lbs, but not an ounce more.
4. **Torch**
Lasts 2x as long as a normal torch. Random smell 1d4 (vanilla, cooked meat, rotten meat, soap).
5. **Flask of oil**
Always handy.
6. **Key**
Open the very next lock you try to open with it.

3. Scrolls

1 purchase delivers 1 scroll (one-time use)

1. **Map**
Nearby locations are drawn on it (badly)—even secret places and traps.
2. **Mirror sheet**
Acts as a mirror.
3. **Origami sheet**
Fold it into a recognizable shape and it becomes the object.
4. **Food creation**
Draw what you want to eat in the blank space and the food appears.
5. **Music score**
Plays entertaining music when unrolled. Music stops when rolled up. Turns to dust when the piece of music is over.
6. **Blank**
What? If the PC protests out loud, a pen and inkwell are dispensed from the machine (free of charge).

by **Gabriel Rossman**



STRANGE RITES

If you read history or anthropology, you'll quickly learn that religions in the real world are far more fantastic than the normal RPG conceit that boils down to: "Start with Episcopalians, except they're all dwarves and they worship Moradin and there's an anvil where the altar should be."

New World cultures provide lots of extreme examples. George Catlin's ethnography of the Mandan nation includes descriptions of a coming-of-age ritual that involved boys being starved, crucified, and beaten. Or consider the reconstructed proto-Indo-European institution of the kóryos: teen boys would be sent out from

the tribe to live as a wolf pack, and re-entry to society as young men involved them ritually sacrificing their pet dogs.

The point is that religious rites can be really strange. I created these tables to let you create something strange but consistent with the ethnographic and archaeological record, the next time your player characters encounter a religious ritual.

ROLL ON EACH TABLE

WHAT'S THE OCCASION?

1 Funerary 2 Astronomical (e.g, solstice, equinox, new moon) 3 Agrarian (e.g., harvest, planting) 4 Wedding 5 Coming of age 6 Diplomatic (e.g., signing a peace treaty)

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF WORSHIP? Roll twice.

1 Orgy 2 Human sacrifice (1d6: 1. strangulation, 2. immolation, 3. ritual combat, 4. heart removal, 5. buried alive or drowned, 6. shoved off a cliff) 3 Animal sacrifice (1d6: 1. cattle, 2. goats or sheep, 3. horses, 4. doves or chickens, 5. dogs or wolves, 6. other) 4 Feast 5 Bonfire of trade goods 6 Fasting 7 Hallucinogenic drugs 8 Self-torture 9 Poetry recital 10 Athletic games

HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

1 An hour 2 Several hours 3 A day and a night 4 Three days 5 A week 6 All month

WHOSE OR WHAT'S PRESENCE IS PROPITIOUS/TABOO?

Roll once for each. If you get the same roll for both, invent some distinction. For instance, flying insects are propitious but crawling insects are taboo, or recently enslaved people are taboo but vernae are propitious.

1 Insects 2 Birds 3 Scavengers 4 Lightning 5 Nobility 6 Commoners 7 Slaves 8 Foreigners 9 Boys who have yet to kill 10 Menstruating women 11 Post-menopausal women 12 Third-gender people 13 Anyone who has killed since the last (1d4: 1. solstice, 2. full moon, 3. rain storm, 4. harvest) 14 The kinship moiety opposite those holding the rites (e.g., in a patrilineal culture, the priest's mother's brothers) 15 Anyone who was born (1d4: 1. with a caul, 2. to a widow, 3. during the new moon, 4. to a slave mother) 16 Flowers 17 Mushrooms 18 Meat 19 Root vegetables 20 Roll twice

WHAT SUPERNATURAL ENTITIES ARE INVOKED OR PROPITIATED?

1 The ancestors of their lineage 2 Minor gods who are the special protectors of a particular lineage (e.g., lares) 3 The fey 4 Nature in an animistic sense 5 A 6HD or higher monster (a dragon, a mind flayer, etc.) which the worshippers believe to be a divinity 6 A Deities & Demigods style pantheon of gods 7 A Lovecraftian entity 8 Foreigners whose visit two generation ago is still misremembered as a visit from the gods

by Ty Pitre

Tension

is a question asked with the answer delayed

In every piece of prep, strive to look for pockets of tension to exploit. Imbuing tension allows you to create moments of the game with a sense of pressure that's satisfying and exciting for your players.

Here's a handy list of 10 ways to INVOKE TENSION:
1 / Constraints: The usual approach to this situation won't work. **2 / Countdowns**: This situation will end, escalate, or evolve soon. **3 / Hidden Dangers**: While the situation appears safe, there is something unexpected below the surface. **4 / Mysteries:** There are tantalising unknowns within the situation. **5 / Competition:** Another person or group is actively opposing the characters in the situation. **6 / Moral Stances:** Participating in the situation says something about the characters. **7 / Retribution:** Participating in the situation will anger another group, person, or faction. **8 / Troublesome NPCs:** The situation contains NPCs that must be navigated carefully. **9 / Gates & Gatekeepers:** Getting to the situation requires a test, and remaining in the situation may require further tests. **10 / Hard Choices:** The situation has zero sum choices—choosing one locks out all the others.

CONSTRAINTS

Take something that is a given and make it impossible. Taking away otherwise normal options and courses of action can cause the players to shift mindsets and operate in a new way, increasing tension. ***Example**: The sphinx, declawed by previous abusive owners, is harmless and hasn't killed anyone in years. But she'll only respond to people that speak to her in questions, and she'll only give straightforward answers to those that make their sentences rhyme at the same time.*
► Can we communicate our needs in a way that satisfies the sphinx?

COUNTDOWNS

Create a clock with a definitive bad ending, and show it to the players. At appropriate times, mark a tick on the clock. As the characters run out of time to complete their task, the tension grows. ***Example***: There's a contact to meet in a nearby nightclub, but the characters catch wind that the watch is going to raid it at some point tonight, scattering every spy and information broker to the wind. The players, seeing the clock in front of them, will feel the tension of trying to find their person before the bad guys show up.
► Can we find our contact before we lose access to this location? Can we get what we need before the watch shows up?

HIDDEN DANGERS

Players will, through a reinforced history of games or tropes, consider certain areas to be safe. A tavern is safe apart from a bar fight or, at worst, a rival showdown. A market square doesn't have the same danger as some dark pit in a dungeon. Invert this. Places that are safe contain a hidden and (more importantly) unexpected danger. **Example:** *The tavern has a pit in the centre of it that a writhing mass lives in, and sometimes the closest patrons turn into food. Meeting with the king requires standing on a narrow stone bridge in a wide cavern, buffeted by howling winds from the caves below.*
► Can we figure out the danger quick enough to avoid it?

MYSTERIES
When there is something afoot and the players feel the unease, they will want to unravel the secret. There is an undeniable desire to know the unknown. ***Example:*** *There is a woman in the tavern that keeps a permanent private booth, and every regular takes time out of their night to bring her a glass of wine and close the curtains. Each emerges looking extra haggard or as if greatly refreshed by the meeting.*
► Who is the woman? What does she do to the people she meets with? Why do they meet with her?

COMPETITION
When the characters are trying to achieve something, even something mundane, the introduction of a rival crew will immediately raise the hackles of players. The higher the stakes of the competition, the more tension introduced. ***Example:*** *A sage only has time and desire to provide their services to a single group a day. To gain an audience, the characters must plead a stronger case than their competitors.*
► Can we outsmart our rivals? Can we deny what they want while getting what we want?

MORAL STANCES
While this doesn't work for every group, creating a situation where the players need to decide on their character's moral stance on tricky issues can immediately raise tension in the game, especially if the longer they remain in the situation, the more moral strain is caused. ***Example:*** *If the characters need to meet with a cabal of friendly-enough vampires, are they willing to discuss things while the vampires wine and dine on a group of the locals? Are they willing to BYOB as an offering?*
► Are we willing to participate in this, even as bystanders? What are the limits of our characters?

THREAT OF RETRIBUTION
If the characters know that taking a certain course of action will bring definitive retribution upon them, they may choose to avoid it. Trying to get away with the action while skirting the retribution drives up the stakes of an otherwise innocuous situation. ***Example:*** *The characters have been invited to an exclusive, high-end fancy party, where the contacts they make will provide them with better equipment, better leads, and better pay. Attending the party will turn the revolutionaries they've been hanging out with against them.*
► Can we get away with this? Is this worth taking risks for?

TROUBLESOME NPCS
NPCs can be downright annoying to deal with, turning a quick transaction or conversation into a tense encounter of trying to disentangle themselves from the situation. ***Example:*** *The quest giver is a powerful mercenary captain, and the jobs the characters pick up from her are typically easy and pay well. However, the captain is irascible—she'll fight at the first provocation. Players must be careful to avoid her temper, and the longer you talk to her, the more you risk an outburst.*
► How do we tell this NPC to get lost without offending them? How do we deal with the troublesome contact?

GATES & GATEKEEPERS
The situation can be made more difficult by forcing the characters to get past a guardian before they can get what they want. This works just the same as it would in a dungeon, really, but you can slap it onto any sort of social situation. **Example:** *The bouncer doesn't like your vibe. They don't want to let you in. And if they have to let you in, they'll follow and check up on you regularly until you're gone.*
► How do we get past? What are they guarding?

HARD CHOICES
When the stakes of a situation are clear to the players and they must make a decision between two or more things, tension builds from that decision. The more the players understand the ramifications of the choices, whether concretely or abstractly, the better. **Example:** *The leader of the citadel has died, and the group needs to choose a new one. Whoever doesn't get chosen will not take kindly to the decision.*
► Who do we choose? What merits do we base our decision on?

by **Adrian Hammer**

d10 DRACONIC SYMBIOSES

In some games, dragons are powerful, setting-defining creatures. They shape entire regions, terrorising every soul within reach. A kaiju flying lizard that can turn to ash entire cities certainly commands a lot of attention. Followers and remora wanting to live off of that power will sprout—it's just a matter of time.

1. An arctic city is heated by the underground sleeping dragon. In return, the peasantry makes sure slumbering music and aromatic candles keep the fat lizard asleep.
2. Cultists drink this dragon's blood to go berserk. Has to be done through the dragon's eye (the only spot without scales). Of course, this dragon loves the flattery of worship.
3. Yaach are hairy, bison-like creatures, with long, shaggy pelts that blend into their environment, making them very hard to spot. Their huge trunks are used to drink and catch mice and oversized insects. They are mammals, but wish otherwise. Will hatch a dragon's egg for as long as needed, given their protective instincts.
4. The dragon lives in its tower, overseeing and protecting the duchy with a menacing gaze towards external threats. The fierce rule of Law reigns here! Every seventh year, the duchy gives tribute, and the dragon takes a maiden as payment for its services.
5. A red dragon is flying over a galley-sized pickle, impaled on top of the cathedral's spire. Every so often, the dragon dives into the huge cucumber and takes a lick. Doing so makes it regain d6 HP and go into an elated stupor.
6. A necrotic black dragon is at the center of the ghoul oligarchy. It is considered their sage, counsellor, and confidant. There is mutual respect and understanding, but also utter dependency. An addict, the dragon relies on the oligarchs to provide the drug it needs to feign death.
7. Gets teeth pulled to be used as magical daggers by mousefolk and wererats. Gets trinkets and candy in return, perpetuating this arrangement. This has, in turn, evolved into a children's tale in other parts of the world.
8. This dragon sells its eggs to a powerful and wealthy wizard. The magician likes them scrambled with salt and cheese. He gives spells and rare books to the dragon in exchange, and as a dragon's hoard is the most important...
9. The Pink Fog and Mist of the Yahaleh Steppes is magical in form and nature. Source of a thousand gruesome tales, feared by merchants and travellers, it is best avoided if possible. An ancient dragon, however, has taken residence there within the last year, seeking the sapphire gems that crystallise on the steppes. However, breathing the fumes for that amount of time makes it incapable of telling the truth (as if by a geas).
10. Actually, this dragon is the "little sister" in this relationship. It serves as the furnace of an underground kingdom of fire giants. Outraged by its working conditions and wages, it is planning an uprising.

by **David Hill**



Of MICE and Villains

Villains with cool motivations make cool adventures. So where do we get cool motivations from?

In the world of espionage, the acronym MICE (or some variation of it) is used to describe the motivations for an asset turning traitor. This can be a good framework for motivations for villains in your games.

Money . *"Greed is good"* - Gordon Gecko
This is an easy motivation to understand since it is often also a motivation for players. An NPC motivated by gold, an artefact, or power might simply be a rival adventurer!

Ideology. *"Rise up? Do you really believe men will fight and die for a rag on a pole?"* - Richard Sharpe
Nothing gets people killed on a grander scale than religion, political beliefs, or nationalism. For examples, see pretty much the entirety of human history.

Coercion. *"I had no choice. They arrived right before you did. I'm sorry."* - Lando Calrissian
Plenty of people find themselves backed into situations by outside forces and end up doing bad things. (This might be better employed on a sub-villain than your big bad!)

Ego. *"He tasks me. He tasks me, and I shall have him. I'll chase him round the moons of Nibia and round the Antares maelstrom and round Perdition's flames before I give him up."* - Khan Noonien Singh
Some people feel the burning desire to prove they are better. This can be an inbuilt trait or be derived from a past grievance.

Things become more interesting when motivations are layered. Sometimes they have a tension against each other. Sometimes they provide a twist.

- **Greed+Coercion.** Bandits in the woods are waylaying travellers, robbing people of their purses, and raiding farmsteads. However, they're not in for the money. A neighbouring baron wants to sow chaos in his rival's land and is holding the families of the alleged bandits hostage.
- **Ideology+Ego.** A priest is leading a peasant revolution, preaching a fiery ideology against the feudal system and hanging nobles. In truth, the priest does not care for the peasants' plight—all of his ambitions are to win the throne for himself.
- **Ego+Ideology/Coercion.** A fierce warlord has proclaimed himself king of all kings, and has set to work conquering this land. In truth, he has learned that there will be a planar invasion during the next confluence of the planets and is trying to unite the lands into a single force to resist this extraplanar invasion.

by **Evlyn Moreau**



Alignment languages misc▪mmunicati▪n

I feel like the alignment languages are a fun way to emphasise the characters' alignment without limiting their roleplay or actions. They provide characters with a vector of interaction—how they use this tool is up to them. Their broad use may seem a bit unbalanced; why learn Goblin or Troll when you can just speak Chaotic? A way to balance things is to make the alignment languages prone to confusing double meanings and miscommunication. This could be due to these languages being similar to simplified conlangs like **Toki Pona**, having a limited vocabulary and needing a lot of contextualisation. **When a character uses an alignment language**, roll a d6 at the end of the discussion.

	CHAOS	BALANCE	LAW
1	Imply something is coveted or feared	Imply patience and waiting	Imply hierarchy, rank or authority
2	Imply something is wretched or powerful	Imply something is natural or cyclic	Imply a debt
3	Imply secrecy or connivance	Imply something must be balanced or reciprocal	Imply something is fixed, sealed, unchangeable
4	Imply dominance or submission	Imply two things are equivalent	Imply judgement or a test
5	Imply personal initiative must be taken	Imply mutual help or trade	Imply unity or cohesion is needed or must be enforced
6	No miscommunication	No miscommunication	No miscommunication

I encourage you to write your own miscommunication tables tailored for your campaign. Don't forget to name each language. Speaking the Changing Tongue, the Green Speech, or the Silver Way is more inspiring than speaking Chaotic, Neutral, or Lawful.

by **Warren D.**

GRENDEL MENDEL

USING PUNNETT SQUARES FOR MONSTER DESIGN

Good monster design is one that is not too complicated, but provides variety and "identity." To help me think about and achieve that variation, I use a sort of "Punnett square" based on [Melee or Ranged] × [Damage or Special].

I created this method when trying to figure out how to further differentiate all the various factions in my game. I wanted each faction to have both a distinctive feel and strategic/tactical pros and cons. That way PCs could make informed decisions, based on their own party compositions, of who to interact with and which tactics to use.Here is the basic **Punnett's Square** outline.

Faction X	Damage	Special
Melee		
Range		

Characteristics of Each Quadrant

In terms of combat, most methods of dealing effects are delivered either in melee or at range (no matter short or long). And broadly, the type of effects delivered by combat are damage to HP or some modification of PC mechanics (broadly defined). Therefore, the two axes of the matrix are Melee or Ranged, and Damage or Special. First, let's look at the two Melee quadrants.

▸ Melee Monsters

· Melee × Damage: Enemies are characterized by how much damage they inflict and the weapons they use to do it: sword, ax, mace, or claws. The rank-and-file of an army or faction. The very basic unit. Generally, I keep the damage equal to whatever weapon you use to define the melee "class." This might also be a place to add an extra attack.

· Melee × Special: For the exercise, I try to keep the damage at a 1d6 level but try to think of (a) some unique way to deliver damage; (b) some unique effect on a successful hit in addition to the damage (which is why it's kept low); or (c) some spell-like effect that changes things while in melee. This quadrant might also include "attack animals" the Melee × Damage units might use.

Now, since you are often running monsters in aggregate, I'd stick to just one additional effect, or at the most two. This is because too many effects take up the referee's brain-space. 1d8 examples include:

1. Too Quick!: Always attacks before the PCs.

2. Charge!: Moves in a straight line; anyone in their way must save vs. paralysis or take +1d6 damage.

3. Heavy Hands: On a successful hit, PC must save versus paralysis or be knocked prone.

4. Duellist: On a damage roll of 1, PC must save vs paralysis or their weapon or shield is knocked from their hand.

5. Grisly Visage: Has a 5' aura of fear (hirelings will not engage in melee; characters < 4 HD must save vs. paralysis).

6. Mirrored Image: Hard to focus on the true creature. The first X attacks automatically miss.

7. Spiky: Take 1 damage per round engaged in melee with the creature (pretty classic).

8. Web: Upon a successful attack, PC cannot move and loses DEX-based AC bonuses (also pretty classic).

▸ Ranged Monsters

Now, let's consider the two Ranged quadrants. For a touch more flavour, I might also put very basic magic-users here with magic-missile-like attacks or ranged elemental damage. This could also be interesting reach weapons like a giant scorpion tail whip.

I set the Armor Class for Ranged x Damage units 1 or 2 points below the Melee × Damage units because they likely will be attempting to avoid combat and will be protected by all other units. I often give them a 1d4 melee weapon of last resort. However, if you wanted to express that what players are facing is a well-run military machine, these Ranged × Damage might just convert into Melee × Damage once the distance is closed.

· Ranged × Damage: Another basic rank-and-file unit armed with missile weapons. I also include reach weapons in this quadrant, like the ever-useful spear. Other mundane sources of missile fire could be the old oil+torch or flaming arrows. Or it could be Melee x Damage units that first engage with one or two javelins before pulling out swords.

· Ranged × Special: When filling out this quadrant, I often don't even think about damage at all (but I don't preclude it). I am often trying to come up with fun, interesting, and thematic area effects (mundane or magical), and creatures with more spell-like effects that give boons and/or banes to friend and foe alike.

1d6 examples include:

1. Fetid Air: Carries a censer whose air obscures the battleground.

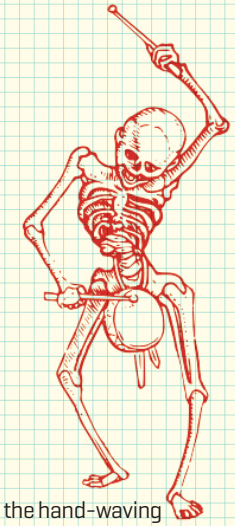
2. Standard Bearer: Carries a banner that boosts morale.

3. Dance of the Dead: Can raise any dead on the battlefield on a roll of 5-in-6 every round.

4. Anti-Magic Eye: Has an anti-magic beholder central eye on a stick directed toward magic-users.

5. Spider Climb Archers: Can climb walls/ceiling.

6. Shadow Hands: Produces large but clumsy hands from the corner shadows to grab PCs, tripping or entangling them.



Example: Skeletons

Skeletons: Always a classic because with the hand-waving powers of necromancy, you can do just about anything with them*. In simple game terms, these common monsters are:
Skeleton: AC 7 [12] **HD** 1 **HP** 4 **Att** 1 x 1d6 **NA** 3d4
This can be boring as presented, especially when 6-9 are generated as a wandering monster. So let's look at what the square can offer.

Skeletons	**Damage**	**Special**
Melee	**Calcified Centurion** AC 7 [12] Rusty axe 1d6	**Horse-Headed Half-Men** AC 5 [14] Cracked Lance 1d6+1 *Charge!*
Range	**Cranium Chuckers** AC 7 [12] Javelin 1d6 *Throws Head 1d6* *AC drops to 10*	**Dead Drummer** AC 9 [10] Stays away from battle Drumming raises the defeated dead after 1 turn as a Cranium Chucker

Distribution

You might ask "How do I determine how many are in each block?" I think the easiest method is to just divide the monster d8 hit die into convenient fourths. So if I have rolled 7 skeletons with the following HD rolls: 1,1,4,4,5,6,8 then I have the following divisions

- HP 1-2 Range x Special = 2x Dead Drummers
- HP 3-4 Range x Damage = 2x Cranium Chuckers
- HP 5-6 Melee x Damage = 2x Calcified Centurion
- HP 7-8 Melee x Special = 1x Horse-Headed Half-Men

Of course, slight adjustments should be made.
For this setup, I might subtract 1 from the Dead Drummers and add 1 to the Calcified Centurions.

*See also *Layering For Dynamic Encounters* in *Knock!* #4 p.55

by **Sersa Victory**

CYCLIC DUNGEON GENERATION

Cyclic dungeon generation is the name given to the level creation algorithm in Joris Dormans's 2017 roguelite Unexplored. Taking inspiration from games like The Legend of Zelda, this algorithm generates dungeons by composing together cycles: circular loops of linked dungeon rooms designed to create a specific flow of gameplay. There are several types of cycles that can be used to construct a dungeon, such as lock-and-key or hidden shortcut. By nesting multiple different cycles, a dungeon can be generated that feels more like a human being intentionally designed it, rather than a purely random scattering of chambers.

This article attempts to adapt this cyclic dungeon generation algorithm for tabletop roleplaying games. The following pages lay out a process for using this method to generate dungeons for use with any fantasy roleplaying game system.

Editor's note: Cyclic dungeons are a cool way to think about the patterns of locks and keys a puzzle can have. Of course, adventure game dungeons don't *need * to have a final boss (or even an ending).

What is a cycle?

A cycle is a (roughly) circular loop of linked dungeon chambers designed to create a certain gameplay flow, such as lock-and-key or hidden shortcut. By nesting several cycles together, a dungeon's builder can create a flowchart representing an engaging non-linear space.

Each cycle described in this document has four elements: a start, a goal, arcs, and insertion points.

- **START.** A dungeon chamber at the beginning of the cycle. In your dungeon's overall cycle, this represents the dungeon or level entrance. In a sub-cycle, the start represents the first chamber in a cluster of rooms. (The overall cycle and sub-cycles are explained opposite.)
- **GOAL.** A dungeon chamber at the end of the cycle. The goal typically represents a reward, an obstacle blocking passage further into the dungeon, or something else useful to the players. In your dungeon's overall cycle, the goal represents the exit to the next level, the boss monster, and/or a treasure hoard. In a sub-cycle, the goal represents something the players seek, such as a key.
- **ARCS.** A cycle has two arcs—lines that connect the start to the goal. These lines represent paths through the dungeon to get from the start to the goal. Arcs can be short, representing 1–2 rooms, or long, representing 2–3 (or more) rooms. Some arcs can only be traversed in one direction. Dotted arcs indicate a sight line to a point of interest but blocked movement. Many arcs have additional points of interest noted.
- **INSERTION POINTS.** A point in the cycle in which a sub-cycle might be inserted. Marked with a diamond [◆].

Twelve cycles

It's important to note that the cycle diagrams are flowcharts—they are not representative of a room's size, shape, or orientation. For example, the diagram for two alternative paths does not imply the starting room is positioned at the west end of the dungeon with two routes leading east to the goal room.

1. Two alternative paths

The dungeoneers are presented with a choice between two alternate long paths to the goal. Each path embodies a distinct or opposite theme, such as monsters versus traps, melee versus magic, or corridors versus caves. Each path is equally dangerous and rewarding.

2. Two keys

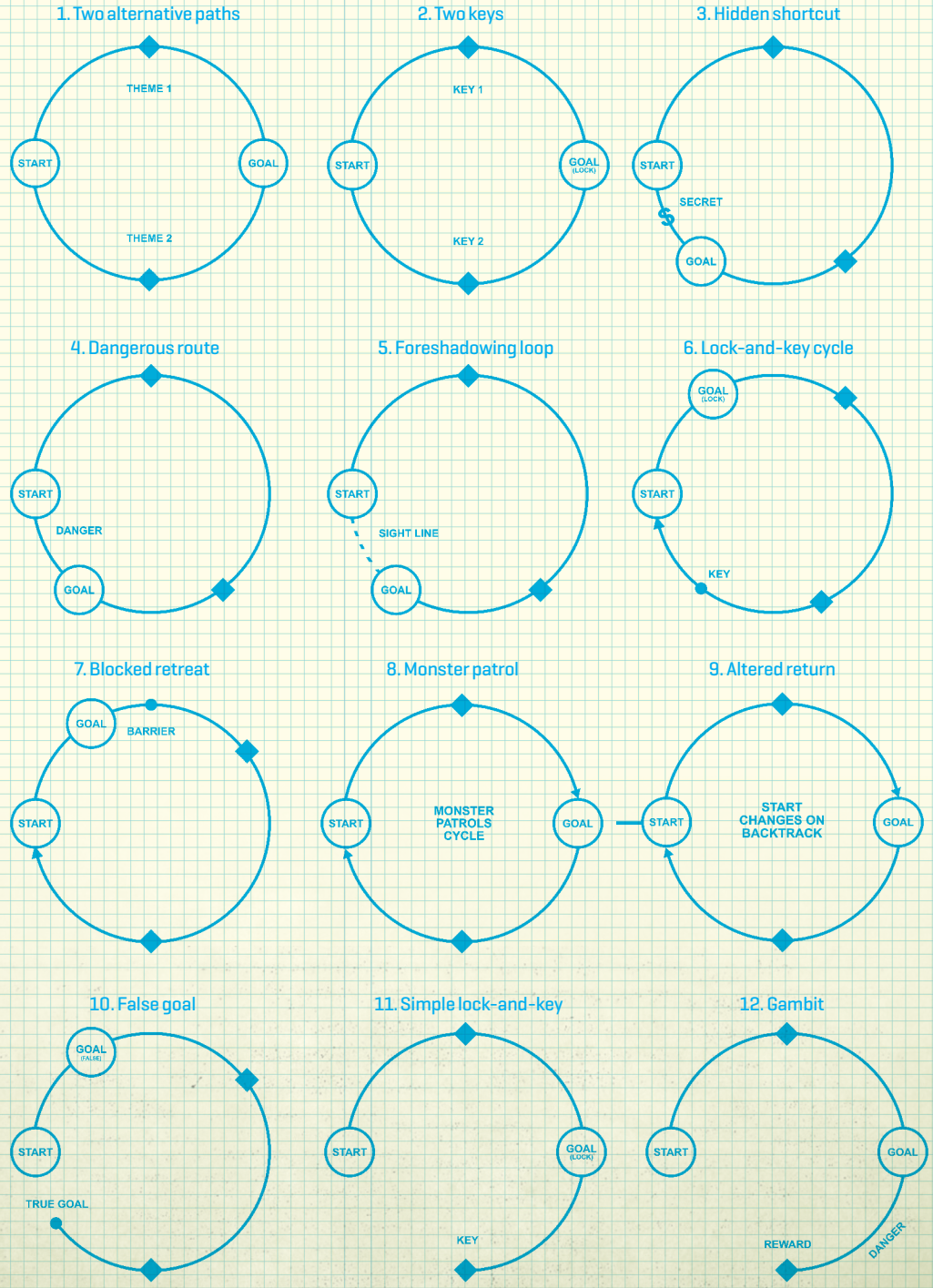
The dungeoneers are presented with two different long paths through the cycle. Both paths eventually meet at the goal, which is a chamber that contains a lock (see page 96). Near the midway point of each long path is a key; both keys must be used, combined, or manipulated to open the lock.

3. Hidden shortcut

The dungeoneers are presented with a long and dangerous path to the goal. However, a secret short and less dangerous path to the goal is hidden in (or near) the start chamber.

4. Dangerous route

The dungeoneers are presented with a choice between a less



dangerous long path to the goal or a much more dangerous short path. This danger might be a powerful monster, a lethal gauntlet of traps, a perilous environmental hazard, or some combination thereof.

5. Foreshadowing loop

The dungeoneers are teased with a view of the goal from the start chamber (or a chamber near the start). However, the dungeoneers are unable to reach the goal from the start chamber. A long path loops around, eventually leading the dungeoneers to the goal.

6. Lock-and-key cycle

The dungeoneers are presented with a short path to the goal; however, the goal chamber contains a lock. A long path from the goal chamber leads to its corresponding key. The chamber containing the key features an exit back to the starting chamber, such as a one-way portal or door that only opens from the key's side. This exit allows the dungeoneers to loop back quickly to the goal.

7. Blocked retreat

The dungeoneers are presented with a short path to the goal. The goal requires the dungeoneers to press farther into the dungeon, complete an objective, and then return. However, a barrier (see opposite) just beyond the goal chamber blocks the dungeoneers from returning until they follow a long and dangerous route that loops back to the starting chamber.

Alternatively, the goal chamber contains something useful to the dungeoneers, such as a safe place to rest or an exit back to the surface.

8. Monster patrol

A very powerful monster patrols a short circular path between the start and the goal. Players moving through the start, goal, or any chambers in between must be careful to avoid the monster. There is likely something valuable in a chamber patrolled by the monster that the dungeoneers must retrieve or manipulate.

9. Altered return

The dungeoneers are presented with a short path to the goal. The start chamber contains a monster, trap, or hazard. When the dungeoneers are forced to backtrack through the start chamber after reaching the goal, the nature of that monster, trap, or hazard changes and/or becomes more perilous.

Alternatively, the start chamber is safe when first entered, but becomes dangerous upon backtracking.

10. False goal

The dungeoneers are presented with a short path to what initially appears to be the goal. However, it is revealed that the "goal" is a trap or trick, and that the true goal lies at the end of a long path that extends from the false goal chamber (or a chamber nearby).

There is a 1-in-3 chance that this long path to the true goal is concealed by a secret.

11. Simple lock-and-key

The dungeoneers are presented with a short path to the goal; however, the goal chamber contains a lock. A short path from the goal chamber leads to the key.

12. Gambit

The dungeoneers are presented with a short path to the goal. An optional additional reward is visible from the goal chamber, but a dangerous guardian or obstacle blocks the short path toward it.

Locks and keys

Several cycle types feature locks and keys. As the names imply, the dungeoneers must retrieve the key to open the lock. However, a lock and key does not necessarily represent a literal padlock and skeleton key.

Locks can be hard or soft. A hard lock prevents the dungeoneers from progressing unless they have the key item, no exceptions. Example hard locks include magical barriers requiring an enchanted stone to pass or a gate that is raised by pulling a lever elsewhere.

A soft lock, on the other hand, can be bypassed by the dungeoneers without its corresponding key, but at some significant risk or cost. Example soft locks include a gauntlet of lethal poison gas or a monster beyond the dungeoneers' experience level. Dungeoneers attempting to pass through a soft lock will likely perish doing so, though they might succeed with incredible luck, skill, or both.

Six types of locks and keys are listed below.

D6	Lock and Key Type	Hard or Soft
1	Literal door lock and key	Hard
2	Terrain feature (pedestal, altar, mechanism, etc.) or NPC and key item	Hard
3	Impassible environmental hazard or magical effect and means to pass or dispel	Hard
4	Powerful (but potentially passable) monster and means to slay or evade	Soft
5	Lethal (but potentially passable) trap and means to disable or evade	Soft
6	Perilous (but potentially passable) hazard and means to neutralize or evade	Soft

Barriers

Cycle #7, the blocked retreat, features a barrier that prevents the dungeoneers from returning to the goal chamber until they circumnavigate back using a long and dangerous route. However, like locks and keys, this does not have to be a literal barrier like a stone wall. Four possible types of barriers are listed below.

D4	Barrier Type
1	Physical or magical barrier (dropping stone, wall of force, etc.) that appears behind the dungeoneers after they pass
2	One-way path (portal, gate, etc.)
3	One-way trap (pit, chute, portal, etc.)
4	Very dangerous (but potentially passable) monster, trap, or hazard that appears behind the dungeoneers after they pass

GENERATION METHOD OVERVIEW

1. Generate overall cycle

Roll a d12 on the Cycle Type table below to determine your dungeon's "overall cycle." This cycle represents at a high level how the rooms of your dungeon will flow from the entrance to the exit, boss monster, or hoard.

Editor's Note: *By way of example, the adventure Nightmare Over Ragged Hollow by Joseph Lewis (available from themerrymushmen.com!) has a core cycle of "Foreshadowing Loop." The players can see the Temple behind the Golden Veil at the start of the adventure but cannot access it until the golden dome shrinks below the bell tower.*

Both diamond-shaped insertion points in the overall cycle's diagram will be replaced with sub-cycles in the next step. These sub-cycles represent clusters of connected chambers within the dungeon's overall loop.

D12	Cycle Type
1	Two alternative paths
2	Two keys
3	Hidden shortcut
4	Dangerous route
5	Foreshadowing loop
6	Lock-and-key cycle
7	Blocked retreat
8	Monster patrol
9	Altered return
10	False goal
11	Simple lock-and-key
12	Gambit

2. Generate sub-cycles

For both diamond-shaped insertion points on your overall cycle's diagram, roll a d12 on the Cycle Type table above and insert that cycle into your dungeon's overall flowchart. Re-roll duplicate cycles if desired. An illustration on how to do this is shown on the next page.

3. Draw the dungeon map

Draw a dungeon map on graph paper that roughly conforms to the flowchart you generated in the previous steps. There is no single "correct" way to translate the flowchart into a dungeon map. You might erase and redraw rooms during this step to get an arrangement you are happy with. If you prefer, you might forgo creating a grid-based map and instead opt for a bubble diagram of rooms for your dungeon's final map.

4. Populate the dungeon

Using the guidelines and random generation tables provided by your game system of choice, populate the dungeon with terrain, monsters, traps, treasure, and other elements. Many cycles reference elements that need to be included, such as monsters, but beyond that feel free to add any content you like.

5. Add embellishments to the dungeon

As you're translating your flowchart into a traditional dungeon map and populating rooms, feel encouraged to add side chambers, connecting passages, detours, secret areas, more locks and keys, additional cycles, and other embellishments to your own personal degree.

ADDING MORE CYCLES

The generation method described in this document creates a modestly sized dungeon that can be played in 2–3 sessions, depending on your game system. To make a longer dungeon, nest more cycles into the flowchart. To make a truly vast space like a megadungeon, you might use this method once to create a high-level flowchart of dungeon levels rather than individual rooms. You would then repeat this process to generate a flowchart for each individual dungeon level. For example, a foreshadowing loop cycle when used at this scale might instead represent one dungeon level that can be seen from another, with the distant area reachable only after circumnavigating through several other dungeon levels.

EXTENDING THIS METHOD

Feel free to come up with your own cycle types to add to this process. You might also try using cyclic generation to create site-based wilderness or science-fiction adventures.

ADJUSTING THE RESULTS

As with any other random generation tools, you should feel encouraged to alter, ignore, or hand select the

results. The process for generating a layout presented in this document is only intended to be a guide—a scaffolding to help jumpstart creativity and expedite the creation of dungeon adventures. When inspiration strikes, don't be afraid to adjust the flowchart or map to accommodate an idea.

For example, while rolling to place monsters in your dungeon, you might get a result of "purple worm." Since burrowing is a central part of this iconic monster's flavor, you decide to insert another cycle into your flowchart: a hidden shortcut representing the one of the purple worm's tunnels that clever players can unearth and exploit to bypass a danger.

Likewise, you might have an idea for a trap that involves a false amulet designed to lure in unwary tomb robbers. In this case, you might decide to hand select the false goal as one of your dungeon's sub-cycles instead of rolling.

EXAMPLE

I want to create a small, low-level dungeon adventure, using the Cycling Dungeon Generation method to procedurally generate my dungeon's layout.

• Step 1, overall cycle. I roll d12 on the cycles table (p.95). Result: 2, my dungeon's overall cycle will be *two keys*. In plain language: there will be two equally long and perilous paths through the dungeon to the "final area", and the players will need to find a key somewhere along each path and combine them to complete the adventure. I draw the two keys diagram on a paper sheet.

• Step 2, sub cycles. Generating my dungeon's first sub-cycle, I roll my d12 again on the cycle chart: 5—foreshadowing loop. In this cycle, the players are given an early view of some goal, but something keeps them from reaching it. On my sheet of paper, I replace one of the diamond insertion points with the foreshadowing loop diagram. Because the overall goal of the dungeon is to find a key in each branch, I set the goal of the foreshadowing loop as the key to find in that dungeon wing.

Generating a second sub-cycle, I rolls a d12 one last time on the cycle table and gets a 10—false goal. In this cycle, the players quickly come upon what they think is their goal, but instead find it to be a trick or trap.

The description of the false goal cycle indicates that there is a 1-in-3 chance that the longer path leading to the real goal is hidden by a secret. I love secrets, and know the process described above is meant to be adjusted to taste, so I decide without rolling that the path to the real goal—the final area's second key—will be a secret. I update my dungeon's flow diagram to include the false goal cycle.

To help solidify my dungeon's flow in my mind, I write it out as a kind of story: There are two long branches in the dungeon that both lead to the final chamber. The goal of the dungeon is to find two keys and use them in that final chamber.

—Down one branch, the players will quickly see the first key, but can't get to it. They will have to make their way around through several rooms in order to reach it.

—Down the other branch, the players will quickly come across a trapped false key, and they must follow a longer path through a nearby secret door to find the real key.

• Step 3, map. I take my graph paper and begin sketching out a grid-based dungeon floor plan that roughly conforms to the flowchart I created in the previous steps.

Since the cycle diagram only describes the flow of areas through a dungeon—not their shape, size, or orientation—I experiment with different ways of arranging my dungeon's chambers.

I draw rooms and corridors, noting which are cycle starts and cycle goals so that I can later place elements like keys. I also feel free to add side chambers, corridors, detours, doors, portals, dead ends, and other embellishments—provided the overall flow of the dungeon remains intact.

• Step 4, populating the dungeon. I first roll to determine what kind of lock and key I might use for my dungeon's overall two keys cycle. I rolls a d6 and get a 2, indicating that the "lock" is some terrain feature, like a pedestal, and the "keys" are items that need to be used on that terrain feature.

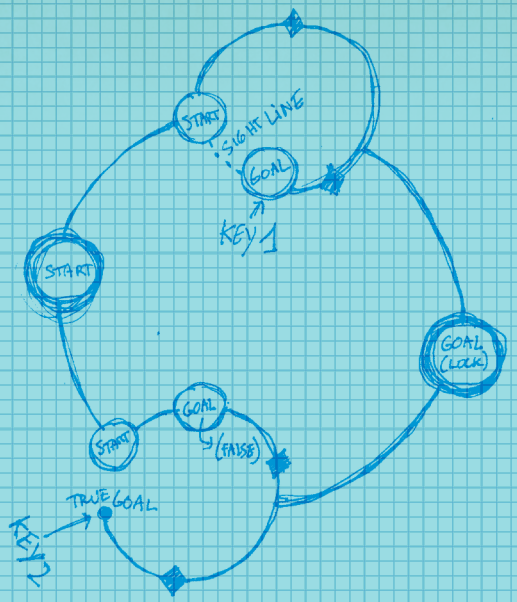
I had the idea of the dungeon being a fey queen's tomb, so after jotting down a few ideas, I settle on the "lock" being a statue of the fey queen on her throne, and the two "key" items being her scepter and crown. Say, by replacing these two relics on the statue, the throne will open to kick off the final battle and reveal the dungeon's hidden treasure.

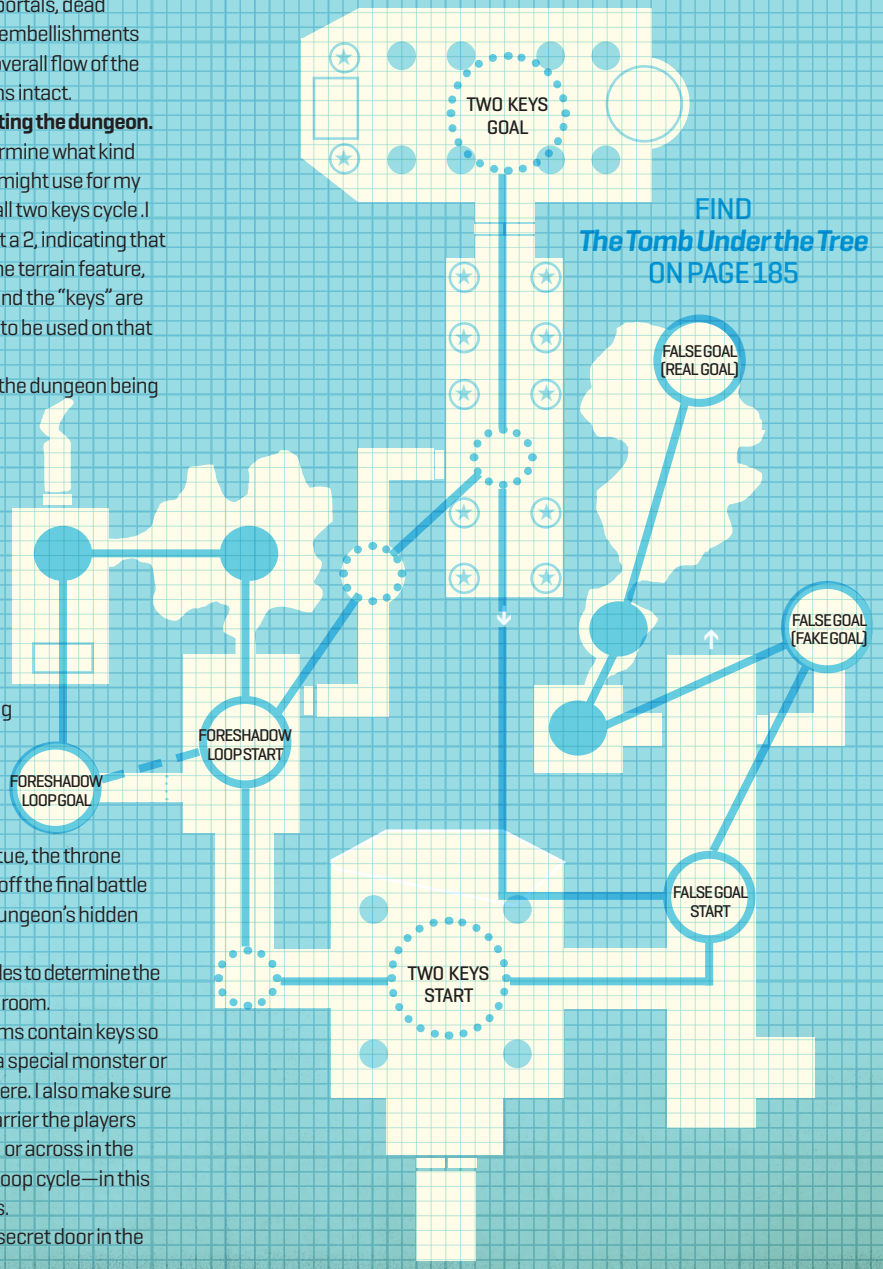
I use random tables to determine the contents of each room.

I note which rooms contain keys so that I can place a special monster or trap guardian there. I also make sure that there is a barrier the players can see through or across in the foreshadowing loop cycle—in this case, a portcullis.

Finally, I place a secret door in the false goal cycle. And during all of the process, I feel free to adjust the dungeon's contents or layout if an idea comes to me while rolling for terrain, monsters, traps, and treasure.

• Step 5, finishing touches. My dungeon is nearly complete, I steer into the fey queen's tomb concept, sprinkling some decorations and lore across the rooms to reflect that theme.

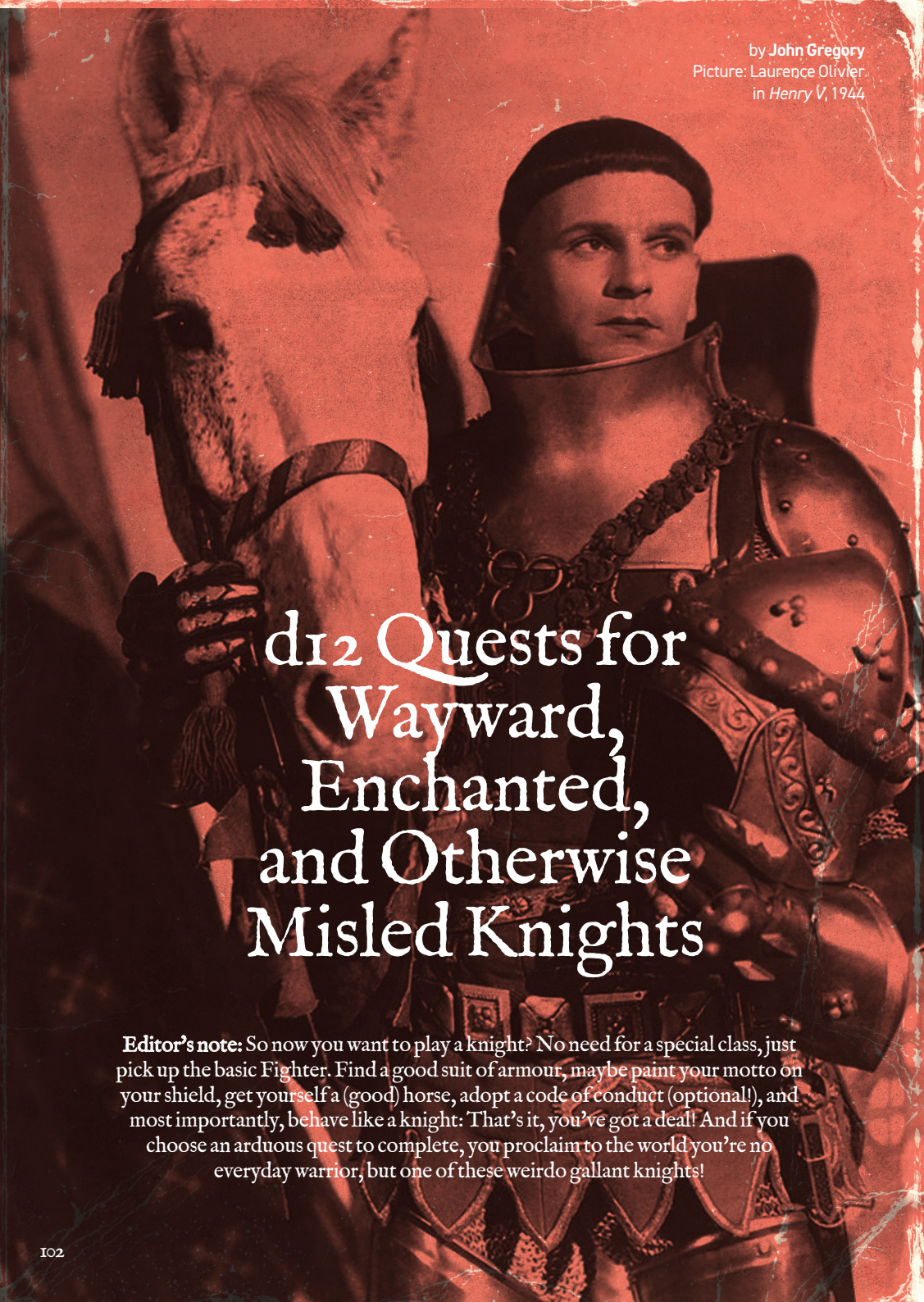




FIND *The Tomb Under the Tree* ON PAGE 185

Take a break! Have a cool map.





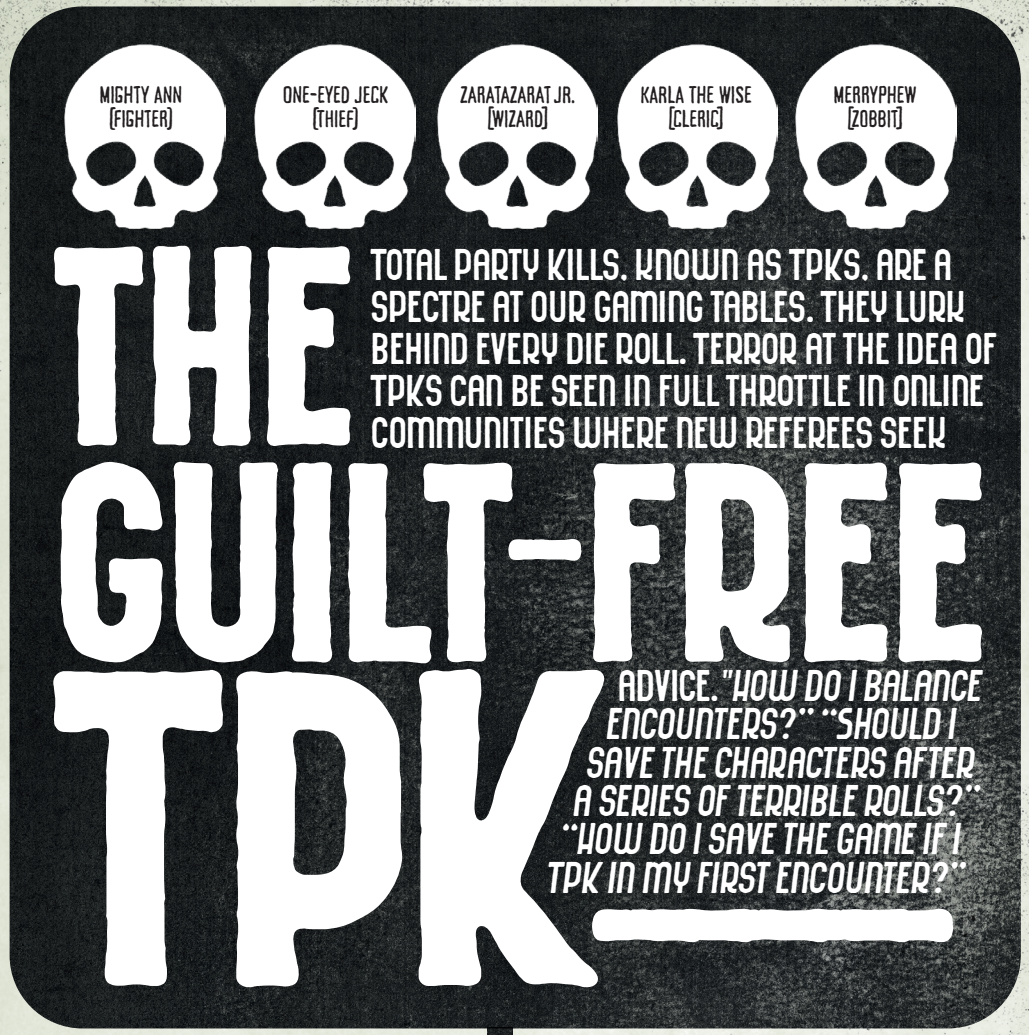
by **John Gregory**
Picture: Laurence Olivier in *Henry V*, 1944

d12 Quests for Wayward, Enchanted, and Otherwise Misled Knights

Editor's note: So now you want to play a knight? No need for a special class, just pick up the basic Fighter. Find a good suit of armour, maybe paint your motto on your shield, get yourself a (good) horse, adopt a code of conduct (optional!), and most importantly, behave like a knight: That's it, you've got a deal! And if you choose an arduous quest to complete, you proclaim to the world you're no everyday warrior, but one of these weirdo gallant knights!

1. On a quest to close the Ark of the Covenant that someone accidentally left ajar and now all the holy is leaking out.
2. A sacred chalice has been stolen from the ancient temple your order was founded to protect. Said chalice belonged to the wrong messiah and actually has no magical or sacred properties to anyone but newts.
3. Giant windmills are so last century. The real enemies are those satellite dishes, beaming all of our information to the aliens. Those dishes are really alien bugs infesting the homes of innocent people!
4. Somewhere on the Southernmost Isle, there is a creature whose gall bladder can be rendered into a panacea for your ailing liege. You followed the unfamiliar map precisely, so why is it snowing?
5. The mascot of your order has gone missing, and it is imperative that you find it to maintain morale. Said mascot is an especially ornery semi-divine dire goat.
6. In order to be promoted from squire to full knight, you have been tasked to find and slay The Snipe. You poor bastard.
7. Your order collects the Million Stories that supposedly make up the whole of your patron goddess' being. It is your job to seek out and verify the million million apocrypha that may or may not be true.
8. You have been tasked to defeat every bridge-guarding knight in the kingdom. However more than once you've cleared a bridge only to come back later to another knight guarding it.
9. The immortal Chartreuse Knight, cousin to the Green Knight, keeps challenging you to battle and keeps losing because they're terribly incompetent. But they just won't stop coming back day after day.
10. You are to bring the Man in the Moon down to your masters for questioning. You've been given a stepladder and length of rope to help accomplish this task. You'll need to find an awfully high mountain for these to be of any use.
11. You are seeking the perfect steed to really be considered a Knight. After all without a steed, you are just another rando in armour. But all of your steeds are turning out...strange.
12. The King-Under-The-Mountain was supposed to wake up in the time of your nation's greatest need, which didn't happen and now your nation is a wasteland. Where did that blighter hide themselves? You've got a thing or two to say to them about promises.

by **Judd Karlman and Augury Ignored**



THE GUILT-FREE TPK

TOTAL PARTY KILLS, KNOWN AS TPKS, ARE A SPECTRE AT OUR GAMING TABLES. THEY LURK BEHIND EVERY DIE ROLL. TERROR AT THE IDEA OF TPKS CAN BE SEEN IN FULL THROTTLE IN ONLINE COMMUNITIES WHERE NEW REFEREES SEEK ADVICE. "HOW DO I BALANCE ENCOUNTERS?" "SHOULD I SAVE THE CHARACTERS AFTER A SERIES OF TERRIBLE ROLLS?" "HOW DO I SAVE THE GAME IF I TPK IN MY FIRST ENCOUNTER?"

Folks who fear character death often don't think of the amazing character moments they can bring up. If the killing of the party isn't total, suddenly there are wakes, as well as contacting your late friend's family and letting them know how it happened, and it changes the party dynamic. Suddenly, rookies might become old-timers, welcoming new adventurers into the group. Care-free rogues might become cautious, having seen firsthand what happens when treasure hunters aren't careful.

These story beats are engaging when they are not ordained or planned but are the emergent result of player and referee decisions combined with dice. The chain of events that caused the character death were clear to all, and the referee can think back on it without remorse. That's because a player character death—even a TPK—is something that exists as a possible, but not probable, outcome of a player's actions during actual play. **A TPK should not be something decided, but something that emerges because of player agency.**

But for the game to work this, the referee must play a certain way. **Play the world authentically. Be excited about your players and their characters. Telegraph danger. Make clear that the referee, too, is a participant at the table, and not a decider of results.** Disclaim responsibility for where exactly everything will go. Wing it, don't rig it. A rigged game cheapens the players' successes and turns their failures fatalistic.

If the players trust that the referee is playing the world and the adventure authentically and fairly, and the referee trusts their players' judgement and their emotional investments, the web of decisions and randomness that coalesced into the TPK will be all the more clear to everyone.

The post-TPK party has a united drive and will get to re-walk some of the same places the previous party did but in a totally different context. You'll get to reference the games that came before. The town that needed saving has suffered. Places and people the players have met before can be familiar yet forever altered from a different player character's point of view. Surely there are still stones unturned, corners unexplored, and many possibilities for continuing adventure, play, and story. That's how *Game of Thrones* stayed on the air for many seasons despite regularly trimming its cast of characters the hard way. That's how the blood feuds and heroic vengeance stories of the Icelandic Sagas are launched. That's how history itself labours on, despite the Ides of March, sacks of Troy, and battles at Agincourt.

Let defeat create possibilities. With a well-established and played-in campaign world, there's sure to be someone ready to pick up the torch (perhaps quite literally).

DEALING WITH A TPK

While your friends are making up their characters with dreams of treasure, glory, and ballads, ask them this question: If your character were to perish in a monster-haunted pit, who would come to find them or avenge them or set their ghost to rest?

You could even make a space for it at the bottom of the character sheet. Ask the players to write that name down while making the character just in case their character perishes.

Or you could really delve into it—ask the players about their characters' belief in the afterlife. What kind of journey do elves go on after they die? What do the orc gods demand of their dead before they are allowed into orc-heaven? What does your heretical sun-god cult believe about feasting in the Bright Halls after one dies? Who in your mythology has returned from the dead, and how did they do that?

If you want to keep playing with the same characters, death is no barrier. The world is broken after your heroes failed to stop the lich. There is a prophecy that the heroes who failed to stop the Bone Emperor are said to be reborn in a generation. Make characters. It is decades after your character's death, and the sun is a bruise in the sky. You are the prophesied heroes reborn…

We know that getting together with friends and rolling dice and creatively solving problems is going to create some kind of a story. We don't know what kind of story it will be. It might be a heroic journey. It might be a picaresque fantasy romp. It might be a cautionary tale. Be open to whatever it might be, and that Total Party Kill fear will fade away as we realise that whatever happens, the worlds we create at the table are interesting enough to continue to be interesting no matter what blood the dice demand.

After all, wouldn't we be terrible adventurers if we let some pesky trifle like being killed stop us?

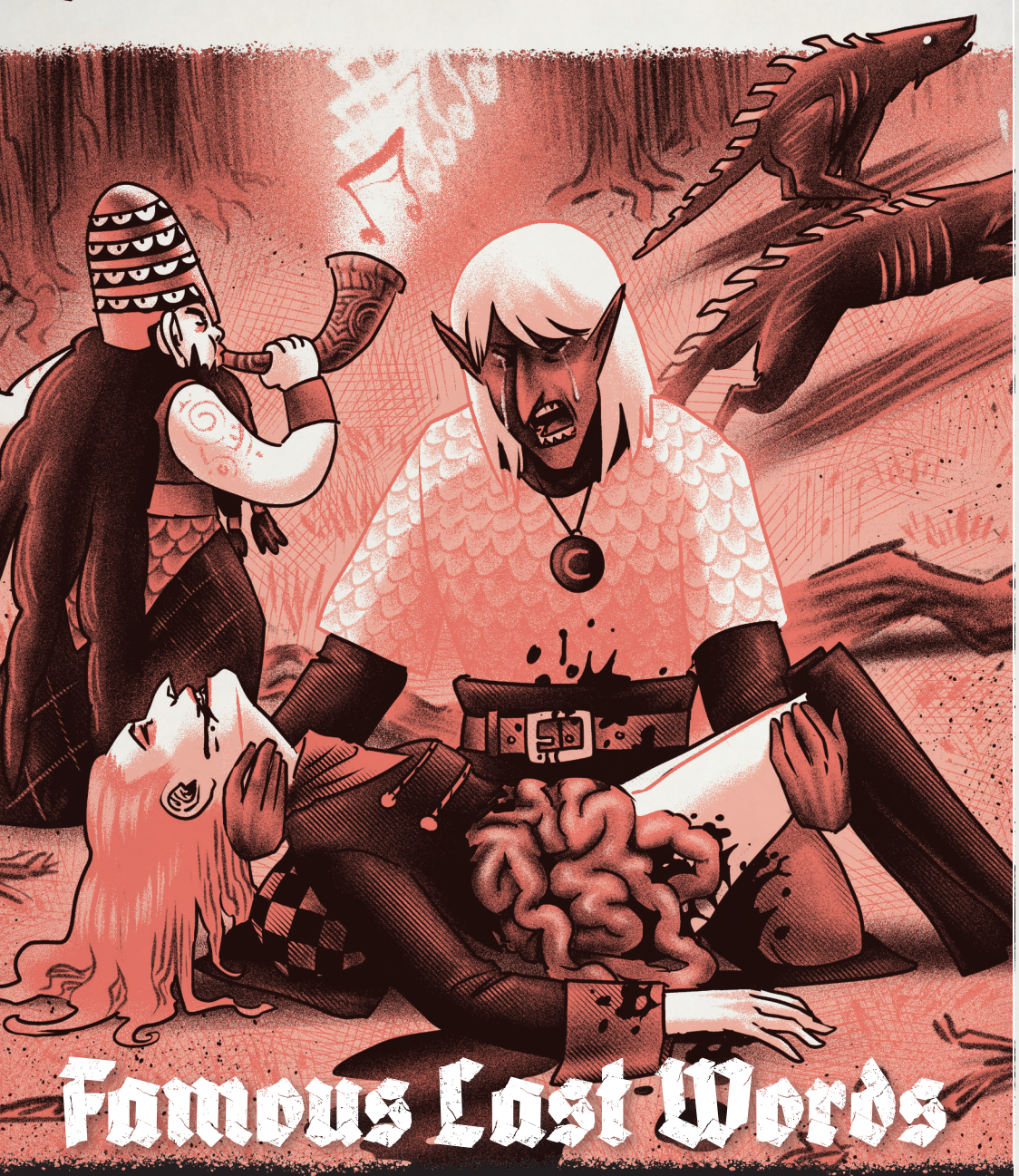
by **Ewen Macalister**

What's Behind That Waterfall?

Do you look behind every waterfall you encounter? Have you ever been disappointed that there was nothing there? Never be disappointed again.

D30

1. A hermit's garden, totally natural to an untrained eye. Powerful healing herbs grow alongside exotic poisons.
2. The lair of a river troll, carpeted with man bones, dry moss, and fish guts.
3. Several frog goblins roast a large salmon; they share nonsense stories and drink fermented ratweed.
4. The naiads' nursery, young brooklets gargling as mothers babble watery lullabies.
5. Giant water snails stuck to the rockface above. Bones fall - picked clean.
6. Barnacles forming a demonic sigil; the mind screams upon beholding it.
7. The bodies of two lovers intertwined, poison bottle still half-full.
8. Runes telling of a long-forgotten slaughter, and the resting place of a dread warrior king.
9. The mouth of the river god, quartz eyes glossy, maw wide. A granite basin sits for offerings.
10. A pristine set of armour laid out, the owner still swimming nearby.
11. King of the crabs, resplendent from gold coins embedded in his carapace.
12. Crude hollows containing myriad skulls, with exactly enough spaces left for the players plus any hirelings. Strange chanting begins.
13. A portal to Elfland, only accessible by diving backwards through the waterfall and into the river.
14. Dead shrubbery and grey cloth, obscuring the oaken door to a bandit camp. Tripwires are concealed by the leaf mulch.
15. The White Hart, wounded and leaving a trail of blue blood. He weeps solemnly.
16. An elf carved into the rock, eyes shut in slumber. Casting *stone to flesh* awakens a long betrayed archdruid.
17. A fossilised dragon skull, teeth sharp as tempered steel.
18. A splintered barrel, alongside the fractured skeleton of a missing local daredevil.
19. Chains set into the stone, fixed to hold a human sacrifice. The water begins to bubble rapidly.
20. Luminous algae draws in man-sized dragonflies, who lay their mewling larvae in the rock pools below.
21. Petroglyphs for an archaic protospell, asking only mammoth's tusks, blood, and a willing caster.
22. A turquoise rock pool which, under the full moon, will wash away the enchantments on any weapon. A splendid dagger lies within.
23. Alien lyre tunes slither through the air. A näcken plays seductively, offering lessons in exchange for a ritual drowning.
24. A deep crevasse impenetrable to lantern light. Tiny carved footsteps, filled by water, lead inside.
25. A trio of moss giants, all guarding the verdant tomb of an elven queen.
26. A smuggler's stash, with a skiff containing assorted contraband.
27. A rusted iron lockbox, suspended up high by a mithril chain. An inscription on the box begs that it never touch the ground.
28. Ornate vents carved into the stone lead to a dwarven feasting-hall, the revellers fond of the refreshing spray.
29. A one-way illusory wall. A cunning fox waits to trap and extort nosy adventurers.
30. A flooded knucker hole bored deep into the earth, resident knucker dragon brooding within.



Famous Last Words

by **Patrick Buechner** Art: **Bruno Prosaiko**

If a character has only seconds to live, this mechanic gives them a chance to reveal a secret or make a request. This move is suited for low-level and non-player characters who have less developed backstories.

When your character is at death's door, call over a surviving character and attempt to share a final message. Make a Constitution check. On a successful check, roll on the Famous Last Words table. On a natural 20, choose your message from the table instead. On a failure, die silently and haunt the world as an undead NPC, returning at the referee's discretion.

Roll 1D6

- **"Remember me."** Roll on the Parting Gifts Table (once or twice on the adjective column and once on the noun column) to describe a memento, and hand it to the surviving character. It grants a +1 bonus to all saving throws when the character spends a round meditating on it. The memento no longer inspires the survivor after five uses.
- **"Make sure they get this."** Roll on the Parting Gifts Table (once or twice on the adjective column and once on the noun column) to describe an object, hand it to the surviving character, and ask them to deliver it to an NPC. The object confers no power, but if it is delivered, the referee may reward the surviving character.
- **"Promise me you'll keep them safe."** Ask the surviving character to protect a new or existing NPC. When the character is actively protecting the named NPC, they receive a +2 bonus to any one check per encounter. This could include attack rolls, saving throws, or skill checks made to protect the NPC.
- **"Avenge me."** With your dying breath, name your killer, its master, or a collaborator, and ask for vengeance. The surviving character gains a +2 bonus on attack rolls, damage rolls, and saving throws when facing the named enemy. This bonus lasts for the next three enemy encounters or until the enemy is defeated.
- **"Behind you!"** If you are dying during battle, warn the surviving character that they're about to be attacked. The warning grants the surviving character a +2 bonus to their AC and initiative in the next round of combat. If there is no battle, roll again.
- **The mysterious non-sequitur.** As you die, mumble some final words that the surviving player doesn't understand. Roll on the Rosebud Table. The surviving character may decide to investigate the meaning in the future.

Parting Gifts Table (d12)

	Adjective		Noun
1	sacred	1	locket
2	fragile	2	scroll
3	stained	3	engraving
4	glowing	4	toy
5	broken	5	statuette
6	ancient	6	map
7	dirty	7	sachet of herbs
8	fancy	8	tool
9	colourful	9	bone/tooth
10	worn	10	creature
11	pretty	11	pair of dice
12	mouldy	12	medallion

Rosebud Table (d12)

	Adjective		Noun
1	frosted	1	crackers
2	lost	2	library
3	angry	3	road
4	giant	4	tower
5	burning	5	kitten
6	haunted	6	ship
7	lost	7	desert
8	abandoned	8	cabinet
9	sad	9	river
10	last	10	city
11	dangerous	11	cask
12	cloudy	12	revolution

On the same topic, see also The Quantum Goodbye Letter p.119

by **Vagabundork** Art: **Arthur Rackham**

Goblin's Guide to GUTTER TALK



All goblins are foul-mouthed, and some are so rude and vulgar that their insults actually harm their targets. These nasty goblins are called **Wiseacres.**

To create a goblin Wiseacre, take an ordinary goblin and roll 3d6+1 to determine her Wisdom modifier*. If the result is between 13 and 19, congratulations! You now have one of these nasty individuals.

A goblin Wiseacre knows 1d6 aggravating insults and can use any of them, in any combination, as many times as her Wisdom modifier.

*13-15: +1 16-17: +2 18: +3 19: +4

Here's a small collection of aggravating insults

1. *BRISTLING IMBECILE*
Duration: 1 turn
Effect: The target receives an electric shock (1d4 damage), her hair stands on end, and her Wisdom is reduced by -1.

2. *SNIVELING MAGGOT*
Duration: Until one night's rest
Effect: Inflicts a minor disease upon the target, reducing her Constitution by 2 (this can actually kill!).

3. *WRETCHED OAF*
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute
Effect: Fills the target's mind with self-doubt, imposing a -1 penalty on all rolls.

4. *MEWLING COWARD*
Duration: 1 round
Effect: Induces uncontrollable fear in the target, forcing her to use her combat action to flee as far as possible from the goblin. Save versus magic to negate.

5. *STUMBLING BUFFOON*
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute
Effect: Causes the target's coordination to falter, reducing her Dexterity by 2.

6. *MOULD-SPEWING DIMWIT*
Duration: 1 round
Effect: Creates a burst of mould and spores around the target, causing her to be blinded until the end of the goblin's next turn (-4 to hit).

7. *SLOBBERING FOOL*
Duration: 1 minute
Effect: Fills the target's mouth with drool, making it difficult for her to speak, and impossible to cast spells.

8. *RAT-BRAINED DUNDERHEAD*
Duration: Until one night's rest
Effect: Infects the target's mind with confusion, causing her Intelligence to be reduced by 1.

9. *INFESTED DOLT*
Duration: Instantaneous
Effect: Releases a swarm of tiny maggots onto the target, dealing 1d3 damage and leaving her nauseated for one round.

10. *FILTHY SCOUNDREL*
Duration: 36 hours
Effect: Covers the target in a vile stench, causing her to be detected easily (no surprise), and a -2 penalty to Charisma.

by **Weird Writer**

D20 QUESTIONS FOR ADVENTURERS

I made the questions simultaneously generic and somewhat evocative to the best of my abilities, as I believe this works best when they are made for the campaign itself, to set mood.

Each player rolls twice for their class.

FIGHTER (d20)

1. Why did you join the war?
2. Your greatest defeat?
3. Who taught you fighting?
4. Why do you want a stronghold?
5. Do you enjoy killing? Why (not)?
6. What monster you would like to slay?
7. Do you enjoy song and wine? Why (not)?
8. How did you feel the first time you wore plate armour?
9. When did you risk your life to protect another?
10. Do you take pride in your abilities?
11. What are your feelings towards those who can't fight?
12. What creature do you dream of using as a mount?
13. What excites you more, treasure or conquering enemies?
14. Why do you abhor violence despite your class?
15. Who was the first person you maimed?
16. Are you fascinated by magic?
17. Civilisation or barbarity?
18. Does a true warrior need to know poetry?
19. Which hours do you prefer for training? Why?
20. How did you learn the importance of retreat?

MAGIC-USER (d20)

1. How did you learn your first spell?
2. Any creature you would like to study?
3. When did you fumble a spell?
4. Who taught you calligraphy?
5. Do you dream of visiting other dimensions?
6. Why do you study?
7. Would you kill an innocent for their spell book? Why (not)?
8. Which monster would you enjoy as your servant?
9. Why a lonely tower?
10. Why do you dress funny?
11. Who paid for your studies?
12. Talk about your spell book.
13. How did you learn so many languages?
14. Why do you want an apprentice eventually?
15. Why do you want to meet a dragon?
16. Do you believe love interferes with the craft? Are you celibate?
17. Do you feel unsuited for dungeoneering?
18. Do you look much at the stars?
19. Do you avoid using magic?
20. What do you feel about Clerics?

CLERIC (d20)

1. How did you end up joining the clergy?
2. What was your first encounter with the undead?
3. Who couldn't you save?
4. Do the heathens deserve death?
5. Do you think dungeoneering is a holy quest? Or do you just believe your mission is meaningful and your god seems to favour you for it?
6. Do you trust your companions regardless of belief?
7. Do you look down on Thieves?
8. Would you ever hold a blade if it meant saving someone or vanquishing evil?
9. Would you prefer to just proselytise instead of fighting?
10. What did you leave behind to be a Cleric?
11. Did your family force you to join the clergy? Why?
12. How does it feel when you channel divine power to turn undead?
13. Where and how do you prefer praying?
14. Who have you punished for their sins?
15. Who have you screamed at on the streets for their ways?
16. Which doubt do you hold within?
17. Are Magic-Users to be trusted?
18. When did you fall to temptation?
19. Do you dream of your dead body being turned into relics?
20. How do you imagine your future temple to look like?

THIEF (d20)

1. Talk about the last time you stole from a child.
2. Are you interested in the local thieves' guild? Why (not)?
3. What does stolen food taste like?
4. Who did you share your loot with one time?
5. How did your former partner betray you?
6. Do you see your job as more legitimate than others?
7. Why did you backstab them? Who even were they?
8. Does your family know?
9. Who taught you how to speak Cant?
10. How did you come across your starting money?
11. Why do you deserve to run crime in town?
12. Why wouldn't you steal from a fellow adventurer?
13. Who are the easiest targets?
14. Why heist the dungeon instead of a house?
15. Is the law watching you?
16. When do you feel free?
17. Why did you start stealing?
18. Would you employ poison?
19. Will only the grave retire you from the great game?
20. Why do you trust your companions instead of other thieves?

Some questions assume social class as well. My reading of the starting money roll compared to the equipment list is that it suggests PCs as minor nobles, rural gentry, petty bourgeois, and similar, depending on how the campaign setting is presented (faux-mediaeval, faux-Renaissance, etc.). The Thief is reasonable to assume as peasantry and the starting money as their latest big score. It also assumes domain game as an objective (and Fighters can start the domain game from level one, so there's that).

by **Nick L.S. Whelan**

A USE FOR BOOKSHELVES

Bookshelves are one of my favourite pieces of dungeon set dressing. They come in many shapes and sizes, hide secret doors, contain hidden treasure, don't take up much floor space, and can go just about anywhere without being out of place. Yet in game terms, bookshelves have always presented me with a major problem: WHAT'S ON THEM?

Players often want to search bookshelves thoroughly, and I frequently don't have anything to give them. More than once my shelves have been filled with burned or waterlogged or shredded books just to avoid questions about what's written in them. Even the most dedicated referee can't detail the contents of every bookshelf. Even coming up with titles would be a foolish waste of time.

But what, aside from spellbooks, are players really looking for on bookshelves? Useful information. Information such as:

- Quest hooks
- Locations of treasure
- Hints about defeating monsters
- Hints at how magic items they might discover work
- Hints about how to bypass traps
- Clues to help them understand information gained elsewhere
- Secrets they can exploit
- Context for the current area, which may or may not be useful

To make bookshelves gameable at the table, the referee need only prepare **a subject**, and **a number**.

All the books on the bookshelf fall within its subject. So a bookshelf about fishing might have books about types of fish, methods of fishing, history of fishing, ways of cooking fish, etc. The actual books don't need to be enumerated or titled. The shelf's theme just gives you a range of possibilities.

The number has two functions. First, it is the number of encumbrance points (or your system's equivalent) required to haul the books off. So "*Bookcase: Fishing 12*" will require the party to use 12 **encumbrance points** to get the books out of the dungeon. If they like they can break the library up, taking as few as 1 encumbrance point worth of books. But if you only take 1 encumbrance point worth of books, then you only have Fishing 1 at your disposal, rather than Fishing 12.

The number is also **the amount of questions that can be answered** by the books before the party has absorbed all of the knowledge the shelf has to give them. Questions must be reasonably within the bookshelves' subject, but this should be interpreted broadly by the referee. Answering a single question requires 12 hours of game time book studying. If the referee doesn't already know the answer, they'll figure it out by the start of the next game session.

So, for example, the players find a bookshelf: Religion 8. Between everyone, the party only has 6 available encumbrance points, so they haul Religion 6 back to the surface. The cleric wants to know if there are any holy relics of his deity within 100 miles that he could recover for the glory of his god. The referee happens to have included such an item in a nearby dungeon, so after the character takes 12 hours to study the books, the referee tells the players about the dungeon, and that there should be a relic there. The fighter, meanwhile, wants to know if there's any god badass enough for her to want to worship. The referee doesn't really have a good answer, so after the session ends he comes up with a heavenly dog who has swords for legs and eagles instead of eyes. He presents the fighter with that info at the start of the next session.

Using this system lets the referee skip writing down long lists of fantasy book titles and also gives the players a unique tool that they'll be interested to use.

by **James Young**



HOW TO FIX RULES

It's happened to all of us. You're running the game, flying high, and then WHAM!

"Wait but that's not realistic."

Your knee-jerk reaction might be «*Shut up it's a game,*» but there's something more fundamental going on there

In a best-case scenario, rules are invisible because they make sense mechanically and in-character.

Instead, you've come up against a problem–rules and fiction are working against each other.

Maybe someone's sending their horde of ten trained rats to climb over a dragon, and you discover that your grappling rules, intended for human-sized combatants, will almost always result in a swarm of rats overwhelming a dragon.

Maybe someone is diving into a lake on horseback, so you go back to a ruling on how long people can hold their breath underwater. Turns out in this situation it means that a horse can hold its breath for an hour!

Completely ridiculous. It's a dire situation and the fate of the shared imaginary hangs in the balance! How do you fix it?

You have three choices:

1. **Paper over the cracks**
2. **Change the fiction**
3. **Change the rules**

OPTION 1 - **Paper Over the Cracks**
Also known as "making a ruling," this is the easiest, the quickest, and usually the best.
It's a one-off situation or an edge case, so you make a ruling and move on.
More importantly, this is usually the only option you have when you're mid-session!
The question is:
"How do I keep the game flowing?"
With the grappling dragon, you just say *"The rats are too small, so they can't wrestle the dragon,"* and it won't work. With the drowning horse, you just say *"The horse is going to panic and won't hold its breath anyway,"* make another ruling about horse drowning or whatever, and keep going.
This is all well and good until you get a *"What if I use my shrink ray on the dragon?"* or *"What if I polymorph into a horse and hold my breath?"*
What now? The initial ruling isn't applicable anymore—something needs to change.

OPTION 2 - **Change the Fiction**
This is often the most fun for the least effort. It's also the best one for when you like how the rule makes players behave in-game.
The question becomes: *"If I keep the rules as written, what does that imply?"*
A classic example is the hoary old topic of "Vancian magic." You like the game mechanic implications of spells-per-day. It's an interesting limitation because casters have to plan ahead and can run out of spells. So…why? Whatever the answer is, it implies something about the world.
With the drowning horse example, maybe you go *"Actually it would be interesting if horses could hold their breath for an hour, and the bigger you are, the longer you can hold your breath."* The implications cascade from there. Is this normal for horses? Do they live by the sea in this world? Actually, is it a water world? What about giants? Could they have underwater cities that only they can reach? Can you kill small animals really quickly by dipping them in water?
And so on and so on.

OPTION 3 - **Change the Rules**
This is the final and most fiddly option.
The problem is too fundamental to be papered over, and you can't think of a satisfactory lore change. On the other hand, it might be that you don't like the gameplay impact of a rule.
The question becomes: *"I know how it should work, so how do I model that in the rules?"*
A classic example is death at 0HP.
Death saves, negative HP, death and dismemberment tables, and so on: these are all rules-based solutions to the perceived problem of character death.
With the grappling dragon example, maybe you go *"I like my grappling rules, but I think size difference between wrestlers will come up fairly often in my game, so I need to change the rules."*
You could add a bonus based on relative size difference, or base it on Hit Dice, or treat the rat swarm as a single wrestler, or make it a multi-way roll-off, or or or…
You have so many options! This is why it can be the most interesting and perilous option. You've got to find a sweet spot between a good mechanic, the lore, the group's collective sense of realism, and quick resolution at the table. It's really satisfying when you get it right.

OPTION 4 - **Keep a Wonky Mechanic Because It's Fun**
Surprise! There is a fourth option!
A classic example is Open Doors.
"The Open Doors roll is one of my all-time favorite D&D mechanics, because one minute the party is slaying demons and dragons like heroes and gods of old and the next minute they can't get the refrigerator open. I love that shit." - Jeff Rients
If it's fun enough for you to look past its flaws, keep it!

by **Jenx** (text & art)



My goblins are...

TALASUMI

The talasum* is a spirit found in Bulgarian folklore.
It is primarily described as an often-invisible spirit of a person who was built into (either physicaly, or just their shadow) a house or bridge to keep the construction from collapsing. As the person dies, their spirit turns into a talasum, and is either a protector or, more often, a malevolent presence that haunts the place they were built into. In more modern-day parlance, a talasum is usually described as a furry monster of some kind, often mischievous but not necessarily evil.

* Bulgarian: Талисъм

Ruined manor houses or abandoned old castles with a person built into them tend to begin generating these small and hairy creatures that seem to simply appear out of the shadowy corners. These are the talasumi, Chaos-spawned echoes of the person trapped within the building's foundation. They are rather simple—mostly they are concerned with eating, guarding their territory, and sorting any household goods they might get their hairy hands on.
Talasumi do not have a conception of name or age, and only the barest sense of individual self. If a talasum is taken out of the ruins that spawned it and away from others of its kind, it can start to develop a sense of self: a vestigial trait of having a human soul as its parent. They are not innately hostile or friendly. Their disposition often depends on the environment they are in and what mood strikes them at the time.

PHYSICAL TRAITS. Talasumi are usually around 100 to 120 cm (so roughly between 3-and-a-half and 4 feet tall), and look like small men covered in thick black hair or fur. They have wide faces and big, saucer-like eyes that seem to reflect light almost like a mirror. They usually do not wear clothes and do not appear to have any sexual organs. They are often armed with just kitchen or farm tools rather than proper weapons. There are also taller and much bulkier talasumi who have rusty red hair and have large, pronounced noses. They seem to act as leaders to the smaller kind.

The following abilities are possessed by all talasumi. → Born of the shadows: All talasumi have the ability to blend into the shadows of the building that birthed them once per night and become invisible to anyone without magical sight. If they stay in the shadows for longer than 10 minutes, there is a risk that they simply get absorbed back into the darkness permanently. If slain, their bodies melt back into darkness in 1d4 days. **→ Darkvision:** Inside the structure that spawned them, all talasumi can see perfectly well in complete darkness as they do in bright sunlight. Outside of that building, they can see about as well as any human.

Talasum (Small) - AC 6 [13], HD 1 (4 HP), ATT 1x weapon (1d6 or by weapon), THAC0 19 [0], MV 60' (20'), SV D14 W15 P16 B17 S18 (NH), ML 7, AL N, NA 2d6

Talasum (Medium, Ginger) - AC 6 [13], HD 1+2 (6 HP), ATT 1x weapon (1d8 or by weapon), THAC0 18 [+1], MV 90' (30'), SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (1), ML 10, AL N, NA 1d6

Talasum (Medium, Emaciated) - AC 6 [13], HD 3** (13 HP), ATT 2x claw (1d3+ paralysis), THAC0 17 [+2], MV 120' (40') SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (3), ML 10, AL C, NA 1d6, Special: Paralysis, save or be paralyzed for 1d4 turns. Once per night, can create Darkness like the M-U/Cleric spell. Undead.

Talasum (Large) - AC 4 [15], HD 6+3* (30), ATT 2x large fists (1d6) or 1x weapon (1d12), THAC0 13 [+6], MV 120' (40'), SV D10 W11 P12 B13 S14 (6), ML 11(7), AL N, NA 1, Special: Surrounded by an aura of Continual Darkness that, if dispelled, returns in 1d6+1 rounds. Due to the aura, it is able to surprise adventurers on 4-in-6. Dispelling the aura of darkness causes an immediate morale check at ML 7.

by **Lars Huijbregts** Art: **Li-An**

The Quantum Goodbye Letter



Depending on what type of timekeeping your campaign uses, player characters tend to get around eight hours of rest, most of which will be taken up by sleeping.

There are a bunch of things the characters likely also do but we gloss over for the sake of the story flow and level of simulation: toilet breaks, cleaning up the dishes, and maintaining weapons and armour. I also like to assume that PCs tend to spend some time journalling about their day. This brings us to the idea of the Quantum Goodbye Letter.

You Won't Know What It Is Until You Get There

The Quantum Goodbye Letter is a letter written by a player character to their compatriots in case they perish in events to come. To ask players to write a letter for their fellow travellers at the end of each rest would be a lot of busywork, and those letters would hopefully be mostly useless.

When a character dies, the player may declare they carry a goodbye letter on them, written during the last relatively comfortable rest that the party enjoyed.

Its contents are only determined (and made up!) when it is opened upon that character's death—hence my misuse of the term "quantum." Only observation defines its contents!

This mechanic can give characters that die unceremoniously a way to:

- Say goodbye to their friends (*"Thank you for giving me a home"*)
- Add some pressure to retrieve a body (as the letter is on their person)
- Resolve or reveal plot threads and secrets (*"If you read this, I have failed. Please save my sister from the Tower of Thorns"*)
- Give a final punchline (*"I sure hope I don't get mauled by wolves tomorrow"*)
- Grant some final characterization (*"Wait, his final letter was just... 'I love dogs'?"*)

On the same topic, see also *Famous Last Words* p.108

by **Paul Taliesin** - Art: **Lukasz Piwinski**

NEGA DUNGEONS

AND THE TEXTURE OF DEATH

Consider the following thought experiment: imagine a dungeon where every room is roughly the same—each room has an orc or some other 1 HD enemy and 50 GP. We can say that the dungeon is "balanced" (for the sake of this example), but it has very little texture. The choice of room you go into matters very little. Just leave after you've pushed your luck far enough. That's the only choice to be made. Over the long term, you'd get bored of play rather quickly; such a game has little depth. **But if some rooms have huge scores and some are total deathtraps, now the dungeon has a lot more surprise, tension, and variability. Suddenly it really matters which rooms you explore, and in what order.**

You can imagine this applying to larger areas of the dungeon—groups of rooms, themed areas, or levels. The upper caves are dangerous but not profitable; the crypt is a well of wealth. There's a new dimension to play. Once the players learn this, they can take advantage of it.

Now let's scale this even higher, and apply it to dungeons. This gives texture to the whole campaign, overall. There are dwarven tombs full of wealth, but also goblin holes full of death and offal. The goblin hole is what we'd call a NEGADUNGEON. When you know that every adventure has an expected payout perfectly relative to its difficulty, it almost doesn't matter what



you choose. The GM gives you an adventure hook, you strap on your armour, and you go in. But if some rooms are jackpots and others are deathtraps—and the same goes for dungeons or adventures—then suddenly you have to get a lot more discerning and more clever.

Of course, it matters a great deal what your social contract is and what kind of timescale you're playing on. If I'm doing a one-shot for some friends, I'd never pull out a negadungeon. However, add that to a sandbox campaign setting, and dynamics emerge. Let's say you know there's a farm out by the forest, and the farmer is under a curse. Anyone who stays in his home turns into a mindless, undead creature. Over the years, he has dug a pit under his farm where he keeps all these ravenous undead. If something happened to him or the enclosure, it could endanger the whole area.

If your game presumes that all adventures have payoffs, it would be hard to include this in your game; you'd have to finagle some reason why the players would go there and ensure there's an appropriate amount of gold there (or whatever your game demands).

But if you like the idea of a living, breathing, real, textured setting, it's easy to place this cursed farmstead in it. There is nothing to be gained by visiting this place, but it can be interesting to have it exist in your game!

After all, you don't know where the game will go. Perhaps the PCs will become the foes of a local band of brigands, and they can lure them onto the farmstead and unleash the undead. Or one PC is a budding necromancer, and can learn to turn the undead into his own army. New possibilities offer themselves—the game broadens.

This is what I mean by texture: the game expands and takes on new dimensions, and many more outcomes are now possible. Some of your play might be unrewarding to the PCs, or unsatisfying, or dangerous, and players have to be more careful, but now all kinds of things might happen which wouldn't in your "correct" setting where each adventure has a guaranteed payoff.

Negadungeons introduce a new dimension to gameplay. They oblige players to investigate adventure hooks, find clever ways to pursue them without putting themselves in danger, do background research, and come up with new ways to approach any apparent problem. From now on, you have to evaluate and strategise at a higher level.

by **Joseph Manola**

MAJOR INJURIES

WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU MAKES YOU STRANGER

A problem with most lasting injury rules is that they make you weaker as a consequence of failure, which makes you more likely to fail again in the future. Realistic, no doubt, but not what many people are looking for in fantasy adventure games! In order to model what I think of as "comic-book trauma"—the kind where undergoing severe physical suffering makes you different without necessarily making you less capable—use the following rules: **When a character undergoes life-changing suffering** (not just a regular injury, but an ordeal so severe that they will never quite be the same again), **roll 2d6 of different colours. Declare before rolling which one is the good dice and which one is the bad dice.**

THE GOOD DICE shows how the experience has changed you for the better, as follows:

1 › Gain +1 Strength permanently. Your ordeal has left you filled with a slightly crazed fury that drives you to train harder than you have ever trained before.

2 › Gain +1 Dexterity permanently. Your experiences have left you jumpy and on-edge, sharpening your reflexes.

3 › Gain +1 Constitution permanently. After what you've lived through, regular pain and hardship barely even register anymore.

4 › Gain +1 Intelligence permanently. Your experiences have made you hyper-vigilant, determined not to miss anything lest you expose yourself to further suffering.

5 › Gain +1 Wisdom permanently. Your sufferings have given you a new perspective on life.

6 › Gain +1 Charisma permanently. When your injuries heal, they leave you with the kind of scars that make you look cool and sexy and dangerous.

THE BAD DICE shows how the experience has changed you for the worse, as follows:

1 › Lose -1 Strength permanently, due to permanent muscle damage.

2 › Lose -1 Dexterity permanently, due to permanent nerve damage.

3 › Lose -1 Constitution permanently, due to permanent organ damage.

4 › Lose -1 Intelligence permanently, due to permanent brain damage.

5 › Lose -1 Wisdom permanently, due to lasting trauma and/or derangement.

6 › Lose -1 Charisma permanently, due to disfiguring scars.

IF YOU ROLL A DOUBLE, then you've somehow passed through your ordeal largely unscathed. In retrospect, it probably seems more like a bad dream than something that really happened. **DO NOTE** that using these rules freely enough will increase the chances of characters drifting towards the extreme ends of the stat distribution range, though this is probably pretty appropriate for people who've been through as many extreme experiences as they have!

by **Josh Mc Cromwell** - Art: **Marc Moureau**

MAKING MAGICAL ITEMS FEEL MAGICAL

The standard treasure lists found at the back of your Dungeon Master's Guide are about as flavourful as a saltine cracker soaked in room-temperature water.

This is boring:

"You find a longbow, a gold ring worth 100 gold, and +1 hammer."

This is much cooler:

"You find an elven bow made of yew and strung with a strand of elf hair. A golden signet ring is marked with the house sigil of three apples. A dwarven battle hammer, short-handled but heavy, carries runes that name it Death Cleaver in the dwarven tongue."

How do we make magic items actually feel like artefacts of legend and lore?

The treasure should have history: evocative, perhaps weird, and in any case memorable.

Any magic should be active: its effects should be dramatic, dynamic, and explicit.



Make treasure historical

If you're a referee like me, I bet you're positively vibrating at an opportunity to tell the players some dope shit you've written—a bit of lore you love but can't deliver organically. Guess what? Your players want treasure. Give it to them that way, like giving your cat a pill wrapped in salami.

When describing treasure, specify:

- The materials of construction
- The people who crafted it
- The artistic embellishments

For example: *"The sword has runes running down its blade in Aklo, naming the blade Tailbiter. The hilt is shaped like a peasant boy fighting a dragon."*

Make magic active

In much of my experience, magic items (especially +1 weapons) never feel especially magical. The little scribbled +1 would fade into a long string of bonuses from other sources. And when a +2 sword came along? I'd throw the +1 sword onto the ground like day-old bread for ducks.

Arnold K. of Goblinpunch describes one of his design principles thus:

› *Never use small, passive bonuses. They're boring, easy to overlook, potentially confusing, and often lead to synergy. Use active abilities instead.* *

Building on that principle, make magic feel magical by making it more active.

Active bonuses

Instead of having a "set it and forget it" bonus, the magic item provides a bonus only when you fulfill certain conditions.

For example: When you cry out the name of a magic sword, your next attack is a critical hit.

Alternatively, instead of having a bonus, the magic item provides an extra dice. Although this bonus is passive, rolling an additional dice feels different in a kinesthetic way. If a normal sword does d6 damage, but I'm rolling 1d6+1d4? That feels physically different at the table. I remember I have a magical sword because I get to pick up a whole other dice!

Memorable features

Even without a bonus to a roll, treasure feels magical when it has a catchy hook that sticks in the player's mind. A sword that screams the blood type of an enemy after a successful attack will have the player characters asking, "A positive? AB? What did it say?"

For example:

- This sword is all but invulnerable to harm. It can hold open a dragon's jaws, or prop open a crushing trash compactor room, or be dipped in acid.
- The sword floats an inch off the ground when dropped—it refuses to let itself be sullied by dirt.
- The sword always points north if placed on the ground and spun. It yearns to make its way to the North Pole and fulfil its purpose of slaying Santa Claus.

Some of these memorable features might, indeed, be "passive" abilities, but at least they're not passive bonuses.

Recharge conditions are another way to make magic feel memorable. A once-per-day ability is fine, but if you need to perform a certain ritual or fulfil a certain condition each time you use the treasure's power, it feels downright arcane.

For example: Once you've called on the sword's magic, you must drive it into a blazing campfire to allow it to rest.

*https://goblinpunch.blogspot.com/2016/12/designing-races.html

Active and Historical Magic Items

Let's apply the principles of "active and historical" to some common magic items.

FLAMING SWORD

- After the first sin, Man and Woman were cast out of the Garden of Eden, and an angel was set to guard the gates with a flaming sword. In time, the garden withered and the angel grew negligent. This is his sword.
- When drawn from its scabbard, the flaming sword erupts into fire.
- It sheds light and heat like a bright **torch**. Although you are never without light as long as you have this sword, it is uncomfortable to hold. Too bright. Too hot. You sweat while it's drawn.
- The sword is as hot as a forge. You can **start fires** with the sword easily. Given time, **you can cut through any material that will melt at forge temperatures**. You can push the sword through a lock, easily hack open wooden doors, and melt down lesser swords.
- If you ever deal **6+ damage** with the flaming sword, **your target catches on fire**. They take an additional 1d6 damage every turn until they spend a turn putting themselves out. **The blood of an innocent will cool this sword's fire,** and the sword's magic will be lost.

RING OF PROTECTION

- The ring of protection is writ with runes of invulnerability. It was created by the God-Emperor as a dowry to his consort, the Golden Youth: a symbol of a promise to never betray each other (which was later broken).
- While worn, **the hand** on which it sits is as **invulnerable** as mithril.
- Your empty hand works like a **light shield** by catching and deflecting blows. You can use your invulnerable hand for all sorts of **combat stunts**.
- Your hand is also **an invulnerable tool**—up unto the wrist. You can dip your finger in acid, hold open a door that slams shut, or catch a swinging pendulum blade. Still, the ring does not confer super strength or other protection. The force of a blow might shatter your shoulder.
- You can elect **to shatter the ring of protection to automatically pass a saving throw**. Decide before making the roll.

BELT OF GIANT STRENGTH

- While wearing this belt, you have the strength of one specific giant. Perhaps you have the belt that channels the strength of Grom the Unwieldy. Or the belt that channels Oglethorp of the Deep Nostrils. These belts were created by dwarves after the Second Giant Wars as a condition of the giants' surrender. When you use the belt's powers, you make the bonded giant weak and tired. If that giant ever dies, the belt ceases to function. Obviously, giants hate this and attack anyone wearing these belts on sight.
- **Once per day**, you may invoke the power of the belt to **perform a Herculean task**. You can lift a portcullis, pull down a column, divert a river through sheer strength, wrestle a lion to the ground, etc. This task **is automatically successful** if it is at all possible through actual main-forte. This power refreshes at dawn, per the ancient bargain.

by **Stuart Ellis-Gorman**

Truth is stranger than fiction. You can use history to power your campaign, patterning the events of your setting on the real world. Your campaign just needs to be low fantasy and magic-less (unless you're willing to adapt the facts in a broader way). An example:

ROLEPLAYING MEDIEVAL FRANCE DURING THE ARMAGNAC-BURGUNDIAN CIVIL WAR.

Background

France in the wake of the death of Henry V

The Treaty of Troyes in 1420 made Henry V of England heir to the French throne and married him to the French king's daughter. Two years later, both kings were dead, and France was in chaos.

Henry the VI of England was still an infant. The boy king's lands in France were run by his uncle, the Duke of Bedford.

The Dauphin of France, Charles, the last surviving son of the French king, while legally disinherited, still ruled the south and east of France from his capital in Bourges.

The Duke of Burgundy, ally to the British, controlled most of France north and east of Paris. Because the decades of conflict had strained the infrastructure of war to its breaking point, this is one of the few moments in history when a band of adventurers could storm castles, lead raids, and play a pivotal role in skirmishes.

Key factions

Players can ally with the English, the Dauphin, or the Burgundians. Material support is limited, but their side dictates reactions to the players and guides their actions.

The English - The English want to conquer Maine. Players aligned with this faction can raid fortresses there and then sell them to John Fastolf.

• John of Lancaster, Duke of Bedford: Younger brother of Henry V, serving as the infant Henry VI's regent in France. John ruled Normandy and the lands around Paris from his capital in Rouen.

• John Fastolf: Master of the Duke of Bedford's household. John Fastolf was one of the principal commanders responsible for the conquest of Maine.

The Dauphin - Players can ally with France and attempt to disrupt English control—raiding English lines or carving out a region in English territory.

• Charles of Valois, Dauphin of France: Derisively called the "King of Bourges," Charles had not yet been crowned and was trapped in a divided court in his capital of Bourges. He relied on loyal captains to fight for him much of the time.

• Poton de Xaintrailles: A Gascon captain in service to the Dauphin. Poton was based in the city of Guise, deep in English territory north of Paris, and commanded a group of castles that disrupted English control and supply in the region.

The Burgundians - The Burgundians were ostensible allies to the English against the Dauphin but were often embroiled in conflicts to maintain their control over Flanders.

• Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy: A fickle ally to England, Philip looked after his own interests first.



Player Characters

Here is a list of potential historical classes, including some alternative names for some that better suit the period.

• **Historical Classes:** Routier *(Fighter)*, Chevalier *(Knight)*, Échelleur *(Acrobat)*, Thief, Assassin, Scout *(Ranger)*

• **Mythic Classes:** Paladin, Herald *(Bard)*, Sorcerer *(Magic-User)*, Hospitaller/Mystic *(Cleric)*

The players can support one side in the civil war or act as routiers (armed robbers) only out for their own profit. Routiers were originally mercenary bands who fought for the highest bidder. When cash was in short supply, routiers made a living by capturing castles and extorting wealth from the surrounding territory. Players can pillage and plunder but must beware catching the ire of a duke or king; suppression of routiers was common.

What's the game about?

The players are not soldiers in a conventional army—that did not exist in medieval France. They are a loose band of mercenaries or fortune seekers who may owe loyalty to one side in the civil war or are just looking out for themselves.

• Capturing a castle

A small band of soldiers couldn't take a medieval castle by siege—but they don't have to! Small castles during this time had very light garrisons, especially if the main army was on campaign. Castles in this period were taken by treachery and surprise. For example:

• Driving a cart into the main gate and then pretending it broke down so that your friends hiding in the woods could rush in before the gate could be closed.

• Hiding in the local trash dump that was foolishly located next to the wall and then rushing the gate when it opened in the morning.

• Using ladders and ropes to climb over an unprotected bit of wall during the night.

If players are particularly sacrilegious, they can raid a fortified monastery. Religious institutions house a lot of treasure, but there are significant social and political repercussions for attacking one.

• Conducting a raid

Another major source of wealth and disruption was the raid. This can be a raid into a city to take wealth, but historically raiding the countryside was more common. Players can rob livestock to sell to a faction for wealth, but they may also need to steal food to feed themselves or their allies.

GENERATING A FORTIFICATION

Roll a d12 and consult the table below.

You can roll once and use the whole row or roll for each column individually.

	Fortification Type	Condition of Walls	Garrison	Wealth	Loyal To
1	Castle	Poor	d4+1 guards	Poor	Routier
2-3	Castle	Being repaired	d6 guards	Moderate	France
4-5	Castle	Excellent	d10 guards	Moderate	England
6	Walled Town	Being repaired	d8 guards	High	England
7-8	Walled Town	Poor	2d4 guards	Poor	France
9-10	Walled Town	Excellent	2d8 guards	Moderate	Burgundy
11	Walled Town	Good, but 200+ years old	d6+2 guards	High	Routier
12	Monastery	Good	d4-1 guards	Moderate	n/a

by **Jo Smith**

LAWS OF THE LAND

Meaningful Terrain Via In-Fiction Limits and Conditions

Create weird worlds to wander in by creating "laws" that govern different regions. These spark tables, when combined and interpreted judiciously, provide challenges that will define areas of wilderness exploration.

For each realm the heroes might explore, roll twice or more on the "Nature's Natures" table and combine to determine the terrain and tone of this region. Then, roll twice on the "Natural Laws" table.

Nature's Natures	Natural Laws: In this Land, You Must Not...
1. forested	1. bring... *1. animals or livestock - 2. food - 3. liquid*
2. stony	2. kill... *1. plants - 2. animals - 3. people - 4. anything*
3. marshy	3. be quiet
4. humid	4. create... *1. noise - 2. light - 3. fire*
5. foggy	5. look at anything
6. arid	6. listen to anything
7. freezing	7. stand... *1. close to one another - 2. on the ground*
8. volcanic	8. go off on your own
9. windswept	9. stop travelling
10. flowering	10. leave the trail
11. steep	11. travel... *1. quickly - 2. slowly*
12. riverside	12. make sudden movements
13. grassy	13. leave a trail
14. fungal	14. stand upright
15. hilly	15. fall
16. flat	16. speak... *1. about the past - 2. about the future*
17. oceanic	17. sleep
18. freshwater	18. breathe the unfiltered air
19. sunken	19. drink water from here
20. fruited	20. expose... *1. skin - 2. metal - 3. leather - 4. wood - 5. blood - 6. paper*

In my opinion, 2 laws per realm or region give it character and make travel a meaningful puzzle to solve without becoming prohibitively difficult; here and there I'd recommend creating a region with only 1 law to act as a respite or sanctuary, and a few treasure-rich regions with 3+ laws can act as fun challenge zones.

Make sure that your description of the region details the consequences of breaking one of these laws; these consequences tend to follow pretty easily from thinking about the ramifications of the laws combined with the nature of the region. The laws, if not the consequences (and probably them too) should ABSOLUTELY be telegraphed to the players, either by NPCs, easy observation, or a low-stakes encounter early on in their exploration.

Examples

THE FIELDS OF SLEEP
foggy + grassy
→ must not sleep
→ must not create noise

The air is still. The fog is gentle on your face. The grass is soft. To sleep here is to sleep without dreams, without interruption or disturbance; indeed, without natural wakefulness at all. Even the scrape of thirst and the gnaw of an empty belly will not rouse you, and the bones of the dead lie alongside the living sleepers, man and beast, whose bodies loom from the mist. Make no noise to rouse them; waking to the ravages of their stomachs, most are mad with a desperate hunger.

THE FLOWERPATHS
oceanic + flowering
→ must not leave the trail
→ must not create light

Deceptively calm waters. At night, flowering algae bloom, thick enough to walk on. Bring no light; even the full moon is bright enough to wither the blooms and leave you to the mercy of the vicious currents that pulse and ripple through the depths.

THE PROWLMARSH
marshy + fungal
→ must not bring food
→ must not leave a trail

Wetland, clusters of pale, fragile mushrooms growing on every dead and dying plant and animal. Be careful not to leave a trail; huge, thin worms will follow your footsteps, waiting till you sleep to slip into your nostrils and weave themselves through the grooves and crevices of your brain. The air here is thick with spores that will settle on any food and grow rapidly, mushrooms bursting through the seams of bags and bundles, their caps and stems leaking luminescent ooze onto the ground when broken.

WITCH-STAR CRATER
flat + sunken
→ must not make sudden movements
→ must not drink water from here!

The bone-white bed of a crater, pockmarked with pools exposing the putrid aquifer below, long ago poisoned by the cursed star that fell here. The ground is unsteady, and while rhythmic walking or running is possible, sudden shifts in weight and movement are liable to punch through the thin shell of compacted dust and send you plunging into the vile waters.

THE SCATTERHILLS
hilly + riverside
→ must not stand close to one another
→ must not travel quickly

River carving its way through soft hills of sand and gravel barely held together by wiry grass. Too many people in one place or too rapid a pace will quickly break the thin roots and send you skittering and sliding down the slopes towards the river with a rockslide of loose earth and stone in your wake.

THE SMOG FLATS
foggy + flat
→ must not create fire
→ must not expose skin

Flat stretch of clay, puckered holes releasing foul clouds of smog into the air that burns exposed skin and erupts into flame at the slightest spark, creating fireballs at best and flash-firestorms at worst.

SANDBOX SEASONINGS

THIS CHECKLIST PROVIDES ADVANCED DETAILS THAT ADD DYNAMISM TO YOUR HEXCRAWL. WITH THESE ASPECTS, YOUR HEX MAP BECOMES A WORLD TO BE EXPLORED, A WORLD THAT TURNS AND REACTS ON ITS OWN.



by **W.F. Smith**

Editor's Note:
This checklist is part of a larger piece on creating hexcrawls originally published on prismaticwasteland.com.

1. USE RANDOM ENCOUNTER TABLES FOR TENSION

A hexcrawl game needs time pressure in order to give weight to the choices players make. Do we stay here and explore this area or do we press forward? If there is no ticking clock, then it never matters. And the simplest way to accomplish this is to have a periodical chance of a random encounter.

1a. Create Encounter Tables Tailored for Each Region

Create unique random encounter tables that show the personality–the boons and banes–of the region. There is no more evocative example than what Ben Robbins lays out in in one of the original 2007 West Marches blog posts, reproduced below:

«...By creating a unique wandering monster table for each wilderness area (one for the Frog Marshes, one for the Notch Fells, etc.), I could carefully sculpt the precise flavour for each region. It made me think very carefully about what each area was like, what critters lived there, and what kind of terrain hazards made sense (anything from bogs to rock-slides to exposure to marsh fever). They were effectively the definition for each territory.»

1b. Create Dynamic Encounter Tables

Add modifiers to the encounter roll to create context-sensitive encounter tables. Using this method, the encounters at the high end of the table become more likely. For instance, you can add bonuses to your encounter rolls to represent the increased presence of lawmen when the player- characters are on the lam after committing a string of crimes.

As an advanced rule, make patrols from the controlling faction more common on roads (adding +1 if the players are travelling by a trail, +3 if travelling on a minor road, and +5 if on a major road). The effect of this would be that while the players are incentivised by the movement rules to travel by roads to get places faster, they may be disinclined to do so if travelling in territory controlled by a hostile faction. Now they have another interesting choice about how they want to push their luck.

1c. Create Different Encounters for Day and Night

A simple way to mix up encounter tables is to include two separate tables for each region to represent day and night encounters. If that's too much, have a few entries that have one variant for the daytime and another for night. Nighttime encounters tend to be more dangerous, since things go bump in the night.

2. CALENDARS & FORECASTS

Adventures occur in a certain space and time. Tools like maps are often foregrounded (in part because they are more visually appealing), but it is the intersection of a map and calendar that produces a dynamic location. On her blog Permanent Cranial Damage, Ava Islam argues that just as players are given a map to help with their decision-making, they should have a calendar containing the major festivals and other events known in the setting. That post makes the most compelling case against temporal railroading by analogizing it to the famous Quantum Ogre problem in describing the "Quantum Birthday" problem (whatever day you arrive in town, it is the ogre's birthday).

2a. Add Holidays to Your Calendar

Holidays are also a fun way to embed your setting into the temporal dimension. Sprinkle your calendar with festivals, feast days, and traditions that are observed by the locals of your setting. These not only make the setting feel more alive but also give something the players might plan around; it may be easier to pull off a heist when a city is celebrating their version of New Orleans' Mardi Gras. Clever players can use their knowledge about the setting and its calendar to their advantage. Perhaps certain holy days allow clerics to cast spells for free or take the maximum dice results. Perhaps certain holidays are lucky for certain activities, such as sailing, marriages, sacrifices, etc., and such activities allow players to roll twice and take the best result.

2b. Track Seasons and Weather

Changes in the seasons and weather also provide useful information for players to base decisions on, along with providing a sense of realism to your setting. Add mechanical differences to the seasons, particularly winter, to modify the players' travel incentives as the seasons change. For instance, if hunting provides rations on a 2-in-6 chance in spring, autumn, and summer, that chance is reduced to a 1-in-6 in winter. Or, for another example, players who forage for herbs can find different types of herbs in each season of the year.

3. FACTIONS

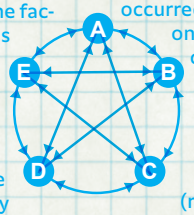
Hexes represent land, controlling land is an avenue for power, and there is definitely more than one group in your setting that wants that power.

3a. Create Factions by Combining Disparate Elements

One way to create factions is to take a historical group and combine it with some fantastical element. For instance, what if the Jacobites of the French Revolution but they're wizards; what if the Italian mafia but they're goblins; what if an evangelical megachurch but they worship demons, etc. The more unusual your pairings, the better your results.

3b. Create Conflict between Factions

Factions don't usually work together. Some might have tenuous alliances but others will be hated rivals. These relationships between the factions are key as they allow the players to ally with or against this or that faction, and provide immediate consequences when they do so (e.g., if you help one faction, you piss off their rival). You can create five factions and map their positive and negative relationships in what I call the "faction pentagram." This provides relationships between the factions, and the process itself prompts you to further flesh out your factions. Oh, the revolutionary wizards hate the demonic church but like the goblin mafia? Why is that? Answering these questions further allows you to discover what is motivating the factions and shine light on how they might interact and what actions they may want the player-characters to do.



4. HISTORY & RUMORS

Most of my discussion of the importance of time in hexcrawls has focused on future events, but the past is just as important. Ben Robbins's West Marches blog posts emphasise the importance of «Layers of History.» Embedding logic and internal consistency into your setting will only improve the players' ability to make informed decisions.

4a. Bullet Point Your Ideas for History

As you have gone through this checklist making your hexcrawl, you likely have already been developing ideas for your world's history. Settlements, geography, and factions all imply things that have come before. Placing ruins on your map is an opportunity to ask: Who built this place and how did it come to its current dilapidated state?

Don't write an encyclopedia of your setting's history (it' is just an inefficient use of your time). Rather, keep notes of your ideas, and potentially sketch out a few bullet points of your setting's history.

4b. Develop History Collaboratively

You also don't have to come up with the history alone! Worldbuilding can be a team activity. This method immediately gets your players invested in the setting and its history and allows them to start with some background knowledge of the setting without having to sit through a monologue from the referee.

4c. Embed History in Rumors

Rumours are a helpful tool for tying everything together in a hexcrawl. Tell your player characters about (a) locations on the map and how they were used in the past (builders, past occupants, events that occurred there); (b) dangerous monsters on the random encounter tables for certain regions (are they new, did they migrate to here, and why?); (c) what events soon to take place, important calendar dates, and the history of yearly traditions; and (d) reasons for the factions' actions (recent activities, historical context, relationships between the factions).

Taken all together, this checklist forms layers for your hexcrawl that centre player choice and allow for a rich exploration experience.



This village...

You quickly need a village, a burg, or a small town for your sandbox, but don't want it to be the same as any other old village. You can quickly generate a village from scratch. Just throw 1d20 to discover its general style, 1d10 to add a special interest, and a few extra d20 to add some weird places and NPCs. The following tables will provide a unique place with a mix of realism and adventure hooks.

by **Nicolas Dessaux**

d20	VILLAGE STYLE
1	**Diffuse habitat.** Houses, farms, and buildings are away from each other, separated by large hedges. People are suspicious of each other, even more so of strangers. When they speak about their neighbours, it's always slanderous stories that rehash old enmities among families.
2	**Street village.** There's only one street, which may be a trade path (01-40) or an ancient empire paved road (41-00). A shrine has been built in the middle of the path so that the road curves around it strangely. Most buildings are shops and taverns for travellers. The street is the place for donkeys, drunkards, brawlers, and duels.
3	**Crossroad village.** The same as above, but streets cross as an X (01-30), a T (31-60), a Y (61-90) or a star (91-100). This strategic place may have no walls (01-30), old crumbling walls (31-60), brand new walls (61-90) or a watchtower (91-00). People are very proud of living there, either because of its wealth (01-35) or past glory (36-00).
4	**Circle village.** All houses and streets are built in concentric circles around a central building. It could be a church (01-20), an ancient ruin (21-40), a castle (41-60), a mound (61-80) or a belfry (81-00). This village has walls of stone (01-20), earth (21-40), wood (41-60), hedges (61-80) or only trenches (81-00). Inhabitants organise their life around the central building authority, past or present, and are proud of their local privileges.
5	**Three-field village.** Three paths split the landscape in equal parts around the village, organising the agriculture cycle between wheat, barley, and a fallow field, with a rotation cycle every year. There's also a common marsh (01-30), moor (31-60), wood (61-90) or heather (91-00) surrounding the village for grazing. Inhabitants have a strong sense of community but argue endlessly about farming details.
6	**Pasture village.** Houses are built around a square (01-25), rectangular (26-75), or even triangle (76-00) pasture, full of sheep, goats, pigs, and cows.
7	**Motte and bailey.** The entire village has been built in the yard of a feudal motte. It may have extended outside of the old trenches (01-20), or the castle may have vanished (21-40), but most of the time (41-00) it simply keeps its original form.
8	**Former fortress.** A past empire has built a fortress here, with a square (01-25), rectangular (26-50), circular (51-75), or star plan (76-00), which defines the plan of the village. People use old carved stones and statues to build houses. The walls are vanished (01-30), crumbling (31-60), poorly restored (61-90), or in good condition (91-00). People still view themselves as the last sentinels of the empire, foreigners being no more than stupid barbarians.
9	**Stilt village.** Next to a river (01-30), a marsh (31-60), or a lake (61-00), this village is built on stilts to avoid seasonal flooding. The flank on the landside is protected by walls of wood. People live mostly from fishing.
10	**Monastery borough.** This village was born from an abbey or monastery of men (01-45), women (46-90), or both (91-00). Most inhabitants work for the monks or nuns, and their personal relationship with the monastery hierarchy has a great meaning to them. They are fond of secrets and gossip about what happens inside the sanctuary walls.

11	**Leprosaria.** The first settlers of this village were lepers and their families. They're still considered to be outcasts. Badly built of gathered wood (01-60) or stone (61-00), the small houses are crowded around a tiny chapel. Most people live from craftsmanship and gardening. A brother or sisterhood of the founders' family members runs the civil life.
12	**Mountain.** Houses are built of grey stones, with heavy chimneys and barely any windows. Roofs are made of dark slates. Streets are dark and narrow, with many stairs.
13	**Knightly.** Several knights' families dwell here in stone manors and towers, each one owning its own chapel. Smaller houses are rented to domestic servants and artisans. Knights like to display their banners. Their alliances and rivalries are the main topic of discussion. Sometimes intrigues turn to open civil war.
14	**Sunny and sophisticated:** Gardens and yards are enriched with fruit trees and ornamental ponds. Comfortable terraced roofs dominate white painted houses and elaborate buildings. Streets are narrow but sunny and quiet. People watch discreetly from their mashrabiya windows and balconies, hoping to spy out love stories or dishonourable behaviour in the neighbourhood.
15	**Windy moor.** Long, low grey (01-50) or red (51-00) stone houses are covered by thatch (01-50) or even greenery (51-00). Only richer manors display towers and large chimneys. Most streets are covered by greenery, with a few ancient stones around churches and other important places.
16	**Colourful.** Most houses are built from wood, painted and decorated with warm colours. Churches and manors are made of red bricks, with large square towers and domes. Colours may be recent (01-60) or decayed (61-00).
17	**Tents.** The full village is made of large tents (01-50) or yurts (51-00), more or less connected to each other. Some enclosures keep herds and mounts.
18	**Boomtown.** The village was built quickly after the discovery of a mine (01-40), or rebuilt after a war (41-70) or disaster (71-00). It was constructed with wooden flotsam and other found material without any sense of urbanism or aesthetic.
19	**Seashore.** Built in a creek (01-40), a delta (41-60), or on a cliff (61-00), this port belongs to fishermen's families. As expected, they have strange relationships with undersea creatures (01-35), smugglers (36-70), pirates (71-90), or forgotten deities (91-00).
20	**Amphitheatre.** The whole village has been built in an antique amphitheatre, using the old building as a fortress. This old theatre itself disappears under the new buildings, but its circular form dictates the village's shape. Houses are connected through caves and tunnels.

d10	SPECIAL INTEREST
1	**Gibbet.** When PCs visit the village for the first time, a crowd is hanging someone for a dubious reason after an expeditious trial. This might even be an NPC they are searching for or already know.
2	**Brewery.** Villagers have a local beer (01-35), wine(36-70), or gin (71-00) they want the PCs to taste. The local inn is famous.
3	**Relics.** The local church (01-50) or temple (51-00) holds the relics of a saint (01-35), a deity (36-70), or a mysterious creature (71-00). Most travellers are pilgrims, sleeping in a large asylum room. In the nearby shops, you can buy icons, medals, and holy water. Inhabitants are proud of their relics, but suspect every pilgrim has plans to steal them due to a rivalry with another local sanctuary.
4	**Fair.** A weekly fair (01-30), market (31-60), ball (61-90), or festival (91-00) is happening right when the PCs first come into the village. People come from miles around for the events, possibly including some known NPCs. Pickpockets, brawlers, and drunkards are part of the event.
5	**Refugees.** A war (01-50) or a plague (51-00) is in a nearby area, so the village is crowded with refugees living in tents all around. Inhabitants are divided between those who welcome them and those who don't.
6	**Border.** The village is next to a border between two powers (01-70) or between the civilised lands and wilderness (71-00). It faces current threats of war (01-30), military occupation (31-60), clashes between smugglers bands (61-90), or rivalry with the nearby village on the other side (91-00).
7	**Bridge.** A wood (01-30), stone (31-60), brick (61-90), or a rope bridge (91-00) divides the village in two parts, across a river (01-50), an inlet (51-75), or a chasm (76-00). People from both sides of the bridge despise each other due to wealth level (01-50), old rivalries (51-80), or unknown reasons (81-00).
8	**Tannery.** Producing leather is a major craft here. The smell is awful, and the water is dangerous to drink due to contamination.
9	**Mill.** There is a large water (01-40), wind (41-80), or animal (81-00) mill for oil (01-30) or flour (31-00). The owner's family is wealthy but suspected of an infernal pact (01-40), witchcraft (41-80), or debauchery (81-00).
10	**Mine.** A copper (01-25), tin (26-50), iron (51-75) mine or marble quarry (76-00) are the centre of the entire village economy. Owners are a private company (01-50), a wealthy landlord (51-75), or a monastery (76-00).

d20	PLACE	FEATURE	NPC	FEATURE
1	Slaughterhouse	Haunted	Archdeacon	Has committed murder
2	Aqueduct	Cursed	Layabout	Got mysteriously rich
3	Dance hall	Abandoned	Chorister	Often stalks near the cemetery
4	Barnyard	Murder place	Undertaker	Practices witchcraft
5	Ossuary	Smuggling cache	Card player	Has incurred huge debts
6	Pillory	Treasure	Vicar	Is not really what they claim
7	Fountain	To be demolished	Wigmaker	Has weird nightmares
8	Orchard	To be sold	Former convict	Is cursed
9	Graveyard	Secret entrance	Preacher	Hides their true nature
10	Statue	Inhabited by sprites	Organist	Hides a corpse
11	Presbytery	Crumbling	Gravedigger	Seeks for a lost treasure
12	Pigsty	Place of pilgrimage	Butler	Is wrongfully imprisoned
13	Rock arch	Strange smell	Apothecary	Poisoned someone
14	Waterfall	Poisoned	Lackey	Plans to kill someone
15	Lily pond	Hides a secret	Plowman	Had someone wrongfully condemned
16	Hamlet	Mysterious sounds	Shoemaker	Inherited a vendetta
17	Washhouse	Oddly placed	Quack	Is pregnant / impregnated a lady
18	Old tree	Turned to a prison	Street singer	Suffers from a disease
19	Well	Marriage place	Tax collector	Is being blackmailed
20	Brewery	Judgement place	Alderman	Has a secret love

by **Eric Nieudan**

```
>> ?/ RULING/<
000
-..-1
```



```
:::DRAWN OR SHEATHED
-..-1
-
--/?/The party has drawn weapons,
loaded crossbows, and spellbooks
at the ready.
x
-..-
-->Roll initiative twice and take
   either result/
-
-
--/?/Everything is sheathed,
spell components are in their
pouches and wands tucked in belts.
x
X
-..--
-->>Improve reaction result
     by one step
x
x
--/!/THX
x
-..-
--> :-)
```


by **Luke Gearing**
Picture: Douglas Fairbanks in *Robin Hood*, 1922

CAROUSING!

When you carouse, you spend a randomly determined amount of money, gaining XP equal to the money spent. Roll a dice based on your carousing location (see below). If the dice result is higher than your current level, roll on the Consequence Table.
If you spend more money than you have, you end up in debt to someone you'd rather not be indebted to, and roll a Consequence if you haven't already.

GAIN XP = GP SPENT

- Villages: d4x100 GP
- Towns: d6x100 GP
- City: d12x100 GP
- Wild Cities: d20x100 GP

1 Rode a horse (or equivalent) through a noble home or barracks. Considered a local legend, but gain an enemy.

2 Save or lose: 1-2) A finger 3-4) Toe 5) Nose 6) Ear 7) Eye 8) Roll twice. Save again—on failure, you remember how it happened.

3 Awaken with a hideous, possibly shameful, tattoo or piercing.

4 Awaken with a wicked sick tattoo or piercing.

5 At some point in the evening, you fell in with members of the criminal underworld and made a contact.

6 You snuck or stumbled into a high-society party and made a useful contact there.

7 Using various pint glasses, tobacco strands, and drug paraphernalia, the most amazing financial scheme was outlined to you. You staked everything. 1-4) It's a scam, obviously. 5) It's a scam and the local authorities think you were a key member. 6) It's the real deal—d100% return on investment in d6 months.

8 You joined a religious faith. Perhaps you meant it, at the time. 1-4) The major local faith. 5-6) Underground faith, heresy, or cult.

9 A hangover to kill a god. Disadvantage to everything for d4 days. Carousing next time is only at half rolled value—once bitten, twice shy.

10 A gambling windfall! d10x10% of wealth gambled at a d10x10% return.

11 The house always wins. Lose d4x25% of wealth.

12 You scored! But something doesn't feel right. Save or acquire a venereal disease.

13 You made an honest-to-god mate. Gain a friend.

14 You thought you were making a friend. As was revealed at the end of the night, they actually fucking hate you. Gain an enemy.

15 You wake up with a pain in your side. Rolling over, you find out why: a sacred religious idol, artefact, or icon that definitely does not belong to you.

16 Your face hurts. That's because you've used a major political symbol or artefact as a pillow—meaning it's not where it should be.

17 A lance of pain up your leg as you shove on a boot—because you stashed a stolen heirloom or crest of a local noble house in there, obviously.

18 In your altered state, you struck for freedom—or so you thought. You broke a beloved local statue, clock, or other such landmark last night.

19 That lovely expensive thing you own—not the magic one, the other really most expensive thing you own? It's ruined. You broke it. You dumb fuck.

20 That lovely expensive thing another (random) party member owns—not the magic one, the other really most expensive thing they own? It's ruined. You broke it. You dumb fuck.

21 You slew the beast that troubled the locals. If by "beast" you mean "important piece of local infrastructure," like a well, a wall, a road, or such.

22 This is why you can't have nice things. Your most expensive object—yes, possibly the magic one—is missing. 1-2) You lost it. 3-4) You lost it and someone else has found it. 5-6) It was stolen from you.

23 This is why you can't be trusted with nice things. A fellow party member's most expensive object—yes, possibly the magic one—is missing. 1-2) You lost it. 3-4) You lost it and someone else found it. 5-6) It was stolen from you.

24 You briefly held a major local relic. Now you are less certain as to its location. 1-4) You lost it. 5-6) It was stolen from you.

25 Now you've had a drink (or whatever) with them, you realise they're not so bad. Reconcile with an enemy. For now.

26 Actually, you're a cunt. Fuck off. Lose a friendly contact—50% chance they turn into an enemy.

27 Last night, you hit rock bottom. You swore an oath to sort your shit out—to clean your act up. Unfortunately, you swore this oath in public. Carouse at half-value here for the next 6 months, keeping your head low.

28 Keen for anything on a drink or two, you promised to deliver…something? To someone? Somewhere? Whatever this thing is, it seems interesting. 50% chance of remembering any of the details of the job.

29 You wake up and find someone ready and overeager to see you work—you promised to take this person along with you for at least d6 adventures. Of course, you made this promise to someone powerful.

30 You freed livestock into the area, causing a stampede. The farmers are actively working to find out who did it (as well as all their sheep). 50% chance they find out and start planning agricultural revenge.

31 You freed predators into the area which is now (at least partly) infested with dangerous animals, preying upon citizens and their animals alike.

32 You awake in a cell with a cell-mate sleeping on your shoulder. You were pulled up on minor charges: 2d20 GP fine.

33 You awake in a cell, legs in irons. You were pulled up on moderate charges: 2d100 GP fine.

34 You awake in a cell, legs and arms chained up. You were pulled up on major charges: d6x1000 GP fine, or working it off for the local authorities.

35 At night, the streets shift and you visit the Other City, the polis of slanted angles and moonlight so alien, so purple as to stain the eyes. Or so it feels, as you stagger home in the morning, having not slept. Sleep all day, and then disadvantage on everything the day after.

36 You just couldn't find that fucking shell, no matter how hard you tried. Conned out of d10x10% of your wealth.

37 From your hiding place, you accidentally spied the unveiling of a religious secret—a ritual, initiation, or eldritch truth. The group in question knows someone saw this and is hunting the one who has defiled their secrets.

38 You've seen plenty of people die, just normally it's not a nobleman cut down by a band of assassins who disappear into the night like smoke.

39 You shagged a local notable—or one of their immediate relatives. 50% chance it was at their place. 30% chance it was more than a shag to them.

40 You cannot believe you woke up in bed with them. Your enemy.

41 You'll need to read up on the local customs and rites regarding holy persons and celibacy quickly. Ideally yesterday. 50% chance they're still here; otherwise they've left.

42 To learn the secrets of the wizard is a rare honour, requiring long years of trust and tutelage. Or you could stumble in on a ritual unnoticed. That'd do the trick too. Those involved in the ritual are keen to find you and ensure you don't spread what you saw.

43 Linked arm-in-arm, hidden behind disguises which failed to hide much, you saw them—local notables, out on the town—a tryst most troublesome, should it come to light.

44 You think I look bad? You should see the other guy. Unfortunately, his mates got in there first. Lose all wealth, and reduced to 1 hp from the mugging.

45 Upon your finger rests a weight new to you. By your side, the one who joined you in holy matrimony—a local notable or one of their immediate relatives. 40% chance they married you in earnest.

46 As it turns out, a holy person can't officiate their own marriage.

47 A pair of matching rings now pair you and your enemy—joined in enmity and in marriage.

48 The new ring on your finger certainly implies marriage—but where is your newfound spouse? More importantly—who are they?

49 You fought the law, and 1-4) The law won. Reduced to 1 hp and wanted for resisting arrest. 5-6) You won. Lose half your hit points and gain huge credibility in the area. The guards you beat up don't report you—they're too embarrassed. 10% chance any future interaction with the guards involves one from this fight.

50 You couldn't say who won or lost the fight, but the gang will definitely remember you. Lose half hit points, and gain an enemy (the entire street gang).

51 Employer of the year. You fought with your hirelings and henchmen last night—all reduced to half hit points and all hirelings taking Loyalty tests.

52 Brawling with wizards and witches is easy, you just 1-3) Clean their clock first. Gain an enemy. 4-6) Let them throw the first "punch"; you're now subject to a highly embarrassing ongoing magical effect.

53 You pissed all over your spellbook. Or, at least, someone's. If no party members have a spellbook, it was a random magic user's.

54 You blasphemed, profusely and at length. 1-4) Proscribed by the local clergy. 5) Proscribed by the faith-at-large. 6) The god (or pantheon, divinity, slime, etc.) themselves heard your blasphemy, and are going to make a special project of you.

55 You scored a huge load of drugs—d12x100 GP worth. You don't remember how you scored the load—40% chance someone is looking for it.

56 CURSED!!!!

57 You fucked up. You ate the Bad Kebab. Welcome to hell. Lose d6 days as you shit your guts out. Some small part of your mind will forever think it did taste pretty good though…

58 You found a new drinking buddy in the form of a talking beast or similar fantasy being. Gain a friend.

59 You've attracted the attention of a petty god, who makes direct, personal contact.

60 Mind altered, you thought nothing of the "gift" bundled in sackcloth by a wan young man who yelled "I'M FREE" and wept as he fled into the night after you accepted the bundle. Looking at it in the cold harsh light of sobriety, it's so obviously cursed.

61 You love a sing-song while drunk. One thing led to another, and now you're in a political group who sing their own songs. You didn't pay too much attention to the lyrics at the time. 1-2) Your views align. Phew. 3-4) They are the polar opposite to your views. Uh-oh. 5-6) They are a laser-focused single issue group—one that you really don't care about one way or the other.

62 You are the zig to their zag, the shit to their roses, the cat to their dog. You've been declared the enemy of a political group active in the area.

63 Whatever this thing is, it's definitely stolen. You didn't steal it, but you think you might have promised to look after it for someone capable of stealing it.

64 You gatecrashed a fancy wedding—one family found you delightfully darling, the other wants you dead. Beautiful ceremony though; really tasteful you know?

65 Guilt haunts you. You didn't mean to do it—a total accident. But how are you meant to tell someone that? Do they even know you did it? But worse, you know: last night, you killed someone's pet accidentally.

66 Inadvertently, you have progressed a prophecy eagerly anticipated by a minor religious group. They are now watching you very closely—although you are not sure if your role is positive or negative.

67 Your cheek stings, and the glove in your pocket reminds you as to why—you've got a duel at noon today—in d4 hours.

68 The first Informal Moonlight Derby was a success, you think. If you don't own a horse, "grand theft equine" joins "riding recklessly and under the influence" on the rap sheet.

69	A little birdie told you about a horrible underground space filled with monsters, treasures, traps, and probable doom. They even gave you a (vague) location for the entrance!
70	A drunken aide spilled the beans on an ongoing political manoeuvre or scandal.
71	The proud new owner of a very valuable item would not stop talking about it last night—guided gently, they gave some suggestions as to the location too. You are not the only one who heard this.
72	A scorned wizard's apprentice bitterly muttered into their pint of bitter about their "master" hidden away nearby, yet not advertising their presence.
73	Through the braggadocio, the story of a magic item lost in the wilderness cut through the noise and sits atop your memory, remaining despite the dissipating clouds of hangover and regret.
74	"You remember that one adventuring band—the one who never came back? No, the other one. I knew them—I know where they were going,"—and now so do you.
75	You've learnt exactly what people believe about a local notable monster, as they all swapped the same stories with slightly different details and emphasis.
76	Through a bulb of pain which begins in the eyes and ends at the base of your skull, you remember that you fired all your hirelings, who have gone on to tell everyone else what a dickhead boss you are. Hirelings from this locale cost you double now.
77	In the spirit of universal siblinghood and transparency, you told all last night—revealing a major secret or all the details of your last escapade.
78 †	A crowd of old geezers attached themselves to you, casually adding their orders to your own. Halve XP gain on this and future carousing rolls in the locale, but have the option of re-rolling the carousing result in future. You lose access to any other Drinking Buddies when rolling this result. Gaining a new set of buddies loses this crowd.
79 †	You (somehow) fall in with the cool crowd, drinking at all the latest establishments and taking all the most novel substances. On an odd carousing roll result, increase the multiplier to 200x.
80 †	You end up as a guest in an exclusive society or club. After a good performance, you are extended an invitation: join them for 500 GP a month. Those failing to pay their dues are barred forever. For members, all carousing results here are multiplied by 200, not 100.
81 †	This is where you belong—the Weird Fringe of nightlife. When carousing here, you spend an extra d8x100 GP, but always roll two consequences, no matter the result.
81	The payroll looks different this morning—you have d20 more hirelings than you did before last night. All were promised a month's wages up front.
83	You invented a new drink—and, bucking tradition, it's pretty good. +1 to all Carousing rolls in the area.
84	A solemn party to commemorate their very rich, very dead ancestor. Of course they'd be happy to show you where their tomb is.
85	A set of the nouveau riche disparagingly gave you a "little tip" as to an investment opportunity. *"With this you might elevate yourself a little from the gutter, hmm?"*
86	For d10x100 GP, you bought a map that promises to lead to treasure. 20% chance it's a fake, and half of all fakes lead into an ambush. Otherwise, roll a random treasure type.
87	You stumbled ass-backwards into an assassination attempt and foiled it. Gain a (known) friend and an (unknown) enemy.
88	Partying with clergy was more fun than you thought. Make a contact in the clergy.
89	On the piss, your drinking group promised no shop talk. And yet, as if haunted by a ghost, they couldn't resist critiquing the work of those not there. Make a contact in a trade.
90	Congratulations! You're a godparent.
91	Through the whisper network, you've learnt something of a semi-public group active in the locale.
92	The gossip of nobles travels far—even to your own grubby little ears. Learn of personal strife in the life of a noble or notable.
93	A hidden landmark of some sort was shared with you—a hidden library, the site where the highwayman was run through, the site where the first guild meeting was held, etc.
94	You awaken with a large set of keys you have never seen before. Presumably someone will be looking for them. They must open something.
95	You fucked with the wrong establishment. A criminal organisation is now your enemy.
96	You dictated a letter, complete with slurred words, to your 1) Ex 2) Parents 3) Enemy 4) Friend 5) Lover 6) Yourself.
97	In your wanderings, you found something—a sizable property, hidden from public view. Unlocked, unoccupied, unowned. Yours for the taking.
98	In the parliament of fools, you are the prime minister. Few will take you seriously in this town again. (This has its advantages.)
99	Drunken and alone in a graveyard, you bemoaned your lot. A spectral arm draped itself across your shoulders, and a grinning skull met you woe for woe. You're now friends with a ghost.
100	You started a fire. A big one. 50% chance a section of the city is destroyed.

† represents Drinking Buddies. This membership in an exclusive society or club increases the GP multiplier to x200, but only counts in that specific area or cultural group. Only one Drinking Buddy group can be benefited from per Carousing session.

D12ENEMIES/FRIENDS

1 A fellow practitioner of your trade, whatever that is. 2 Guard (20% chance they hold rank). 3 Criminal. 4 Noble. 5 Politician, courtier, etc. 6 Clergy or holy person. 7 Magic practitioner. 8 Commoner. 9 Noble's staff member. 10 Artisan. 11 Merchant. 12 Some sort of creature hiding in general society.

by **Warren D.** - Art: **Emiel Boven**

YOU DID THIS TO ME

Dead PCs Return To Menace The Living & Other Dungeon Headaches

One of the neatest mechanics from *InPlacesDeep's Nightwick Abbey** that I have experienced is that PCs who are killed and left in the dungeon tend to return as wights.

This spurred me to think about the death of PCs in my own dungeons. If the mythic underworld can infect the mundane to make it mystical, why not PCs' corpses as well? I think this effect could help make PC death a little more impactful and add a natural ritual to the game—honouring the dead.

Additionally, I think dead PCs rising to take revenge adds a personalised touch to a dungeon that is the result of players' actions and decisions. And I think whether consciously stated or not, players love to see the impact they have on the world.

UPON RETURN TO THE DUNGEON, THE PARTY FINDS THOSE LEFT BEHIND…

In general, the newly arisen have new HP totals rolled using d8s, will not negotiate with PCs, and require silver or magic weapons to hit, unless they are lower than 4HD, in which case silver weapons add +1 to the damage rolled (e.g., a silver dagger does 1d4+1 dmg). But I want to create some variability, especially if this is going to be used in more "vanilla" dungeons. That way, monsters that are added increase the dynamism instead of being just another bag of hit points. To that end, here are some special abilities based on class.

* https://inplacesdeep.blogspot.com/search?q=Nightwick

FIGHTERS Blood-lusting and battle-hardened! Returns as a fast rage zombie, now can charge 30'and inflict 2d6 damage, while thrown objects do 1d8 damage.

WIZARDS The body dies, the head lives! The head pops off and floats around. Now can cast one spell known in life out of each eye. May grow more eyes and cast more spells—behold.

CLERICS Faith inverted! The corpse rises, talks backward, and is now an anti-cleric; will lair in the nearest grave, crypt, mausoleum, etc., and raise the dead from anything the PC recently killed their last session until found; use turn table to measure the success of raising the dead.

THIEVES Skulk in the shadows eternal! A piece of their soul is molded into a rat/crow-like thing—an omen of bad luck. Can be glimpsed when a PC attempts something dangerous; increases saving throws by +2.

ELFS A cold but exquisite corpse! Travels out of the dungeon seeking the warmth of home and adoration, radiating *charm person* and constantly requesting the charmed to continually build and add to fires, resulting in the dwelling burning down, trapping all within—except for the elf, who just moves on...

DWARFS Endless toil, endless trouble! Everything left behind except a pick; they make new tunnels, collapse old ones, leave traps, and they don't know when, but they'll dig to (a) hell eventually.

HALFLINGS Hearth and hive! The corpse spontaneously generates a walking nest home to stinging, biting insects; double the number of vermin on the encounter table even if you have to increase the die size to do so.

HOW TO PROTECT AGAINST SUCH DESECRATION

Remove The Body: Take the corpse out of the dungeon and give a proper burial. Gus L of All Dead Generations has suggested: (1) hauling a corpse is encumbering; (2) if given a successful burial of at least 100gp, the replacement character gets a 1/2 share of XP.

Salt Circle: Take salt with you. If someone dies, make a salt circle around them. Works until the circle is broken. Should last at least a week, but longer than that? Eh...

Cast *bless* On The Body: It will send the soul to the proper place or at least the afterlife of the cleric's devotion, which might not be the dead person's preference but...eh...



by **Ahimsa Kerp**

At some point in your D&D weirdo life, you realise that everything around is a source of inspiration. Like…

Songs that are actually magic items

Arrows in the Dark

THE SWORD

These arrows were specially enchanted to be harmless during the day and deadly beneath moonlight. The arrows are made of dark wood and black feathers with obsidian heads. They have a subtle hue about them of distant starlight and smell faintly of ozone.

- **Damage:** 1d6+1
- **Fired during daylight:** Any attack less than a natural 20 does no damage and breaks the arrow. An attack roll of natural 20 does damage as normal, but there are no special effects.
- **Fired during night:** Acts as a +3 arrow. If the arrow hits, it does double damage.
- **Fired beneath a full moon:** Acts as a +3 arrow. If the arrow hits, the foe is instantly slain. Creatures of 10 or more HD lose half their HP instead of death.



Black Blade

BLUE ÖYSTER CULT

Not that black blade. These five curved blades affixed to a crossbar were designed to fit over the knuckles or be concealed under and against the palm. They were inspired by the armament of big cats and they possess the power to turn those they strike into felines.

- **Damage:** 1d6+2
- **Natural 20:** On an attack roll of natural 20, the target must save vs petrification or be transformed into a feline shape. Their bodies twist and reluctantly change as the transformation takes them over (roll 1d6 on the below table to see what kind of cat they change into). If the save succeeds, the blades inflict normal damage.
- **Charges:** The black blades can create, as you'd expect, nine lives. Once this many souls have been turned into a big cat, the blades are drained and become a normal +2 magical weapon.
- **Immunity:** The bearer of this weapon will not be attacked by felines of any size or shape.
- **Restrictions:** Non-living creatures are unaffected.

HOUSECAT
AC 8 [11], **HD** 1 (4hp), **Att** 2 × claw (1d), 1 × bite (1d2), **THAC0** 19 [+0], **MV** 120′ (40′), **SV** D15 W16 P17 B18 S19 (2), **ML** 2, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 5

LION
AC 6 [13], **HD** 5 (22hp), **Att** 2 × claw (1d4+1), 1 × bite (1d10), **THAC0** 15 [+4], **MV** 150′ (50′), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (3), **ML** 9, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 175

MOUNTAIN LION
AC 6 [13], **HD** 3+2 (15hp), **Att** 2 × claw (1d3), 1 × bite (1d6), **THAC0** 16 [+3], **MV** 150′ (50′), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (2), **ML** 8, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 50







PANTHER
AC 4 [15], HD 4 (18hp), **Att** 2 × claw (1d4), 1 × bite (1d8), **THAC0** 16 [+3], **MV** 210′ (70′), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (2), **ML** 8, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 75

TIGER
AC 6 [13], **HD** 6 (27hp), **Att** 2 × claw (1d6), 1 × bite (2d6), **THAC0** 14 [+5], **MV** 150′ (50′), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (3), **ML** 9, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 275

SABER-TOOTHED TIGER
AC 6 [13], **HD** 8 (36hp), **Att** 2 × claw (1d8), 1 × bite (2d8), **THAC0** 12 [+7], **MV** 150′ (50′), **SV** D10 W11 P12 B13 S14 (4), **ML** 10, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 650

Black Dog

LED ZEPPELIN

A miniature statuette 4" tall carved in the form of a snarling dog. Speaking the correct command word [Darlin', carved in Elvish on the collar] and casting the figurine onto the ground causes it to transform into a living animal which obeys the character's commands.

- **Returning to figurine:** Repeating the command word returns the animal to its figurine form.
- **If an animal is slain:** It returns to its figurine form.
- **If a figurine is destroyed:** Its magical power is lost irrevocably.

BLACK DOG
A shaggy war dog with keen senses and a bad attitude.
AC 3 [16], **HD** 5+2 (22hp), **Att** 1 × bite (3d4), **THAC0** 15 [+4], **MV** 150′ (50′), **SV** D10 W11 P12 B13 S14, **ML** 11, **AL** Neutral
- ▶ **Infravision:** 90′.
- ▶ **Detect invisible:** 75% chance.
- ▶ **Intelligent:** Speaks Common.
- ▶ **Mortal enemy:** +5 to attack and damage vs cats of any size.
- ▶ **Usage frequency:** Once per session, for up to 6 hours.



Five Magics

MEGADEATH

This aged yellow scroll, though crumbling, is much stronger than it looks. If held out to intercept incoming magic, it will absorb and capture the spell out of the air. The hostile spell will not affect the bearer of this scroll, though an area of effect spell would still hit the other targets. After being absorbed into the scroll, anyone who can *read magic* is able to cast the spell once. If five magic spells are contained on the scroll, they will disappear and a bonus spell of the highest level will appear. After it is used once, it will disappear, and the scroll of five magics will again be empty.

Teardrinker

MASTODON

An invisible dirk that is 2' long, this item is feared and hated by the few who have discerned its existence.

- **Damage:** 1d4 + 2
- **Emotional damage:** A target injured by Teardrinker loses some of their capacity for emotion and suffers from aches of ennui. The first three successive hits have the following effects.
  - First hit: Depressed - Target is at -2 to hit and damage.
  - Second hit: Morose - As above, and cannot summon energy to even attempt saving throws.
  - Third hit: Despondent - As above but cannot be bothered to use any racial or class powers and abilities. Further hits only do regular damage as the target is as miserable as possible. The only cure for this emotional damage is one week (per level of depression) spent on nothing but wild carousing.



Snakeskin Drape

MESSA

When this long snakeskin wrap is worn, the wearer gains slit pupils, a forked tongue, and abilities like those of a cobra.

- Leather Armor +1
- **Poisonous Spit:** Range 4'. A hit causes death (save vs poison).
- **Speed:** Attack twice per round. Second attack at the end of each round.
- **Magic resistance:** +4 bonus to all saving throws against magic.

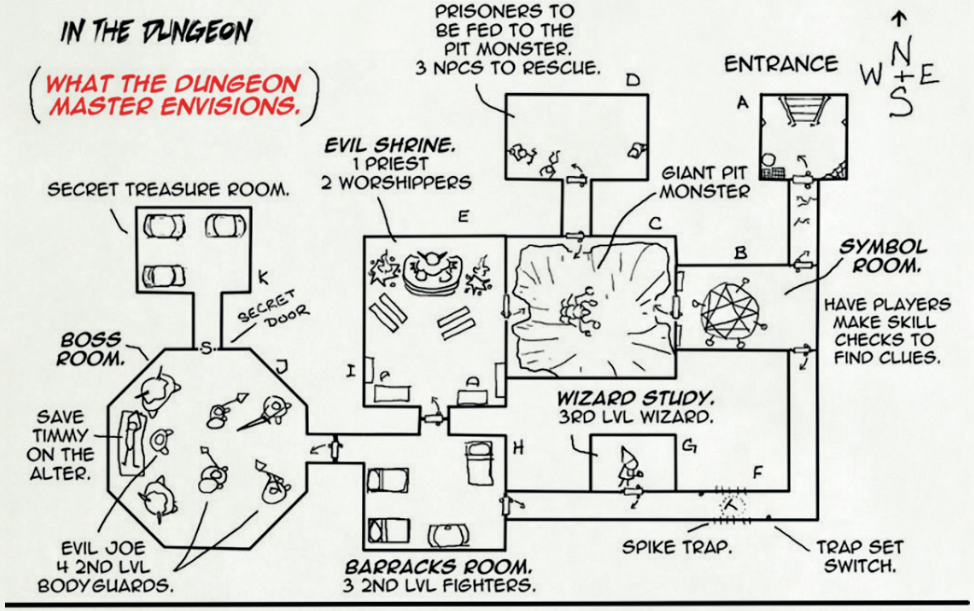
War Pigs

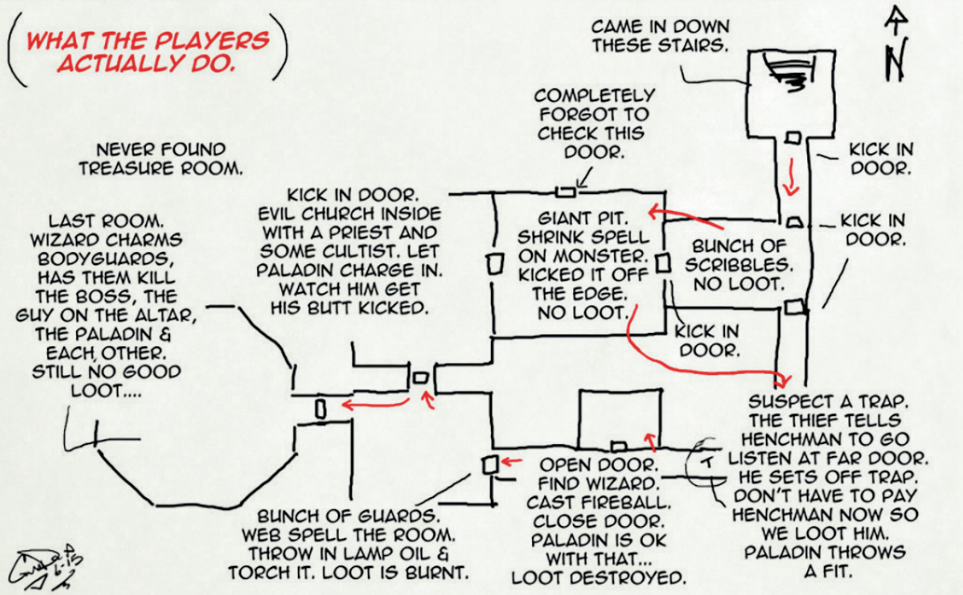
BLACK SABBATH

These metallic creatures were forged long ago by the gods. They can run through air faster than a bird, swim through water better than any fish, and there is no darkness, no stygian gloom, sufficient to dampen the golden glow that comes from their mane and bristles.

AC 1 [18], **HD** 7 (29hp), **Att** 1 × tusk (2d4), **THAC0** 10 [+9], **MV** 150′ (50′), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 9, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 500
- ▶ **Flying:** 180′ (60′)
- ▶ **Swimming:** 240 (80′)
- ▶ **Berserk:** May enter a rage where they are +2 to hit and damage and fight to the death. This rage sometimes causes them to attack their allies; all attack rolls of natural 5 and lower will automatically hit a randomly determined ally.

by **Gavin Dea**


IN THE DUNGEON
(WHAT THE DUNGEON MASTER ENVISIONS.)
PRISONERS TO BE FED TO THE PIT MONSTER. 3 NPCS TO RESCUE.
ENTRANCE
N
W
E
S
EVIL SHRINE. 1 PRIEST 2 WORSHIPPERS
GIANT PIT MONSTER
SECRET TREASURE ROOM.
SECRET DOOR
SYMBOL ROOM.
HAVE PLAYERS MAKE SKILL CHECKS TO FIND CLUES.
BOSS ROOM.
WIZARD STUDY. 3RD LVL WIZARD.
SAVE TIMMY ON THE ALTER.
EVIL JOE 4 2ND LVL BODYGUARDS.
BARRACKS ROOM. 3 2ND LVL FIGHTERS.
SPIKE TRAP.
TRAP SET SWITCH.


(WHAT THE PLAYERS ACTUALLY DO.)
N
CAME IN DOWN THESE STAIRS.
COMPLETELY FORGOT TO CHECK THIS DOOR.
KICK IN DOOR.
KICK IN DOOR.
NEVER FOUND TREASURE ROOM.
KICK IN DOOR. EVIL CHURCH INSIDE WITH A PRIEST AND SOME CULTIST. LET PALADIN CHARGE IN. WATCH HIM GET HIS BUTT KICKED.
GIANT PIT. SHRINK SPELL ON MONSTER. KICKED IT OFF THE EDGE. NO LOOT.
BUNCH OF SCRIBBLES. NO LOOT.
KICK IN DOOR.
LAST ROOM. WIZARD CHARMS BODYGUARDS, HAS THEM KILL THE BOSS, THE GUY ON THE ALTAR, THE PALADIN & EACH OTHER. STILL NO GOOD LOOT....
SUSPECT A TRAP. THE THIEF TELLS HENCHMAN TO GO LISTEN AT FAR DOOR. HE SETS OFF TRAP. DON'T HAVE TO PAY HENCHMAN NOW SO WE LOOT HIM. PALADIN THROWS A FIT.
OPEN DOOR. FIND WIZARD. CAST FIREBALL. CLOSE DOOR. PALADIN IS OK WITH THAT... LOOT DESTROYED.
BUNCH OF GUARDS. WEB SPELL THE ROOM. THROW IN LAMP OIL & TORCH IT. LOOT IS BURNT.


Picture: Roger Moore in *Ivanohe*, 1958
RET
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Sinbad

by **Ahimsa Kerp**

Picture: Douglas Fairbanks Jr. in *Sinbad the Sailor*, 1947

Requirement: Minimum DEX 13, minimum CHA 13
Prime Requisite: DEX and CHA
Hit dice: d8
Maximum level: 14
Armour: leather
Weapons: all
Languages: Alignment, Common

Inspired by the classic fantasy movie *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* (1977), sinbads are traders, fighters, diplomats, monster slayers, and more. Every element in this movie is about how important knowledge is. In a way, this is a detective story with adventure dressings.
Members of this class are welcome at almost any port in the world and hold in their heads a dazzling array of rumours and facts. While they prefer diplomacy, when swords are drawn they make for deadly opponents, and they never leave a crew member behind.

Combat

Sinbads can use all weapons, but prefer to use light melee weapons. When using light blades, they may substitute their Dex bonus for both to-hit and damage.
They will not wear armour bulkier than leather for fear of drowning, though they can use shields.

Contacts

A sinbad knows people all around the world. Once per session, they may call in a favor from an NPC they describe. When attempting to hire retainers, the sinbad rolls 3d6 (instead of 2d6) and keeps the highest dice when testing the potential retainer's reaction. In addition, when making a loyalty check for retainers, roll 3d6 (instead of 2d6) and keep the lowest dice.

Savvy

At the beginning of each session, a sinbad may roll 1d4. The result is the number of rumours the sinbad may ask for during that session. The sinbad may ask if they've heard of specific rumours about the subject of the situation they're in: rumours about a treasure, a dungeon, or a monster.

Disarming

A sinbad can declare a successful attack disarms their enemy rather than doing any damage.

After Reaching 9th Level

A sinbad may establish a naval academy where they teach their skills to would-be sailors.
They will attract 1d6 apprentices, who are of level 1d4.

The Sinbad Level Progression

Level	Title	XP	HD	THAC0	D	W	P	B	S
1	Deck Hand	0	1d8	19 [0]	13	14	13	15	15
2	Swab	2,000	2d8	19 [0]	13	14	13	15	15
3	Mate	4,000	3d8	19 [0]	13	14	13	15	15
4	Seafarer	8,000	4d8	17 [+2]	12	13	11	13	13
5	Sea Dog	16,000	5d8	17 [+2]	12	13	11	13	13
6	Mariner	32,000	6d8	17 [+2]	12	13	11	13	13
7	Navigator	64,000	7d8	14 [+5]	12	13	11	13	13
8	Pirate	120,000	8d8	14 [+5]	12	13	11	13	13
9	Sailor	240,000	9d8	14 [+5]	10	11	9	11	10
10	Sinbad	360,000	9d8+2*	12 [+7]	10	11	9	11	10
11	Sinbad	480,000	9d8+4*	12 [+7]	10	11	9	11	10
12	Sinbad	600,000	9d8+6*	12 [+7]	10	11	9	11	10
13	Sinbad	720,000	9d8+8*	10 [+9]	8	9	7	9	8
14	Sinbad the Sailor	840,000	9d8+10*	10 [+9]	8	9	7	9	8

by **A.C. Luke** - Art: **Letty Wilson**

Kobold

Requirement: Minimum DEX 9
Prime Requisite: INT and DEX
Hit dice: d4
Maximum level: 8
Armour: Leather, chainmail, shields
Weapons: Any appropriate to size
Languages : Alignment, Common, Kobold

Small demihumans with a canine appearance, kobolds stand 3' tall and weigh 30–40 pounds. They have rat-like tails and communicate in a language that resembles a small dog barking. Kobolds who live above ground have a thin layer of fur, while underground dwellers are hairless, with scaly, rust-coloured skin. Keenly aware of the disadvantages of their size and stature, kobolds use stealth, traps, and trickery to protect themselves and their communities. This has given them a reputation for being cunning and wicked, but a kobold ally is steadfast—those who can't work as a team rarely last long.

Combat

Kobolds can use leather armour, chainmail, and shields, but it must be tailored to their small size. Similarly, they can use any weapon appropriate to their stature (as determined by the referee). They cannot use longbows or two-handed swords.

Defensive Bonus

Due to their small size, kobolds gain a +2 bonus to Armour Class when attacked by large opponents (greater than human-sized).

Infravision

Kobolds have infravision to 60' (see Darkness under Hazards and Challenges in OSE).

Detect Room Traps

Due to their expertise with traps, kobolds have a 2-in-6 chance of detecting non-magical room traps when searching (see Dungeon Adventuring in OSE).

Kobold Skills

Kobold can use the following skills, with the chance of success shown opposite:

- **Find or remove treasure traps** (TR): A roll is required to find a treasure trap and then another to remove it. This may be attempted only once per trap.

The Kobold Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THAC0	D	W	P	B	S
1	0	1d4	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12
2	1,800	2d4	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12
3	3,600	3d4	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12
4	7,200	4d4	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10
5	14,400	5d4	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10
6	28,600	6d4	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10
7	59,200	7d4	14 [+5]	4	5	6	7	8
8	118,400	8d4	14 [+5]	4	5	6	7	8



	TR	HN	HS	MS	OL
1	15	1-2	10	20	15
2	20	1-2	15	25	20
3	25	1-3	20	30	25
4	30	1-3	25	35	30
5	40	1-3	30	40	35
6	50	1-4	35	45	45
7	60	1-4	45	55	55
8	70	1-4	55	65	65

▸ **Hear noise** (HN): In a quiet environment (e.g., not in combat), a kobold may attempt to listen at a door or to hear the sounds of something (e.g., a wandering monster) approaching.
▸ **Hide in shadows** (HS): Requires the kobold to be motionless—attacking or moving while hiding is not possible.
▸ **Move silently** (MS): A kobold may attempt to sneak past enemies unnoticed.
▸ **Open locks** (OL): Requires thieves' tools (see Equipment in OSE). A kobold can only try this skill once per lock. If the roll fails, the kobold may not try the same lock again before gaining an experience level.

After Reaching 8th Level

A kobold may construct a stronghold that will attract kobolds seeking refuge and security from far and wide. Kobolds typically live in clans, so kobolds of the character's clan will be attracted to this stronghold. Kobolds from other clans will generally be friendly, and clans may collaborate in times of war or disaster.
A kobold ruler may only hire kobold mercenaries. Specialists and retainers of any race may be hired, but this is very uncommon.

DID YOU KNOW?

It's an age-old question: Is a kobold a fairy, a lizard, or a dog? And, as you've likely already guessed, the answer is that they're all three.

Kobolds as Fairies
In Germanic folklore, kobolds are a spirit akin to a goblin or fairy. With the ability to turn invisible, and a preference for staying that way, these sprites live secretly alongside humanity. When not invisible, kobolds are typically depicted as human-like, very young or very old, and the size of a small child. As shapeshifters, they're also sometimes depicted as small animals, animate objects, and even fire.

Kobolds in folklore are primarily defined by their habitat. As such, we can talk about kobolds of the hearth, earth, and sea.

Kobolds of the Hearth
Most commonly, kobolds are household spirits, putting them in the company of the Scottish *brownie*, Nordic *nisse*, Slavic *domovoy*, etc. Taking up residence in a human household, they perform chores and help out around the house—as long as they're given food and treated with sufficient respect. If not, they'll become angry, causing accidents and bad luck until placated or driven away.

Kobolds of the Earth
Many spirits are said to lurk beneath the earth, and that includes the kobold. As miners went about their business, they believed they could hear kobolds drilling and hammering elsewhere in the mines. These underground kobolds were often far more malevolent than their aboveground counterparts, being blamed for accidents, rock slides, and just for chucking rocks at people.
A particularly important accusation levelled at kobolds was their spoiling of silver ore into a worthless and dangerous substitute. This ore was dubbed "kobold" by the miners, lending them their English name. (It wasn't spoiled silver at all, but a new element that came to be known as *cobalt*.)

Kobolds of the Sea
Kobold could also refer to a water spirit *klabautermann* (likely from the Low German *klabastern* meaning "rumble or make a noise").
He merrily and diligently assists sailors and fishermen with their duties, to the point where, if a sailor is washed overboard, he'll leap into the sea to rescue them. Dressed as a sailor, the klabautermann carries a tobacco pipe and wears a sailor's cap. Sometimes his likeness is carved into a ship's mast for good luck, though no sailor actually wants to set eyes on him—it's only to a doomed crew that he will ever reveal himself.

Kobolds as Dogs and Lizards: A Brief History
So, if that's what a kobold is, how did we get from there to trap-using lizard people that serve dragons in fifth edition D&D?
In *Original D&D* (1974), kobolds were sparsely described as a kind of "weaker" goblin—which, given where goblins normally place in D&D power rankings, seems particularly damning. But, as ignoble as that might be conflating kobolds and goblins, at least in the folkloric sense it isn't inappropriate at all!
In the first AD&D *Monster Manual* (1977), kobolds are described as hairless with small horns. Still, because they live underground, we can see the link to the folkloric mining kobolds that will continue throughout the critters' long career.
So, where do dog kobolds come in? The Mentzer *Dungeons & Dragons Basic Set* (1983) has the following description: *"These small, evil dog-like men usually live underground. They have scaly, rust-brown skin and no hair."*
Still, the descriptions of kobolds in early D&D remained vague. Ultimately, what they looked like in any given book was more or less up to the artist's interpretation. Some leaned more lizard, others more dog. It's this dog kind of kobold that makes its way via BECMI D&D to Japan, ensuring future Japanese kobolds in video games and anime were strictly canine.
Future TSR products kept kobolds ambiguous. In 1993, the company would publish the boxed set adventure *Dragon Mountain*, which featured legions of kobolds as servants of the dragon Infyrana. Although these kobolds appear as horned goblins in Tony DiTerlizzi's art, the precedent of kobolds as draconic servants was set.
Wizards of the Coast's third edition gave them the subtype Reptilian and a standardised, lizard-like look. Following in *Dragon Mountain*'s footsteps, these new kobolds often featured in adventures as the servants of dragons, and perhaps even their distant relations, a link which has only strengthened in recent years.
And with all that, the last remnants of the dog kobold in official depictions had been swept away. Kobolds are now strictly 'lil lizards.

Strider

by **Stuart Robertson** - Art: **HARK (Carl Ädel)**

Author's Note: I rolled up a ranger as my first character when I bought the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* player's handbook back in 1984. I was a big fan of Ralph Bakshi's animated *Lord of the Rings* film and wanted a character like Strider. (*Editor's Note: This is why we called this class the "Strider."*) **There are many versions of the ranger class out there,** some focusing on some different trick that these wilderness warriors are supposed to have: multiple weapons, archery, pets, etc. This one is an attempt to get back to the basics. It's interesting that when you strip out the more verbose language from AD&D, the actual rules required for a ranger are a lot less than you'd think and fit quite nicely into the format for B/X.

Requirement: Minimum STR 13
Prime Requisite: STR
Hit dice: d6 (spécial)
Maximum level: 14
Armour: Any
Weapons: Any
Languages : Alignment, Common

Striders are human fighters who patrol the wilderness, protecting the civilised lands from the encroachment of evil humanoids. They are skilled in woodcraft, scouting and tracking. When a strider reaches higher levels, they learn to cast spells taken from a subset of both the cleric and magic-user lists.

Combat

Striders use two six-sided dice (d6) to determine their hit points. They may use any weapon, wear any type of armour, and may use shields.

Special abilities

- **Damage Bonus:** Striders add their level as a bonus to damage when fighting evil humanoids in melee combat, including bugbears, ettins, giants, gnolls, goblins, hobgoblins, kobolds, ogres, ogre magi, orcs, and trolls.
- **Scout:** Striders are alert and difficult to surprise (a roll of 1 on 1d6) while more likely to surprise their enemies (a roll of 1, 2 or 3 on 1d6).
- **Tracker:** Striders are able to follow a creature's tracks left outdoors since the last rain or snow.

Strider Spell List

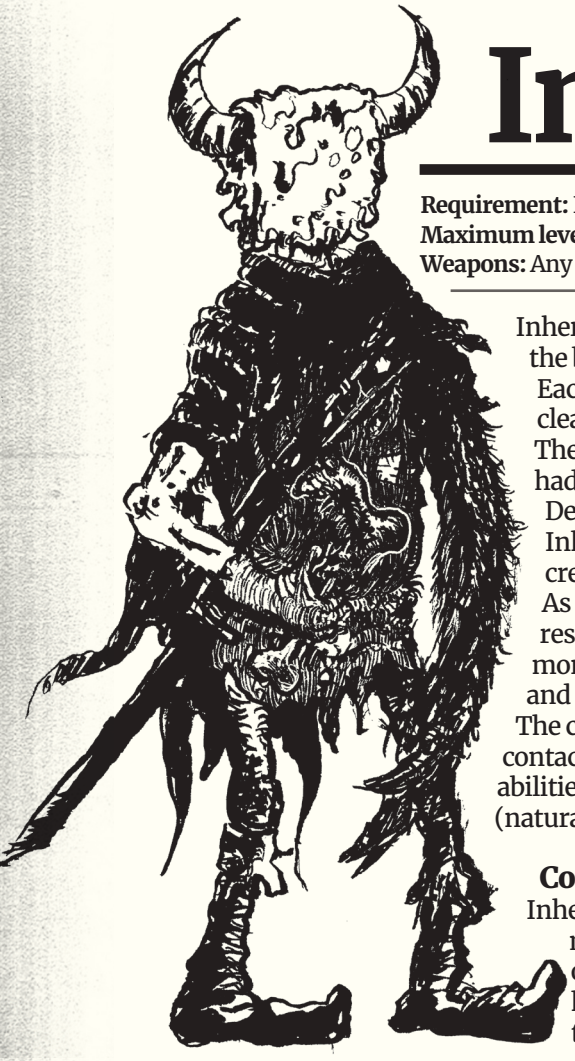
- **1st Level:** *detect evil, purify food and water, read languages, remove fear, resist cold, ventriloquism*
- **2nd Level:** *bless, detect invisible, find traps, know alignment, locate object, speak with animal*

The Strider Level Progression

Level	Title	XP	HD	THAC0	D	W	P	B	S	Spells 1	Spells 2
1	Runner	0	2d6	19 [0]	12	13	14	15	16		
2	Ranger	2,250	3d6	19 [0]	12	13	14	15	16		
3	Scout	4,500	4d6	19 [0]	12	13	14	15	16		
4	Courser	9,000	5d6	17 [+2]	10	11	12	13	14		
5	Tracker	18,000	6d6	17 [+2]	10	11	12	13	14		
6	Guide	36,000	7d6	17 [+2]	10	11	12	13	14		
7	Pathfinder	72,000	8d6	14 [+5]	8	9	10	10	12		
8	Strider	140,000	9d6	14 [+5]	8	9	10	10	12		
9	Strider Knight	280,000	10d6	14 [+5]	8	9	10	10	12	2	
10	Strider Lord	420,000	11d6	12 [+7]	6	7	8	8	10	3	
11	Strider Lord	560,000	11d6+2*	12 [+7]	6	7	8	8	10	4	
12	Strider Lord	700,000	11d6+4*	12 [+7]	6	7	8	8	10	4	2
13	Strider Lord	840,000	11d6+6*	10 [+9]	4	5	6	5	8	4	2
14	Strider Lord	980,000	11d6+8*	10 [+9]	4	5	6	5	8	4	3



by **James Young** - Art: **Daniel Harila Carlsen**



Inheritor

Requirement: None **Prime Requisite:** CON **Hit dice:** d6
Maximum level: 10 **Armour:** Chainmail, shields
Weapons: Any one-handed **Languages :** Alignment, Common

Inheritors are a kind of demon. They form from the black-veined mud of the rivers of Hell.

Each is a soul that rejected the afterlife, wiped clean of memory.

Their bodies congeal into the form that they had in life. Inheritors look like the Damned.

Demons cannot create. They can only copy.

Inheritors twist this curse: they copy the creatures they consume.

As a character class, Inheritors have an interesting and flexible niche. You don't just kill monsters and take their stuff; you eat them and take their powers too!

The core constraints are that you have to survive contact with an attack in order to steal it, stealing abilities makes you vulnerable for a while, and (naturally) you have to kill the monster first.

Combat

Inheritors can wear leather and chain armour and can use shields. They can wield one-handed weapons, but do not train in heavier arms because many of their abilities require the use of a hand.

The Inheritor Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THAC0	D	W	P	B	S
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	13	14	13	16	15
2	2,000	2d6	19 [0]	13	14	13	16	15
3	4,000	3d6	19 [0]	13	14	13	16	15
4	8,000	4d6	17 [+2]	13	14	13	16	15
5	16,000	5d6	17 [+2]	13	14	13	16	15
6	32,000	6d6	17 [+2]	11	12	11	14	12
7	64,000	7d6	14 [+5]	11	12	11	14	12
8	120,000	8d6	14 [+5]	11	12	11	14	12
9	240,000	9d6	14 [+5]	11	12	11	14	12
10	360,000	9d6+1*	12 [+7]	11	12	11	14	12

Monstrovore

▸ You eat monsters to gain their powers.

▸ Each ability you steal is called a Mutation.

▸ Digestion takes 10 minutes, during which time you are a vulnerable, immobile puddle of mutating flesh and mud and bubbling blood. This heals you for 1d6 HP.

▸ To steal a passive ability, like the ability to breathe underwater or stick to walls, you must have seen it happen.

▸ To steal an active ability, like a poisoned bite or fire breath, you must have been affected by it.

▸ You can take as many Mutations as you like from the same monster, up to your limit.

▸ Your body physically changes with each Mutation: curling horns, goat legs, compound eyes, gills, etc.

Mutation Slots

You have a number of Mutation Slots equal to your level.

▸ Each ability takes up a single slot. Multiple abilities absorbed from the same creature each take up their own slot.

▸ When you eat a monster, you can choose to overwrite your previously-used Mutation slots with new abilities.

Meat Points

Meat Points are like mana for active Mutations–they let you use your powers safely. You have a number of Meat Points equal to your level. Meat Points refresh to maximum after a night's rest.

Passive Mutations

A passive Mutation grants you a minor always-on ability.

Active Mutations

An active Mutation allows you to use a monster's power or special ability, using it exactly as the original creature used it.

▸ Using an active Mutation costs one Meat Point or 1d6 HP, your choice.

▸ HP lost in this way can only be healed through natural healing. Examples:

• A crab spider might provide the following mutations:

– Passive Mutation: Taking a crab spider's Cling ability allows you to Climb Sheer Surfaces as a Level 1 Thief. This makes your fingers and toes look like hairy spider legs.

– Active Mutation: Taking the crab spider's Poison ability allows you to deliver a poisonous bite causing death in 1d4 turns (victims can save versus poison with a +2 bonus). Your throat swells with venom sacs.

• A gelatinous cube might provide the following mutations:

– Passive Mutation: You gain permeable flesh, able to hide about 100 coins inside your own body. Your skin becomes translucent, almost transparent.

– Active Mutation:
Taking a Gelatinous Cube's Paralysis grants a numbing touch. Victims must save versus paralysis or be paralyzed for 2d4 turns. Your skin is covered in a sheen of goo.

Due to the wide range of monster abilities, an exhaustive list is impossible, so negotiate with your referee!

After Reaching 10th Level

An Inheritor may become a Spawning Pit in a dark, wet, underground location with sufficient access to organic life. It retains its intelligence and occasionally spawns new Inheritors of levels 1–3 who are born with a random selection of its Mutations.

by **Paolo Greco** - Art: **Daniel Harila Carlsen**

Adjurer The Adventuring Exorcist

Requirement: None
Prime Requisite: WIS
Hit dice: d6
Maximum level: 14
Armour: Any, including shields
Weapons: Any blunt weapons
Languages : Alignment, Common

You can be pious and go to seminary to become an exorcist all you want, but it takes only a bit of curiosity to discover that exorcised demons, besides being banished to where they come from, can also be controlled and bound, and their powers exploited. As for summoning, all it takes is their name, some incense, and the proper invocations. Oh, it works for angels too.

Combat

The adjurer has spent quite a few years in academia, and is not new to duelling. They can use all one-handed weapons, wear light armour, and use shields.

The Adjuration

The adjurer can turn and command spirits like a cleric, depending on the formula used in the adjuration: this effect lasts one turn.
Spirits, for an adjurer, means undead (corporeal or not), demons and devils and angels, kami and and dryads and genus loci, djinns and efreet, dryads and other faeries, and any other spirit at large, including elementals and maybe also the spirits animating golems.
A T result (see Adjuration Table opposite) means the spirit is automatically controlled or banished for one turn per adjurer level, and D means the spirit is either controlled or banished permanently. Spirits find adjuring an excruciating experience, and suffer similarly any other time they are subject to an adjurer class ability involving a turning roll.

The Adjurer Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THAC0	D	W	P	B	S
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	11	12	14	16	15
2	1,500	2d6	19 [0]	11	12	14	16	15
3	3,000	3d6	19 [0]	11	12	14	16	15
4	6,000	4d6	19 [0]	11	12	14	16	15
5	12,000	5d6	17 [+2]	9	10	12	14	12
6	25,000	6d6	17 [+2]	9	10	12	14	12
7	50,000	7d6	17 [+2]	9	10	12	14	12
8	100,000	8d6	17 [+2]	9	10	12	14	12
9	200,000	9d6	14 [+5]	6	7	9	11	9
10	300,000	9d6 + 1*	14 [+5]	6	7	9	11	9
11	400,000	9d6+2*	14 [+5]	6	7	9	11	9
12	500,000	9d6+3*	14 [+5]	6	7	9	11	9
13	600,000	9d6+4*	12 [+7]	3	5	7	8	7
14	700,000	9d6+5*	12 [+7]	3	5	7	8	7

The Banishment

Banished spirits vanish and are unable to manifest by their own volition for some time: usually 1 day, doubled for each Hit Die and asterisk of the spirit. Corporeal undead and other spirits bound to a physical form will not vanish, but are completely powerless during this time. An adjurer can also banish controlled spirits: this requires a normal roll, and in case of failure, the spirit can save against spells to free itself from the adjurer's control.

The Healing

Diseases, as we all know, are caused by ill spirits. An adjurer can adjure illnesses, but this requires a Wisdom check to identify the ill spirit. These spirits range from level 1/2 (brownies causing hayfever) to level 9 or more (the Black Death), and very often do not have physical forms of their own.

The Circle

Spirits are oftentimes malevolent and ill-disposed toward the adjurer. The wise adjurer can spend a turn to trace a warding circle. Spirits who attempt to pass over the circle trigger a turning check. On a failure, the spirit breaches the ward. On a success, the spirit and their powers cannot pass over the circle, permanently trapping the spirit inside or outside the circle. The ward fails when the adjurer goes over the circle or attacks the spirit in melee, or if someone else wipes or breaks it. Throwing items, missiles, magic, holy water, or holy relics over the circle is allowed and does not affect the circle. Fortifying the circle with salt weakens the spirit's assault: increase the adjurer level for the purpose of the check by 1d2-1 if using table salt, and by 1d8-1 for the most expensive rock salt crystals, worth 4000 gp or more.



The Adjuration Table

Lvl	Hit Dice of Monster Type							
	1	2	2*	3	4	5	6	7-9
1	7	9	11	—	—	—	—	—
2	T	7	9	11	—	—	—	—
3	T	T	7	9	11	—	—	—
4	D	T	T	7	9	11	—	—
5	D	D	T	T	7	9	11	—
6	D	D	D	T	T	7	9	11
7	D	D	D	D	T	T	7	9
8	D	D	D	D	D	T	T	7
9	D	D	D	D	D	D	T	T
10	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	T
11+	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D

* 2 HD monsters with a special ability (i.e., with an asterisk next to their HD rating, in the monster description).

The Summoning

The adjurer can summon spirits by calling them by their name. This rite requires a turn. To decide if the spirit appears, use a reaction roll, and track the reaction as the relationship between the spirit and the adjurer evolves. Spirits are susceptible to supplications and worship like all of us: apply +1 or +2 to the roll, but since the praise made them bolder, apply the same modifier to the spirit level in adjuration rolls against the spirit. The reaction roll also determines the disposition of the spirit toward the adjurer and if the spirit is willing to use its powers for the adjurer. There can also be an amount of dealing here: the spirit can ask the adjurer to commit some deeds in order to grant their services, or the adjurer can assault the spirit to soften it between adjuration attempts. Using incense and other fumigations also gives a positive modifier to the reaction roll (50GP for +1, 2000GP for +2) but without the ego stroking associated with supplications. It is advised to draw a warding circle and stand outside it if summoning the spirit inside, or vice-versa.

The Binding and the Ring

The adjurer can bind a controlled spirit into an object, typically a ring: this takes a turn and a successful turning attempt. If the roll fails, the spirit is released from control in 1d4+1 rounds. In this case, the wise adjurer might try to banish or control it again. In the case of a successful binding, the spirit is trapped into the object, together with its physical form. The adjurer can force the trapped spirit to use their powers with a successful turning roll, but not more than a single given power at a time. The powers available are related to the item: for example, a shield grants only defensive powers and a weapon only offensive powers. Rings, however, give access to all kinds of powers. Remember, a character is limited to only two magic rings. The adjurer can also free a bound spirit: it is no longer under their control when released and will have physical form. Wise adjurers make a pact with it beforehand, so that they might enjoy its services before it scampers away (or turns on them).

The Pentacle

At level six, the adjurer can craft a pentacle: part magic medallion, part goetic coat of arms. Crafting a pentacle takes a month and 10,000 gp in gold and other components, and it takes a season to attune to the adjurer. Pentacles, when proudly displayed by the adjurer, have one of the following effects:

- **Dominabitur:** Continuous *protection from evil*; breaking the protection disables the pentacle for 1 hour.
- **Chobar:** Damage is halved from all non-magical sources.
- **Contremuit:** *Earthquake* 1/year, and wards the adjurer from earthquakes.
- **Gloria:** +2 Charisma
- **Grandinem:** *Control weather* 1/ month, but only to worsen it.
- **Portabunt**: *Teleport* 1/week

The True Name

Knowing the true name of a spirit gives great power over it.

- The spirit will always answer a summoning.
- All turning rolls against the spirit treat the adjurer as 1d6-1 levels higher (roll the extra die for each attempt).

Adjurers can find the true names of spirits in books and from other adjurers. The most reliable way, however, is from other controlled spirits: they'll not surrender this knowledge easily, and might require some service (or some magic torture).



by **Eric Nieudan**
Art: **Orko**

Celestial Rats

It's not just humanoids who honour the gods. Sentient (or just clever) animals do too. Large, established rat colonies know how to gather under the night sky and cast a plea to the stars for help and guidance.
Woe to those who dwell in house and hamlet if the stars answer these prayers! Celestial rats despise two-legged folk, hating their pointless vanity and insatiable greed.
Celestial rats speak all languages but only condescend to do so if the colony they are helping would benefit from it.

Cursed gemstones: A slain celestial rat turns to vapour and leaves behind a gem that glints like a star. It is worth 1d4 x 1,000 GP, but those who salvage such gems have their life expectancy reduced by 10 years as they become sickly and prone to catching diseases (-2 to saves).

AC 0 [19] (magical), HD 2+2 (12 hp), Att smite bite (2d8) or spell, THAC0 17 [+2], MV 120′ (40′) fly, SV D11 W12 P14 B16 S15 (C2), ML 9, AL L, XP 55, NA 1d6, TT cursed gemstones (see above)
- Afraid of the dark: Will not venture into total darkness, away from heaven's gaze
- Read the stars: Once per week, can predict the near future (up to a month away)
- Smite bite: Infused with divine energy; only deals 1d3 damage to Lawful creatures
- Spells: Each rat can cast a random spell from any list, 3/day



by **Eric Nieudan**
Art: **Orko**

Bloëmdrakk

You would be forgiven for mistaking this dog-sized, vegetal-looking wyrm for a faerie dragon, but you won't find one of these creatures in the woodland groves of the fey. The bloëmdrakk is a blood-drinking, plant-based parasite with a peculiar life cycle. It sprouts deep underground where chthonian magic is strongest, but feeds on the surface.

Approaching a bloëmdrakk is a dangerous proposition, as its defensive mechanism is also how it propagates its dandelion-like, floating seeds. The plant empties its sacks of gas through its head, effectively breathing out like a dragon. The breath disperses within a minute, and the seeds are carried away (see dragon thistle, p. 81) while the bloëmdrakk attaches to the incapacitated victim to drain them of their blood.

The bloëmdrakk floats via internal stores of lighter-than-air gas, carried by the breeze. When all its gas stores are empty, the bloëmdrakk must crawl for 2d20 hours.

AC 5 [14] (tough bark), HD 1/2/3 (5/9/14 hp), Att 2 × sucking thorns (1 damage) or breath (see table), THAC0 19/18/17 [+1/+2/+3], MV 60′ (20′) float, 15′ (5′) crawl, SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, ML 10, AL N, XP 16/30/65, NA 1, TT harvest (see table)

Age	Colour	Breath	Harvest
1 month (1 HD)	green	Sleep cloud, 10', 1/day	Dried and powdered, the emerald bark makes slumber tea (save or sleep for a week)
3 months (2 HD)	red	As above, plus levitate cloud, 20', 1/day	Heart-shaped fruit grants the ability to fly (as spell, duration is only 1 turn if fruit is older than 1 week)
6 months (3 HD)	gold	As above, plus hold person cloud, 30', 1/day	If woven into a crown, golden flowers protect from magic (+d3 to saves vs. magic, crown withers on a 3)



by **Christopher S.** - Art: **Rackham le Roux**

Hydra Knight

Perhaps they were a knight who slew a hydra, only to be infected with the blood in the process. Perhaps they made a poorly worded deal with the fairies to regrow limbs lost. Or maybe some dumb bastard just pissed off the wrong god. Maybe all of them, and they're bound to protect a place, which your PCs just so happen to be robbing. Who knows.

The Hydra Knight appears as an average height human clad in plate armor, rended and broken. Where their right arm should be, two arms grow from the socket. Two hands hang from their left wrist. A tiny, confused head sprouts from an old scar on their neck.

Removing their helm is not advised. Not for any mechanical reason, but just because they're ugly as hell: a mouth full of too many teeth plus extras, two eyes sharing the same socket (and a third normal eye in its own socket). Their ears can't be looking too great either.

They smell strongly of copper.

The knight's curse is simple: Should they lose a part of themselves, two more will grow back. Lose an arm? Two grow from the socket. Finger bitten off? Worry not, for now there are six on that hand. Cut your leg shaving? Welcome to your new, tiny, vestigial leg.

AC 3 [16], HD 2 (9hp), Att 1 x sword(1d8) 1 x bash (1d6), THACO 14 [+5 (-1/[+1] per extra arm), MV 30' (10') (+5 per extra leg), SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, ML 9, AL Chaos, XP 400, NA 1 (1), TT S

▸ Poisoned Blood: Anyone within 5' of a Hydra Knight when it takes damage dies in 1d10 rounds unless they save vs. poison. ▸ Fragile Limbs: Should an attack against the Hydra Knight deal 5+ damage, the Hydra Knight loses a limb. ▸ Regrow Limbs: Should the Hydra Knight lose a limb, two more grow in its place almost instantly. This gives them +1 to their to-hit score, an extra arm bash attack, and +5 hp.



by **A.C. Luke** - Art: **Rackham le Roux**

Nuckelavee

Deriving its name from the Orcadian *knoggelvi*, nuckelavee ultimately means "Devil of the Sea"

This enormous creature resembles a man riding a horse, except that his torso merges into the horse where the rider would normally be seated. Its head is ten times the size of a human, pig-like with an enormously wide mouth. The horse itself has a singular red eye that burns with a red flame. The nuckelavee is skinless, a creature of raw flesh and pulsing black veins.

The nuckelavee's breath is a horrid poison, blighting flora and causing disease in animals. The sea-devil is blamed for livestock disappearing, plagues and epidemics, and prolonged droughts. An unusual quirk of the nuckelavee is that it takes great offence to the burning of seaweed, the mere sight of it driving it into an uncontrollable rage. Once, it vented its wrath by inflicting every horse on the island of Stronsay with the deadly disease mortasheen (likely what is now known as glanders).

Indeed, the only weakness the nuckelavee is said to have had is its intense fear of fresh water. If you encounter it, your only hope is to make it across a loch, river, or stream. If you can't do that, then all that's left for you to do is to pray for rain.

USING THE NUCKELAVEE IN YOUR GAME

• Delving a Water Temple

The nuckelavee hasn't menaced the coastal villagers of your fantasy kingdom for some time, ever since great heroes in the past helped a sea goddess seal it away for good. But now, enemies of the kingdom have found a more devious way to defeat their foe than simple open warfare—getting the nuckelavee to do their job for them! They've travelled into an undersea temple or dungeon* in attempt to free the devil from its prison. Can the party stop them in time?

• Mortasheen

Like so many folkloric creatures, the nuckelavee is a creature that brings with it poison and sickness. In the case of the sea-devil in particular, it once cursed all the horses on an island with the deadly disease mortasheen. If you abstract the effects to be more fantastical, a race against time to lift the curse of mortasheen from their horses and livestock could make a great rural adventure in a fantasy or pre-modern setting.

Linking with our themes of fresh water, perhaps our party needs to locate and travel to an ancient sacred spring. It'll be a dangerous trek, one heading deep into a dark forest or treacherous mountain range, but the alternative is tragedy. Only through the healing water of the spring can the livestock of their home be saved.

* Everyone loves a water temple, right? Here's your chance to include one!

AC 3 [16], HD 9** (40 hp), Att. 2 x hoof (1d6), man: 1 x weapon (1d6 or by weapon), horse: 1 x bite (2d6) or 1 x breath (3d6 + disease), THAC0 12 [+7], MV 120′ (40′) / 180′ (60′) swimming, SV D8 W9 P10 B10 S12, ML 10, TT U

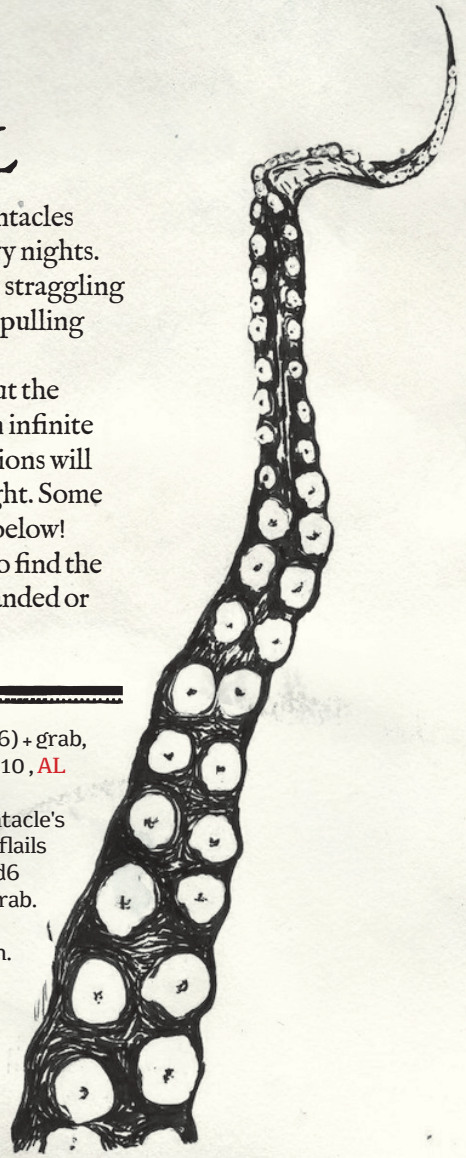
▸ Attack pattern (horse head): 50% chance of breath attack; otherwise bites.

▸ Breath weapon: Can be used up to three times per day. Creates a poisonous cloud 50′ long, 40′ wide, 20′ high. All caught in the area suffer damage (save versus breath for half) and become diseased (save versus poison to avoid, +4 if the save versus breath was successful). The poison expelled by the nuckelavee immediately kills all vegetation and creatures with less than 1 HD within range, then dissipates after 1 round. ▸ Disease: The victim is sick for ten days (no physical activity possible except half-speed movement). ▸ Immunity: Can only be harmed by magical attacks. Immune to poison. ▸ Magic resistance: Unaffected by illusions, sleep, charm, and hold spells. Can detect invisible creatures within 60′.



The Thing in the Well

In the lower quarters of the City, gigantic tentacles have been seen emerging from wells on foggy nights. They've grabbed vagrant dogs, a stray child, straggling drunkards, and even a member of the watch, pulling them into the depths in a instant.
If a tentacle is destroyed, the attack stops. But the creature to whom it belongs seems to have an infinite number of them, and the attacks and abductions will keep happening foggy night after foggy night. Some even say there's more than one such creature below!
A few rare bravos descended into the depths to find the creature, but they either came back empty-handed or never reappeared.



TENTACLE - AC 5 [14], HD 3 (13hp), Att 1 x whip (1d6) + grab, THACO 17 [+2], MV -, SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 , ML 10 , AL Chaos , XP 35 , NA 1, TT None
▸ Grabbing: A target taking 4+ damage from the tentacle's whip attack is automatically grabbed. The tentacle flails the grabbed victim about for 2+1d4 turns, dealing 1d6 damage each turn. Save vs paralysis to escape the grab. At the end of the duration, the tentacle disappears into the hole with its victim, who is never seen again.
▸ Range: May attack any target within 15' radius of the well.



Angel Faces

These bats have a six-foot wingspan and the heads of human infants. They nest atop ancient monuments, abandoned temples, and uninhabited castles.
Coming out at nightfall to feed on the souls of nocturnal travellers, they always appear in group of d4+4 individuals and dive on their prey at full speed.
Survivors' nightmares are long haunted by the laughter, cries, and baby screams of these merciless, greedy monsters.

AC 6 [13], HD 2* (9hp), Att 1 x cursed bite (1d4) or babbling, THACO 18 [+1], MV 30' (10')/ 180' (60') flying, SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 , ML 8 , AL Chaos , XP 25 , NA 1d4 + 4 , TT None
▸ Cursed bite: A victim taking 4+ damage from a single attack must save vs death or lose 1 point in their highest ability score. Lost points can be recovered by a *remove curse*, or if the creature is killed and its nest burnt. ▸ Baby babbling: All target within 5' radius save vs spells or are unable to attack this turn. ▸ Lightning-fast: Always get the initiative. ▸ Vulnerability: Must test morale when confronted with particularly bright light. Sunlight turns them to dust.

by **Nobboc**
Art: **Joe Porkio**

The Mud Monster



These 6-foot-high earth spirits haunt the remote marshy lands, walking silently and ponderously. Their arms are always raised, with their long fingers ready to seize any living flesh passing within their reach. Their pallid, plate-sized eyes search the mists. Their mouths howl noiselessly.
Swamp dwellers know a flute melody able to appease mud monsters. They return to the mud from which they were made, only to reappear a few days later.
If you dig through the sludge after killing a mud monster, there's a 3-in-6 chance you'll find a fist-sized green pearl, worth 400 + 1d6 x 100 gp. It diffuses a gloomy, sinister light that delights chaotic creatures but worries all others (risk of curse and various inconveniences for any non-chaotic owner, at the referee's discretion).

AC 4 [15], HD 4 (18 hp), Att 2 x punch (1d6) or death hug, THACO 16 +3, MV 60' (20'), SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 , ML 12 , AL Chaos , XP 75, NA 1d3 .
▸ Death hug: The victim is grabbed and pinned to the monster's torso; take 1d8 damage every turn unless they make a save vs paralysis. A dead victim dissolves into the monster, which gains 1d8 hp per victim's level. A mud monster attacking in this way can take no action other than to move.
▸ Resistance: Fire, piercing, and bludgeoning weapons deal only half damage.



Picture: *Jabberwocky*, Terry Gilliam, 1977 (best movie ever)

EXTRAORDINARY EXCURSIONS

by **Eric Nieudan** - Art: **BertDrawStuff**

In the Shadow of the Last Free Wyrm

This pointcrawl is located on the road to Olgendsongrad, the city of the dragon butchers (the setting to one of the adventure modules The Merry Mushmen are releasing in 2025). It'll work with characters of low- to mid-level, as long as they know not to bite off more than they can chew.
Unless given a class and level, NPCs are normal humans or the entry for their species in the monsters list.
All monsters and NPCs underlined refer to a stat block in Old-School Essentials Basic Fantasy.

d4 things to do in the valleys

1. **Infiltrators.** *Sheriff Souplette from a nearby town is puzzled by the amount of banditry happening on the road to Olgendsongrad. She is hiring adventurers to join one of the three valleys' gangs and promises to pay for useful information.*
2. **Free Jeremy!** *His thieves' guild has put together the ransom for the fake baronet held hostage by the Dragon Prince (area 1). The PCs are hired to deliver the 3,000 GP (mostly gold-plated lead).*
3. **Offerings.** *An old druid asks the party to bring an offering (three crates of live crabs) to the shrine of Lulaloola, a mountain nymph, located in Holyton (area 2).*
4. **Rumours of dragon treasure** *in the three valleys abound (d4): 1. A firebreather used to lair in the hills (area 7). 2. A mireswimmer has been seen recently by a large tree in the swamp; 3. The Dragon Prince... What if they were a real one? Someone should check the castle's cellars; 4. Some sort of invincible dragon lives at the top or Dumedy Peak; it can't be watching over its hoard all the time, right?*

Three Valleys in the Drakkend Range

The valleys on the map (next page) are connected by the once prosperous town of Druseol. The cultures of the mountains have evolved surrounded by warring states. Even if the peace under the protection of the dragon butchers has lasted almost a century, everyone here is wary of neighbours and distrustful of strangers. But they tolerate Olgendsongrad's dragon patrols and religious edicts, as these keep the local bandits and cults from helping themselves to their harvest and cattle.



Factions

The three main groups in and around Druseol.

The Dragon Prince

The de facto ruler of the three valleys is a retired brigand who styled herself Dragon Prince when she took the castle in Druseol about twelve years ago. **Jaymila Arlège** (9th-level thief, N) is an energetic sexagenarian who rules benevolently as long as road taxes fill her coffers. She maintains a small army of 50 lazy but experienced veterans (mounted brigands in plate).

- **Wants:** Peace, quiet, a steady revenue stream; to really be able to control the Last Free Wyrm (see area 6) as she claims she can.
- **Dislikes:** The Silverwing Militia watching over her business; the Union not paying its own dues.
- **Fears:** The ghost of the lover she betrayed taking over the town.
- **Quirks:** Challenges capable-looking fighters to duels for sport.

The Silverwing Militia

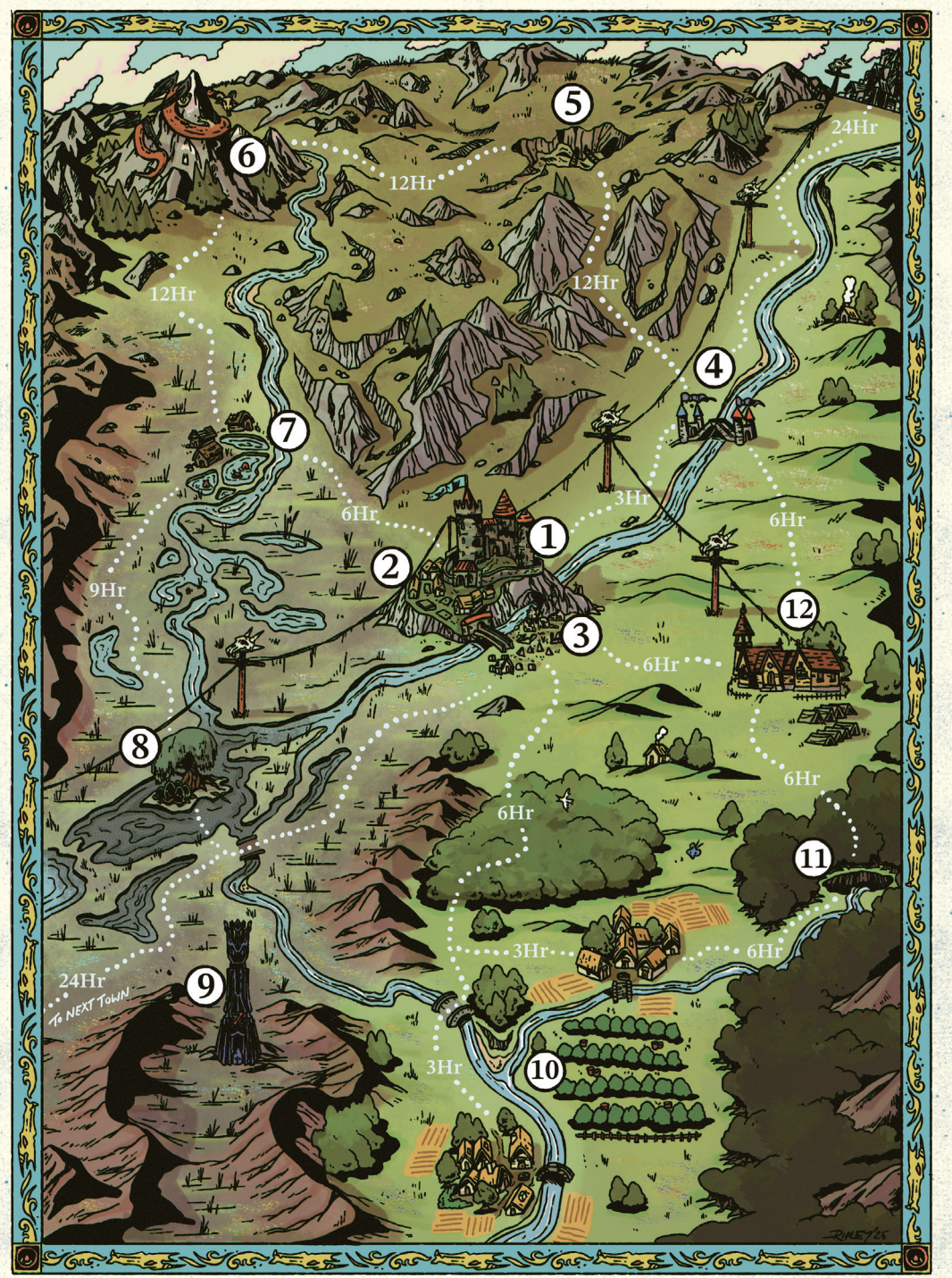
The city of Olgendsongrad doesn't breed dragons for the sole purpose of butchering them. It also uses them to keep the peace. Its most mobile forces are known as the Silverwing Militia, daring scouts riding silver-harnessed, subdued Chaotic dragons. Permanently assigned to the three valleys (in area 12) is **Flight Leader Ursuxope** (3rd level fighter, L), an ageing flyboy of aristocratic background, who aspires to one last promotion to round up his retirement benefits.

- **Wants:** To find the Union of Outlaws and arrest them all.
- **Dislikes:** The Dragon Prince and her masquerading thugs; most locals for being obnoxious and stupid.
- **Fears:** The Last Free Wyrm, who tore three militia riders right from the sky just months ago.
- **Quirks:** An aesthete who finds beauty in the weirdest things; expects adoring admiration (as most flying scouts do).

The Union of Outlaws

When their workers' union was made illegal in Olgendsongrad, young and charismatic leader **Naug Arlège** (2nd-level fighter, L) fled to Druseol, hoping that his aunt would at least give him and his comrades a place to regroup. But the Dragon Prince didn't want to draw attention to her illict status as the local ruler. She pointed to a good hideout in the hills and wished her nephew good luck. In the years since, Naug has turned his outlawed union into a union for outlaws: a crew that has made banditry in the valleys much more effective and friendly. Adventuring groups are encouraged to join even if they aren't planning on doing banditry—better be on the side of caution in a business that can pivot at any time, right? The dues are a modest 10% of all illegal income, minus 1% per two years of membership, with a minimum of 6%.

- **Wants:** To unite all mountain bandits, brigands, and buccaneers into a single syndicate able to deal with the city.
- **Dislikes:** The Dragon Prince for hindering their effort; the Silverwing Militia for refusing bribes too often.
- **Fears:** That Olgendsongrad realises the mountains have a bandit problem again.
- **Quirks:** Business-like and detail-oriented.



Travel times assume unencumbered walking speed. Adjust accordingly if carrying loot, mounted, sailing, or flying.

Locations

DRUSEOL

Once a bustling town attracting traders and pilgrims, Druseol has become an empty shell. It started when Olgendsongrad's living dragon-god sent its troops to destroy the relics kept here for generations, killing the rightful prince whose family swore to defend them an age ago. With the shrines gone, trade naturally moved to the city only a day up the road. Nowadays, the townsfolk subsist however they can.

1 The Dragon Prince's Castle

Sat atop a rocky spur, the old keep retains the glory of the old days. Despite her humble beginnings, the Dragon Prince (see p. 178) fancies herself a gallant knight. Noble folk and other interesting travellers are invited to stay and take part in a hunt or, with enough contestants, a tournament. The prince has a telephonic apparatus that guests may request the use of.

- **Keep:** Old, soot covered. Richly appointed rooms, well-guarded stores. The prince, her wife **Ming** (5th-level magic-user, N), 5 servants.
- **Ghosts:** Many, as the castle has a bloody history. The previous castellan (and the Dragon Prince's betrayed lover) are not among them.
- **Outbuildings:** Barracks, stables, kitchen. 12 "knights" (brigands) and 6 workers.
- **Dungeons:** Deep and damp. Home to 5 tax evaders, 3 bandits from the Union of Outlaws, and, Baronet Jeremmmaz of Farawayhuhland (2nd level thief, C). Jeremmmaz is really Jeremy, who pretended to be a nobleman when caught stealing; he now waits for an imaginary ransom.

2 Upperton

In the upper part of Druseol, only the dozen houses closest to the castle are still standing. The rest have been used for firewood and construction materials to update the keep. Chimneys, cellars, and piles of unused slate and stone remain among the vegetable gardens and pigsties of the locals.

- **Streets:** Muddy, dark, smelling of pig and human excrement.
- **Inhabitants:** Farmers, traders, thieves, the prince's "sergeants-at-arms" (brigands).
- **The Robber's Rest Inn:** Five houses around the market square merged into a smoky, smelly establishment. Owned by **Okko Kook** (5th-level dwarf, C), a merciless condwarf who encourages criminal activity targeting his guests. Currently recruiting clerics and scholars to start a dragon cult: he plans to run it anonymously, fleece his acolytes, and report the illicit religious organisation to Olgendsongrad before they hear about it. He's done it twice before.

3 Ruins of Holyton

By the river that flows below the keep, dozens of shrines to mountain saints, river spirits, and petty gods where pilgrims used to come from far and wide. Decades after these practices were violently ended, only a few dare visit each year.

- **River shrines:** Broken, defaced, thoroughly looted.
- **All-Saints' Graveyard:** Empty, except for the reliquaries watched over by **Lona the Deceased** (vampire, L). Formerly a traveling nun, she feels duty bound to stay until the few relics remaining in Holyton are in the possession of worthy (Lawful and religious) heroes. She will

1D8 DRUSEOLERS AND THEIR SCAMS

1. **Bronze-Scaled Aziëraz** (4th level thief, C), a con artist appearing as a dragon-person (thanks to her *wyrmask*: makes whoever or whatever it is attached to look draconic). Looking for help in recovering a great wyrm's treasure in the hills (and is planning an ambush by 2d10 union bandits she warned).
2. **Gorogiorgio the Green** (1st level cleric, C), demonic adept and physician. His healing potions (100 GP, taste like rotten egg) only work on a failed save vs. death.
3. **Blackjack Jacques** (2nd level fighter, N), ageing leader of a band of 11 non-union bandits. Loves to cheat at cards, dice, even chess (with a magic set that confuses the black player—save vs. spells or lose the game).
4. **Molsy Janzon** (N), now a cabbage farmer, wanted for forgery in Olgendsongrad (250 GP reward). Sells convincing treasure maps (50 GP, roll d12 for the location the map leads to).
5. **Lady Bulo of the Towering North** (dwarf, C), local guide and pickpocket (her magical gloves give her a 75% PP skill). Recently divorced from Okko Kook (see area 2).
6. **Klepto Klea** (1st level fighter, N), caravan guard between jobs. Buys strangers a (drugged) bottle of apple brandy and sneaks into their rooms later (save vs. poison to wake up).
7. **Down-on-his-luck Rick** (L), former merchant, surviving on begging and petty theft. The closest thing to a honest person in Druseol.
8. **Pretty Ashlee** (N), inn staff willing to spend the night with a guest. The next morning, their whole "family" (3d6 unrelated locals) demand an immediate wedding. An arrangement is suggested: take Pretty Ashlee as an apprentice adventurer, paying their "father" a "hiring fee" (100 GP). Ashlee is carrying a homing pigeon to "keep in touch with their family"—that is, report on the characters' successes to their uncle Jacques (entry 3) and arrange a mugging.

ENCOUNTERS

Roll for encounters every morning, afternoon, and night.
Encounters occur on: Foothills: 3-in-6; Swamp: 2-in-6; Orchard: 1-in-6.
Encounter roll: Footills: 1d6; Swamp: 1d6+3; Orchard: 1d6+6.

1	**Gold-diggers:** 2d6 brigands led by 1 merchant. Looking for unmapped abandoned dragon lairs, aggressively questioning travellers. Carrying leftover treasure (1d6 x 10,000 CP; 1d6 x 100 GP in furniture).
2	**1d4 mountain lions**, wary but hungry. Hoping to pounce on a straggler.
3	**Fake shepherd** (bandit in an outré costume) calling for help. 1d4+2 (non-union) bandits in sheep pelts are hiding among the flock, ready to fire blowguns (save vs. poison or fall asleep 2d6 minutes, 1 dose each).
4	**2d6 bandits** on their way to or back from work. Their union rep tries to get the characters to join the Union of Outlaws.
5	**The Last Free Wyrm!** Flying high above (see area 6). **If alone**, she swoops down and swallows a nearby sheep flock, pig herd, or group of riders... before darting back towards Dumedy Peak. **If with Omex**, she lands and attempts to communicate and beg for help.
6	**Prisoner convoy:** The black dragon who laid her eggs in the swamp (see area 8), flightless, chained, and escorted by 3d6 city soldiers (brigands in chainmail, N).
7	**Silverwing militia:** 1 white dragon in a silver harness ridden by 1d3+1 scouts (2nd level fighters, L). Circle above and land to investigate any suspicious behaviour.
8	**3d6 buccaneers** following a target (roll d12 on this table). Their riverboat is nearby, crewed by as many buccaneers (chests with 2,000 EP and 13,000 GP in jewellery, elven cloak and boots, ring of invisibility).
9	**Fake merchant's oxcart** (4 brigands in hidden chainmail) transporting lockboxes (1d6) – 1-3: union dues (15,000 SP) – 4-5: stolen art objects (2,000 GP, weigh 200 lb) – 6: a suit of antique platemail for the Dragon Prince (+1, +3 in duels, 6,000 GP).
10	**1d6 griffons**, adapted to life in the orchard. Enjoy apples as much as horse meat. In the highest apple tree, their nest contains a stolen tax collector's chest (10,000 EP, letter addressed to the Dragon Prince about discovering a clutch of dragon eggs in the swamp, under a willow tree).
11	**Tower acolytes:** 1d3+1 acolytes on an errand for Frater Bilak (see area 9). Wearing black cloaks and pointy red hats, trying to pass as an evil magician's apprentices.
12	**Trade caravan:** 2d6 wagons with 2 mercenary guards (brigands) each. Led by 1d4 merchants and followed by 4d4 dragon cult pilgrims (normal humans), all bound for Olgendsongrad.

WEATHER

This region is high in the mountains yet close to the sea, so the weather is very changeable and rarely nice. Summers are rainy and windy; winters are frozen and foggy. If you like detailed weather events, I recommend Roger SG Sorolla's Weather Dice system (p. 122 of *KNOCK!* issue 4). Otherwise, just ask a d6 how bad the weather is two or three times a day.

follow the relic bearers, commenting harshly but never intervening, until she's satisfied they are true heroes.

» **Hidden relics:** Saint Olovar's emerald mitre (as *ring of protection* +2), Saint Digbrid's rosebud of gold (*growth of nature* 1/week), Blessed Breon's broken heart (know the names of someone's loved ones after 10 minutes of conversation), Saint Ulfius the Tortured's iron wheel (*cure light wounds* 1d4/day, weighs 300 lb).

THE FOOTHILLS

A rocky waste between Dumedy Peak and Mount Khamois. Treacherous trails wind between cliffs and across slopes. It is easy to get lost here (3-in-6 chance without a guide or ranger character).

4 Bridgefort

Outside of Druseol, this is the only risk-free way across the fast-flowing mountain river. This fort changes hands regularly and often violently. Factions will pay "independent parties" to see their rivals gone so they can move in.

» **The bridge:** Chipping, lichen-covered stone battlements with a tower gate on each side. Closed at night, open but guarded during the day.

Current occupants: roll 1d3.

1. Silverwing Militia: 1 green dragon and 2d4 scouts (2nd level fighters, L). Check everyone against a stack of wanted posters. Crossing is 1 SP per leg (2 for people, 4 for animals, 6 for dragons—amputees get a discount).

2. Outlaw Union: 2d6 bandits taking it easy and extorting as much as they can from travellers. Adventurer types are offered a bundle deal of 8d6 GP to cross. Others pay 1d6 SP each.

3. The Dragon Prince: with 2d4 "knights" (mounted and armoured brigands, N), requesting 5 GP each to cross. Armed travellers can cross for free if they duel the prince (she's really bored, okay?).

5 Outlaw Union Hideout

This cave complex is a red dragon's lair "cleared" by Olgendsongrad's enslavement effort. At the end of a deep ravine, it can be found by following man-made handholds and a couple of rope ladders (and rarely escaping notice of the sentries). Intruders are challenged, arrested, and questioned before being pitched on the advantages of joining the union. Before they are escorted back to the hills, visitors must drink a measure of Oldminster's Geriatric Brain Brew which makes them lose all sense of direction for 1d3 days. Characters who refuse to join are noted as potential crime targets, and their descriptions sent to union members via carrier pigeons.

» **Caverns:** 7 interconnected, dry rooms, heavily guarded access. The only escape route is a 100' vertical pit (union leader Naug Arlège keeps a magical telescopic ladder in his quarters).

» **Occupants:** 25 part-time bandits see to the union's administrative tasks and plan a bright future for organised crime.

» **Treasure**: In the deepest cave, sacks of members' dues (20,000 CP, 10,000 SP, 8,000 GP) as well as a list of names, locations, and specialties related to every recent act of brigandry (worth a fortune to Olgendsongrad).

6 The Last Free Wyrm

When the jagged flanks of Dumedy Peak are bathed in red fire by the setting sun, the locals are reminded of the dragon that Olgendsongrad never slayed nor enslaved. Of the many stories attempting to explain this miracle, none are even close to the truth. The flying reptile sometimes seen flying high above the mountains is, in truth, not a dragon. **Baisy**, as she likes to be called, is a 300' snake with two pairs of raven wings, three pairs of human arms, and the head of a goat. She was summoned by an experiment in interplanar magic in the city and ousted towards the mountains by irresponsible urban wizards.

The Last Free Wyrm is an intelligent being, but her otherworldly mind has trouble adapting to this mortal plane. She wants to escape to a more welcoming dimension. She needs help, but everyone she's met is too afraid to even listen to her confused explanations. Recently, however, she met Omex the gnome who's been helping her with food (see area 7).

» **Baisy:** 50 HD quasi-god no one should fight; famished: -2 to reaction until fed 200 lb. of meat or fish.

» **Inside her gullet:** Accessed via a rope attached to her back teeth, a little campsite—fire pit, sleeping furs, backpack containing gnome-size clothes, and 3 gems (600 GP each).

THE TELEPHONIC NETWORK

Marked on the map are wooden poles at least 70' high. At their tops, cables weaved from dragon nerve tissue pass through dragon skulls. Olgendsongrad has spent fortunes developing the telephone network in the mountains, making communication between the neighbouring realms fast and cheap. Owned by the wealthy and operated by the Bird Fanciers' and Telephonists' Guild, telephonic apparatuses are ornate, door-sized cabinets. An oval mirror displays a blurry image of one's interlocutor while their crackly voice comes out of a copper mesh.

THE SWAMP

A cold and muggy floodplain, the drainage efforts of a century ago all but forgotten. Home to beavers, bugs, and buccaneers.

7 Abandoned Trout Farm

Three burned-out stone buildings surround a series of linked water basins overflowing with black-rainbow fish. Hidden among the rubble is old **Omex** (gnome, L), nursing a badly broken leg. The family of bears who lair in the salt cellar bring him trout and berries.

» **Omex:** Desperate to climb back to Dumedy Peak to bring fish to his best mate Baisy (see area 6). Worried that she will "go on a hunt" otherwise. Also worried about his drunken promise to the Dragon Prince to bring Baisy to the castle as a princely mount.

» **Bears:** Mother and two adolescent cubs. Pretty smart and generally peaceable, but very protective of Omex.

8 Hanging tree

Under a mighty willow tree at the centre of a black pond, hidden by its foliage, are black dragon eggs laid by an escapee. As she was looking for a better place to nest, however, she was retaken by the city's soldiers (see encounter 6).

» **Eggs:** Five in number, 3d6 months from hatching. 50 lbs and 3,000 GP each.

» **Hanging tree:** Old Mossy, a grumpy Chaotic treant. Only cares about the eggs because they attract delicious warm-blooded victims.

9 The Dark Tower of Zaratazarat the Maleficent

To establish his covert monastery, **Frater Bilak** (5th-level cleric, L) built a black tower and spread the rumour that it belonged to the infamous mage Zaratazarat. In the intervening seven years, he has attracted 14 acolytes (L) and no one has poked their nose into his heretical affairs. The tower welcomes the faithful of Zetta the Divine Machine, but turns away everyone else with theatrics and coloured smoke.

» **Tower:** Smooth obsidian, flaming-red Z above a magical door (password: "Zetta is everything and more!").

» **Inside**: Simple furniture, peaceful people in white robes, temple on the roof with a Z-shaped altar.

» **Treasure:** Sacred candelabra (platinum, 7 x 500 GP), stock of potions.

» **Among the novices:** Star-crossed lovers Verthina and Mydea (see area 10) are hiding while they plan for their future (which doesn't include taking vows, contrary to what they promised Bilak).

THE ORCHARD

The weather is always a little better in this valley, where beautiful trees grow from the richest soil this side of the Drakkend mountains.

10 Battlefield

Two villages, Cider-City and Best-Apples, reluctantly share the Orchard's land, as well as the apple press built midway between them. Their frequent disagreements are

settled during weekly games of *saoule*: a no-holds-barred game involving every able-bodied villager, a pig bladder, and copious amounts of apple brandy.

- **Enmity:** Both villages and their folk are identical in appearance, customs, and language. Yet they hate each other, insisting they have nothing in common with the no-good, demon-worshipping, pig-lickers who stole half the valley.
- **Cider-City:** Also known as Saint-Durdle. Boasts a miraculous cider made with water from the legendary sacred spring (it isn't). Sells produce to the Silverwing Militia camp at the boarding school (see area 12).
- **Best-Apples:** Formerly Saint-Gurdol. Has exclusive trading rights with Druseol for cider and brandy (at a loss, but it's better than letting Cider-Shitty poison the Dragon Prince with their goblin piss).
- **A game of *saoule*:** Strapping adventurers are promptly drafted into the local team and promised free lodgings, booze, and kisses from the winners of various apple-themed beauty contests. The rules are simple: the ball starts at the apple press at dawn; it must land at the opponent's village square before sundown. No weapons, but farming tools are overlooked.
- **Verthina and Mydea:** The star *saoule* players of both teams have disappeared. Many suspect a repulsive seduction attempt by the enemy.

11 Miraculous Pit

Deep in the forest, where few dare tread for fear of mad goblin knights and owlbears, is a site holy to those worshipping Nature. At the bottom of a 300'-deep cave shaft, a spring comes forth, its water so magical that it flows upwards to the surface. No one lays claim to this miraculous place, however, as a green wyrm and its kobold followers used to make their lair here. The hunters who killed it abandoned the hoard after losing too many of their number to traps (see below).

- **Descent:** Made difficult by the water trickling up and the traps.
- **Miraculous water:** One pint heals 1 hit point per hour over 1d6 hours. It may also enhance the effect of potions if used as a crafting base.
- **Treasure:** Hidden under fake rocks. 30,000 EP, 3,000 GP, *Brightdawn* (spear +2, carved in ivory, always points towards the east when dropped), black iron shield (cursed -1), potion of *control undead*, scrolls (*pass-wall, levitate, phantasmal force, protection from normal missiles*).

1d4 vicious traps

1. **Hollow ledge:** Crumbles underfoot. Save vs. paralysis or fall to the bottom.
2. **Blind man's mushroom:** Explodes in a spore cloud when touched. Save vs. poison or become blind.
3. **Boulder fall:** Triggered by a tripwire, 3d6 damage, save vs. breath for half.
4. **Dryadmoss:** Touch this emerald growth and become its soil. As yellow mould but dead victims become Chaotic dryads.

12 Fresh Air, Bright Minds Boarding School

A few years ago, the school was one of the most affluent and popular in the realm. But since Olgendsongrad opened its Interrealm Trade and Travel Hub, it has become fashionable to study in faraway planes and exotic dimensions. **Headmistress Elkabeth** (1st level cleric, L) has been waiting for the fad to pass, but she's now pondering reconversion. She has bought the (stolen) property title to the Robber's Rest Inn (see area 3), but who would take care of the children?

- **Pupils:** 11 well-behaved teenagers from respected if not illustrious families.
- **Staff:** Long gone. Elkabeth does everything with the help of a domestic wood golem.
- **Silverwing Militia camp:** Military tents under silver pennons on the grounds. 4 green dragons and 12 soldiers soldiers (2nd-level fighters, L) take advantage of the school's telephonic apparatus. **Flight Leader Ursuxope** would like to see her men quartered in the school's empty dormitories.

Find more about Olgensongrad in Eric's upcoming adventure:
They're Making Hostage Sausage at the Dragon Meat™ Processing Plant!

by **Sersa Victory**
Art: **Evlyn M.**

A SIMPLE BUT PERILOUS 3RD-LEVEL DUNGEON!
THIS DUNGEON IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE CYCLIC DUNGEON METHOD (P. 94) BEING USED. PAGE 98 DETAILS THE LOOPS USED IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THIS DUNGEON .

The Tomb under the Tree

Dare you seek the treasure of the Dusk Queen?

The legend says:
Beneath a colossal tree of golden leaves lies a maze of root-choked catacombs. It is in these catacombs that the Dusk Queen of legend is entombed with her royal treasures. However, deathless guardians and devious tricks await any who would intrude on her sleep…

RUMOURS

1. *"My granddaughter Olette has been crying for her da for a week. The fool went looking for treasure in the tomb and hasn't come back. If you find out what happened to him, I'll be in your debt."* – Mayor Lobson.
2. *"What is it with everyone and this tomb? Just last week, a young halfling came by asking lots of questions about it. We haven't seen him since."*– Nöls, innkeeper.
3. *"This young halfling got me to make a rot-proof leather gas mask last week! For 15 gold! Essential for tomb robbers, he said!"* – Bryon, cobbler.
4. *"My idiot of an apprentice stole a spell book, a wand from my personal collection, and a pendant I'm particularly attached to. He entered under the tree. Find it, and I'll make it worth your while."* – Zaratazarat, travelling mage.
5. *"There's more than just a tomb under this tree. It's a door! A passageway to the Underworld!"* – Bert, barfly
6. *"If you want to see the sky, don't look into the snake's eye!"* – local adage

Faraway in the forest, where folk no longer go, in a place where birdsong, wind, and the sounds of the forest are stilled, is a mound covered in dry grass. **On its southern face** is a dark entrance from which escapes an exhalation of cold air, like the rattling breath of a dying man (leads to room 1). **At its summit** is a colossal black tree with golden leaves rising high above the rest of the forest. Its roots hide a hole barely larger than the entrance to a fox's den, though a child or halfling could perhaps squeeze through (leads, after several contortions, to an opening in the ceiling of room 4). Every turn spent here, 1-in-6 chance of encountering the snakilisk crawling in or out (see p. 190).

1. Burial mound

The floor of this pillared hall is bare dirt piled into a **mound** that nearly reaches the ceiling. Roots from the colossal tree aboveground snake down and wrap around the pillars. Sickly yellow flowers bloom from the roots.

- **Mound:** If the characters disturb the mound, 2d6 **skeletons** in war-maiden dresses, covered in the same yellow flowers as the pillars, rise from the dirt and attack.
  - › **Digging in the mound** unearths a crude wooden coffin. Inside the coffin are rotting bones, a vermeil funerary mask worth 300 GP, a *potion of growth*, a scroll of *invisibility*, and *Third-Eye*, an elven longsword +1 with an amethyst pommel. Its bearer detects secret doors as an elf.

SKELETONS
AC 7 [12], **HD** 1 (4hp), **Att** 1 × weapon (1d6 or by weapon), **THAC0** 19 [0], **MV** 60' (20'), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 12, **XP** 10
▸ **Mind-altering Flowers:** At the start of the skeletons' turn, roll 1d6 if at least 3 skeletons remain. On a 1–2, enchanting dust issues from the flowers on the skeletons: Each character in the area must save versus poison or be affected as the charm person spell. This charm ends if all of the skeletons are destroyed.
▸ **Undead:** Make no noise, until they attack. Immune to effects that affect living creatures (e.g., poison). Immune to mind-affecting or mind-reading spells (e.g., charm, hold, sleep).

2. Scaling corridor

Four **slabs** at the north end of the corridor (marked "T") are slightly higher than the others.

- **Slabs:** If stepped on, the slabs sink gently into the ground with an audible click, followed by a grinding sound. One round later, a **stone block** slams down over the area marked "X." Any character in this area must save versus breath or die.
- **Stone block:** Massive. Prevents retreat back to area 1. It would take 1d4 days of hard work to break through the stone.

3. Ruined idol

A once-towering statue of the Dusk Queen lies broken in jagged chunks. Centipedes (of regular size) slither in dark corners of the room. The portcullis to the west is rusted shut.

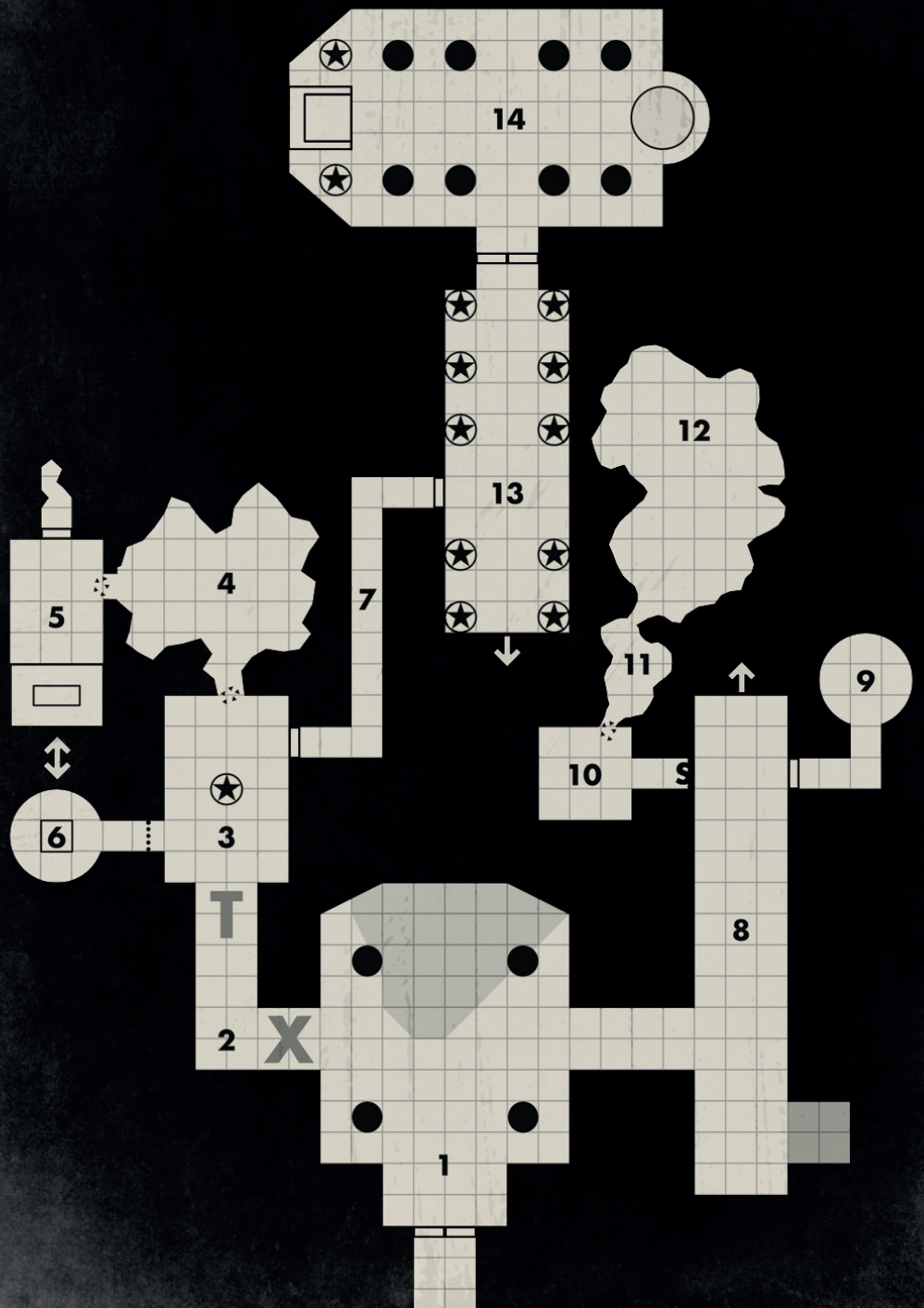
- **Portcullis:** Room 6 can be seen beyond. Yellow mold covers the bars.
  - › **Attempting to force open the portcullis** disturbs the mold. Characters within 10' radius of the disturbed mold spores must save versus death or take 1d4 damages per round for 6 rounds. The spores eventually disperse after that and become harmless.

4. Dimly lit grotto

Shafts of sunlight (or moonlight if nighttime) peek through cracks in the ceiling of this cave. Large bones and stiff feathers carpet the ground. A silver **chest** glitters in the center of the cave where a ferocious **zombie owlbear**, standing on his hind legs, tries to catch a **halfling**, trapped in the widest crack in the ceiling (leading between the roots of the large tree on the mound — see above).

- **Chest:** The chest contains shiny stones, bird eggs, and trinkets that have fallen into the owlbear's den through the cracks above. A dirt-smudged medallion bearing the symbol of the Dusk Queen (a crescent moon concealing the sun) can be found among this collected debris. *(This talisman can be used to safely open the double doors in area 13.)*

ZOMBIE OWLBEAR
Unable to hoot, growl, or display the ferocity of an owlbear, it retains an obsessive territorial instinct and doesn't leave the room.
AC 5 [14], **HD** 5 (22hp), **Att** 2 × claw (1d8), 1 × bite (1d8), **THAC0** 15 [+4], **MV** 120' (40'), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 12, **XP** 175
▸ **Bear hug:** If a victim is hit by both paws in the same round, the owlbear hugs for an extra 2d8 automatic damage.
▸ **Undead:** Makes no noise, until it attacks. Immune to effects that affect living creatures (e.g., poison). Immune to mind-affecting or mind-reading spells (e.g., charm, hold, sleep).



TÜLT, HALFLING, wannabe grave robber
Needs to make a fortune before marrying the miller's daughter. A band of dwarves passing through his village told him about this tomb full of treasure.
AC 7 [12], **HD** 1–1 (3hp), **Att** 1 × sling (1d4) or by weapon, **THAC0** 19 [0], **MV** 90′ (30′), **SV** D8 W9 P10 B13 S12, **ML** 7, **AL** Lawful, **XP** 10

5. Heroine's tomb

A **sarcophagus** sits atop a raised tier. The cover stone is chiseled with the likeness of a stern woman in fluted mail; her right eye is a ruby, the left a sapphire (200 GP each).

- **Opening the Sarcophagus:** Pushing aside the cover stone reveals not a skeleton, but rather a hidden tunnel that leads to **area 6**.

6. Obelisk and sceptre

The preserved body of an **armoured woman** stands upright inside a recessed alcove set into an obelisk. On the ground at her feet: a severed pair of withered, greedy hands. To the north, a narrow, 3' high **tunnel**.

- **Armoured woman:** The preserved corpse wears a scarab of protection and a silver bracelet encrusted with opals and tourmaline (800 GP). She also clutches the **sceptre** of the Dusk Queen.
- **Sceptre**: an orichalcum disc engraved with a crescent moon hiding the sun at the end of an ivory handle inlaid with geometrical opaline motifs; worth 1,600 GP. It is connected to an extremely fine silver wire wrapped around the handle. *(This sceptre, combined with the crown in area 12, is used to reveal the Dusk Queen's treasure in area 14.)*
  - › **If the sceptre is pulled**, a scything blade cuts across the opening in front of her: save versus breath or take 1d8 damage, and save versus poison or contract the rotting curse of a mummy.
- **Tunnel**: Leads to the interior of the sarcophagus in room 5.

7. Scoured passageway

This long hallway, closed by doors at both exits, is remarkably free of debris. Midway down the corridor, skeletons appear to float in midair *(a gelatinous cube blocks movement through this passageway)*.

GELATINOUS CUBE
If the doors are open, the cube wanders slowly and randomly through the accessible rooms.
AC 8 [11], **HD** 4* (18hp), **Att** 1 × touch (2d4 + paralysis), **THAC0** 16 [+3], **MV** 60′ (20′), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 12, **AI** Neutral, **XP** 125

- ▸ **Surprise:** On a roll of 1–4, due to near-invisibility
- ▸ **Paralysis:** For 2d4 turns (save vs. paralysis)
- ▸ **Energy immunity:** Unharmed by cold or lightning

The equipment of the tomb robbers engulfed by the cube have no monetary value; however, there is a **keepsake** around the neck of one skeleton

- **Keepsake:** Opens to show a delicately painted portrait of a young girl. Returning it to Olette in the nearby village can earn a favor from her well-connected family (see rumor #1).

8. Hall of mosaics

Mosaics of painted stones are set into the walls. Burned-out cressets hang from the high vaulted ceiling of this wide hallway at 10' intervals. A **door of green mist** is set into the north wall. A flight of spiral stairs to the southeast have fallen away, leaving only a 60-foot **shaft** down into darkness.

- **Mosaics:** The mosaics depict women harvesting wheat and carrying it to a pillared temple at the north end of the image. Above the temple, a tile in the shape of a seven-pointed crown is missing. If characters listen carefully, they can hear the faint echoes of women singing hymns while they labour.
  - › **If the missing tile is replaced** by an object of exactly the same weight and dimensions, section of wall marked "S" on the map rotates open, allowing passage to room 10.
- **Door of green mist**: This doorway was conjured by Zaratazarat's apprentice (see rumour #5) and leads to room 13.
- **Shaft:** Plaintive moans emanate from the shaft. At the bottom of the shaft, among the rubble, is the **corpse** of Gazivius (Zaratazarat's apprentice) who fell to his demise.
- **Corpse:** Wears a worn-out magician's robe. Broken neck and legs. At his side, a leather bag containing a **spell book** and a **magic wand**. In his hand, he still holds a **platinum pendant** at the end of a silver chain.
  - › **Looting the body** makes a bluish incorporeal figure appear beside the one searching: the ghost of **Gazivius**.
- **Spell book:** *Macig missile* (badly transcribed; missiles bounce back to hit the caster; each time, take half the damage), *shield, sleep, knock, haste*
- **Wand of random-yet-permanent dungeon shortcuts:** Utter the magic formula *"Hop! Hip! Hop! Zum-zum hop!,"* and you create a dimensional doorway shrouded in green mist to a random room in the dungeon, roughly in the direction pointed by the wand. 2 charges remaining.
- **Platinum pendant:** In the shape of a seven-pointed crown, worth 400 GP. Fits perfectly in place of the missing mosaic tile (see above). Once in place, the pendant remains sealed to the mosaic; attempts to pry it out are possible but risk damaging it, which reduces its value.

GAZIVIUS
Inofensive, friendly, naïve. Looks preoccupied. Doesn't seem to have fully realised his death yet. Answers questions in a fluttery voice, with a slight delay. He spied his master preparing an expedition to the Tomb and decided to go himself, to finally break free from his detestable mentor. Knows the wand's magic formula. Knows the pendant is a key. Does not remember much more. He wants to see the sun. And his mother.

9. False crown

The air reeks of rotten meat. A statue of a kneeling knight holds out a golden **crown**, as if in offering. **Stirges** nest in cracks in the ceiling.

- **Crown:** A band engraved with runes showing a sun hiding a moon. In fact, it's worthless copper painted gold.

STIRGES
1d4+4 are always present. Attack if woken by noise.
AC 7 [12], **HD** 1* (4hp), **Att** 1 x beak (1d3 + blood sucking), **THAC0** 19 [0], **MV** 30′ (10′) / 180′ (60′) flying, **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 9, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 13

- ▸ **Dive attack:** First attack is at +2 to hit.
- ▸ **Blood sucking:** Upon a successful attack, attaches and drains victim's blood: 1d3 automatic damage per round.
- ▸ **Detach:** If stirges or victim dies.

10. Enchanted mosaic

This chamber contains a **mosaic** depicting a robed woman facing away from the viewer, hands raised in jubilation toward a crescent moon that rises over distant mountain peaks.

- **Mosaic:** If touched, the stones of the mosaic rearrange themselves to show the robed woman turning to beckon the characters. She identifies herself as the **Oracle of Dusk**. She offers to truthfully answer three yes-or-no questions about the dungeon.

11. Happy surprise!

A leather **satchel** lies on the floor, abandoned.

- Satchel: It contains 3 *potions of healing*, 1 *potion of invulnerability*, 1 *potion of heroism*, and a purse containing 850 GP in colored gems.

12. The den of the snakilisk

Hundreds of **funerary urns** are piled in this cavern dimly lit by outside light from fine ceiling crevices. Stalagmites and stalactites dot the area like the fangs of some great behemoth. A couple of amazingly realistic warrior statues slowly erode in shallow puddles of rainwater from above.

- **Funerary urns:** The characters find the following items by searching through the urns if they take the time (1 item every 1d4 turns). If the **Snakilisk** is present, it attacks immediately.
  1. Purse containing 350 GP
  2. **Rings of the Twins:** two matching silver rings engraved with gold thread; function as rings of protection +1, +4 if the bearers hold hands).
  3. **Crown of the Dusk Queen:** seven-pointed orichalcum band supporting two ivory horns inlaid with geometric tourmaline motifs, together forming a crescent moon, worth 2,500 GP. *(This crown, combined with the sceptre in area 6, is used to reveal the Dusk Queen's treasure in room 14.)*
- **Snakilisk:** A snakilisk makes its den atop the piles of urns. There is 3-in-6 chance it's present, slumbering.
  - If present, it wakes up and fiercely defends its nest as soon as someone approaches the urns.
  - If not present, there is 2-in-6 chance per turn it returns from the outside, slipping through one of the ceiling crevices.

SNAKILISK
Long snake with stone scales and three bulging eyes. Little-known, lesser kind of basilisk.
AC 3 [16], **HD** 4+1** (19hp), **Att** 1 × bite (1d6 + petrification), 1 × gaze (petrification), **THAC0** 16 [+3], **MV** 60' (20'), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 9, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 275
▸ **Petrifying touch:** Anyone touched by a snakilisk is turned to stone (save vs. petrify).
▸ **Petrifying gaze:** Anyone meeting a snakilisk's gaze is turned to stone (save vs. petrify). Unless averting eyes or using a mirror, characters in melee are affected each round.
▸ **Averting eyes:** -4 penalty to-hit; the snakilisk gains a +2 bonus to attack.
▸ **Mirrors:** The reflection of a snakilisk is harmless. Fighting by looking in a mirror incurs a -1 penalty to attack. If a snakilisk sees its own reflection (2-in-6 chance), it must save or be petrified.

13. Royal hall

A procession of statues lines this wide, vaulted hall lit by everburning braziers. Each statue depicts an armoured woman holding a stone talisman to the sky. The air smells of baking cinnamon. A **door of green mist** is set into the south wall. A set of **ornate double doors**, depicting a crescent moon obscuring a sun, are set onto the north wall.

- **Door of green mist:** This doorway was conjured by Zaratazarat's apprentice (see rumour #5) and leads to room 8.
- **Ornate double doors:** The doors are sealed. Raising the medallion found in room 4 breaks the seal.
  - **Attempting to break open the doors** without raising the medallion causes the eyes of the statues to glow with wrathful light. All characters present must save versus spells or suffer **the curse of the basilisk** for one full cycle of the moon. While cursed, a character is turned to stone for 3d6 days if they roll a natural 1 on an attack or saving throw.

14. Grand Tomb of Dusk

Massive columns support the ceiling of this vast tomb directly under the base of the colossal tree aboveground. Roots as thick as sea serpents glow from within, casting off golden motes that dance like fireflies. A wide **well** of brackish water stands to the east. Dominating the chamber is the marble **statue** of a 10' tall queen on a throne at the head of the hall. Half-moon tapestries frame her artfully sculpted flowing hair.

- **Well**: 20' deep. At the bottom of the well is a locked, rusted steel door. (Opened with the well-gaol key; see below.)
- **Statue:** The statue of the Dusk Queen **is missing her sceptre** (from room 6) **and crown** (from room 12).
  - **If these items are replaced**, the entire tomb shakes and the throne slides back, revealing an onyx sarcophagus underneath, glittering with starlight. Resting within the sarcophagus is the **mummy of the Dusk Queen**, who awakes slowly.

DUSK QUEEN (Mummy)
AC 3 [16], **HD** 5+1* (23hp), **Att** 1 × touch (1d12 + disease), **THAC0** 14 [+5], **MV** 60' (20'), **SV** D10 W11 P12 B13 S14, **ML** 12, **XP** 400
▸ **Spellcasting:** The Dusk Queen can cast one time each the spells charm person, mirror image, and sticks to snakes.
▸ **Paralyse with terror:** Anyone seeing the Dusk Queen must save versus paralysis or be paralysed with terror. Paralysis is broken if the Dusk Queen attacks or goes out of sight.
▸ **Disease:** Anyone hit contracts a horrible rotting disease. Magical healing is ineffective; natural healing is ten times slower. The disease can only be removed by magic.
▸ **Damage immunity:** Only harmed by fire or magic. All damage reduced by half.
▸ **Undead:** Make no noise, until they attack. Immune to effects that affect living creatures (e.g., poison). Immune to mind-affecting or mind-reading spells (e.g., charm, hold, sleep).

The Dusk Queen's sarcophagus also contains exquisite jewelry worth 1,500 GP, 17 gold bars engraved with a crescent moon (100 GP each), a *potion of treasure finding*, a *scroll* of *lightning bolt*, an *amulet of health*, and the well-gaol key (see below).

- **If not attacked**, the Dust Queen slowly rises to her feet, speaking in a lilting but incomprehensible language as she watches the characters. Then she walks over to the statue and picks up her sceptre and crown, bursting into a crystalline laugh. Then, if she's not disturbed, she stays put or wanders around the room, humming softly, ignoring the characters and seeming to speak to people only she can see. If disturbed, she lets out a warning growl and resumes her activities.
- **If attacked**, or if someone tries to take back the sceptre or the crown, her anger immediately boils over.

Towards future adventures?

The door at the bottom of the well can be opened with the well-gaol key found in the Dusk Queen's sarcophagus. Doing so causes the water in the well to drain away, rushing down a flight of spiral steps, deeper into the unknown...

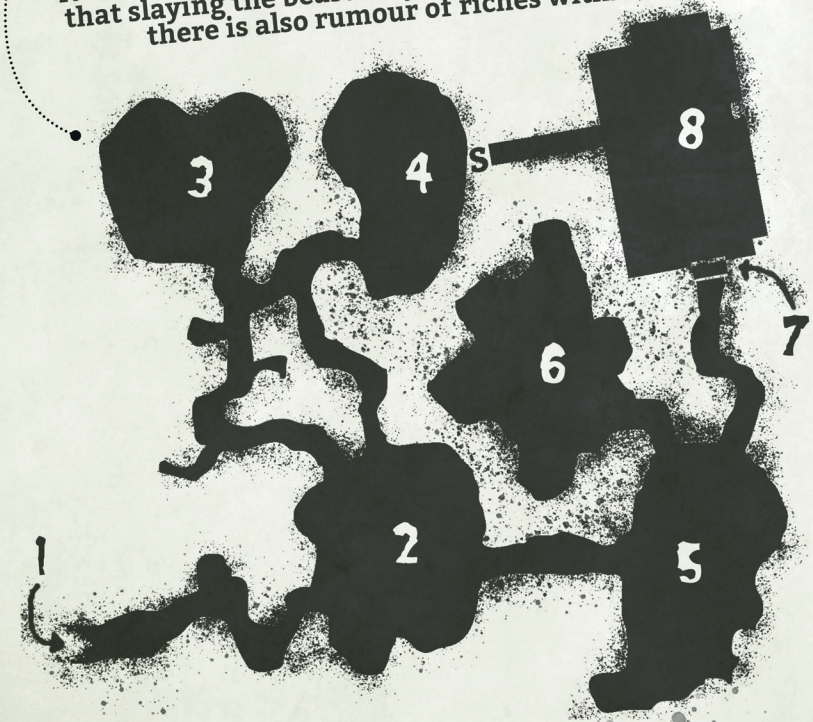


By **Andre Nova**

Level 4-6

CAYMAN JADE CAVES

WHAT'S THIS?
A shrine was built to appease the Tyrant Caiman. It has lingered undisturbed for ages. Rumours say that slaying the beast only makes it stronger. But there is also rumour of riches within.



1. ENTRANCE. It feels cold and wet. Stalagmites and stalactites dominate the entire cave system, with green moss coating the walls. Light is dim.

2. CENTIPEDES' NEST. 2d6 goliath centipedes are nestled here during the day and go at night to hunt. They attack any intruders if awakened, but flee if their numbers are lessened to half.

3. PETROGLYPHS. Wall has petroglyphs depicting dancing caimans in a sequenced choreography. The glyphs glow in the presence of fire. If studied by an intelligent PC, they seem to form a musical duet of sorts.

4. "DEAD END." A spirit lingers here, taking the form of an ancient royal scribe bedecked in jade. If flattered or negotiated with, the spirit offers advice. Roll d4 or choose: (1) *"Beware the caimans"*, (2) *"Bring me a coconut"*, (3) *"How long before they finish building the statue?"*, (4) *"Can you all play the song?"* If this chamber is searched, a secret passage can be found, leading into the shrine directly.

5. FLOODED HALLS. Holes in the ceiling allow light in. The waters look otherworldly, reflecting hues of blue, green, and purple. They are mildly acidic and corrode metal items in three rounds. PCs submerged in the water take d4 damage each round. There are 3d4 caimans in the waters, which are not particularly fond of intruders. The Two-Headed Tyrant Caiman is in the mines (room #6), but arrives in d4 rounds if a fight takes place.

6. JADE MINES. Shiny objects glitter in the walls. Each hour spent here excavating yields d6 greenish jade gemstones (d100 GP each). However, the ceiling is very unstable—bits and pieces rain down on the PCs with each pickaxe stroke. After the first hour of excavation, there's a 20% chance per hour that it collapses. In the event of a collapse, stalactites plummet abruptly, inflicting 2d10 damage (save versus wand for half).
The Two-headed Tyrant Caiman is found here, meditating.

7. DOOR OF THE CAYMAN. Made of stone, with a giant caiman depicted on it. It is magically sealed and only opens if the song (room #3) is played by two musical instruments simultaneously.

8. SHRINE. Carved chamber supported by pillars shaped like caimans. The centrepiece is a moss-covered stone replica of the Two-Headed Tyrant Caiman. Two of its teeth are missing. If their sockets are fitted with the jade teeth from the living tyrant (room #6), the Caiman Statue Tyrant springs to life! Simultaneously, the ceiling comes alive as 2d20 caimans descend from it and start carving a new statue. This will take 2d6 rounds. The worker caiman are driven to build the statue, not fight. If the Cayman Statue Tyrant is killed before the new statue is built, the cycle is finally broken. The worker caymans will flee, their morale broken.
Otherwise, the Cayman Statue Tyrant takes the place of the old tyrant in the mines, and its legend grows.

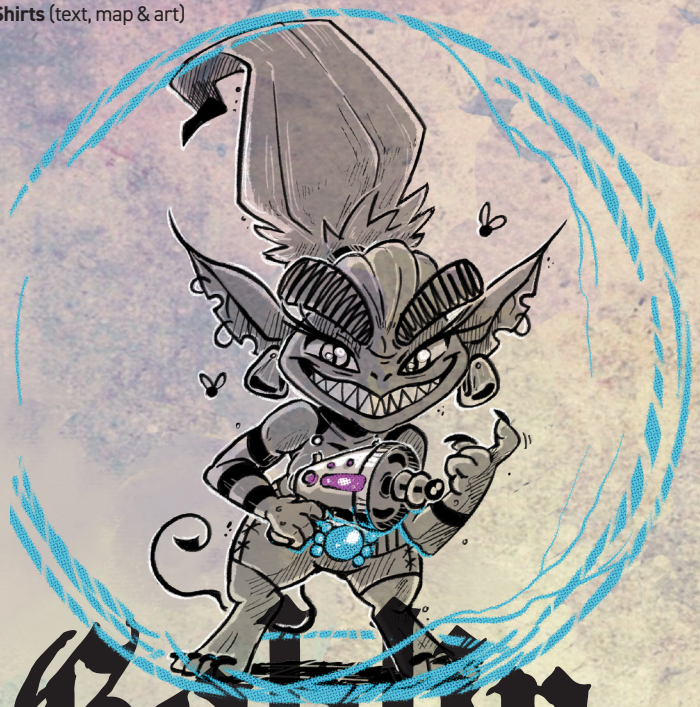
Goliath centipedes. The size of human legs, incredibly adhesive, and abnormally fast.
HD 1* (5hp), **AC** 5 [14], **Att** 1 × bite(d3 + poison), **MV** 90' (30'), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 7, **AL** N, **XP** 13
▸ **Poison:** The poison inflicts fevers and delirium for d3 days (save vs. poison to avoid). An infected PC temporarily loses d3 points from their Constitution or Strength scores per day. If an ability score drops to zero, they die from the poison.

Caymans. Alligator-like but smaller and faster and display multiple spots in shades of green, brown, black and grey.
HD 2 (9hp), **AC** 12 [8], **Att** 1 × bite (1d8), **MV** 90' (30'), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 9, **AL** N, **XP** 20
▸ **Immunity:** Acid

Two-Headed Tyrant Caiman. Colossal, angry caiman with two heads. Looks undead (but it's not).
HD 6* (27hp), **AC** 6 [14], ***Att*** 2 x bite (2d8 + acid), **MV** 120' (40'), **SV** D10 W11 P12 B13 S14, **ML** 10, **AL** C, **XP** 500
▸ **Acid:** Causes an extra d4 damage per round until it is washed off. A PC may spend a round wiping the acid off.
▸ It has 2d3 teeth made of jade (300 GP each).

Caiman Statue Tyrant. Moss-covered statue of the caiman tyrant with two heads. Mouth full of jade teeth.
HD 13* (58hp), **AC** 4 [16], ***Att*** 2 x bite (4d8 + acid), **MV** 60' (20'), **SV** D4 W5 P6 B5 S8, **ML** 12, **AL** C, **XP** 2,300
▸ **Acid:** Causes an extra d4 damage per round until it is washed off. A PC may spend a round wiping the acid off.
▸ **If defeated**: The Statue Tyrant's crumbled body reveals the Caiman Slayer in its remains: a +1 two-handed serrated sword (1d10+1).
▸ **Inflicts acid damage:** Which may have special effects on certain creatures.
▸ **Caustic:** On a natural 20, the sword gushes acid. This acid destroys normal armour immediately and inflicts an additional d4 damage each round until it is wiped off.

by **Goblins Don't Wear Shirts** (text, map & art)



Goblin with a Ray Gun

THE JOB

Farmer Maggot is having a problem with rats* in his basement and needs a band of plucky adventurers to clear them out. Gather your most expendable low-level party, and kick off a campaign with an easy** quest they won't soon forget!

* It's not rats. It's a goblin with a ray gun.

** It's far from easy

WAIT, DID YOU SAY RAY GUN!?

Beebo, a goblin kicked out of her clan for just being *the worst*, found her way into a cliffside cave (area 12), discovering an ancient crashed UFO. Through a stroke of luck, the automated defences and robots didn't kill her, as it turns out the owners of the crashed ship are long-distant relatives of goblins! Anyway, so Beebo found a shield belt and a ray gun, and is now one seriously dangerous goblin indeed!



The Basement

- **Unlit**
- **Smells like a privy**
- **Scared squeaks from rats in Area 2**

1

- **Farmer Maggo**t locks and bolts the door after PCs enter
  - Says to knock to be let out, but falls asleep for 1d4+1 hours
- Sacks chewed open; teeth marks *could* be a rat?
- Upturned barrels and crates containing dried beans, grains, and salted meats, now spoiled.
- Shelves of rusted **old farm tools**
  - Includes 1 lantern, 2 flasks of oil, 2 empty sacks, a crowbar, 5 torches, and a tinderbox
- A strange, perfectly round **hole** 4' wide in east wall leads to area 3
- **Locked door** to area 3 (Maggot has key)

2

- **3 Giant Rats**, cowering in fear
- More crates and barrels of dried food and tools; nothing interesting
- **Old tattered rugs** lie on the floor
  - Beneath rugs is a floor safe with an old lock
  - Safe contains the deed to the farm, 120 GP, 380 SP, a set of ivory dentures worth 80 GP, and a holy book worth 25 GP, with scrolls (*cure light wounds, protection from evil,* and *light*) tucked inside

Giant Rat
AC 7 [12] **HD** ½ (2hp) **Att** 1 x bite (1d3 + disease) **THAC0** 19 [0], **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 , **ML** 2 **AL** N **XP** 5
▸ **Disease.** Bite has a 1-in-20 chance of infecting the target (save vs poison). The disease has a 1-in-4 chance of being deadly (die in 1d6 days). Otherwise, the victim is sick and bedridden for one month.

3

- Three-quarters of a giant rat on floor
- Circular **hole** in west wall leads to area 1
- Large **rat's nest**, contains nothing of value
- A suit of bronze **chainmail** (smells like pee)
- Round **shield**, two **spears,** and a **halberd** on a wooden rack against east wall
- Partially-melted plate armour scattered on the floor
- A circular **hole** in the south wall leads to area 5
- **Bookcases** with books on agriculture and animal husbandry
- Northern bookcase swings to reveal a **hidden passage**

4

- **Shrine to Cora**, goddess of the afterlife and vegetation
  - Dried blood in a bowl, thorny roses, stalks of dried wheat
- A **silver dagger** worth 20 GP and **two rubies** (50 GP each)
- A small **jade statue** of the goddess (250 GP)
  - **Curses** anyone removing it from the shrine to taste only ash when eating/drinking until PC makes amends

Beebo

- Starts in **random area** (roll 1d6+4)
- Active after PCs enter the Ship
- Moves 1 location towards party per turn, attacks, and flees to random location (roll 1d10)
- Uses hit-and-run tactics to harass PCs; doesn't stick around for a drag-out fight

AC 6 [13] **HD** 1-1** (3hp) **Att** 1x Ray Gun **THAC0** 19 [0], **SV** D14 W15 P16 B17 S18 **ML** 7 **AL** C **XP** 7
▸ **Ray gun.** has 20 charges and has two beam modes (50/50 chance of Beebo using either one).
- **Vaporize** (2 charges) save or die, 30 ft long 4 ft wide, bores holes through solid rock and steel
- **Zap** (1 charge) 1d10 dmg, 100 ft range

▸ **Shield belt.** A spherical force field grants immunity to damage and 1st level spells.

The Ship

- **Unlit except where [noted]**
- **Constant, low hum from the Core (area 11)**
- **Doors have portholes to see through**
- **Opened by touching glowing wall panel**
- **Access ducts allow small creatures like Beebo or halflings to get around**
- **If entered, roll 1d6+4 for destination room (takes 1 turn)**

5 - Bridge [pulsing red lights]

- Three **goblin-like skeletons**
  - Each has a platinum dog tag (100 GP)
  - Captain's skeleton also has a fancy hat
- **Computers** unresponsive; flash collision warnings in ancient Goblin
- Door to the Core (area 11) locked; requires **Captain's Codes** (area 10)
- **Captain's chair** has secret compartment with a **vibro-knife** (as +1 dagger)

6 - Med Bay

- **Auto-Med Bot** behind curtain enthusiastically bears down on first PC to enter
  - Attempts to inject a vaccine serum into one PC (+2 to SV versus disease) then becomes inert
  - Defends itself if attacked
- **Re-life hypo** on tray returns dead things to life (one dose)
- **Medicine cabinet** contains 2 vials of healing goo (heals 1d6+1 hp, cures paralysis)

Auto-Med Bot
AC 7 [12] **HD** 3* (12hp) **Att** 2x scalpel (1d3), 1x circular saw (1d6) or syringe **THAC0** 17 [+2] **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 **ML** 7 **AL** N **XP** 50
▸ **Syringe:** A syringe full of numbing anaesthetic. Save vs paralysis or suffer half movement and -2 penalty to all rolls for 1d6 + 6 turns; successful save halves penalty and duration and allows normal movement.

7 - Mess Hall

- **Auto-Chef Bot** busy making pots of alien foodstuffs
  - Only attacks in self-defence
- 3 servings of **uber-nutrient stew** (gain +1d2 max hp on first eating)
  - bowl now inhabited by an opportunistic Soup Slime

Auto-Chef Bot
AC 7 [12] **HD** 1+1* (5hp) **Att** Cleaver (1d8) **THAC0** 18 [+1] **SV** D11 W12 P14 B16 S15 **ML** 12 **AL** N **XP** 19
▸ **Battle rage:** +2 to hit humans and similar humanoids (e.g., orcs, goblins). Rage sometimes makes them attack their allies.

Soup Slime
AC 7 [12] **HD** 1+1* (4hp) **Att** Pseudopod strangle (1d4) **THAC0** 18 [+1] **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 **ML** 8 **AL** N **XP** 19
▸ **Looks tasty:** Almost indistinguishable from a nutritious pea and carrot soup. 4-in-6 chance of surprising anyone trying to eat it.

8 - Engine Room [flashing sparks]

- Giant centipede blown in two by twin **laser turrets** (AC 6, 5hp each)
  - Upon entering centre of room, save versus wands or take 1d6 dmg from laser turrets
- Desk has an **autotool** which dismantles/fixes objects 1d4+1 times
- **Wave detector** hanging above desk can detect magic 1/day (as spell), worth 1500 GP to an artisan or wizard.
- **Broken fuselage** leads to area 12

9 - Cargo Bay [dim blinking lights]

- **Cryo-pods** with alien life-forms, opened with buttons on console:
  - 2 Purple Astro-Ferrets
  - 1 Future Human in a spacesuit
  - 1 Giant Snakeopede



-1 Sentient Crab-Wizard
- Future Human and Crab Wizard can be treated as backup PCs if needed
• **Cargo bay doors** to area 12 opened with lever behind pods

Future Human - **AC** 5 [14] **HD** 1* (4hp) **Att** Laser club (1d6) or Taser **SD** Spacesuit **THAC0** 18 [+1] **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 **ML** 7 **AL** N **XP** 13
Spacesuit: Protection as chain; air filters grant immunity to harmful gases and smells.
▸ **Taser:** Save vs paralysis or fall unconscious for 1d4+1 turns. +2 bonus to save if not wearing metal armour (4 charges)
▸ **Mostly Harmless:** Treat as Fighter of equivalent HD, but a pacifist; any killing blow made will instead cause unconsciousness for 1d4+1 turns.

Purple Astro Ferret
AC 5 [14] **HD** 1+1 (5hp) **Att** bite (1d8) **THAC0** 18 [+1] **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 ML 8 AL N XP 15
▸ **Volatile**: Unpredictable temper; may turn on trainers or other people.

Giant Snakeopede
AC 6 [13] **HD** 2* (9hp) **Att** bite (1d4+poison) **THAC0** 18 [+1] **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 **ML** 7 **AL** N **XP** 25
▸ **Poison:** Causes death (save vs poison)

Sentient Crab-Wizard
AC 3 [15] **HD** 1** (4hp) **Att** Claw (1d4) **THAC0** 19 [+0] **SV** D11 W12 P14 B16 S15 ML 7 **AL** N **XP** 7
▸ **Chitinous hide:** Natural armour equivalent to plate AC3 [15].
▸ **Spellcasting:** As Magic User of equivalent HD. Knows two random 1st level spells.
▸ **Coral wand**: Has randomly determined 1st level spell with 1d6+6 charges.

10 - Crew Quarters
• **Twin bunkrooms** for crew
• **Captain's quarters** (south room)
- **Robo-Hound** guards south room. Won't attack anyone wearing captain's hat, and will obey their commands.
- **Goblin communication device** in captain's **wardrobe**; insert into ear and you can speak/read Goblin
- **Skeleton of ship's cat** on captain's bed, **jewelled collar** (250 GP), has **USB drive with Captain's Codes**

Robo-hound
AC 7 [12] **HD** 2+2 (11hp) **Att** 1 x bite (1d6) **THAC0** 17 [+2] **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 **ML** 10 **AL** N **XP** 5
▸ **Do a flip:** Can do a backflip on command. Useless, but impressive.

11 - The Core [bright blue light]
• **Big computer** controls all systems on the ship, including Beebo's Shield Belt
- Keyboard solid gold (2,000 GP)
- Can be shut down or set to self-destruct (10 minutes real time) with **Captain's Codes** (area 10)
• Power source is a vat of glowing sentient **Blue Goo**
- Defends computer
• Acid barrels, save versus breath or 1d10 damage if spilled, covers 10' square each

Blue Goo
AC 4 [15] **HD** 3* (12hp) **Att** Pound (1d8) **THAC0** 17 [+2] **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 **ML** 10 **AL** N **XP** 50
▸ **Amorphous:** Able to fit through small gaps, underneath doors, etc. Cannot be restrained.

12 - The Cave
• **Goblin footprints** lead from the exit towards Ship
• 4 **Giant Centipedes** nest in the rocks
• **Dead goblin spacer** has platinum dog tag (100 GP) and a pocket teleporter (as teleport spell, 1d4+1 charges)

Giant Centipede
AC 9 [10] **HD** ½* (2hp) **Att** bite (poison) **THAC0** 19 [0] **SV** D14 W15 P16 B17 S18 **ML** 7 **AL** N **XP** 6
▸ **Poison:** Causes victims to become horribly sick for ten days (save vs poison): no physical activity possible except half-speed movement.



AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT



Sometimes, we all engage in a little navel-gazing.
This isn't a new recurring segment, just the new editor-in-chief being self-indulgent. We'll let him do it—this time.

THE OSR SHOULD DIE

by **Marcia B**

Editor's Note: *What a provocative article for an old-school gaming magazine, eh? Arguing if the OSR is dead or not is a tradition in the scene–which is Marcia's point: Which OSR? What do you mean when you say it's dead? The proclamation is a silly one. Let us stop having the fight.*

Is the OSR dead yet? If you asked some, they would say yes. There was a body of cultural knowledge which has been rendered inaccessible (for some reason) to hobbyists who are working in the same space. What is old is new again, so people are talking about random encounters and reaction rolls as if they had discovered them themselves, like Christopher Columbus discovering the Americas. They weren't the first ones there, and if you were to ask Ramanan Sivaranjan from the Save Vs. Total Party Kill blog, no one had left either. The OSR is not dead because he's still there, as are others from the time of G+ who are also still doing their own thing. How can something be dead and alive at the same time? It could be a difference of definitions. It could also be a zombie.

An authoritative definition of the OSR is difficult to arrive at because any one definition is sure to attract contention from groups that self-identify with the term. These parties are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they tend to embody particular perspectives on the term owing to their different time periods, social networks, or activities (including play, communication, and organisation, among other factors). Trying to invent or assert a definition of the OSR is itself participating in the discourse surrounding the OSR. It's self-referential and often self-serving. It is worthwhile, instead, to consider the multiplicity of the OSR as an empty signifier (i.e. a signifier that signifies nothing), and to understand why people try to answer the question, "What is the OSR?" In doing so, we can criticise not just the apparent existence of a singular and true OSR, but also the role that the mere term "OSR" plays in establishing collective identities through false imagined histories.

A history of anything is always going to be biased towards one view over another. Therefore, I will not consider the history of a particular OSR or an offshoot thereof, but of the term "OSR" and to what it has been applied. Then I will address what I believe is the real question at hand: not when the "real" OSR started and ended, but why that term ("the OSR") has been adopted by different groups with different interests and relations to the hobby: hardcore AD&D players, DIY D&D bloggers, or commercial book publishers.

2000-2009

The term "old-school revival" or "old-school renaissance" originated in the early 2000s. It was used mainly by players of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* on the fan website Dragonsfoot. *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* had just been published by Wizards of the Coast, and it represented—or perhaps imposed—a new direction of play for the Dungeons & Dragons brand (albeit one which had been anticipated with the release of supplements for *AD&D Second Edition*, especially *Combat & Tactics*). Meanwhile, Dragonsfoot published materials for ongoing AD&D campaigns, and those who felt left behind by Wizards of the Coast or even the post-Gygax TSR (the original publishers of D&D) found a new home. However, many feared that without official support, the player base for these defunct games would dwindle and all would be forgotten.

Third Edition posed a problem, but also a solution. Owing to the promiscuous Open Game License (OGL) originated by Wizards of the Coast for their new game, Dragonfoot's OSR community was enabled to publish retroclones which either faithfully reproduced the rules and mechanics of early D&D rulebooks or remixed them to agree more with Third Edition's d20 system: *Castles & Crusades* (2004), *OSRIC* (2006), *Basic Fantasy RPG* (2007), *Labyrinth Lord* (2007), *Swords & Wizardry* (2008). This is the end of the story for some, perhaps exemplified by Gary Gygax's death in 2008.

Yet for others, it was a beginning. James Maliszewski began his Grognardia blog in 2008. His first post was a copy of the OGL, declaring all materials on his blog to be under that licence. His second post was called "What's a Grognard?," where he lays out the mission statement of his blog:

"RPG grognards are popularly held to be fat, bearded guys who go on and on about how things were better 'back in the day' before 'the kids' ruined everything. I don't think the history of roleplaying games since 1974 has been one of continual decline, but I do think a lot of good stuff has been lost or at least forgotten since then. One of the purposes of this blog is to discuss that good stuff and its importance for and applicability to the hobby today."

- James Malizewski, What's a Grognard, 2008

Maliszewski argued elsewhere that the OSR *"has no grand unifying principle beyond a love [...] for RPGs, particularly Dungeons & Dragons"* (and its older editions), but rather than being a reactionary "revival," it included the creative force of a "renaissance." He said many people who identify with the OSR are just playing the way they want to play, and doing it themselves ("DIY") rather than receiving that playstyle from a book sold to them. This is best represented by Matthew J. Finch's *A Quick Primer for Old School Gaming*, which outlines principles such as: rulings, not rules; player skill, not character skill; heroes, not superheroes; and forgetting game balance. Many of these maxims contradict the ethos of TSR-sanctioned play and reject the advice Gygax gave in *Advanced D&D*. Regardless, because of the movement's fervor to establish itself, there were materials being made that were not retroclones but, instead, wholly new works that (apparently) share an ethos of design with those old D&D editions. The OSR was still in its infancy, Maliszewski concluded, and whether it would result in a renaissance proper was then yet to be seen.

Maliszewski's article is not without rose-tinted glasses. John B. from The Retired Adventurer regards the old-school renaissance as "a romantic reinvention, not an unbroken chain of tradition." This may be attributed to a shift in focus somewhere between 1999 and 2009, from continuing to play AD&D to playing according to a specific style which was then theorised about on blogs and elsewhere. It is not a total discontinuity, however: early on, the members of the self-identified OSR took a DIY approach because their playstyles were no longer supported by official publications of D&D. Being a movement centralised on one platform, it did not take long for one playstyle to predominate in that community's culture. All the while, this playstyle has the appearance of something rediscovered rather than something created, with legitimacy derived from this apparent tradition.

There is no point in arguing where a line should be drawn in time between a "real" OSR and a "false" OSR in 2000-2009, or between a so-called revival and renaissance. This is not only because many of the same people participated in the OSR up to 2009 and beyond, but also because the tendency of the OSR to become a "movement" and a "culture" existed at its inception. Its origin was, strictly speaking, nothing new: it was AD&D players (less often of other editions) reminiscing about publications for D&D before Third Edition, or even before Second Edition. The production of cultural materials by this community, whether forum threads or blog posts or rulebooks, necessarily culminated in a renaissance, as the act of creation and introspection results in something new informed by past and present. The unifying principle of the OSR at any point is nostalgia for a lost ideal, the reality of which was never lost but was instead constantly in the process of being created in hindsight.

2010-2019

In 2011, Google released the social network Google+ or G+, where users interacted in specific groups or communities rather than always addressing a whole mass of "friends." G+ interfaced with the blogging platform Blogger, which Google acquired earlier in 2003. What better way to discuss the hobby, share blog posts, and organise campaigns online? G+ therefore became a hub of activity as the OSR outgrew the Dragonsfoot forums in size and in ideology. The earlier OSR, being a revival of interest in AD&D, was already overshadowed in years prior by an interest in other editions of D&D and a desire to realise the ideas they (apparently) encoded. The G+ community grew out of this context and produced much of the common wisdom we now often take for granted. It elaborated upon the OSR as a playstyle, rather than as a revival of appreciation for TSR literature. This is the era many identify as the OSR proper (or, rather, the time to have been there), especially those who participated in it. Many seminal blog posts from this time have been reproduced in issues of *Knock!*.

This time was also marked by new book publications. These were not retroclones, but instead novel rulebooks whose rules were derived from community discussions. They were sometimes marked by auteur game settings. Chief among these was *Lamentations of the Flame Princess* (2011). Previously an imprint for new OSR adventures, such as *Death Frost Doom*, the titular rulebook was based off of *Basic/Expert D&D* (1981) with a heavy-metal theme. Likewise, *Dungeon Crawl Classics* had begun in 2003 as a line of new old-school adventures, but published its own self-titled rulebook in 2012. Also around this time were *Dark Dungeons* (2010), *Stars Without Number* (2010), *Neoclassical Geek Revival* (2011), *Delving Deeper* (2012), and *Whitehack* (2013), among others.

In August 2012, Timothy Brannan declared that the OSR was dead. If the goal was to reintroduce and popularise

some vision of old-school play to a general audience, that was already accomplished. The community would live on, he figured, but it needed new goals. Earlier, in January of that year, Tavis Allison also proclaimed the death of the OSR. Having achieved some mainstream success in publishing, he saw the new goal as to expand the consumer market for OSR publications without compromising vision (while also being wary of the failures of the traditional publishing model which Gygax and others took advantage of). He concludes: *"The OSR is dead, long live the OSR!"*

What happened between Allison and Brannan's declarations was the announcement of D&D Next in May 2012, the open play-test for what would be published as *D&D Fifth Edition* in 2014. Mike Mearls, one of its lead designers, wanted to take cues from the OSR for its design. Although that edition became the prototype of the "neo-traditional" gaming culture, as prefigured by the popular podcast Critical Role, it was first celebrated as the long-awaited return of D&D to the old-school tradition:

"OSR-style games currently capture over 9 percent of the RPG market according to ENWorld's Hot Role-Playing Games. If you consider the Fifth Edition of Dungeons & Dragons to be part of that movement, it's nearly 70 percent of the entire RPG market. The OSR has gone mainstream. If the OSR stands for Old-School Renaissance, it seems the Renaissance is over: D&D, in all of its previous editions, is now how most of us play our role-playing games."

- Mike Tresca, ENWorld, 2015

Meanwhile, publications on the G+ side of the maybe-dead maybe-alive OSR were taking a new path, informed not by old D&D but by a tendency to reduce formal rules to be as minimal as possible. The idea was that this would facilitate rulings by the referee and encourage players to look beyond the book to interact with the game. Since Wizards of the Coast made old editions of D&D available digitally starting in 2012, there was also less of a worry about preserving the original (allegedly) old-school rulebooks. Why buy a retroclone when you can buy the original? Publications became more experimental, with *Into the Odd* (2015), *The Black Hack* (2016), and *Knave* (2017) being chief representatives. Many thus identify this period from about 2015 and thereafter as its own, distinct from the earlier years of the G+ community, characterised by increasing tangentiality and commercialism.

OSR became more akin to a vague marketing buzzword than a marker of backwards compatibility with TSR-era D&D. However, it is difficult to draw a line at any point where one category was more highly regarded than others. Old-School Essentials (2019), for example, a popular retroclone of B/X, exists alongside *Electric Bastionland* (2019), *Mork Borg* (2019), and *The Ultraviolet Grasslands* (2018), which are further removed from the OSR's original context. The only certain thing is that the OSR became increasingly commercial, and more work was being published than ever before.

The End?

In December 2018, Google announced that they would be shutting down G+ in April 2019. Having served as a nexus for so much blogging and so many online campaigns during the 2010s, the community built on that platform would become like a chicken running around with its head cut off. One might call this moment a collective trauma for the OSR community, not because it gave anyone PTSD but because it represents a rupture in the passage and reproduction of cultural knowledge.

Now there is no focal point for community discussion. Blogs are more isolated from each other, and there are loosely-knit communities on Twitter, Reddit, Discord, and small forums. Many participants on those platforms have no idea of what had been done before. The store of cultural knowledge, despite still being online, is rendered inaccessible for lack of a community to propagate it. The marketplace is the best way to get big ideas across now, especially with the popularity of digital materials and their commercialisation. Previously direct relationships between community members are now often mediated through indirect commodity exchange. This isn't a moral issue; it is just how it is.

Many members of the G+ community did not abandon their blogs, no more than Dragonsfoot users abandoned the forum when G+ came on the scene. Newcomers, not unlike their predecessors, view themselves in discontinuity with the recent past and see the OSR as a long-gone community rather than one still accessible to them and still being developed to this day. There is an increasing interest in commercialisation–a stated principle of one attempted successor to the OSR called "SWORDDREAM"–but there also are still bloggers blogging blogs, and grognards complaining about damn kids on forums few read anymore.

Each group interested in the OSR playstyle identifies in some way with the OSR, or at least defines their identity relative to the OSR, but in different ways. Is the OSR a revival of AD&D or some other TSR edition of the game? Is it a renaissance of new materials, such as adventures and retroclones, compatible with those old games? Is it a design movement guided by the same ethos of play as early D&D? Is it like porn, in that you know it when you see it? Rather than saying these definitions are all correct, I claim that they are all wrong: not because there is a true definition of the OSR, but because the OSR has no definition. The existence of any supposed OSR is predicated on an imagined relationship to the past, a false history to which it lays claim.

Those first grognards were very simple in what they wanted. They didn't like the new Third Edition or, really, anything published since Gygax's departure from TSR. At first glance, there is not much going on with these folks on a productive level. Any materials being made were mostly adventures and house rules, rather than any introspective work on what they liked about these games or what they wanted to see more of. They didn't need more than that. Why would they?

Yet the seeds of an OSR identity were already taking hold. When the words "old-school revival" were first typed, they could not be taken back. Thereafter existed a moniker with which people could identify, and in doing so they could identify their own desires with those of a whole group of people. This very identity rested in a past state of affairs, the golden age of D&D, and a desire to return there. It is not that nostalgia is inherently grounded in falsehood (as much or as often as it tends to be), but that nostalgia seeks to affirm its ideal history regardless of its truth-value. The history of D&D supposed by the OSR is an imagined one which contradicts the game's past in service of an ideal.

The banner of "OSR" was upheld by various groups whose desires overlapped, contradicted, crossed paths, and diverged again. None of them held onto the banner because they were its rightful owners, but instead because the banner is a signifier of a desire to return to the past (before it became wholly a self-referential indicator of OSR-ness). This holds as true for AD&D grognards as it does for many G+ bloggers. It even holds true now for those who look at the OSR as a bygone era, both as a reference point for their own identity and as a corpse ripe for the picking. As Sivaranjan says, *"I'm still here!"*

Conclusion

Each proclamation of the OSR's death relies upon a particular definition of the OSR. When the OSR "died" in 2012, it was because the community had attained the success for which it had striven: the old school was finally revived. When the OSR "died" in 2019, it was because a significant platform was deleted from the internet. Yet it was only a death to those who looked at the ruin afterward and thought of all that had been forgotten since, with no one to restore it to yet some other past state.

At the same time, most of the people who were there were just dispersed elsewhere, still doing their own thing on odd corners of the internet. Will the OSR really die, if it hasn't yet? Well, which OSR, and in which way? These are not neutral claims, and any answer reveals much more about one's relationship to a community (or lack of one) and its ideal, rather than anything about the OSR as such (especially as a playstyle). This is true whether you think the OSR has died or is still alive.

You cannot stop people from identifying with the OSR. It is synonymous with a culture of play that was originated and cultivated by players who identified with the term. Nor can you stop people from playing the way that is most often described as OSR. However, it is concerning to see the myth of the OSR be propagated, and more importantly to see claims about whether something or someone is or isn't part of the OSR. As a playstyle, the OSR has not gone away and will not go away for a long time. Another term might be more descriptive, but that's not for any one person to decide.

As an empty signifier of some relationship to the past, it is easier to say that the OSR has always been dead. Early on, grognards donned the costumes of Gygax and (less often) Arneson. They thought that the past had been forgotten, confusing it for their ideal history. Now, we don the costumes of grognards. The longer the OSR "lives," the more dead it becomes. Let's drop the act.

Let it die.

BLOGS LEAVE RUINS

by **Warren D.**

"I think the OSR as I knew it is basically a ruin. And it's a strange mouldering ruin in the swamp that other people from the future gaming societies come to delve for its weird secrets. And they come to speak to the wizards and cackling ghouls that inhabit that ruin."
- Patrick Stuart of False Machine (falsemachine.blogspot.com), 2021

"I think the OSR as I knew it is basically a ruin..." The OSR, as a scene, rose in 2006 with the publication of OSRIC/Labyrinth Lord and fragmented in 2019 with the shuttering of G+. Some argue it is now dead, some argue it is alive, some argue it is transmuted, and some even argue it never existed in the first place because they never stopped playing old-school D&D. In some ways, the OSR has accomplished its ur-goal: bringing a greater focus to a playstyle centered around unguided exploration into a lethal unknown. In another meaningful (if anticlimactic) way, the OSR has become integrated into the wider RPG ecosystem as a marketing term.

"And it's a strange mouldering ruin in the swamp...". Blogs leave ruins. This is because blogs are not short form or visually-based fleeting spirits subject to the the tidal forces of "the algorithm." Instead, blogs are built ponderously on the idiosyncratic fetid loam of the author's interest in old-school play. Each post raises the blog into an eventual grand tower of the author's thoughts. And the ruin metaphor is particularly apt for an RPG movement organised around dungeon crawling. While blogs are a unified whole, they contain serpentine passages of thought, "sublevels" fixated around rulesets or campaign ideas, and midnight gardens seeded with other blogs' ideas. The blog might be dormant or abandoned but the edifice is still intact.

"...that other people from future gaming societies come to delve for its weird secrets." And because these blogs still stand, it makes it difficult to nail down the death of the OSR because the scene's primary knowledge repositories still exist. And true to False Machine's quote, this allows acolytes and neophytes alike to continue to learn from them. So in turn, these empty ruins promote OSR teachings. You need not "have to have been there" to understand 90% of a blog's obsession. You just have to traverse its floors, sublevels, and gardens conveniently laid out in the sidebar.

"They come to speak to the wizards and cackling ghouls that inhabit that ruin." To delve into these blog halls is to almost shift backward in time and look over the author's shoulder. By the simple act of reading, a long-dead blog can imprint itself back on the reader. Your referee notebook starts to fill itself up with new (to you) traps, monsters, puzzles, and procedures learned from your delve. Discarded threads of thought have new lengths added to them as you run them out in your campaigns. Dead worlds might be wholly ignited again and changed as you make those lands and civilizations your own. How dead can the OSR be if even its abandoned blogs perpetuate this occultic imprinting?

"Where do I start?!" If the above has inspired you, here are my quick tips for building your own eventual ruin. First, you should blog about what interests you and not worry about anything else. Second, use a platform that is easiest for you–whatever allows you to make a post and add a picture is all you need. Third, dig up that journal you swore you would start and use it to jot down ideas, and review them occasionally for blog ideas; certainly, start all your hot takes here. Fourth, here are some topics to get you going:

- Last RPG post that lit a fire in your brain and why?
- Description of the last session you played in.
- What are 6 pieces of "terrain" to add to any dungeon room encounter?
- Who are the gods of law, neutrality, and chaos in your campaign and what if a fighter gives an offering to each?
- What are three illustrations that define some part of your ideal D&D?

And when you tire of it, or life takes you away, or the campaign ends, don't delete it. Instead, let it moulder, let it sink, let the ghouls fill its halls. And let the adventurers come–there is treasure there after all.

AFTER REBELLION

by **David "noisms" McGrogan**

Editor's Note: *The original version of this article from David "noisms" McGrogan was published just prior to his 2000th post on his sixteen-year-old blog, Monsters and Manuals. A long campaign in the Blog Marches, indeed.*

I have been writing RPG nonsense for sixteen years, which might actually be before some readers were even born. As I reflect, I would like—in the manner of an aged veteran reflecting on his many campaigns (the edition wars, the storygames wars, the GNS wars, the post-G+ wars, etc.)—to try to put it all into some sort of context and perhaps even frame it with a meaning of some kind.

In many ways, the past sixteen years can be understood as the creation, flourishing, co-option, and gradual dissolution or maturation of a scene, which in the way of all scenes—the Merseybeat scene, the grunge scene, the acid house scene, the arts and crafts movement, hard bebop, and so on—began with a huge cultural flowering, generated vast enthusiasm, become dominated by commercial interests, and then entered into a "grown-up" phase in which it is essentially acting as a foundation or groundwork for newer things.

But what strikes me now, looking back, is something a little more dramatic and, dare I say it, important: the OSR mattered not because it was any old scene, like any other; it mattered because it kept alive what I long ago referred to as the subversive qualities of nerddom[1]: at one time being a nerd meant being rather strongly counter-cultural in certain important ways that, if you were being overly romantic, you could see as corrective to societal pressures to conform. These days, geek culture has well-and-truly entered the mainstream and has as a result been thoroughly commercialised. D&D has, as a consequence, become much more universal and standardised; there is not only a very widespread mode of play, but also a very unified aesthetic and design philosophy and even illustrative style that is unmistakably now its own subgenre of fantasy[2].

What the OSR did, in essence, was to subvert the monolithic and centralising tendencies that were so much in evidence in the d20 Open Gaming License (OGL) era, by liberating D&D from ownership by any one company or association with one brand, and thereby giving its ownership to the people who loved it in order that they could do what they wanted with it. The major writers and thinkers of the movement were not alone in this approach, but their work was instrumental because they focused their efforts on the most popular RPG, which was in danger of becoming the dominant game.

To summarise, what the OSR did was genuinely rebellious and even, dare I say it, punkish. It took something that was becoming flagrantly commercialised in a monopolistic way and rescued it from the bland, drab fate that awaited it. In the process, the OSR itself became a (very minor) commercial phenomenon, but in a way that allowed it to stay true to its basically subversive origins. This was no mean feat. It was worth doing, and we should be glad that it was done.

The other thing that strikes me is that as the scene has collapsed, or mellowed, or aged, or whichever term you prefer to use, it has moved blessedly beyond its early associations with particular authors or notable charismatic figures and bigmouths. Here I will venture into controversy, but I think it is important to make the point that we owe a debt of gratitude to those people for being the ones to pour rocket fuel on the emergence of the scene in the period 2008-2012 or so. Without those figures, I'm not sure that the OSR would have been a "thing" in the first place. But it is also a relief to not have to spend even a second of any given day paying attention to the psychodramas associated with the big G+ personalities of yesteryear. We've moved beyond that phase, and it's largely a good thing that we have.

Where do we go next? Who knows? I certainly have no intention of stopping blogging or writing. Life has gotten in the way in so many respects, but I've somehow kept going. And I'll keep going a while yet.

1) https://monstersandmanuals.blogspot.com/2017/05/the-pacification-of-nerd.html
2) Editor's Note: As an illustrative example to this point, see the history of the kobold, p. 154.

SEVEN MAXIMS OF THE OSR

by **Gus L.**

The OSR was never well defined. At least, definitions of it have always been in conflict, and now more than ever, because the OSR fractured into several, often competing scenes. This makes it hard to talk about what the OSR was, and sparks conflict over ideas that might seem uncontroversial. I suspect it comes partially from one of the ways that the OSR solidified into a scene and style of design—the creation of instructive maxims.

Maxims differ from aphorisms in that they present themselves as little truths, almost with the force of rules. Aphorisms ask their audience to think and often hint at paradoxes or complexities. Maxims don't. That makes maxims great tools for forming group identity but less effective at teaching or giving their audience any sort of deep understanding. In the OSR, maxims served as a shorthand to describe the playstyle. In 2025, collective memory clouds and wears into the grooves of dogmatic repetition.

YOU CAN NEVER GO HOME AGAIN

From the beginning of the scene, there have been efforts to wrestle with the contradictory history of early Dungeons & Dragons. Some cliques claim that the goal of the OSR was to play games in the manner of some ideal past table: Gygax's basement in Lake Geneva, or *"the way D&D was meant to be played."* This is nostalgic invention. Even to the degree that designers might want to perform this sort of resurrection, the earliest RPGs and playstyles were themselves constantly in flux. Dungeons & Dragons showed a great deal of conflict and transformation within its playstyle from the first. Worse for revivalists, a variety of playstyles and design approaches seem to fit within the description of "Old-School" RPGs. The bloggers, referees, forum wits, and designers of the OSR have long struggled to articulate exactly what they wanted, and the goals of the playstyle have never been uniform.

The OSR never really represented a "rediscovery" of a fully functional set of rules, procedures, or play culture that had somehow been lost or destroyed. Instead it grew and found its distinct identity largely in reaction to 3.5 and 4th edition Dungeons & Dragons. This has sometimes led to other reactionary ideas, blaming shortcomings in contemporary play on a cast of villains: the Hickmans, the Blumes, Lorraine Williams, Patricia Pulling and the Satanic Panic, or even Young People.

The OSR's contributions should be seen more positively. From the start, the OSR was full of invention, adaptation, and reevaluation. It was a new way of understanding and playing games: while it referenced the start of the hobby, the OSR transformed and built upon the past rather than simply repeating it.

Maxims have power in the OSR because they serve to anchor this decades-long aggregation of hundreds of peoples' ideas and experiences into statements of general principle. They are also vague by necessity. Vagueness helps form group identity because it is open to interpretation and allows variation … it doesn't actually explain how to play the game.

MAXIMS YOU MAY HAVE HEARD

The following maxims were common in OSR spaces and continue to be cited in discussions of the OSR scene. Below is my understanding of these maxims, my criticisms of them, and a positive reading of them.

I. *"Rulings not Rules"*

Perhaps the "ruling" maxim of OSR maxims. A simple idea, but one that gets taken to extremes and is presented as a call for removing all rules or for justifying absolute referee control without regard to player expectations or consistency.

While old systems tend to be comparatively "rules-lite" and some strands of the OSR have embraced minimalist rules, OSR play has always depended on the consistency and predictability of known rules and procedures. These rules give a framework or at least references for ad hoc rulings.

"Rulings not Rules" can mean two related things:

- RPGs should offer the freedom for characters to act beyond scenarios already contemplated by rules. This is accomplished by referee decisions—ad hoc rulings that should become consistent table rules if the events requiring the ruling occur again.
- Fantasy adventure games all demand a high degree of trust between the players and referee. Meta-gaming and "rules lawyering" solutions that are against the "spirit" of the setting or its fictional consistency (e.g., the "peasant railgun") are considered unsporting and perhaps even cheating—the referee has the authority to reject them even if the rules as written allow them.

II. *"The Answer isn't on your Character Sheet"*

Similar to *"Rulings not Rules,"* this maxim rejects the dominance of mechanical solutions to game puzzles and problems. OSR playstyles don't depend on a set of specific character abilities to overcome problems, and obstacles don't always have a clear solution based on a specific piece of equipment, spell, or skill. Rather, players should observe and ask questions about the fantasy environment and then solve problems by describing actions that use the resources described. The OSR character finds secret doors by tapping walls with a 10' pole and listening for hollow spaces, rather than rolling to "spot hidden."

While there is truth to this being an aspect of the modern playstyle, the maxim speaks in absolutes that don't match the experience of most original games. Each edition of Dungeons & Dragons has added progressively more character skills, but even the earliest contains rolls for finding secret doors and avoiding traps. When the thief class was added in D&D's first supplement, skill tests became an established game element. Similarly, spells and equipment have always been tools that players are meant to write on their character sheet and use to solve problems in play.

So what might this maxim mean? Instead of being an admonishment against character complexity, it's best seen as a commitment to open-ended adventure design and problem solving.

- The game should present complex but logical obstacles. Players can overcome these obstacles using logical reasoning and things they discover in the fantasy world (including PC equipment and skills) in interesting and unexpected ways. The referee and designer should give clues relatively freely and respond to reasonable solutions to obstacles and puzzles without hiding clues or success behind unnecessary skill checks or other rolls.
- Adding to these practices, the best player solutions are those that don't require any rolls or checks and don't waste character resources like: equipment, hit points, or spells. Players seek to minimise resource expenditure by finding clever solutions, and referees should encourage these.

III. *"Role-Playing not Roll-Playing"*

In the OSR context, *"Role-Playing not Roll-Playing"* is almost always an expression of disdain for later edition's alleged focus on character building and tactical, feat-centered combat. As with other maxims, early editions are filled with examples that would contradict it—a game-forward approach instead of "narrative character acting" was common in early playstyles.

To define this maxim in a positive way, it would be productive to tie this maxim to the game design concept of "fruitful voids." Fruitful voids are the spaces in play that are left without rules. They encourage or even force the referee to make decisions based purely on player description and the referee's sense of what is fair and reasonable. Fruitful voids are very common in early RPG design, which leaves many standard dungeon crawl events without mechanical support. "Role-playing" can be seen as a preference for problem-solving and the acknowledgment of fruitful voids as a feature rather than incomplete design.

- The referee should avoid unnecessary dice rolls beyond having a simple system; it's also an aspect of "role-playing" to allow players to invent ways to succeed that don't depend on pre-existing mechanics or dice rolls.
- Designing dungeon risks shouldn't link them exclusively to specific mechanics, because an RPG should present a wide array of complex obstacles and allow the players to overcome them in many ways—often ones that the referee or designer hasn't anticipated.

IV. *"Don't Fudge Dice!"*

This maxim can be controversial because, in order to never fudge dice, a referee would have to be perfect, never creating a situation where fudging dice feels necessary to maintain fairness. Of course, no referee is perfect. The problem is that fudging dice is an extreme measure. One of the skills of a good OSR referee is to stand by their decisions and the prewritten circumstances of the adventure in both good and bad circumstances.

Failure to enforce the consequences of bad rolls or the unexpected luck in good ones corrodes trust in the referee and the integrity of the game fiction. Failure to follow the dice result too often looks like the referee is trying to direct play, while pretending dice are forcing them to do so.

Even fudging dice to avoid negative results is destabilising and can build distrust among the players, who can no longer feel like their choices matter. Bad results make both the referee and players accountable to the setting's fiction. A referee who softens the consequences of player mistakes can't be trusted not to impede the players' future victories. No one wants to play an unfair game.

- Mutual trust is essential when one is running a game with high risk to the characters, because in moments where characters fail, the players need to know that the referee is a neutral arbitrator.
- Put practically, let the maxim stand. As a referee, avoid fudging dice. If you have to change a dice result, do it publicly and explain your reasoning, acknowledging that you made a mistake by calling for the roll.

V. *"Play the World not the Rules"*

Sometimes this can be phrased in other ways or as related maxims like *"Create Situations not Stories"* or *"Sandboxes not Railroads."* It's an affirmation that the game is concerned with player choice and creating an adventure where anything is possible because things outside the rules follow logical patterns that the players can deduce using real-world knowledge. For example, water flows downhill, and wolves (or their equivalent) eat meat.

The maxim also speaks to world design, claiming that the adventure is not a predetermined narrative, but represents the exploration of locations within the setting—its secrets, its factions, and larger-scale events that can be discovered and influenced if the players want.

These ideas can cause confusion: the idea of a sandbox and absolute player freedom tend to be daunting. The referee might feel the need to design an entire world before the first session or prepare a huge number of locations. Likewise, the idea of absolute freedom can stun players. What's expected of them? How do they go about it?

The comparably-high character death rates in many early OSR games work because there's a whole world to explore beyond the individual characters. Character death is not the end of a campaign, as the player need only promote a henchperson or roll up a new PC—something they can do anyway on a whim, retiring their current PC to run a bakery if they want. This is in contrast to popular modern playstyles where campaigns are built with the individual characters as the centrepieces.

When understood in this way, *"Playing the World not the Rules"* is freeing, not constricting, for both player and referee. A sandbox setting is open for players to do anything—while acknowledging both the power limitations of the characters and that the game is about adventure within a fantastical world. When players wish to go too far beyond these limits, the setting and referee can push back. Consequences and risk from player choice are the necessary conditions for player freedom. Character and campaign progression naturally leave space for the referee to design as the campaign continues.

- The goal of a sandbox setting is to offer an experience of possibility and opportunity by creating a "world" that has existence and consistency beyond the characters' individual "story."
- Changing characters due to death or player choice should be easy; the setting remains intact, and new characters can take up adventure without significant change.
- Setting design is best done in stages, starting with small areas and building as the campaign progresses, while leaving plenty of unknowns to fill in as needed.

VI. *"Combat is a Fail State"*

Early Dungeons & Dragons focused on combat as a major part of play: 8-14 players, each with 1-2 characters and a henchman or two, could engage in far more combat with far more success than modern groups of 3–6 adventurers and henchmen. The idea that Gygax and Arneson saw the 1974 edition of Dungeons & Dragons as a supplement to, perhaps even a "mini game" for, larger war game scenarios seems at least partially correct—meaning that the characters were closer to war game "pieces" then the modern RPG concept of the character. Thus the maxim of *"Combat as a Fail State"* is a pushback against this early playstyle as well as the common complaint that OSR games are simply hack-and-slash combat.

Likewise, combat mechanics are the densest part of most OSR rulesets—but the maxim suggests this is not because combat is the focus of play. Rather, rules are most necessary for parts of the game that are the most contentious and require the most clarity. There are plenty of rules in most sports about what constitutes foul play, but that doesn't mean that basketball is about throwing elbows and running around holding the ball.

Perhaps it's better to phrase this maxim as *"Combat is an Inevitable Failstate"*—much like the way most poker hands end in a call and the players have to show their hands. It's not the goal of play or the ideal way for a skilled poker player to win the hand, but it happens a lot because it's easy and the rules push towards it. Players must work to avoid combat.

- The maxim expresses a distinctive aspect of the OSR playstyle, an adaptation to using rules designed for large parties with smaller ones in an open world full of asymmetric threats.
- While OSR systems still have lots of combat rules, rules aren't always where the players are expected to spend the most time or which represent ideal play. The maxim insists on the possibility that players can (and should!) overcome enemies through changing the odds or without fighting: ambush, traps, deception, alliance, bribery, and simply avoiding dangerous enemies are often better solutions than dangerous combat.

VII. *"Strict Time Records Must be Kept"*

On page 37 of the first edition of the *Dungeon Masters Guide*, Gygax writes *"YOU CAN NOT HAVE A MEANINGFUL CAMPAIGN IF STRICT TIME RECORDS ARE NOT KEPT."* A famous quote and not just because it's in all-caps. This maxim was long treated in the OSR space as a sort of humourous overreaction by Gygax, the barking of a grumpy grognard.

However, this quote was originally about the logistics of a many-session campaign. At the specific sort of open-table public game that Gygax advocated for, bookkeeping and calendars are essential to track dozens of players and characters coming and going over months or years. For Gygax, this isn't a general command, but relates specifically to campaign play, downtime, and upkeep cost.

As the maxim has taken root in the OSR psyche, though, strict time records began to refer to dungeon turns or combat order. It has become a reminder that turn-keeping and related rules are the legs that dungeon-crawl-style exploration stands on.

- To understand *"Strict Time Records Must be Kept"* in the OSR sense, consider that procedures of turn-keeping, dungeon navigation, encumbrance, supply depletion, and random encounters serve as structural supports to location exploration. They make exploration risky, which drives the choice-based gameplay that the OSR centres.

That's seven maxims that were common in the OSR and still persist in its offspring and affiliated scenes, playstyles, and communities.

Like any discussion of what the OSR was (or is), these answers are debatable and personal. Even if I'm wrong, I think the process of looking at OSR truisms less dogmatically, peeling them apart and deciding what's polemic, what's simplification, and what's actually descriptive, is worthwhile to understand the possibilities and future of dungeon-crawl-style RPGs.

by **Nobboc**

THE GREAT OSR SWINDLE

They made you believe OSR was a return to the past, a long and pious journey in the footsteps of the founding fathers, an ascetic pilgrimage...AND THEY LIED TO YOU. Anchoring the OSR in the past is a mistake. To see its origin and motivation in nostalgia is an illusion.

From '75 to '77, and for a few years afterwards, some young punks threw everything away and returned to the roots of rock 'n' roll, denying almost 30 years of musical tradition that had led to a musical genre that had become complex, baroque, and bloated. Their motivation was obviously not nostalgia for Chuck Berry's riffs or Elvis's "That's All Right." They went in search of the original energy and freedom that gave birth to rock, seeking to fulfill the unfulfilled promise of its origins.

And from the early '80s, let's say with the release of the *Sandinista* album which made The Clash the best rock gang of all time (don't argue with me!), the parochial quarrels appeared. *"This is not punk anymore," "Punk is dead,"* and so on...

In a similar way (at least in my eyes), around 2000, in the small world of RPGs, some people set out on a long journey.

Dissatisfied with what our hobby had become, not finding their place anymore in the evolution of the scene, they decided to wipe the slate clean of 35 years of tradition and return to the very basics. ***Tabula rasa.*** And as subsequent events showed, this return to the game's basic concepts was never an end in itself. It was merely a necessary step, a tool, to experiment and analyse, to take a new evolutionary path, avoiding the mistakes of the past. **To fulfil the unfulfilled promises of its origins.**

Together, these brave argonauts succeeded in defining a certain playing ethic, certain principles, that we all know today (see, for example *Principia Apocrypha* and Matt Finch's *Primer*, among others), which were soon applied to a whole panoply of new, diverse creations, borrowing from one another, each continuing along its own path, without ever straying too far or forgetting one another. We've seen the emergence of games as diverse as (in no particular order) *S&W, Into the Odd, DCC, LotFP, SotU, Maze Rats, The Black Hack, Shadowdark, Troïka, OSE*, *Cairn*, and so on (the list is long).

From the outset, the OSR scene has been marked by an overflowing creativity, an expansive generosity, and an intrinsic modernism. And it's still the most creative scene in the RPG world today. By far.

In the history of RPGs, we've never had so much quality material or so much choice: gems like Jason Sholtis's genius *Odious Uplands*, dungeoncrawl extravaganzas like DCC's modules, the captivating *Dolmenwood*, Gabor Lux's "old-school-so-cool" adventures, Dudinack's or Brad Kerr's little gems, Arnold K's, Joseph Manola's, or Jeff Rients's blogs, *The Monster Overhaul* by Skerples, *Beyond Corny Groń, Knave2, Pirate Borg*, Yochai Gal's *Beyond the Pale*, Nate Treme's *Almanach*, Luka Rejec's *UVG*, Peter Mullen's, Evlyn Moreau's, Stephan Poag's, Sam Mameli's or Matt Ray's art, and so on (I'm only naming what's on my mind as I write; the list could be two pages long.)

It was this jubilant creativity, this de facto modernity, that gave birth to the idea of *Knock!*.

Forget nostalgia or *"it was better before."* Our OSR games are far better off today than the ones of the pioneers ever were. There's nothing lost from the '70s to the '80s to regret. We're spoiled. And we should thank all those who have participated in this adventure, whether directly or indirectly. (I say this all the more easily because I wasn't there at the beginning —I arrived late.)

Of course, not everything is rosy. Some grumpy old grognards feel dispossessed by the newcomers, some Young Turks feel the need to "kill the father" in their turn to make a place for themselves, and others try at all costs to classify, label, and ultimately divide the OSR scene (like *"Is The Clash still a punk band?"*).

But who cares? Who cares that you name my or your game OSR, POSR, NuOSR, NoArtPunkOSR, Fekin-OrthodoxOSR... whatever. Who cares*?

In the end, the facts show that the "R" never stood for Renaissance or Revival, but for Restart and Redesign. And it was a Revolution.

*By the way, we at the Mushmen Tower like to use the term adventure games (as it was suggested first, I think, by Ben Milton). But... so what?

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