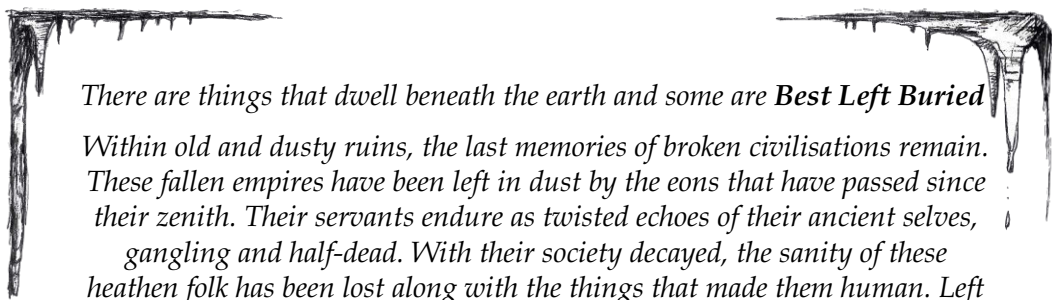


# BEST LEFT BURIED



Doomsayer's Guide to Horror  
Z. Cox & B. Brown



*There are things that dwell beneath the earth and some are **Best Left Buried***

*Within old and dusty ruins, the last memories of broken civilisations remain. These fallen empires have been left in dust by the eons that have passed since their zenith. Their servants endure as twisted echoes of their ancient selves, gangling and half-dead. With their society decayed, the sanity of these heathen folk has been lost along with the things that made them human. Left alone in tenebrous places, they have been cracked by isolation and lust for the light they forgot they needed. They have long descended into feral barbarism. All that survived the fall are raving priests, slobbering minions and gibbering monstrosities.*

*Even as their worshippers moulder and shrivel, the hungry gods sleep, slumbering in their long forgotten temples. These are chthonic deities: uncaring, impossible and beyond all forms of human comprehension. To even perceive these terrible entities drives the sane to madness.*

*This place is the **Crypt**.*

*There is a breed of strange folk that take to these ruins, known as Cryptdiggers. They might be Wizards, Knights, Godsmen, Freeblades or Man-Killers, but they are rough folk all. They are grim, determined and seemingly indefatigable. Seeking gold, fortune and perhaps even adventure, they come with swords, sorcery and righteous fury to reap the Crypt for all it is worth.*

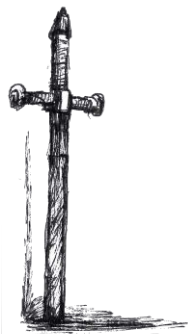
*The Crypt takes these brave and foolish folk and spits them out dead or broken.*

*The wounds that do not kill them fester and leave them maimed. The eldritch touch of magic takes their flesh and corrupts it. The abominations they fight take the aberrant corners of their minds and turn their spirits against them.*

*Their minds and souls **DECAY** until they themselves are left **RUINED**.*

*You are these folk. The Crypt will take you in, make you rich and powerful and then destroy you.*

*I hope you have fun.*



# Chapter 1: Introduction

There's a joke going around that everyone has their own fantasy heartbreaker. This is ours.

I fell out of love with modern versions of some games a while back. They were too easy, too complicated and too weighty in literature. The decisions in each game had no consequence, or at least none that couldn't be averted with a rest or a resurrection spell. The monsters were too iconic. You can't put fear into the hearts of your players when they know the exact subspecies of ooze they are facing or how many hit points the troll has.

This game tries to alleviate those problems. Characters are simple to make and classless, so no two heroes are the same. Monsters are bizarre. Affliction, injury and death are certain fate for the characters. The Crypt will take them in and spit them out broken.

The Doomsayer's Guide To Horror contains a huge amount of material for the aspiring Doomsayer. However, this book won't make too much sense to you unless you own a copy of the Cryptdigger's Guide to Survival, which you can find in PDF on DriveThruRPG or from other good RPG stores. Follow us on social media to keep an eye on the next wave of SoulMuppet content.

Enjoy,

Zach and Ben



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# Chapter 2: Running The Game

Herein lie the tools and tricks the Doomsayer is going to use to kill you. If you're a player, go back to safer waters. If you are a Doomsayer, have fun and continue.

Best Left Buried is designed to be entirely modular. The game is built on a relatively simple engine and then added to by various **Archetypes**, **Advancements**, **Afflictions**, **Injuries** and **Adaptations**. Build your own ones, add them to your game and then post them on the internet for everyone else to enjoy.

There is a lot of information on the internet and elsewhere about running RPGs, but Best Left Buried is not a run-of-the-mill fantasy game, it is explicitly a fantasy-horror game. You could use this advice in any horror game, but it is particularly useful in Best Left Buried.

## Fun in Best Left Buried

Best Left Buried is a horror game. Before your first session, sit down and think about what players enjoy. It won't even hurt to ask them.

Some enjoy seeing and defeating terrifying monsters. Some just like rolling dice. Others like gaining

awesome treasure. Some love overcoming impossible challenges against all odds. Some like being scared. They might enjoy the escape from dull reality, the sense of adventure. Many get a kick from pretending to be people completely different to themselves. Some just like hanging out with their friends with snacks and drinks. A deceptively large percentage are spectators who like watching other people have fun.

For all the talk about killing, maiming and generally emotionally abusing the player characters, nobody enjoys dying. Some people enjoy their character nearly dying and the adrenaline rush of the near escape from certain death, but they are a rare breed.

As the **Doomsayer**, it is not your job to kill your player's characters. You want the players to have fun. Work out the kind of game your players enjoy and do everything you can to deliver that exact game. Cater to your audience. For all of the talk of preparing three characters, just let the players play their favourite. However, the character don't always need to have fun for the players to have fun.

People watch horror movies because they want to be scared.

Describe everything in as vivid detail as you can muster. Talk about the sights, the smells, the sounds, the taste of the air, even the textures of the environment. If you aren't a skilled improviser of such things, write out detailed notes for your Crypts, Monsters and Characters.

Do unusual voices for NPCs. If you players laugh at you, you might be a little bit rubbish, but you'll get better and eventually they'll join in.

During combat, keep everything moving at rapid pace. Get the adrenaline pumping. Describe the action, encourage players to narrate their actions. If they ever say 'I hit them with my sword, it deals 5 damage' then that's boring. As an incentive, offer players with particularly exciting or dramatic descriptions the **Upper Hand** on attacks.

Finally, avoid fights and traps that seem arbitrary and repetitive. If you have ask the party 100 times how exactly they open a door to see if a trap is triggered that's probably not exciting. Avoid making fights that are just "insert five generic bad guys here in a blank room". This is repetitive and bland. Present innovative and strange environments that can reward quick thinking and keep the game fresh and exciting. We'll talk more about this in the next chapter.

## Challenge in Best Left

### Buried

Best Left Buried works best when it is challenging. Success can have less of a thrill if the game is trivially easy, it probably isn't fun. At the same time, the challenges you present aren't designed to kill the players, they are meant to give them room to show off their skills and ingenuity.

When setting up puzzles or encounters, try to challenge your players, not your characters, and definitely not their character sheets. Good puzzles should be solvable with common sense and have no simple solutions but lots of complicated solutions. If you do have to attack the characters, do it in novel ways. The very best puzzles don't deal damage; they impede, obstruct, confuse and misinform the party and allow player skill to shine.

Remember, characters don't have the wide array of spells and cool abilities they might have in more modern games. Generally they start with one cool thing or trick, and 5 items they can use. If players run into trouble with a trap, puzzle or obstacle, remind them to look on their character sheet and see if they have any equipment that will help. The right tool can make an impossible task possible, a hard task easy and an easy task trivial.

There aren't a lot of problems in a dungeon that can't be solved with rope, pickaxes and time (and usually a lot of noise).

The approach to fighting monsters should be thought of as another type of puzzle. The simplest way to solve a combat is usually the worst, and has the highest tax in **Grip** and **Vigour**. Monsters should be dynamic and have defined weaknesses that are (at least slightly) telegraphed and therefore exploitable by characters.

Your NPCs can also be an obstacle. Make them dynamic and as real as possible. Think about their motivations and desires. Think about what they will do in response to a given situation. Reward players for guessing their intentions and foiling their plans.

In the Crypt, only fanatical or inhuman enemies will fight to the death or attack on sight. Wherever possible they will retreat when disadvantaged, and try to find more information or allies before attacking. Even the strangest monsters have other things to do than mindlessly throw themselves at the enemy, and if injured they might retreat to lick their wounds.

Sentient and intelligent bad guys might tactically retreat, surrender, attempt to negotiate, or even just hide from or avoid the characters. Clever players can turn combat encounters with these kinds of enemies into social encounters, allowing them to save valuable **Grip** and **Vigour**.

Combat in *Best Left Buried* is not intended to be balanced or fair. Bad guys should be real antagonists who try with all their heart and soul to destroy the party. Players should do everything they can to scrap out every single advantage they can and turn the odds in their favour.

Quoting (sadly, far from verbatim) Joseph Manola: "Getting into anything resembling a fair fight is a terrible idea (...) The good guys don't win because they're good; they win because they are able to attain a greater capacity for acts of spectacular mass violence than their enemies."

In short, all is fair in love and war.

## Omens and Fear in *Best Left Buried*

Being scary in an RPG is hard. The best type of fear you can project is visceral, genuine emotional fear. I think Stephen King said it best in the following quote: "I recognize terror as the finest emotion and so I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find that I cannot terrify, I will try to horrify, and if I find that I cannot horrify, I'll go for the gross-out. I'm not proud."

Terror is usually described as the feeling of dread and anticipation that precedes the horrifying experience. By contrast, horror is the feeling of revulsion that usually follows a frightening sight, sound,

or otherwise scary experience. The gross-out is something that is disgusting, repellent, or shocking, usually involving blood, ichor or something obnoxiously creepy.

If you can scare the players with the looming threat or something hiding just around the corner, then that's a higher cause than a jump scare, which in turn is more elegant than something gross.

You can also use the terror creating elements to provide and hide information. What is more terrifying than the unknown? We call these features "omens", the evidence a monster or trap exists.

When traps, monsters and other obstacles are dangerous, they should be obvious. This is why we never instantly kill a player without warning them or telegraphing it in some way. Creatures that are large, lethal or terrible should leave omens of their passage: scraps of fur or skin, huge footprints, mutilated corpses of other monsters or fellow adventurers, screams in the distance, graffiti scrawled on the dungeon walls, trails of blood or ichor. Stuff like this not only acts as interesting set dressing, but also shows that the monster is there and that the characters have passed into its territory. Perhaps other Cryptdiggers in the company have seen the creature in scouting missions, or heard about it from other NPCs. Maybe something near that area of the dungeon wiped out a whole other wing of the company.

All of these things are rock solid horror tropes you can use to set up players with information. The omens can give them tools to outwit and eventually defeat the monster.

If they can't feasibly kill the creature, they should be able to avoid it. Until it starts hunting them; that's when it gets really scary.

## Safe Spaces in Best Left Buried

The principle we operate on in Best Left Buried is that the best way to roleplay a scared character is to be a scared player. Despite this, it is important to make sure that boundaries are in place for the game.

Before you play, speak to your players about the stuff that deeply terrifies them, and how or if they would want it to appear in a roleplaying game. Some people have real, deep seated trauma that you don't want to see unearthed in a tabletop game that is meant to be fun.

Sometimes players are happy to have their fears exposed. A player once told me they had a fear of spiders, whales and textures with lots of tiny holes (Trypophobia, google it). He viewed it as a challenge. He wanted to be scared. He let me run a session where the



monsters were a spectral whale and a spider that burrowed holes in the wall.

Other people don't want to experience this. Best Left Buried might not be the game for them, but if they still want to play, it is your duty as the Doomsayer to make sure they are not disadvantaged by it to a point they feel uncomfortable. Don't make it so the player can't join in because you deliberately disadvantaged them. If someone feels so unpleasant they no longer want to be at your table, you have screwed up.

Good communication can solve these problems before they happen. You don't have to do edgy stuff to make the game a horror game, in fact, gross-outs are the lowest form of horror.

I always like to suggest players fill out anonymous no-go zones before play begins to you can tailor the content towards them. The format could be:

1. What kind of monsters/ experience do you don't like, but you don't mind being exposed to in the game?

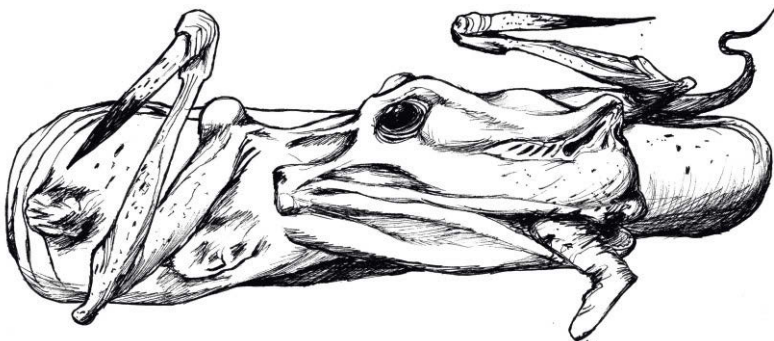
2. What kind of monsters/ experience do you not want to see in game at all?

As a general rule I would always steer away from bestiality, sexual violence or torture. Some types of mind control can also be really horrible for players. I tend to avoid this too.

Safety tools such as X Cards can also work really well, but I personally find these to be poor substitute for good, frequent communication between players.

In addition, some **Afflictions** are deliberately uncouth (and sometimes darkly comic) depictions of mental health issues from the real world. If one of the **Afflictions** makes a player feel uncomfortable, then drop it from the list and replace it with a new one.

Best Left Buried is meant to display the powerful and world changing acts that anyone can make, even if they are suffering from physical and mental illnesses. It should lift people up, not put them down. Make your table a safe and fun place to play and people will always come back.



*'The cave widened ahead of them and the darkness seemed all consuming and all encompassing. Despite Lillian's staff and Albert's torch, they felt they were lost like sailors on the wide sea where there were no stars.*

*They were deep in the Crypt now. Carris was dead at the hands of the Thing of the Lake, while the Shark-Giant had bitten the Ninefingered clean in twain. They were alone.*

*Albert stayed back, while Lillian lifted her staff high and cast incandescence all about. They could see the shadows retreating in fear as if they were alive, and distant murky shapes flickered the black. There were statues of giants looming above them, temple steps that rose to the suggestion of pillars beyond the light's edge.*

*Albert could have sworn he saw shapes moving in the dark. He drew his sword and made ready to die well.'*



# Chapter 3: The Crypt

The adventures of *Best Left Buried* are spread across a thousand worlds. You can set a game in any of these worlds: one you made yourself, one you read in a book or one in this book. There is only one rule.

## **There is always a Crypt.**

A Crypt is an environment suited for adventuring. They usually has four things in common:

1. The Crypt is dark, claustrophobic and unpleasant. It often takes the form a dungeon or tomb buried beneath the ground, but can take numerous other incarnations. These restrictions limit the character's actions. If they can simply leave at any time, the environment ceases to become threatening.

2. The Crypt is full of threats. These might be horrible monsters, sinister evils or the minions of a dark overlord. It might be the stronghold of some creature. It might also be full of mind-shattering environments, strange obstacles or traps. If there are no obstacles to stop the characters achieving what they want, the game becomes trivial.

3. The Crypt has something the characters want and rewards exploration. It might be as simple as gold and treasure, or something they seek at the bottom. They might wish to rescue a friend, recover an artefact

or uncover the Crypt's secrets. They might want to vanquish a particular foe, earn favour with a faction that wishes the Crypt destroyed, or escape from inside of it. If there are no reasons for the characters to enter, they never will. The Crypt will reward exploration.

4. The Crypt is away from civilisation. If the characters can rely on allies, social structures and the forces of law and order, the Crypt becomes less threatening. There are cities and villages where justice reigns and civilisation is safe from harm, but these places are far from the characters.

Films, literature and RPGs (both those on the tabletop and in video games) are full of amazing Crypts: The Temple of Doom from *Indiana Jones*, The Mines of Moria from *Lord of the Rings*, White Plume Mountain from *Dungeons and Dragons*, The Tower of the Elephant from *Conan the Barbarian*, the Knossian Labyrinth from the legend of *Theseus*, Icecrown Citadel from *World of Warcraft*, The City of the Invincible Overlord from *The Judges Guild*, Bran Castle from *Dracula*, R'yleh from the *Lovecraft Mythos* and a thousand others.

The underground environment is not compulsory. The Crypt might be a haunted house, a spooky

forest, a mist-shrouded swamp, a labyrinthine mountain range, or even a city or fortress infested with bad guys. Environments such as Wonderland, Narnia, The Land and Oz could be classed as Crypts, as they are weird, enclosed environments full of threats that the lead character wishes to escape from.

You can use any of these environments as inspiration when building your own dungeon. There is also a vast array of published dungeon products you could use to play Best Left Buried. My fondest recommendations for published dungeons are:

- *Deep Carbon Observatory* by Patrick Stuart and Scrap Princess
- Any of the (free!) one page dungeons by Trilemma/Michael Prescott
- *Tomb of the Serpent Kings* by Skerples
- Literally anything by the Demon Collective
- *The Crucible of Freya* by Frog God Games
- *Barrowmaze* by Grey Gillepsie
- *Operation Unfathomable* by the Hydra Cooperative
- *Beneath the Canals* by Michael T Lombardi et al.

However, it is my firm belief that writing a dungeon is easier than reading and adapting one. The thing you will create will be yours and

yours alone. There is a reason that some games refer to the **Doomsayer** as the Dungeon Master.

## The Idea

The first question to ask when creating a Crypt is "why is it there?"

Consider this; unless your Crypt is an entirely naturally occurring cave network, something or someone has built it and dug its tunnels into the earth. Before its ruination somebody used to live here, and considered its existence valuable enough to spend thousands of hours of (likely slave) labour on its construction.

The Crypt may be a ruined city, an abandoned mine, a lost temple, a conquered fortress, a tribal burial ground or a den of a powerful wizard. All answers are correct at this stage; the only thing that matters is that you have an idea about what it was.

The next thing to consider is the manner of ruination. Someone used to live here, where are they now? Was the destruction external or internal? Was it sudden, like an earthquake, or slow-burn, like an economic downturn? This decision should inform your design, and the ruination should leave marks upon the Crypt and all its inhabitants. Here are some examples:

- A ruined city, destroyed due to moral decadence and a slow descent into lawlessness.

- An abandoned mine, where the inhabitants dug too deep and breached the homelands of a goblin war tribe.
- A lost temple to a god, whose cultists summoned a Beyonder.
- A conquered fortress, whose garrison was infected with a disease through biological warfare.
- A tribal burial ground, where its groundskeepers were destroyed following an all consuming war.
- The den of a powerful wizard, who failed his ascent to Lichdom.

Remember, civilisation can be monstrous too. It is possible, and even encouraged, to build layer after layer of ruination into the Crypt. If this apocalyptic event was hundreds or thousands of years ago, the monsters you face may be the original occupants, their destroyers, the allies or descendants of either factions, or a swathe of completely unrelated creatures that have simply grown in absence of civilisation. The axis of good and evil, law and chaos, and humanity and monstrosity are yours to manipulate.

For an example of some more fleshed out dungeon ideas from the Thirteen Duchies of Lendal, see **Chapter 6: Worlds of the Crypt**

## Regions and Rooms

When designing a dungeon, you don't need to finish it in one sitting. You just need an idea and enough rooms for the first session. It is astute to break the Crypt down into regions before you split it into rooms. These areas of the Crypt should have their own name, theme, mood and function. Like when you considered the Crypt's purpose and previous inhabitants, decide on the origins and current use of this area.

The factions that inhabit the Crypt will also leave their marks on it and use different areas for different purposes. Warm, easily defensible areas with access to food and water will be prized by the Crypt's inhabitants, and intelligent or civilised creatures will likely set up camps and home bases there.

For the Crypt to seem like a dynamic environment, you should have thought about and answered all or at least some of these things. A proper Crypt will seem like an organic environment that existed long before the characters came to explore it.

The areas of the Crypt often correspond to levels, and can be found on different maps. The areas deeper into the Crypt and further away from the surface are usually more difficult, and typically contain more treasure and the most powerful monsters. Early levels of the Crypt may have already been



explored by other adventurers, but the deepest levels may have been unspoiled for thousands of years.

## Monsters and Factions

Once the dungeon has been split into sections, consider what lives where. The easiest way to do this is to consider the factions or significant monsters that exist in the different areas.

Factions leave their mark on the dungeon. Tribes of underground creatures have camps and dwellings they set up. Cults leave strange religious markings and equipment. All creatures need sources of food and water, especially if they are a large group. Some non-human creatures deal with this in strange ways, but everyone needs to eat.

Consider how the different factions in the dungeon interact. Do the cultists and the goblins on level 2 have an ongoing war over water sources, or do they in a tentative alliance against the bandits on level 1? How do the kobolds deal with the troll they share the caves with?

Just because there are different types of monster, it does not mean they are part of different factions. The factions may be alliances of different monsters and, if so, try to justify their relationship. Internal faction strife can also make interesting relationships for the PCs to exploit.

The minimum number of factions you want for each level of the dungeon is probably 2 or 3, in

addition to the characters. It may help to draw some kind of diagram to split up the different factions and how they interact, especially if you have 5-6. Put the PCs in the middle of the diagram, and update their relationship with the creatures as you go.

Like how we present tactile encounters and tactile rooms, we should present tactile spaces in the faction game. These differing relationships give the characters tools they can use to outwit their enemies. The best way to kill a large group of enemies isn't to kill them yourself, but to persuade or trick their enemies (or allies) into doing it for you.

## Room Stocking

When it comes to individual rooms, think about their purpose in the original complex. If you are unsure what this might be, take another room nearby in the complex and put their use together. A mages' room might need an antechamber. A kitchen might need a pantry or storage room. A guard outpost might need a barracks or an armoury. A library might need a room for book binding. If you are stuck for ideas, you can always add more sleeping quarters, storage rooms or bathrooms, even if these usually aren't the most evocative dungeon rooms.

In terms of enemies, think about if they are part of any factions. If they aren't, then consider the nature of their relationship with these factions.

Encounters made up of mixed enemies are much more memorable than encounters with a larger numbers of identical foes. Three cultists led by a wizard is a much more memorable encounter than coming across each of them separately, as is a guard drake or other brutish creature and its two handlers. You can also mix heavily armoured frontline troops with ranged skirmishers.

All of these mixes of enemies make for compelling fights, allowing the players and the Doomsayer to flex their tactical muscles and force decision making to a higher level than 'I hit it with my stick'.

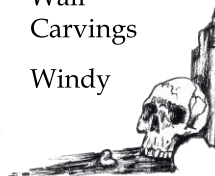
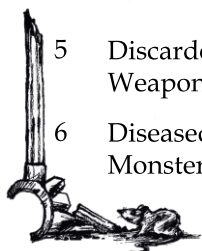
Avoid box rooms containing a fixed number of opponents. Include esoteric dungeon elements that promote tactical play and decision making. Anything that splits up zones is a good bet. Anything that provides verticality to the room or blocks line of sight is a good idea. Stuff the characters or their enemies can interact with is also a welcome inclusion. Partially functioning traps can also provide tools for the characters to use, allowing them to lure monsters towards them. At the very least, include flavour about what the room contains.

Think on the spectrum of all five senses. What does it look like? What does it sound like? What can you smell? How does the air taste? Is the room hot or cold? How does it feel? The more of these things you can fit into a room, the more



## Spice Up Your Dungeon

Dice	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Boiling Cauldrons	Creaking Door	Locked Cage Pillars		Slick Ice	Thick Smoke
2	Brightly Lit	Dungeon Graffiti	Monster Nest	Quicksand	Smell of Ozone	Tight Corridors
3	Broken Equipment	Flammable Materials	Monster Tracks	Raining Underground	Spike Pit	Underground River
4	Dense Fog	Footsteps in the Distance	Muddy	Random Encounter	Mushroom Spore	Unstable Ceiling
5	Discarded Weapons	Human Corpse	Overgrown	Roosting Birds	Sticky Puddles	Wall Carvings
6	Diseased Monsters	Intermittent Geysers	Piles of Rubble	Sharp Precipice	Swarm of Insects	Windy



real it will feel to the players. Also think about why these things might be this way. Certain smells and sounds can reveal information about environments, factions and monsters. The first time this information translates into something the characters can take advantage of and weaponise it, it becomes something the players care about, transcending its original purpose as set dressing.

Considering these things in your dungeon design will be more constructive than trying to improvise them at the table. Make a few notes about what the room is like, as well as its actual contents.

Fear not empty rooms. Not every room in the dungeon has to contain a trap, puzzle or monster. While they should still contain sensory elements, they do not have to contain life or death experiences. If every room or encounter is a near death experience, these will become cheap and meaningless. These are still useful in building suspense. If you throw monsters at the same rate you might in other roleplaying games, you will end up killing them unsatisfyingly quickly. It is impossible to scare the party if every room is full of seven kobolds. Keep the monsters scarce and the encounters evocative.

If you run out of ideas for how to make a room interesting, use the above table to add tactical elements to a room.

# Civilisation and the Wilderness

There are three types of environment in RPGs: the city, the wilderness and the dungeon, which is known as the Crypt in *Best Left Buried*.

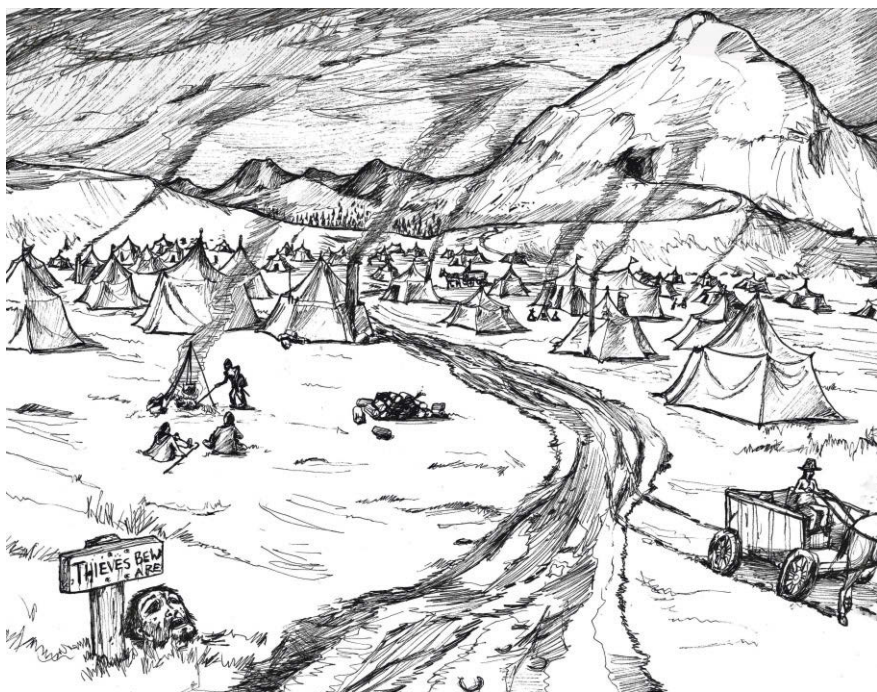
Not all adventure can be done in a Crypt. Sometimes adventurers go to the city to spend their coin, relax or seek out work from various factions. Sometimes they are travelling through the wilderness to get from one place to another or to engage in some sort of quest from an NPC.

To make non-Crypt environments good for adventuring, try to convey the same four aspects as the Crypt possesses: **Claustrophobic, Dangerous, Rewarding** and **Isolated**. Make your wildernesses

desolate badlands full of bandits and hidden treasures. Make your cities lawless hives of scum and villainy with ample opportunities for intrigue and reward.

However, players should not always feel on edge. Present safe havens with friendly faces within the game's environment, similar to a surface camp for a group of Cryptdiggers. This might be a reliable tavern, a well-defended homestead, a frontier village, a guildhouse or, indeed, a stronghold owned by the players. This gives them a sense of comfort and attachment, tying them to a particular place and offering a safety net to return to. It will hurt all the more when you take it away from them.

For more on civilisation and settings, see **Chapter 6: Worlds of the Crypt**.

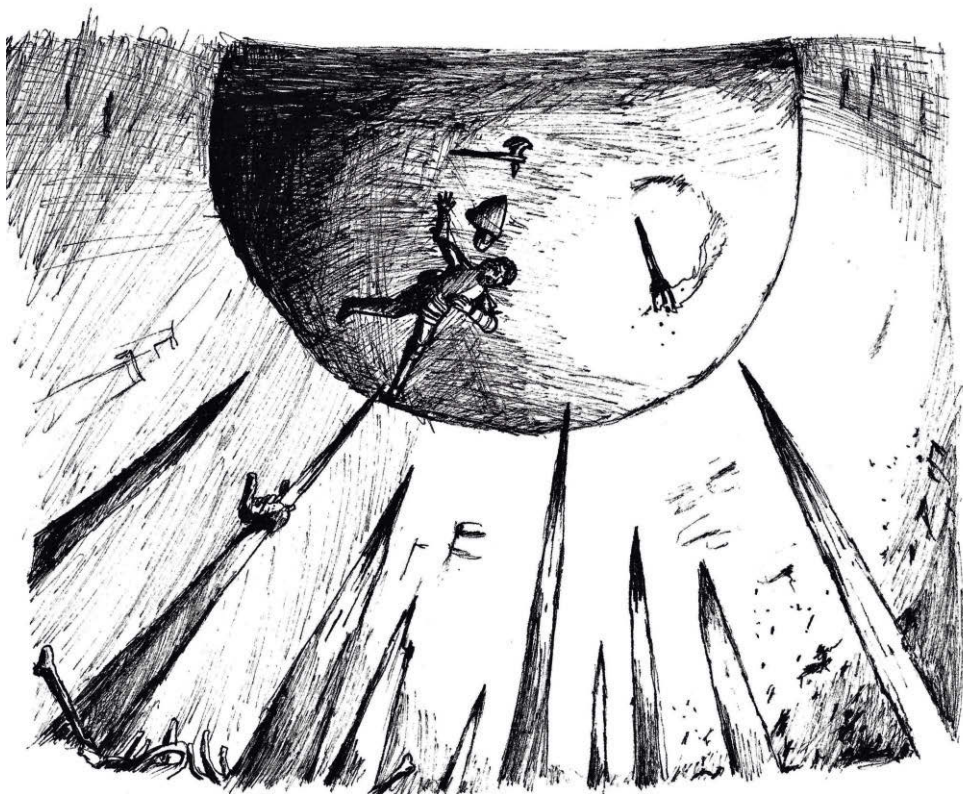




# The "Trap Door" Syndrome

The very first playtest of Best Left Buried ran by the public had a very strange type of trap. The interior doors of the dungeon had traps that triggered if the doors were pushed and opened safely if they were pulled. This took us a long time to work out and it was not a fun process. The effects of the traps were different for each door, varying from blow-darts to poison gas, falling scythes to pit traps, and even one instance of sentient, strangling child intestines. Yes, you read that correctly.

This lead to a very particular kind of un-fun for the session. We crawled through a lot of rooms, but the whole thing was very unpleasant. Yet this trap made sense. This was a living dungeon with sentient occupants who needed to get through it. The inhabitants all knew about the pull trick, so they could traverse it safely. It is dangerous for the players, because they either had to test it by pushing or pulling random doors until they caught the trick, or they were forced to interrogate some of the dungeon's few clear minded inhabitants to get this information. There is reasoning, but it requires you to look back and realise how it works. There's no obvious way to figure it out.





Possibly my favourite trap of all time is found in the first room of Lamentations of the Flame Princess's *Tower of the Stargazer*. Spoilers follow.

There is a double door to a wizard's tower, with a snake-shaped handle and a large door knocker. If you ring the knocker, there is a cavernous sound and the door opens safely. If you try to use the handle, the snake bites you and you suffer from poison.

This is a harsh and horrible trap, but it makes sense. Anyone who wants to see the wizard and has legitimate reason to be there will ring the doorbell, and anyone with ill intent will try to sneak in via the handle and get bitten by a poisonous snake. This makes sense to the wizard, and makes characters think about the wizard and his attitude to would be intruders. There is a reasoning to it which the players might be able to work out. It might even help them approach future traps more effectively.

Traps are like monsters: if they are lethal, they should be visible. Try to use sequential traps. You might show an example of a broken or compromised trap early in the dungeon, and then repeat it later on. Dungeon graffiti may provide tips on how to locate traps. Tell-tale marks of traps previously triggering might be found on the walls, like scorch marks, scratches or pockmarks.

Remember, most characters are experienced dungeoneers and have more visual stimulus available to them than the players. If they would see something suspicious, you should mention it to them. It could also be assumed that characters will have received at least one stern lecture from the company recruiter about particular types of trap to look for - and avoid - and as such they know the signs to watch out for. **Observation Checks** in relation to traps might be 'This looks like it triggers a pit trap' or 'You think there's a tripline here'. Failure might give misinformation, result in a character not noticing it, or just a feeling of 'something is wrong here'.

Think mechanically or technically about how the trap might work. If the players do something that you think would correctly disarm the trap, then offer them the **Upper Hand** on checks to disarm it, or make it a **Trivial** check.

Finally, assume that unless the characters are moving quickly (as in a chase, through complete darkness or in combat) that they are moving slowly and taking reasonable precautions. They do not need to make clarifying statements, such as 'I search the hallway for traps' or 'I use my 10 foot pole to check for pressure plates', as it can be assumed in the concept of them moving through unexplored areas of the dungeon that they are already doing so.



# Chapter 4: Monsters

Monsters need to be flavourful. Think of something cool and terrifying that exists in your players deepest, darkest nightmares. The numbers aren't important, they are just a chassis, the skeleton of some terrible beast. It is your job to give the monster flavour, personality, and a unique look and feel.

Never say, *"You come into the room and see five skeletons. What is your initiative order?"*

Describe the monster in all of the grandeur and flourish you can muster. When they kill it, it makes the fight all the more memorable. Put on a silly voice. Sound vague and mysterious. Use purple prose. Milk it.

Instead, say, *"Through the thick, liquid shadows shamle five vague shapes. Hanging from bone are rags and tatters of baleful cloth. They are the remains of an ancient warriors, risen from the grave by some sinister magics. They traipse towards you with a slow and awkward gait. The glimmering blue soulfire that sits where their eyeballs might once have been stares at you and through you. What do we want to call them?"*

Always let your players name the monsters. Never tell them they are fighting standard monsters, like Wights or Zombies or Were-Bears or Dragons. Even if they are, let the

players call them Tombdwellers, Nightbears, Shamblers or Scale-fiends. Telling the players what the monster is called secures them in an expectation of its power. It makes the characters able to quantify the monster and decide whether they can kill it. It makes them into mathematical agents, not Cryptdiggers facing a do or die situation.

Making your own monsters keeps your players guessing. No Cryptdigger apprentice knows every monster in the Crypt. Such a thing would be impossible.

Don't make the players simulate their character's fear or hesitation when faced with a supernatural threat, make it genuine and sincere.

Combats do not only exist to be a drain on a character's resources and slowly drag them closer to death. From a game design and resource perspective it is their purpose, but never let the players feel like that. Keep them on the edge of their seats, half dying from suspense.

In **Best Left Buried**, every fight could a character's last. Make them fear it.

# Monster Stats

To make a monster do as follows:

- Come up with a crazy idea for a creepy, violent or inhuman monster that would live in the dark corners of the Crypt.
- Give it some **Stats**. A standard expendable mob might have +1, 0, -1 across the three stats. More powerful monsters might have +2, +1, 0 or even higher. Characterful monsters tend to have stats with a high variance.
- Give it some **Advancements**. You might choose something from **Chapter 3**, or one of the monster **Adaptations** from below.
- Give it some **Vigour** and **Grip**. Regular mobs may have less than 5 **Vigour**, but more powerful ones have much more. Most monsters in the Crypt are not unafflicted, so have zero **Grip**, but others might have their own supply.
- Decide if it has any weapons, or natural weapons, such as claws, tentacles, fists or teeth, that may act like weapons.
- Decide how quickly it moves and thus its **Initiative** modifier. Remember: Monsters that deal high damage and always attack before the players are unsatisfying if the character is instantly murdered.
- Give it a score for attack targets. Most monsters have 9. Easy to hit monsters may have 7 or 8 (think of it as negative armour). Others might

have higher scores, being equivalent to characters in **Plate** or **Basic Armour** or even having a **Shield**. Avoid giving monsters an attack target of more than 11, unless you want it to be a beastly challenge for high level characters. Players like hitting monsters, so increase the **Vigour** pool instead or give it an advancement like **Ironshelled** or **Hex-Proof**.

- Give a monster a list of things it is good and bad at to increase its flavour. It has the **Upper Hand** on things it is good at, and is **Against The Odds** at things it is bad at.

*For monsters from other famous role playing games, give monsters around D6 Vigour and 1 Grip per "Hit Dice". For AC from similar games, start at a target of 8 for 10 AC and increase the target by one for every two points the AC increases.*

# Monster Adaptations

You can give a Monster any **Advancement** that would make sense, or one of the **Adaptations** below.

If a monster has an **Advancement** that requires **Grip**, but has no **Grip** of its own, it uses a points of **Vigour** instead. For every point of **Grip** they would spend, the cost is 2 points of **Vigour**.

**Acidic:** The monster can spend an action and 2 **Grip** to damage a metal tool, weapon, or piece of armour. This reduces its damage or



protection by 1, or imposes **Against The Odds** on **Stat Checks** made with the tool. If three of these effects stack, the object breaks.

**Amorphous:** The monster can spend an action and a point of **Grip** to transform into a new form. This transformation may be obvious (like a slime taking a new shape) or may be impossible to detect (like a Doppelganger or other sinister shapeshifter).

**Aquatic:** The monster can breathe underwater. It has the **Upper Hand** on **Stat Checks** made underwater. The creature might be **Amphibious** or purely **Aquatic** depending on if it can also breathe above water.

**Beetle Flesh:** When killed, the monster turns into a swarm of rats, bats, worms or insects. Unless this swarm is destroyed, the monster reforms in D6 days.

**Blinking:** A monster can use its action and a point of **Grip** to disappear from view and move to a space up to D3 **Zones** away. The monster counts as having used an **Escape** action on its turn.

**Bloodthirsty:** This monster has the **Upper Hand** on attacks if the target has less than half its total **Vigour**.

**Bloodscent:** The monster has the **Upper Hand** to detect targets with less than half **Vigour**

**Brittleskinned:** Physical attacks made against the monster have the **Upper Hand**.

**Compressible:** The monster moves at regular speed through tight spaces, possibly allowing it to move through **Impassable** zones or move through certain zones quicker.

**Corpsemover:** The monster can spend an action and a point of **Grip** to make a humanoid corpse do something unnatural, like glow, stand up or dance.

**Devour:** The monster can spend an action attempting to consume an enemy. The enemy must pass a **Brawn** or **Wit** check or be **Immobilised**. On subsequent turns, the monster can repeat the action and make their target pass another **Brawn** or **Wit** check. If the target fails, they are fully consumed. This will do different things depending





on the monster, but **Vigour** damage, **Grip** damage and **Injuries** are all possibilities.

**Disguise:** The monster can pass as a certain mundane object, such as a statue, part of the floor or wall, or a piece of furniture. Characters may need to make **observation checks** to notice it.

**Disorganised:** An extra monster in the same **Zone** attacking the same target is required in order to **Gang Up** on an enemy.

**Elemental:** The monster's attacks deal damage related to its elemental type, counting as magical. Also, attacks of that elemental type made against the monster are **Against The Odds**.

**Ethereal:** Attacks made by non-magical weapons against the monster are **Against The Odds**.

**Fearsome:** On first encountering this monster, every character is forced to make a **Grip** check.

**Fear of the Light:** The monster is **Against The Odds** on **Attacks** and **observation checks** while in sunlight.

**Firebreathing:** Can use up to 2 **Vigour** as **Grip** to use **Fire** and **Lightning Strange** on a target in short range.

**Flame-wreathed:** If a character ends their turn in the same **Zone** as the monster, they lose 1 point of **Vigour**. This effect does not stack. Characters who are immune to flame damage do not take this damage.

**Flesh-gorging:** The monster can take an action to feast on a recently deceased corpse. If it passes a **Brawn** check it recovers D6 **Vigour**.

**Flying:** The monster can use its move to fly into the air.

**Gelatinous Grip:** When the monster attacks the target must pass a **Brawn** check or be **Immobilized**. The target can use its action and make a **Brawn** check to **Escape**.

**Hex-Addled:** Magic attacks against the monster have the **Upper Hand**. They are also **Against The Odds** on **Stat Checks** made to resist the effects of magic.

**Hex-Proof:** Magic attacks against the monster are **Against The Odds**. They also have the **Upper Hand** on **Stat Checks** made to resist the effects of magic.

**Hulking:** Ranged attacks made against the monster have the **Upper Hand**. Double the monster's **Vigour** pool.

**Ironshelled:** Attacks made by weapons against the monster are **Against The Odds**.

**Lifedrinker:** The monster regains **Vigour** equal to half all damage inflicted by its attacks.

**Luminescent:** The monster fills a number of **Zones** with light. Depending on the power of the monster, this may be the **Zone** it is in, every adjacent **Zone** or even more.

**Nimble:** When the monster makes a **Wit** check to **Escape**, it has the **Upper Hand**.

**Otherworldy Gaze:** The monster can spend an action to focus upon one enemy and force them to make an **Against The Odds Grip Check**. If they fail they lose **D3 Grip**.

**Quick Reflexes:** **Wit** checks made to **Escape** from the monster are **Against The Odds**.

**Rampage:** When the monster takes damage, it may immediately make an **Against The Odds** attack against a target in the same **Zone** as it.

**Razorclawed:** Attacks made by the monster have the **Upper Hand**.

**Resistance:** Choose a type of damage, like fire, slashing, bludgeoning, piercing, acid, lightning etc. Attacks against the monster using this damage are **Against The Odds**. They have **The Upper Hand** on **Stat Checks** made to resist such damage.

**Petrifying Gaze:** The monster can spend a point of **Grip** on its turn to attempt to Petrify an enemy. The enemy must pass a **Will** check or be **Immobilised**. On its next turn, the monster can repeat expenditure of **Grip** and make their target pass another **Will** check. If the target fails, they are fully turned to stone. Powerful holy magic is required to resurrect them, and if they return to life treat them as being **Unconscious**.

**Shadowclad:** Characters are **Against The Odds** on **observation checks** to notice the monster while in shadow.

**Soulfeast:** When the monster kills a target, it gains **D3 Vigour**.

**Spider Climb:** The monster can stick to walls or ceilings, allowing it to pass some **Impassable Zones**.

**Slippery:** Any checks made to restrain the monster are **Against The Odds**.

**Undead:** The monster cannot be targeted by mind altering magics and does not have to eat, breathe or drink. Reduce the monster's **Initiative** by 1.

**Unstoppable:** Never roll on the **Injury** table for this monster. If it is hit with a **Critical Hit**, simply deal **1D6** extra damage.

**Violent End:** When the monster dies, it explodes. Every creature in the same **Zone** must pass a **Wit Check** or take **D3** damage.

**Weakness:** Choose a type of damage, like fire, slashing, bludgeoning, piercing, acid, lightning etc. Attacks against the monster using this damage have the **Upper Hand**. They are also **Against The Odds** on **Stat Checks** made to resist such damage.

**Wound-Knitting:** The monster recovers **D3 Vigour** per turn. Depending on the monster, this might be disabled by acid, cold, holy or fire damage.

## Non-Mechanical Threat

The following section borrows very heavily from a blog post by Michael Prescott of Trilemma about **Non-Mechanical Difficulty Levels for Monstrous Threats**. It is definitely worth a read. He describes many of these concepts with much greater eloquence than me.

Best Left Buried has a very flat power curve. **Advancements** usually tend to grant more tools to solve problems, rather than being fix-all abilities. Character's **Vigour** is also quite static, and only increases 10-15% with each **Advancement**. Combat is also swingy and explosive, rarely lasting more than a few rounds. You can only really give a character or monster +3 for a **Stat** before the damage gets out of hand and almost all attacks result in **Injuries**.

To present truly dangerous monsters, you have to alter their power in ways beyond the numbers. Equally, individually weak monsters can become powerful when given agency to control encounters.

Players have more power when they can control the degree of danger they are subject too. Think of each of the below qualities as a scale you can slide to alter power levels and challenge the players in different ways.

## Manoeuvrability

Monsters who are stuck in on room or area are generally less powerful. Conversely, enemies who can move around quickly are much more dangerous. It is easy to exploit terrain against a stationary monster, or just avoid them altogether and make combat superfluous. Monsters who move quickly over a wide area are unpredictable and harder to avoid. Also, it is easy to retreat from a stationary monster if the encounter goes sideways, but fast monsters will have the advantage if one party chooses to flee when the fight goes poorly. However, mobile monsters can be more susceptible to being lured into traps, as they are more likely to give chase.

## Cohesion

Unorganised monsters are easy to defeat, and they can be picked off one by one. Organised groups will rarely move alone and will seamlessly plan complicated manoeuvres. This might be a result of hunting experience, military training or even worse, shared consciousness. However, cohesive groups are generally more predictable than lone monsters.

## Factionality

Different groups of monsters can be fooled, tricked or persuaded to destroy each other. Getting monsters who hate each other to do this is much easier than splitting up a strong alliance.

## Aggression

Aggressive creatures will seek out the party and attempt to destroy them. Defensive creatures will usually stay in the same area and may avoid the party entirely if they are not hostile. Much like **Manoeuvrability**, this can greatly effect the difficulty of the encounter.

## Information

The more information the monsters have about the party, the more dangerous they are. Inattentive monsters will usually be unaware or just straight-up ignore the characters, but aware monsters will be able to better plan for their opponent. Good information may be a result of vigilance or just intelligence.

## Obscurity

Most monsters in **Best Left Buried** are unknown and mysterious, but certain monsters are prevalent in mythology. Knowing werewolves are slain by silver bullets, or undead are vulnerable to sunlight and holy water is a powerful advantage. Nebulous and mysterious foes create more dangerous threats than common enemies. We try to exploit this by making all monsters strange and unknowable.

## Quantity

Single enemies are simple to defeat, numerous enemies are a massive challenge. This is particularly

relevant in **Best Left Buried**, because of the rules for **Ganging Up**. Even the hardest warriors can be dragged down by a horde of enemies.

## Hidden

If the players do not know a threat exists, the threat is much more dangerous. We try to be as up front with players about monsters as possible, and hidden monsters should be revealed, at least in part, to the players with some information, even if **Observation Checks** are failed.

You can use the above list to make low powered monsters more dangerous and high powered monsters less dangerous. A dragon that is passive, singular and commonly known of might be less dangerous to the party than a tribe of aggressive, cohesive and numerous goblins. It is advisable to fill your dungeons with monsters of differing qualities on the above scales, so that the dungeon is diverse and not solvable with one-size-fits-all solutions.



## Monster Moods

Not every monster should attack on sight. Best Left Buried will become very lethal if that is the case. If you need ideas, assign a monster to one of the below categories, and roll randomly when it is first encountered to see what it is doing or what its mood is. This idea is stolen from *Troika*, which rocks.

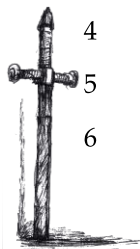
These, even more so than other random tables, are guidelines not rules. If a roll doesn't make sense, re-roll or replace it with what does.

### General

- 1 Helpful
- 2 Friendly
- 3 Indifferent
- 4 Wary
- 5 Unfriendly
- 6 Hostile

### Abomination (Horror, Demon, Elemental)

- 1 Skulking
- 2 Gibbering
- 3 Feeding
- 4 Sleeping
- 5 Hungry
- 6 Aggressive



### Great Beast (Dragon, Manticore, Giant)

- 1 Sleepy
- 2 Satiated
- 3 Bored
- 4 Hungry
- 5 Ravenous
- 6 Enraged



### Critter (Rats, Goblins, Birds)

- 1 Distracted
- 2 Inquisitive
- 3 Skittish
- 4 Opportunistic
- 5 Hungry
- 6 Playful

### Tribals (Goblins, Savages, Bullywugs)

- 1 Cautious
- 2 Unobservant
- 3 Friendly
- 4 Playful
- 5 Lurking
- 6 Scheming





## **Constructs (Skeletons, Fungonids, Golems)**

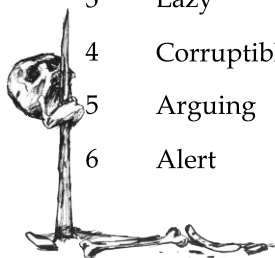
- 1 Oblivious
- 2 Confused
- 3 Indifferent
- 4 Defensive
- 5 Implacable
- 6 Enraged

## **Cultists (Wizards, Priests, Acolytes)**

- 1 Enraptured
- 2 Suspicious
- 3 Paranoid
- 4 Deceptive
- 5 Ensorcelled
- 6 Violent

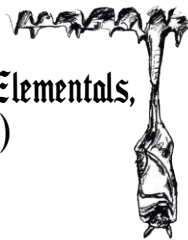
## **Guards (Soldiers, Orcs, Bandits)**

- 1 Distracted
- 2 Tenacious
- 3 Lazy
- 4 Corruptible
- 5 Arguing
- 6 Alert



## **Otherworlder (Imps, Elementals, Poltergeists)**

- 1 Nattering
- 2 Ethereal
- 3 Destructive
- 4 Deceitful
- 5 Furious
- 6 Dispassionate

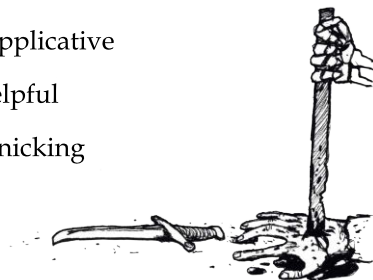


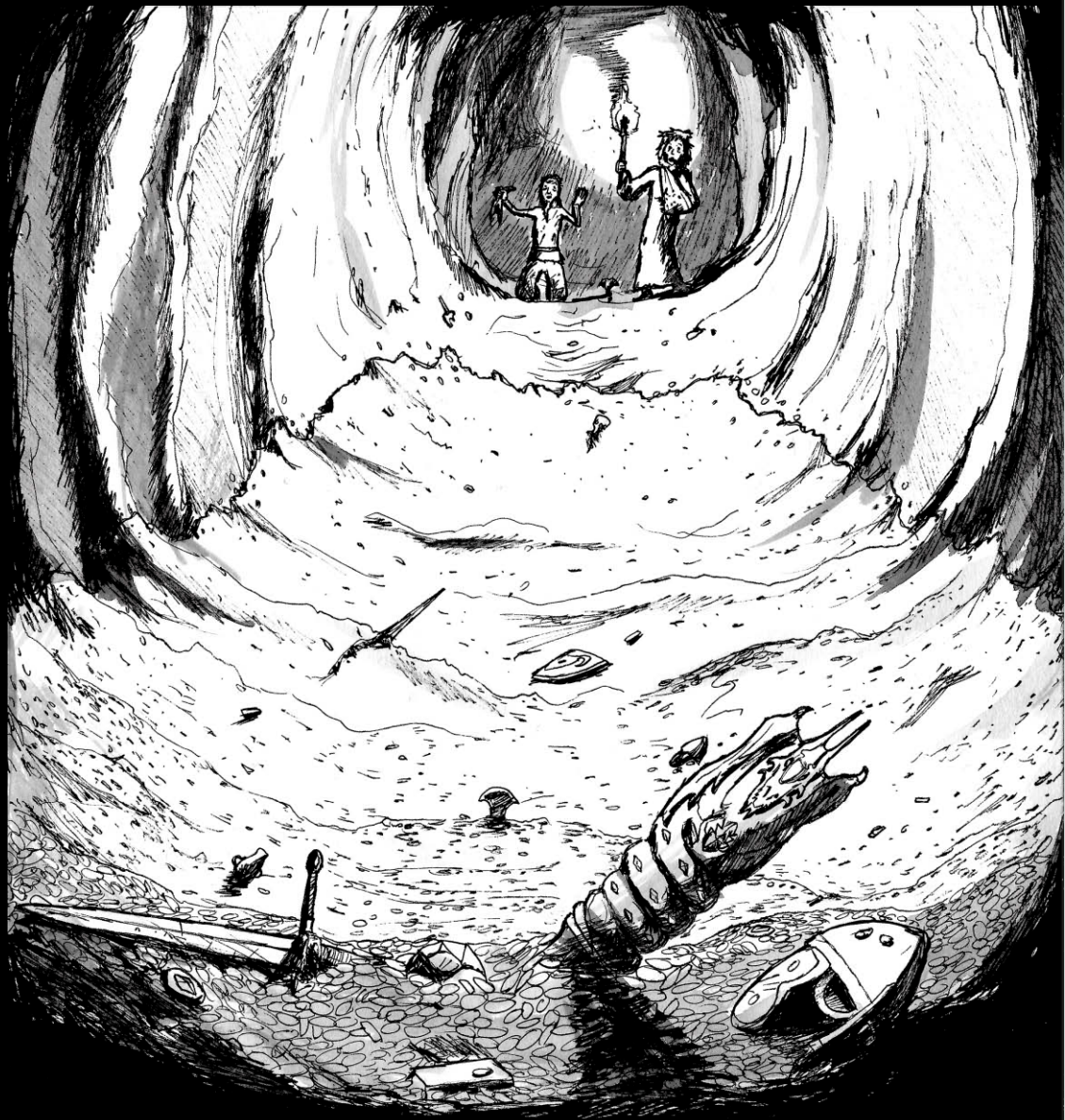
## **Brigands (Raiders, Bandits, Adventurers)**

- 1 Argumentative
- 2 Plundering
- 3 Resting
- 4 Unaware
- 5 Curious
- 6 Violent

## **Civilian (Merchant, Captive, Slave)**

- 1 Fearful
- 2 Confused
- 3 Shocked
- 4 Supplicative
- 5 Helpful
- 6 Panicking





*'Robert always thought he would have some line, some quip, for the moment they eventually found their hoard and could retire. When that day finally came, all of his verbosity fell away, and he droppped to his knees and wept tears of joy. Coins and helms and staves and jewelry, countless gold and gems on the floor before him packed in this grimy, dirty cave where none of those things should never have been.'*

# Chapter 5: Rewards and Treasure

The Crypt is only worth something if it is **Rewarding**. If there's nothing in the Crypt, there would be no reason for the characters to go into it. Risk has to be met with reward, and the main types of reward are **Experience** and **Treasure**.

## Experience

Players gain power through **Experience**. This is not governed in the player-facing section of the rules as not to significantly warp player behaviour to take advantage of potential exploits.

With some exceptions, characters do not explicitly gain **Experience** for killing monsters. Conflict in Best Left Buried should be avoided where possible. "Farming" low level creeps like in a video game does not increase the character's power level. In fact, the murder of helpless, friendly or harmless inhabitants of the Crypt is generally a quite stupid idea, and may result in **Grip Checks** for characters.

The main method of gaining **Experience** is returning treasure to the camp. This is covered in the section on treasure.

Characters also gain experience from passing **Grip Checks**. The horrors they see can shake them, but when they resist their effects they are generally left with a stronger resolve. If the players start deliberately doing things in an attempt to gain **Experience** from **Grip Checks**, follow through on the fictional concept of how this would work and do not grant the **Experience**. If players seek out a monster, environment or experience to deliberately suffer a **Grip Check**, then don't grant **Experience**.

Characters can also gain **Experience** for seeing great sights and overcoming shocking challenges. Coming to a cliff edge and seeing the City of the Glass Pool for the first time, defeating a hideous Blackbeast and driving its followers from its temple, or unlocking a riddledoor and deciphering the secrets of a isolated wizard might all be worth a few points of **Experience**. Generally speaking, if it's a tale epic enough for a bard to write a good song about, it's good enough for a reward.



Finally, you might reward a singular player for a particular moment of ingenuity during play. If a player does something that makes you jealous about how clever they are, then they have earned it. Figuring out strange secrets, solving puzzles in bizarre and brilliant ways, engaging in particularly skilful negotiations or good roleplaying all might be worth a reward.

**Experience** is a lever to make the game your own. If you want to run a high-powered, epic game that replicates a setting like *Dragonlance* or *Lord of the Rings*, then give **Experience** out like hot cakes. If you want to keep your cards in your hand and the players wanting more, like in the *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplaying Game* or the novels of the *Black Company*, keep the **Experience** back and make the players really work for it.

## Treasure

Treasure is the reason that most adventurers delve into the Crypt. Treasures are not always shiny, but they must always be valuable.

For each significant treasure or group of treasures returned to their Camp by the characters, calculate **Experience**. For every good descriptive word used by the **Doomsayer** to signify the item's value, add 1 **Experience** to the item's value. Remove 1 **Experience** from the item's value for each negative word used to describe it. For

example, an "Ivory Amulet" would be worth 2 **Experience**, "Several Gemmed Goblets" would be worth 3 **Experience**, and "Ripped Ceremonial Elven Tapestry" would be worth 2 **Experience** (3 for "Ceremonial Elven Tapestry", minus 1 for "Ripped").

At the end of the session, add up the total from treasure recovered and divide it evenly between each surviving member of the party who recovered the items.

This can lead to issues like characters abandoning the rest of the party to escape with treasure. If this sounds like something that would make you or your players uncomfortable, you can divide the total **Experience** by the number of characters who set out on the expedition, not the number who returned from it. However, surviving characters is the canonical method, and nothing is cooler than rewarding the sole survivor of a massacre who returns home carrying 18 **Experience** worth of treasure with a couple of Advancements at once.

Characters who decide to murder other characters to steal their treasure and get all of the **Experience** should meet with consequences both in and out of game.

Magical treasure, such as potions, scrolls or magic items do not allow players to gain experience in this way.

# Magic Items

Players love powerful magic items. These types of treasure are usually of two types: **Monstrous** and **Mortal**.

## Monstrous Treasure

**Monstrous Treasure** increases a character's power by granting them a monster **Adaptation**. You might have an **Ironshelled** shield, a **Shadowclad** cloak, a **Bloodthirsty** battleaxe, a **Woundknitting** ring or a staff that lets a character use **Otherwordly Gaze** or **Firebreathing**.

These items are powerful. Avoid giving more than one or maybe two to each character. They are usually given as a reward for reaching some treasure horde or are stripped from the body of a fallen foe.

**Monstrous Treasures** usually come with disadvantages, which might be reflected by granting the character a thematically appropriate **Affliction** or other drawback.

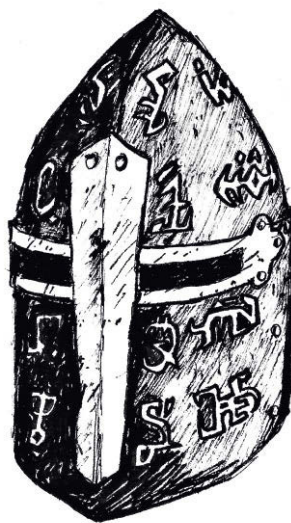
For example: a **Bloodthirsty** battleaxe might give **Frothing Rage**, a pair of **Nimble** boots might give **Silver Fingers**, a **Flamewreathed** cloak might give **The Glorious Blaze** or a **Shadowclad** cloak might give a **Debilitating Dread** of bright light.

Alternatively, the item might come with a sinister **Drawback**. It could be sentient and require a task to be completed before its powers can be used. It may feast on souls or blood, be it yours or your enemy's. It might

desire the destruction of a certain enemy or location. It might threaten the character's mind and require a price in **Grip** to be used. It might eat gold, and crumble the coin you touch into dust. It might warp aspects of your appearance. It might grant another negative **Adaptation**, such as **Fear of the Light**, **Brittleskinned** or **Disorganised**. You might occasionally wake from a rest far from where you went to sleep, covered in blood.

In short, let your imagination run wild.

The power of those in the Crypt rarely comes without consequence and **Monstrous Treasures** are designed to push the characters towards becoming the monsters themselves.



# Mortal Treasure

**Mortal Treasures** are subtler items. They are typically made by apprentice wizards or artificers as experiments to test various magical techniques. While not as overtly powerful as **Monstrous Treasures**, **Mortal Treasures** do not come with the threat of drawbacks or **Affliction**.

**Mortal Treasures** act as a useful but highly situational effect that rewards players for using them with ingenuity to solve puzzles and problems. Being magical, they will frequently break the rules of physics.

## Mortal Treasure (Part 1)

D6 D6 Item

- |   |   |                                                                             |
|---|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | 1 | A deck of cards that always lets you draw the card you want.                |
| 1 | 2 | A necklace that slowly tightens when worn.                                  |
| 1 | 3 | A severed hand that ties superb knots.                                      |
| 1 | 4 | A flint and tinder that makes sparks of electricity not flame.              |
| 1 | 5 | A bag of dust that smells of what you think about when it opens.            |
| 1 | 6 | A piece of cloth that flows in an unseen wind.                              |
| 2 | 1 | A pair of linked mirrors; where each shows the other's reflection.          |
| 2 | 2 | A compass that points towards the nearest quantity of spilt blood.          |
| 2 | 3 | A marble that rolls uphill.                                                 |
| 2 | 4 | A red gem that will turn into a glass's worth of wine when crushed.         |
| 2 | 5 | A jawbone with 2d6 teeth that will each act as a ration.                    |
| 2 | 6 | A demi-human skull that will chatter if you stroke it.                      |
| 3 | 1 | A shoe that always fits.                                                    |
| 3 | 2 | A seed that will quickly fill a <b>Zone</b> with knee-high weeds if buried. |
| 3 | 3 | A key that will fit any lock, but crumbles to dust once used.               |
| 3 | 4 | A blood-red coin that forever holds your focus.                             |
| 3 | 5 | An ointment that removes all friction from a single surface.                |
| 3 | 6 | A single hobnailed boot that walks by itself.                               |

While none of these items listed have explicit mechanic benefits, they might situationally grant the **Upper Hand** or **Against the Odds** on certain **Stat** or **Observation** checks, as well as making **Impossible** checks doable and normal checks **Trivial**. As a general rule, they should not help in combat.

## Mortal Treasure (Part2)

D6 D6 Item

- |   |   |                                                                      |
|---|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4 | 1 | A pocket watch that can pause time for one second.                   |
| 4 | 2 | An uncut crystal that glows with soft moonlight.                     |
| 4 | 3 | An ever-turning spinning top.                                        |
| 4 | 4 | A needle and thread that can repair any break in a surface.          |
| 4 | 5 | A six fingered glove that can be worn by a person with five fingers. |
| 4 | 6 | A die that only rolls 3.                                             |
| 5 | 1 | A blue gem that pulses like a heart.                                 |
| 5 | 2 | A pencil that can never be sharpened.                                |
| 5 | 3 | A pebble that falls like a feather when dropped.                     |
| 5 | 4 | A silent whistle.                                                    |
| 5 | 5 | A piece of rope that coils up when you speak a certain keyword.      |
| 5 | 6 | A rag that absorbs any material staining it over a day.              |
| 6 | 1 | A lantern that never stops glowing.                                  |
| 6 | 2 | A pen that never runs out of ink.                                    |
| 6 | 3 | A box of patches that burn with cold flame                           |
| 6 | 4 | A map of a fictional city, that gives the owner pleasant dreams.     |
| 6 | 5 | A heavy tooth that can cut through anything, but then breaks.        |
| 6 | 6 | A sea shell that bears the smell and scent of the seashore.          |

# Potions and Spell Scrolls

**Potions** and **Spell Scrolls** are single use consumables that grant the short-term benefits of an **Advancement** or an **Adaptation**.

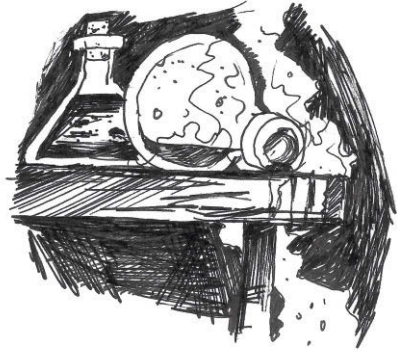
Drinking a **Potion** costs 3 points of **Grip** and requires an action. This then grants an **Adaptation** for a single combat (or for five minutes if used out of combat). Examples of possible potions include a **Woundknitting Potion**, **Blinking Potion** or an **Amorphous Potion**.

Once the character has drunk the potion, it is gone and cannot be used again.

Potion effects are usually ambiguous, and can be described differently depending on its **Adaptation**. A **Luminous Potion** might be a honey-like substance that casts strange light, whereas an **Acidic Potion** could be a gloopy lime green vial that bubbles when exposed to the air. You can taste test a potion to determine what it does, but this requires a **Grip Check**.

The **Grip** loss represents the negative effect of the potion's chemistry ravaging your mind and body.

Reading a **Spell Scroll** requires a **Will** of at least 1. A character can spend 2 points of **Grip** and an action to then gain the ability to use the scroll's **Advancement** once next turn, with its normal cost in **Grip**. **Spell Scrolls** that grant the use of non-Journeyman Arcane or Divine



**Advancements** require 3 **Will** and cost 4 points of **Grip** to read. Common **Spell Scrolls** include **Spellwrath**, **Fire** and **Lightning** **Strange**, **Shadow Glamours**, **I See Truth In The Stars**, **Arcane Wards**, and **Spirits of the Beyond**.

Both **Spell Scrolls** and **Potions** are valuable commodities worth large quantities of money if traded to the right merchant in the surface world. They should be given out and used with care.

## Other Treasure

Myriad are the spoils of the Crypt.

Various other valuable, non-magical treasures are present in the Crypt. The civilisations of old held great worth in gems and precious metals, even if they are found cursed, debased and covered in filth.

Most Cryptdiggers will spend most of their days accumulating valuable items to sell once they return to civilisation. These are also the main way to generate **Experience**.



In most companies, the Cryptdigger who initially finds the treasure is entitled to their share of the **First Spoils** or **First Pockets**, determined by what they can physically carry out of the Crypt in their backpack and pockets. The remaining profits, after paying the financier of the expedition and covering expenses, are split evenly amongst the entire company. Cryptdiggers will make successive trips into the Crypt to strip it for anything they can for the **Company Spoils**. Taking selfish pieces from the **Company Spoils** is known as **Second Spoils** or **Second Pockets**, and is punished by exile or even death. At the very least, the penalty for **Second Pockets** is having a couple of fingers severed

This book contains no set price lists for goods. Such things should be determined by availability of the good, as well as the materials and labour used in its production. Prices are determined by supply and demand. Of great importance is who is buying the item. A piece of art could be worth thousands of gold coins to an influential fence or merchant in the middle of a thriving city, but its worth little more than the paper it's printed on to a poor farmer from town. Equally, other things may be worth more to the farmer than the merchant.

However, if you do want a price list, a number of excellent ones can be found online. Particular note is given to *Traders and Merchants* by Walrock Homebrew.

The best treasures are strange, unusual and only worth something to very atypical people. If you can take it to the nearest village and exchange it for a large amount of money, then it is probably quite boring.

Coins found in the Crypt should very rarely be of modern denominations and should not be easily interchangeable with them. The modern equivalent would be trying to buy something on the high street of 21<sup>st</sup> century Paris with some 18<sup>th</sup> century French livre. Often, it could be more similar to trying to buy things with the Roman denari you dug up in your back yard. If your money is green, rusting or has holes in it, it probably won't be accepted by your local merchant, and you will earn mostly funny looks for your troubles. However, most Cryptdiggers will know specialist currency fences who will melt your Crypt gold down into liquid metals and give you some sensible modern coin back for it.



# Chapter 6: Worlds of the Crypt

As much as **Best Left Buried** is about dungeoneering, civilisation is important too.

This section outlines some ideas about running adventures or downtime in cities, as well as some lore about the setting I use to run **Best Left Buried** — the Thirteen Duchies of Lendal. Even if this entire setting isn't used wholesale in your games, the goal is to present a list of ideas that be borrowed and cannibalised for whatever settings you choose.

## The World

I tend to surgically add regions from other superb RPG products into the hinterlands of the settings I write in case I, or the players, immediately require a change in scenery or I want to inject something foreign.

To the west of Lendal can be found the lands of Junkai and the Melanic Moors (see *Fire On The Velvet Horizon* by Patrick Stuart and the Scrap Princess). To the east of Lendal, past the Mountains of the Moon, can be found *Yoon Suin and the Purple Land* (see the book of the same name by David McGrogan). Both can be most easily reached by sea, as Junkai

is across the Fallow Ocean and the most westerly reaches of the Mountains of the Moon are nearly impassable. Beyond Yoon Suin are the lands of the *Wicked City* (see the assorted works of Joseph Manola).

## The Thirteen Duchies of Lendal

Before the coming of the Wizard of White Tower, the Thirteen Duchies of Lendal were ruled by a line of kings that sat at the Capital, in the historic duchy of Calmyn. These island archipelagos are rumoured to be the birthplace of humanity, and boast many historic cultures.

Roughly 300 years before the current period, one of the King's advisors, the Wizard of White Tower, launched a successful coup against the king and installed himself as de facto ruler. He has since achieved lichdom, and controls the Duchies from his tower in the Delavan Range. Besides the collection of taxes and the persecution of most demi-humans, such as Elves and Dwarves, the policies determined from White Tower are fairly



minimal, so each duchy has fair rein to establish whatever laws they please. The additional condition is the forbiddance of open warfare between the states. To ensure this, the Wizard keeps an acolyte in the court of each duchy to act as 'advisor' to the Duke or Duchess. These Overseers make up the Council of the Thirteen, who convene with the Wizard by scry at the full moon.

## Duchies

The Duchies are spread across a number of islands. The Great Isle is home to Calmyn, Maigne, Jerrod and Torre, as well as the dwarven ruins of Rytik. The Western Isle is home to Roche, Keene, Salver and Ilym, as well of the elven ruins of Linwode. Each of the Duchies has a distinct culture, environment and economy that can inform the types of characters, vistas and encounters which might be found in each region.

The material presented here is fairly minimal, and is meant to provide the **Doomsayer** with inspiration, and expects them to stay on their feet for precise details. If you can't invent something new for the region, borrow a cultural trait, accent, or quirk from a Renaissance European culture, and you will end up with something appropriate for this area of the world. The main places to look for inspiration for the Great Isle and the Western Isle are southern France and northern Italy, as well as mixing

in ideas from Central European states such as Croatia, Austria and Hungary, whereas the Northern Isles also have influences from England, Scotland and Scandinavia.

## The Great Isle

### Calmyn

The folk of Calmyn ruled all of Lendal and the Capital was once the seat of Good King Yomund. They are most famous for their keen enterprise, and the Great Banks of Calmyn hold thousands of galleons of debt from loans to almost every institution and noble family in Lendal. It is also a place of learning, known for congregations of wizards and numerous libraries and universities. Many of the greatest Freeblades and Cryptdigging companies of the land also call Calmyn home. Its people are polite, quick witted and ambitious. Knowledge of manners and protocol is far more valuable in Calmyn than a bag full of gold, and many visitors hire guides for this reason.

### Maigne

Maigne was the first city to form an alliance with Calmyn. Its folk are fearless explorers and sailors, the first among the people of Lendal to find the foreign land of Junkai across the sea. They are passionate, boisterous and quick to laugh, and their poets are foremost in all of

Lendal. The city of Maigne is built on stilts out of the water beneath a chalk cliff, and most of its underside can be accessed by a network of canals and watery tunnels.

## **Jerrod**

Unlike their Maignish cousins, the folk of Jerrod are dour and predictable. Jerrod enjoys a hilly landscape which is rich for mining and wine growing. They also benefit from skilled smiths and great aristocratic wealth, gained from their past trade with the now absent dwarves of Rytik. Their grasp of technology is only matched by their love of rich and extravagant food, which permeates every layer of their society.

## **Torre**

In ancient times Torre was a land of savannahs, but foul goblin sorcery has since wrought great floods upon the land and it is now a fetid, warm swampland. Ruins of some of humanity's oldest cities litter the marshes, many of which are filled with goblinoids and other violent demi-humans. Torre itself is a city of marble temples, whose folk are religious to a point of fault. They are famed for their mathematicians and cartographers.

## **The Western Isle**

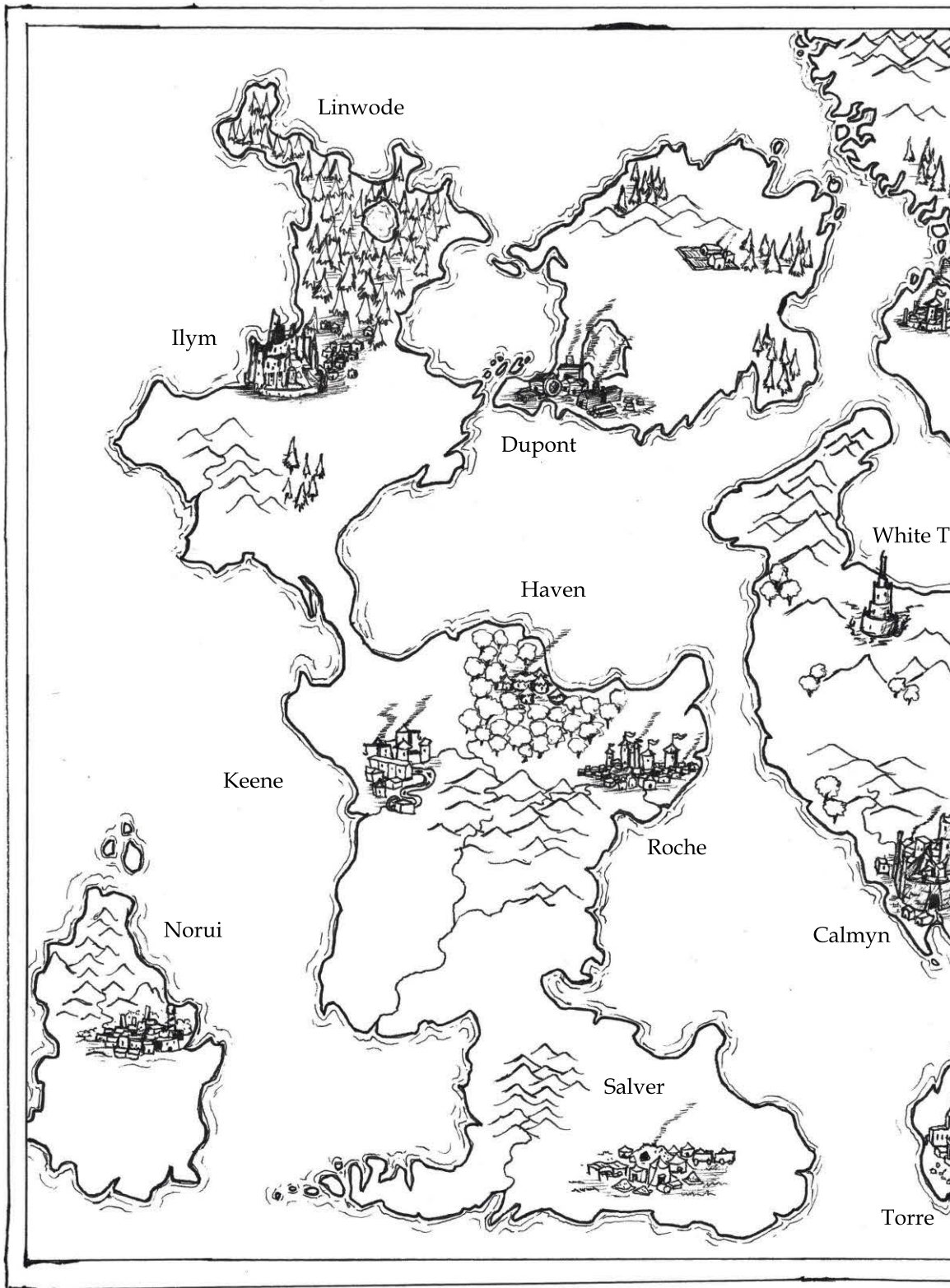
### **Roche**

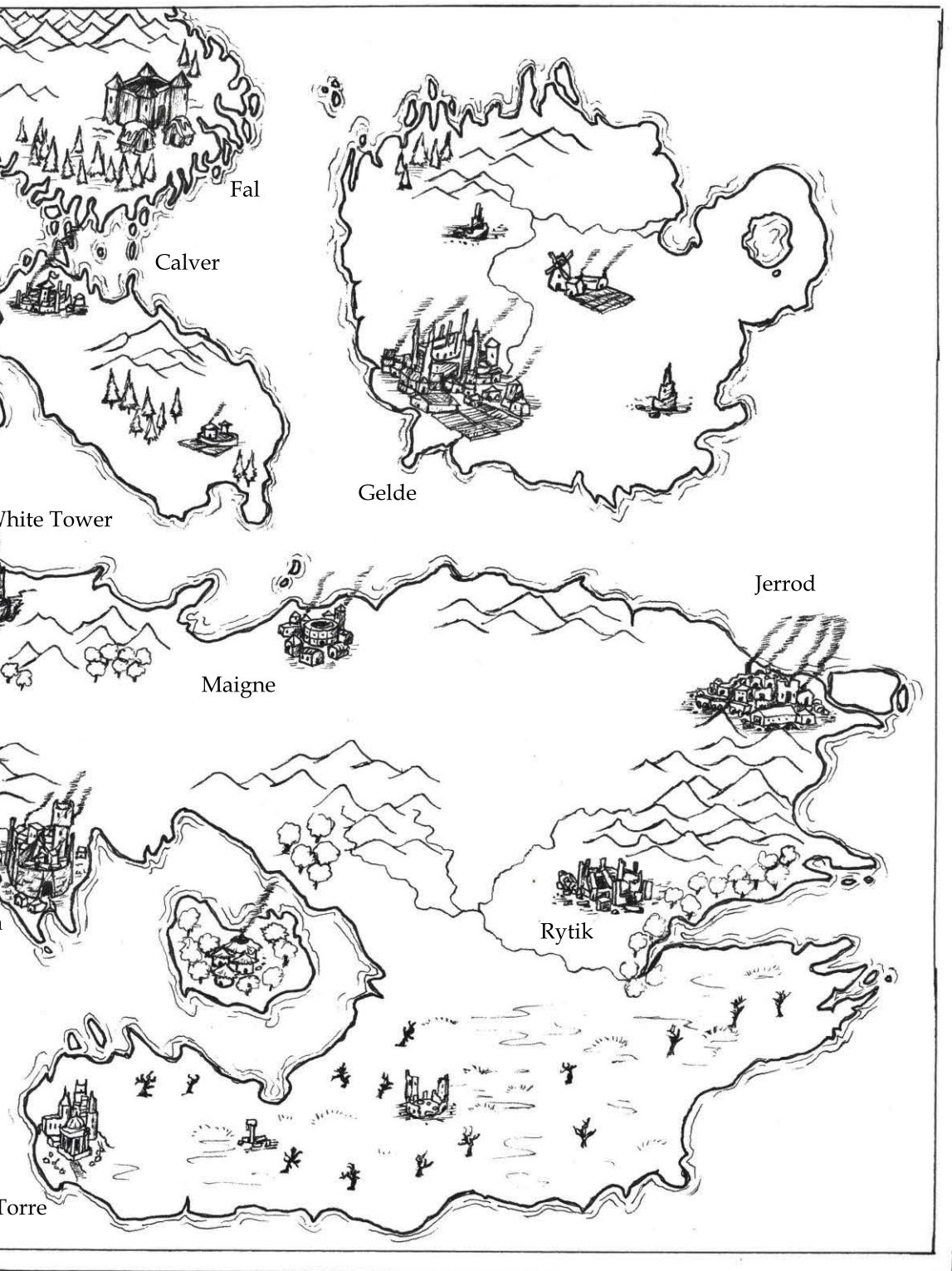
Roche is the most populous duchy of the Western Isle. It has been both mocked and praised as "The Second City" and is regarded as Lendal's centre of culture and philosophy. Their economy is famed for exports of spices and dyes, and its people spearhead the most avant-garde of fashions. While they call themselves romantics, Roche's nobility are viewed by others as pompous, extravagant dullards. They are also much resented by their own rising middle classes, as well as teeming hordes of the working class within the city. Regardless, Roche possesses many beautiful vistas and is known as the Garden Duchy.

### **Keene**

The folk of Keene are hard-working and enterprising, but equally known for their love of wine and music. They are slow to forgive grudges, and Keene and Roche are the closest to open warfare of the city states within Lendal. They are embroiled in seemingly endless disputes over the gold-bearing hills of their shared border. Cultists in Keene were first to begin worshipping the Wizard of the White Tower as a god, and the First Church of the Prophet resides here.







## Salver

Salver is a wide grassland renowned for exporting fine horses. They are also known for the trade of spices, which they trade with places as far as Yoon-Suin and Junkai. The people of Salver are prone to long stretches of silence, and when a Salveri opens his mouth, most folk know to listen. They also love to gamble on horse races, dogfights, cards or anything else. They trade in great underground markets. If one wishes to sell something strange or illicit, the silence of the Salveri merchant is a luxury worth travelling for.

## Ilym

The citadel of Ilym is built into white cliffs above the sea, rumoured to be crafted by an alliance of its historic Duke and a high order Earth Elemental named The Architect. Its people are fearful, isolationist and prone to believing even the most outlandish of folklores. They live in the shadows and shallows of the Linwode, a haunted forest where the Elves slumber and trees are said to walk. For more on the Linwode, see the *Weird of the Wode*, also by SoulMuppet Publishing.

## The Northern Isles

### Dupont

The lands of Dupont are deeply forested, and provide many exports of fine timber. While their ships are the best crafted in all of Lendal, their

seamen are despised for their almost perpetual drunkenness. The folk of Dupont are even more obsessed with alcohol than their neighbours, and fashion a fine liquor brewed from tree-sap. They are known for their joyfulness and love of life, as well as their unusual culture of obsessive gift-giving.

### Calver

Chivalry still reigns in Calver, and the knights of its land are famed. The folk of Calver adore crafting and telling of stories and myths, for its rough foothills and shallow lakes are supposedly filled with monsters worthy of slaying. Most of their folk live in walled towns, hiding from the worst of these creatures. Some of the Calveri knightly orders operate as little more than glorified mercenary companies, but others truly remember the ancient values of knighthood. Their main export is tin and iron, as well as fine weapons and armour, and a suit of Calveri plate is a good worthy of song.

### Fal

Ruled from the city of Lastholme, most of Fal is a frozen wildland. Its people speak in guttural accents and adore telling stories, never allowing themselves to be one-upped by a friend or rival. The northern borders of Fal are rife with orckind, and many young are abducted and taken as slaves or

child soldiers. This is widely regarded as a myth by foreigners. In ancient myths, the last true dragons called Fal home, and the worship of the Dragon God Ados is common there.

## **Gelde**

Gelde is full of wide, sweeping greenlands, and produces a huge quantity of food and other grains that are exported to the other Duchies. It is the ancestral homeland of the Small Folk, and its human inhabitants share their love of rest and plenty. Despite their stereotype of laziness, any Gelder will put in a solid shift if they know there's a meal at the end of it. Gelde is also famed for its wizards, and the land is littered with ruined towers. Its capital has the most prestigious university outside of Calmyn — the famed White Arcadium.

## **The Last Isle**

### **Norui**

Norui was the last of the duchies to join in the alliance, and is viewed as a haven for outcasts. Much of its land is a barren desert, but its people make do via a brisk sea trade and fishing. The Norui are more optimistic and outwards looking than other peoples of Lendal. Many foreign and even non-human races find solace here in communes as part of the city, notably the Slugmen of Yoon-Suin and Seapeoples of Herad. The Duke has earned a number of

warnings from his wizardly advisor, and these communities exist on a knife-edge. The ancient Norui built great temples for their dead under the desert, many of which provide ample pickings for Cryptdiggers.

## **Crypts**

Included below are some sample Crypts you might use as adventure locations, plot hooks or for flavourful discussions amongst boastful Cryptdiggers.

### **The Ruins of Rytik**

This ancient citadel is the only above ground remnant of dwarven civilisation. Following the death of Good King Yomund, the Wizard declared war on dwarfkind and struck Rytik with a great spell that opened a rift to the depths of the Great Dark. Rytik has since become a popular expedition site for Cryptdiggers, as its halls are still full of monsters and the famed riches of the dwarves. The chasm also has a direct route into the Great Dark, and the permanent tent city of Descent operates a lift that will lower entire companies into the veins of the earth for entirely unreasonable prices.

### **The Verden Obelisk**

On the Isle of Cape Verde in the Gulf of Torre, there is a mile high obelisk of white stone. When the moon is high, a portal is said to



open in its walls that leads to a subterranean dungeon filled with the watery dead.

## **The Orc-Halls**

Far north past Fal is the spiritual home of the great orc tribes. Were these scattered tribes ever able to unite under one leader, Lastholme would surely be doomed. The war relics of the tribes are kept within the Orc-Halls, the spoils of a thousand raids and conquests. They would make ripe pickings for any adventurer willing to brave the hordes.

## **Aluneth, The Marble City**

When the Elves fled into the Linwode, they left their capital behind. To salt the lands they lost they broke the seals on the Well of Souls, and now Aluneth is filled with the vengeful ghosts of the Elven dead. Despite this, great treasures and items of antiquity were abandoned in its empty halls as the Elves fled. For more on Aluneth, see the **Weird of the Wode** by SoulMuppet Publishing.

## **The Acropolis of Lys**

Deep in the swamps of Torre, Lys was capital of the first Tyranny. The Tyrant of Lys held control over much of the birthplace of humanity, but this sacred, god-forgotten city is said to be filled with unholy bog monsters and toadlike goblinoids. Despite this, even the simplest scraps

taken from Lys can be profound cultural artefacts that would be greatly desirable to curators and archeologists.

## **The Tower of the Alchemist**

The Tower of the Alchemist is the ruined home of a powerful archmage who discovered several terrible secrets of transmutation. The Alchemist died following a failed experiment, and now the tower is crawling with strange creatures who are the runoff of her attempts to animate metallic compounds with chained lightning, swampwater and other assorted chemics.

## **Haven**

Haven is the temple city of the Catfolk, and can be found in the deep jungles on the borders of Roche and Keene. The jungles are teeming with feral creatures and carnivorous plants, bred by the Catfolk to protect their homeland from humanity. The pyramids and temples of the Catfolk are filled with strange religious artefacts that hold great power and are deeply desired by the Wizard and his minions.

## **Lord Swallow's Court**

The legend of the Vampire spreads from Lord Swallow's Court. Lord Swallow was a Blood Elven Necromancer who was slain centuries ago by Saint Vincent the



Yewbearer and the knights of the Order of the Blessed Rose. The tale of Saint Vincent was responsible for the proliferation of the various methods of slaying "vampires", from holy water to garlic to stakes of living wood. While Lord Swallow is definitely dead, his ancient castle is still haunted by the living dead and the Duke of Calver still has a sizeable bounty on the head of any vampires.

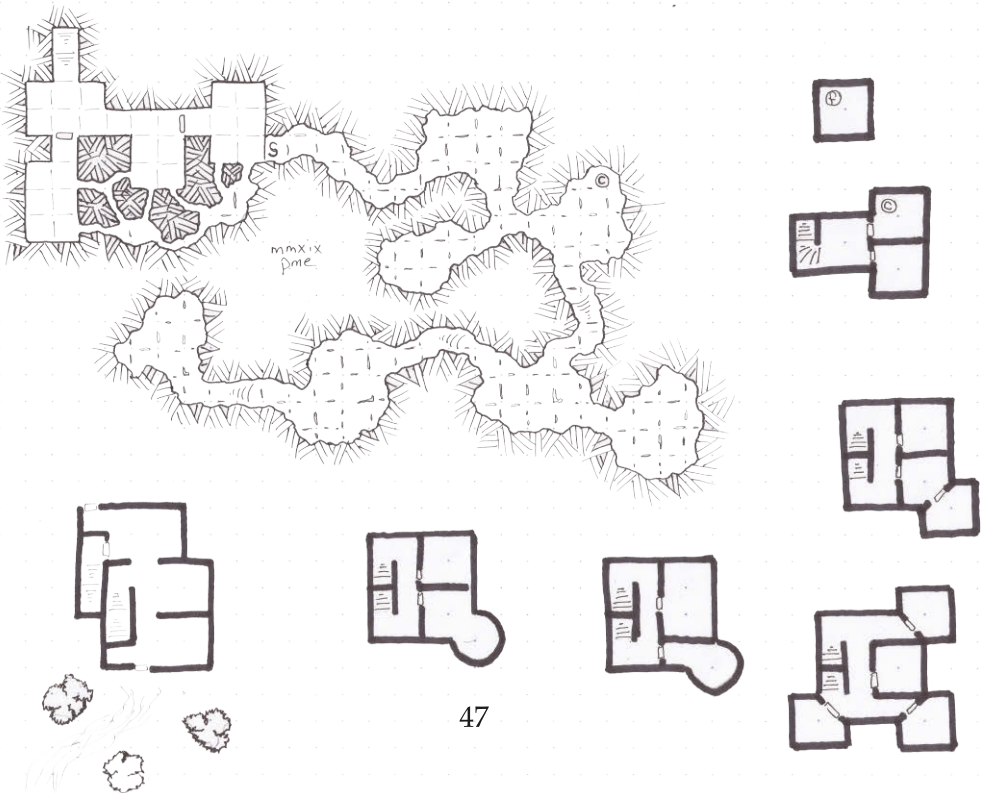
## Ramesak's Refuge

The ancestors of the Norui built great tombs for their dead, to keep their corpses and their treasures safe from necromancers and grave robbers. Ramesak's Refuge is notable among these structures as it is

stricken with a null field that negates certain types of magic, including necromancy. This tomb is unguarded by monsters, but instead filled with all of the traps of the delirious God-King Ramesak, who was an accomplished wizard and engineer. Some of the contraptions that defend the tomb are said to boggle the mind.

## Lord Edmund's Barrow

For more on this dungeon, see **Chapter 8: Lord Edmund's Barrow.**



## Contacts

Contacts can be useful allies or rivals for the characters or entire companies, or just as interesting people for the players to meet while back in civilisation. Most of these characters are useful for selling things or providing quest hooks, and the characters existing contacts might point them towards one of them if they have something they are looking to sell. They are intended to be location neutral, and can be placed in whichever Duchy or other setting you require, as long as you are happy plopping down their dwelling or business.



## Jeremina Clipper

Known as Clipper to her friends, Jeremina runs a quasi-legal service where she melts down Crypt-Gold into its base metals and sells it to industry contacts. Coins of mythical origin are not accepted as standard tender in Lendal. She pays the Cryptdiggers a shockingly low base rate of around 20% of what it's worth, which increases depending on the quantity and quality of the metal. Weird coins cost extra.

She is a middle aged woman with dyed red hair and a peg leg, who speaks in the cutting-edge slang of the local criminal underclass. She would love nothing more than to be free of her debt to the local crime boss, and will recruit friendly Cryptdiggers to achieve this.

## Uspu The Antiquarian

Uspu is a peddler of antiques and items of exceptionality. He is constantly on the run from the authorities, and travels from place to place, usually setting up shop in the underside of the neighbourhood's seediest tavern. He dresses in alchemist's robes, and is never seen anywhere without his trademark pigskin mask and thick goggles, which he claims protects him from the "foul humours of the urban landscape".

He will have D6 **Mortal Treasures** on him at any one time, and has a 50% likelihood of carrying a

**Monstrous Treasure.** He prefers bartering or favours to exchanges of coin as he is rarely “cash rich”. If he sees an item he “simply must possess”, he will continue to make offers and threats until it is his.

If killed, Uspu will collapse into a cloud of gas and reform in 3 days, attempting to seek vengeance for his murder, however impractical this may be. His clients are usually embroiled in these schemes, voluntarily or otherwise.

## **Taxbal the Slugman**

Taxbal is a massive snob. His official role is the Undersecretary to the Ambassador from the Yellow City. However the day to day workload seems to mostly be made up of living comfortably while moaning about the lacking quality of human culture, architecture and opium. In fact, he will constantly compare the inferiority of anything Lendish to its slugman equivalent, and heavily patronise anyone who attempts to debate him on these matters.

The Slug Men of **Yoon Suin** are aristocrats whose tea parlours and opium dens are the envy of the entire world. Taxbal is a social outcast from the culture of the Yellow City, effectively exiled by the matriarch of his noble house for an embarrassing incident that he will not ever speak of.

Taxbal’s expertise is unsurprisingly in the substances of the night. He will buy drugs, poisons and other

interesting chemics from the party. However, Taxbal’s regular shipment of opiates from his homeland has been delayed by bandits (or whatever other adversary you require), and he will pay handsomely for its return. Nothing else hits the spot for him.

Once you become very friendly with Taxbal, he may provide occasional narcotics-based nights of extravagance. These might clear **Grip** or even **Afflictions**, but the most extravagant carousing table you can find will be required.

## **Jaspal the Arrogate**

Jaspal is an arrogant, or travelling priest. He moves from village to village acting as a magistrate and religious official for settlements otherwise too small for their own. He will officiate weddings, funerals, trials or transfers of land, taking donations from the townsfolk. He is mostly a vagrant who moves between these positions.

Jaspal is a legitimately charming young man with a strong heart and wide network of contacts throughout the church and the common-folk, who respect him for his honesty and integrity. He is also a spy.

Jaspal is actually the long-time cover of Fortin, a high ranking agent or official of whatever crime boss, bandit, evil priest, Thieves’ Guild, nobleman or wizard the

campaign requires. Jasper's position as an adored man of the people tends to be a reliable position to find out valuable information, as well as a solid guise for approaching Cryptdiggers to pump them for intel.

## Baroness Rosette

Baroness Rosette is an art collector and member of the local aristocracy. She is of advanced years and pristine upbringing, and has more than enough money to spend on the extravagances of her trade. She purchases recovered "artwork" from Cryptdiggers and sells them via auction to a network of archeologists, academics and collectors.

Some works that suit her own interest are even added to her own personal gallery. Her preferred art forms are Elven sculpture, Dwarven pornography, Toadling dream collages and ultraviolet sub-light paintings from the denizens of the Great Dark.

Many of these styles are frowned upon by the church, and the worst are deemed heretical. There are always priests and inquisitors seeking inroads to interrogate her and have her collection destroyed, and the Baroness always requires folk of a certain cut to bribe and threaten them.

## Cobbert the Powdermaker

Cobbert is an alchemist, gunsmith and manufacturer of explosives. This is generally regarded as a poorly synergistic skill set for someone with such a love of flame. Cobbert is loud, flamboyant and opinionated, and while many see him as somewhat of a bumpkin, he is an excellent demolitionist.

He is always on the lookout for new chemics and materials he can use for his experiments. He particularly craves examples of Dwarven artifice, which are the highest form of his craft. Cobbert probably has a few ideas for where he could find useful materials, and will offer to finance any Cryptdiggers willing to help him locate them.



## Molly Cackler

Mol runs a tavern called the Cackling Cockatrice. It is one of those taverns where people who lead adventurous lives tend to gather, and as a result Mol has many friends amongst this cohort of freeblades, wizards and explorers. She is middle-aged, jolly and fairly plump, with short, dark hair. Molly loves talking to anyone about anything, and is particularly keen to hear about the exploits of young Cryptdiggers.

Some of Molly's friends will tell you she used to be Cryptdigger in her younger years, but if confronted about this, she will probably laugh it off. In fact, she used to run a company back in "the old days". If you need someone to sell something or get information from someone, she probably knows who you could talk to.

## Withal Primrose

Withal is a clerk in the local branch of Finnegan's and Son, one of Calmyn's leading banks. One of F&S's areas of business is lending money to Cryptdiggers who are on particularly promising expeditions, and Withal is one of the leading administrators of this function. They also handle the auction and sale of "extraction licenses" of some Crypts which lie on privately-owned land. If she holds you in good regard, she can ensure cheaper rates of interest on loans, the first pick of any interesting

contracts and licenses the bank comes across, as well as delays before bounty hunters are sent if you miss payment. A sympathetic ear is very useful in a financial institution.

Banking is boring, but Withal is very good at it. She is a young, officious woman with a razor intellect. She has a glass eye from a childhood accident.

## The Hasteless

The Hasteless is a wizard of some age, who boasts all of the trappings and attires of the classical wizard: pointy hat, white beard, staff, robes, etc. He runs a library called the Harpy's Hall, where intellectuals gather to pool knowledge. The Hall is always filled with patrons, even at the strangest hours of the morning. The Hasteless has absolutely no sense of urgency. As a result of a misfired Haste Spell in his youth, his actions have been slowed permanently. He is the leading source of knowledge within the city he inhabits. The specialism of the library is ancient history and magical theory, but it also has tomes and scrolls in some quantity on almost any subject. As long as you are reasonably polite, happy to not speak above a whisper within the stacks and capable of paying the extravagant late return fees, most wizardly or academic types will be welcome in the Hall. The Hasteless hates rogues and criminals with a hot passion, and often suspects thievish types of wanting to steal from his collection.



# Gods and Religion

When assembling a list of gods for a setting, it is important to consider different pantheons and eras of religion. Like the real world, an entire civilisation rarely joins in the monolithic worship of the same ten gods. Think about the relationships between different gods, different pantheons and even different followers. Each religion will likely have orthodox and radical practitioners of various schools of thought.

## New Gods

Usually the result of faddish urban movements and cults, the New Gods are rarely bringers of divine miracles. Followers of the New Gods often commit acts of violence upon those of older faiths, who in turn tend to look down on them as philosophical movements rather than genuine religious creeds.

## Example: The God-Wizard

Some priests worship the Wizard of White Tower as a deity. While the Wizard himself still exists upon earth, many followers consider his ascent to lichdom as the beginning of a transition to true godhood. Radicals within the church seek to kill the wizard and destroy his physical form so he can finally ascend.

The priests of the God-Wizard do not wield the same magics of the

Godsmen of "heathen" religions, but do often carry considerable arcane power from worship of their master.

## The Old Gods

The Old Gods were worshipped en masse before the Wizard's ascension. They were first worshipped by Elves and Dwarves, and are not native gods to humanity. Like the Elves, the Old Gods are classically without gender. Despite this, most modern, relatively secular humans tend to refer to them with gendered pronouns. Worship of the Old Gods is practiced throughout Lendal, but is most common in the Northern Isles.

There are eight Old Gods, and while they are thought of as a family by most worshippers, they are in fact rivals and allies of convenience, spread across the axis of cosmic allegiances and domains.

The Old Gods originate from the Star Tree of Bythonia, which floats aimlessly through the void of space. Their primary symbol is a starlit tree or a streaking comet – the method by which their most powerful servants arrive on earth.

Many of the priests of the Old Gods mask their gender to match their gods. Many of their temples resemble Elvish buildings, and have the style of pagodas found on Earth. Folk who are not priests will commonly refer to gods by their

titles, and only invoke their names in times of great need or while swearing.

## **Vaul the Maker**

Vaul is revered as the creator of life, who fashioned all things in the fires of creation. He is respected by craftsmen, leaders and dwarves for his wisdom. The Old Gods call him King. His followers are uncaring for good and evil, and simply tend to the status quo that Vaul set the world upon in the first days. Vaul was once praised as a mighty warrior before he was maimed in single combat with the Thousand-Eyed-Giant, an impossible creature from the Place Beyond. In ancient times, only kings and royalty were permitted to pray to Vaul, but in the modern era this restriction has lessened.

## **Hannar the Giver**

Hannar is praised as the creator of the world's plants and animals, and is regarded as a god of the wild. What Vaul creates, she nurtures like a mother. The Elves of the Woodland hold great love for Hannar. Unlike most gods of nature, Hannar welcomes settlements appearing in her sacred wildlands, initially showering them with gifts, but eventually swallowing their homes under a mass of flora.

## **Ados the Drake**

Ados is the god of purity, light and righteousness. His followers despise witches and mages, and frequently burn the followers of the "false gods" of other pantheons. Ados is father of all dragons, and the true dragons that remain are worshipped as disciples of the great lizard. Many orders of knights have Ados as their patron, and his worship is popular in the Northern Isles. Within large cities in the Northern Isles, the most prominent temple will almost always be that of Ados.

The Wizard resents the Church of the Scale for the power it holds over his people, but still fears it. Previously, followers of the Church have stood in open rebellion against the Kings of Lendal, and at times in history the entirety of the Northern Isles has been at war with the kingdom.

## **Freyal the Hearthkeeper**

Freyal is the god of family, law and home. Her followers are stalwart providers of hospitality, and if you see the brass sign of the Hearthkeeper above a door on your travels, you know that warm food and lodgings can be had. As well as being a patron of innkeepers, Freyal has custodianship over one of the premier knightly order of Lendal, the Order of the Blessed Rose, who are her sworn followers. It is common for the young to pray to Freyal for husbands and wives and

the old to pray to her for healthy children. If these prayers are answered, they usually take the form of small blessings instead of grand miracles.

## **Vashni the Slayer**

Vashni is the god of war and death, and lives on the battlefields of Lendal. When the followers of Vashni die, they are supposedly transported to his home plane where they can forever experience glorious combat in an eternal war. Vashni despises the undead, and views them as an abomination that disrupts the correct passage of life and death.

A faction within Vashni's worshippers is the Cult of the Undying, a group of priests who continually resurrect the same group of legendary warriors to battle particularly heinous enemies of the cult or threats against the fabric of reality. Such necromancy is considered vile heresy by the rest of Vashni's followers.

## **Keelathi the Seer**

Keelathi is the god of secrets and magic. She is adored by many sorcerers, particularly those who find themselves in conflict with the Wizard. Like their god, Keelathi's followers adore secrets and most hoard arcane knowledge, practicing in underground groups. There is no central church of Keelathi and her worshippers are extremely fractured,

almost exclusively as part of small cults with widely differing traditions.

## **Barathiel the Allfather**

Barathiel is a god of many faces, claiming dominion of the four elements. His worshippers name him Earthshaper, Stormlord, Tidecaller and Firemaker, and say he crafted the world in the ancient days. A common belief amongst his cultists is that Small Gods are Barakiel's children, but some radicals believe that the many gods of the elements are only his different faces and that the Allfather is, in fact, every god. Most priests of the Small Gods reject both of these theories.

Amongst the common folk, Barathiel is blamed by many for plagues, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, and other natural disasters. Whenever catastrophe strikes in Lendal, the cultists of the Allfather always scream for sacrifice, claiming the end times are nigh. Barathiel is an uncaring god, and the only sacrifice he accepts is human blood.

## **Narak-Y-Karan the**

### **Trickster**

Narak-Y-Karan is the two faced god of mischief, trickery and duality. He is patron to thieves, merchants and outlaws. While Narak extols kindness, joy and charity to others, Karan is a darker

goddess who takes joy in torture, death and thievery. Interacting with their followers is an interesting exercise, which has wildly differing outcomes depending on their god's will. This will is interpreted through a complicated series of omens decreed by Saint Olval the Dualhearted, who was close enough to her gods to be able to interpret their fickle desires. She constructed a series of seven hundred commandments that cover a wide variety of omens, portents, signs and clues as to their divine will. They are nearly incomprehensible to heathens, but followers of the Trickster find them to be an iron-shod set of instructions. Their interpretations differ amongst different schools of the wider cult, and engaging with a Godsmen of the Trickster in debate within this field borders on impossible. Worshippers of the Trickster are just as likely to feed orphans as burn them alive, so their worship is conducted in secret or away from urban centres.

## Small Gods

There are small gods of the hills and the valleys and the forests. There are gods living in the depths of the seas and on the withering winds. The deepest darkness that lives in the forgotten earth can become a god with enough belief. They have strange names: Talltrees, Nighthowl, Waterdeep, Southwind, Longwinter, Stippledark.



Considered by greater deities to be little more than demons of the wild, Small Gods are the spirits of the earth who occasionally draw worship from monsters or savage humans. Druids and Rangers also often pray to the Small Gods of the streams, forests and mountains. In places where nature runs wild, these beings can amass considerable power.

The power of Small Gods is driven by faith and sacrifice. According to some tales, Small Gods can be slain. First, their followers must be killed, then their temples ruined, and finally their sacred relics cast into flames or the sea.

## Example: The Moon

The Moon is one of the greatest of the Small Gods. She brings the tide and her wings reflect the starlight. The fuel of her belief comes from the dwarves' deep fear of her. Dwarves leave sacrifices of silver out beneath the night sky for her to take. They pray her song won't take hold of them. They scratch her image on the roofs of their buildings. All of this gives fuel to the moon, driving her power and growing terror. The Moon provides her most powerful priests with the powers the dwarves most despise.

## The Ancients

There are three Ancients, who their priests say created all of the world. They are dead gods, slain in the Dawn War, a great and terrible conflict where the giants who served the Ancients fought the heralds and dragons of the Old Gods.

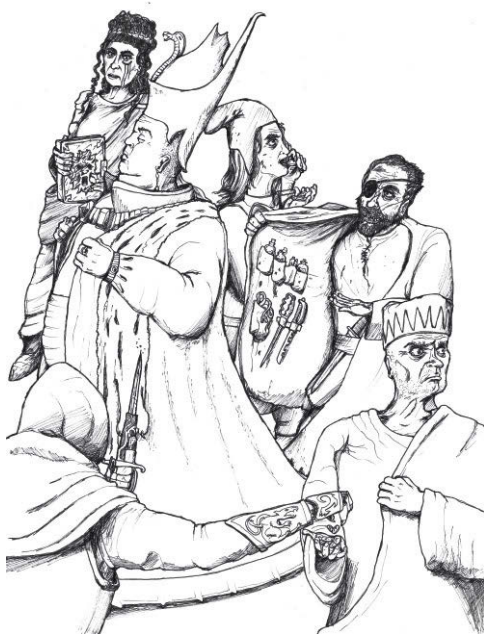
Three relics remain hidden in the dark corners of the world, one for each god, and when wielded their powers could unmake the very earth, sea and sky. They are the Heart of Arden, the Eye of Umbar and the Soul of J'Kun. The priests of the Ancients plot to use these artefacts to resurrect them, but this is an almost impossible feat which would require materials from across the world and the wider cosmos.

## Cryptdigger Fashion

The best Cryptdiggers have the most money, and the best way to spend it is on outrageous fashion that shows you are the best of the business.

Members of the company might have signature pieces of clothings or weird equipment pieces. Spot colouring is also common, and members of the company might share common palettes or items of jewellery. Particularly leaders of the company might have their own fashion ideas to help them stand out.

The Sons of Ember might all favour dress coats, the Crimson Cloaks might all wear dashing red outerwear and the High Moon might bear small silver jewellery with lunar iconography.





# Cryptdigger Fashion

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Alabaster Masks	Animal Furs	Bandanas	Bootknife	Neckerchiefs	Chainmail Sewn into Overcoats
2	Deliberately Torn Cloaks	Distinctive Tattoos	Dyed Hair	Embellishing Feathers	Equipment on Bandolier	Fake Gemstones
3	Fishbone Necklaces	Gilded Armour	Heraldic Emblems	Jackets with Countless Pockets	Lacquered Leather Armour	Long, Blustery Cloaks
4	Makeup	Obnoxious Jewellery	Oilsealed Longcoats	Ornate Scarves	Patterned Handkerchief	Piercings
5	Prayerbeads	Rare Fabrics	Religious Iconography	Ruffled Collars	Sash with Concealed Razorblades	Silvered Weapons
6	Slashed Tunics	Studded Waistcoats	Turtleshell Scalemail	Unusual Haircuts	Whale Leather Bracers	Wide Brimmed Hats





# Chapter 7: The Camp

If your players each have one character, you will need to work out how to organise the party within the wider Cryptdigging company.

Companies often travel to Crypts together and set up a shared camp. The rules for running a camp can be found in the second half of this chapter, but it usually is made up of between 5 and 50 Cryptdiggers.

It is assumed that your set of characters each make up one Wing of the company, a small group of between 3 and 10 Cryptdiggers that run shifts together. Like a squad or platoon in a modern military unit, this group will sleep together, eat together, do guard duties and chores together, and also adventure into the Crypt as a unit.

The Wing is led by a Sergeant or Commander, who reports in to the Company's Council. The Sergeant is voted for by each wing, but this is a function of company politics as much as it is a pure meritocracy. The Sergeant may be a character, or they also might be an NPC controlled by the **Doomsayer**.

There are usually five member of the council: the Guildmaster, the Sage, the Prophet, the Recruiter and the Quartermaster. They vote on decisions to determine the path the company takes, and the Guildmaster has the deciding vote in case of a tie. However, the

Prophet holds great sway in these discussions, as the ability to see the future proves essential in many debates.

Every expedition, the votes for council members are recast. A replacement is typically voted in as soon as possible if the standing council member dies or retires. Elections are a tumultuous time for the company. "Campaigning" or making promises about future voting is typically regarded as poor form, and the company members are meant to vote on merit alone. In potentially close elections, this tradition is very quickly cast aside.

If the collected Wing Sergeants agree unanimously, a vote of no confidence can be put forth for a Council Member, and the entire company can vote. If two thirds of a Wing finds their Sergeant unsatisfactory, they can request a vote on a new Sergeant. Both these practices are regarded as shameful and underhanded.

Company wide votes are adjudicated by the Recruiter, who counts the votes and reports the results. If the Recruiter's position is being voted on, another Council Member is given the responsibility. These are cast in private with the Silver Coin as evidence of company membership. If the coin is lost or spent, the Cryptdigger loses their right to vote.

## The Coin

Upon joining the company, Cryptdiggers are given a large silver coin as a symbol of membership. While this coin has great value (typically about a year's wages for a labourer), it is rarely spent by company members. It is not only a sign of membership, but also used to vote in elections and to put forward one's point in a public debate. "Breaking the coin" for mundane expenditure is highly frowned upon, and essentially prevents a Cryptdigger from progressing in rank. Outside of companies, there is a significant black market for Cryptdigger coins as status symbols, or as tools for thieves and charlatans. Most Cryptdiggers are buried with their coins, making ripe pickings for graverobbers.

While some view the coin as a status symbol, it represents much more than that. Joining a company is a binding contract. Most companies reflect this with the signing of a document, but others employ sorcerous oaths, binding geases or offers of blood to ensure members do not flee with their winnings. Desertion is punishable by death, and retirement is rarely an option.

## Retirement

In normal circumstances, high ranking guild members may be allowed to retire on merit grounds, usually subject to a company wide vote. In a widely practised loophole,

it is possible to petition the Guildmaster for an exception to the voting process, but the Guildmaster is allowed to demand a task be completed so the contract can be voided. This usually takes the format of finding some particular treasure or defeating a legendary monster, so the retiree can either earn their exit or die in a blaze of glory. Spiteful Guildmasters have been known to make demands that are impossible, such as walking on the moon, slaying a god or presenting truly mythical artefacts. Folk tales are filled with stories of Cryptdiggers who have done just that in hope of a quiet life.

It is widely held amongst Guildmasters that the lofty possibility of retirement for exceptional Cryptdiggers is good for company morale, so retirement is allowed for a select few.

Due to the stringent retirement processes, many old Cryptdiggers are well past their time. These men and women often help out around the camp, acting as camp followers or servants and helping with chores. They often act as non-combatant council members, and are a valuable source of wisdom. Many of them bear **Afflictions** and **Injuries** from their years of service, and some are nothing more than glorified hangers-on. It is rare for a company to move around with half again of its active Cryptdiggers population in veteran camp followers.

# Roleplaying The Camp

When playing this sort of campaign, you can provide really interesting relationship building between your characters and the camp. After a long session's dungeon crawling, you can return the characters to the camp and subject them to what normal life is like for these adventurers.

Cryptdiggers gossip. They might hear rumours about weird monsters or deadly traps around the camp. They might hear stories of Cryptdiggers who went in and didn't come back.

Transplant tropes or realities from the modern workplace into the camp. There might be a boss who is angry at the characters because they never bring back enough treasure. There might be teacher's pets who always do exactly what their boss wants them to and always suck up. There might be fellow wings who the characters either like or hate, acting as their friends or rivals. The characters might receive a set of orders that just don't make sense. You might have a couple of fresh-faced recruits asking for some advice, or some old timers who are mocking you for your elementary mistakes.

The hubbub of the camp can provide a sharp contrast with the Crypt, and allow you to focus on the roleplaying and relationship building pillars of a game, rather than the features that Best Left Buried usually focuses on, such as combat and exploration.

Building a relationship with the company as a whole can provide opportunities for the characters to grow in rank. More powerful characters can get elected as council members, allowing them greater responsibility and a chance to make big decisions for the company.

## Council Members

Every Cryptdigger company has five council members: the Guildmaster, the Scholar, the Prophet, the Quartermaster and the Recruiter.

The Guildmaster is the highest ranking official and de-facto leader of the company. They act as a public face for people looking to employ the company, and they must have a firm grasp of both dungeoneering techniques and military tactics. They get the deciding vote in the event of a tie. The role is often seen as more of a statesman role than a practical one, but most Guildmasters are fearsome adventurers.

The Scholar handles knowledge and research for the guild, offering information and wisdom in decision-making. They are usually wizards or Godsmen, and tend to any magic items, scrolls and potions the company owns. Most Scholars also keep libraries of books, which they can consult if their considerable knowledge is not enough.



The Recruiter is usually a charismatic Cryptdigger, responsible for finding recruits and convincing them to join the company, as well as for their early training. While this might seem like a simple role, companies live and die on the quantity and quality of their new members, and the Recruiter keeps them flowing. While away from society, Recruiters tend to act as wranglers by organising shifts, training recruits and making sure the company members stay in line. They also adjudicate elections.

The Quartermaster handles equipment, resources and finances. Theoretically, this role also includes ensuring the members of the company are well fed, but this is often outsourced to other company members. While it is often seen as a boring, bureaucratic role, it is a vital position for company success. Nothing is worse than being halfway through an expedition, and running out of torches. It is thus held by one person for a long time, so there are no sudden changes that could disrupt supply lines.

The Prophet is a role exclusively held by wizards or Godsmen, usually ones with visions of the future. The Prophet advises the other guild members with sooth that can guide the company to greater deeds or avoid fell warnings. However, no prophecy is perfect.

## Orders

Parties are often sent into the Crypt with specific orders from a Council Member. Sometimes they are obvious, but other times they will serve some strange agenda. Roll below if you need ideas.

## Resting

If you want to use more mechanical resting rules than the narrative based resting rules in the **Cryptdigger's Guide to Survival**, you can use the below tables to simulate rests and their outcomes. You can either roll for each individual character, or roll for the group. The **Doomsayer** can decide whether any **Mishaps** are applied to one character or all of them.

### Sample Orders (2d6)

- |   |                                   |    |                            |
|---|-----------------------------------|----|----------------------------|
| 2 | Capture Monster                   | 7  | Find Treasure              |
| 3 | Locate Nest/Den/Settlement        | 8  | Scout Area                 |
| 4 | Make Contact With Monster Faction | 9  | Create Map                 |
|   |                                   | 10 | Destroy Resource           |
| 5 | Destroy Monster                   | 11 | Rescue Cryptdigger         |
| 6 | Reach Area/Room                   | 12 | Retrieve Specific Artefact |

## Quality of Rest

Rest locations are rated on the following scale. The nicer the camp, the less likely you are to suffer **Mishaps** and the more likely you are to recover **Grip** and **Vigour**.

**Shocking:** Shoddy Crypt Digs, Sleeping in the Dirt, Hermit's Hovel

**Poor:** Secure Crypt Digs, Improvised Camp, Peasant Dwellings, Seedy Tavern

**Basic:** Urban Housing, Modest or Rural Tavern, Standard Camp

**Good:** Urban, Friendly or Pleasant Tavern, Luxurious Camp, Quality Housing

**Special:** Sophisticated House Party, Staying with Local Noble, Shady Enterprise, Luxury Brothel, Gambling Den

## Recovery

To rest normally, roll a D6 on the **Recovery Table** that relates to your rest quality and apply the result.

To carouse, spend between 1 and 3 **Experience**. Roll an extra D6 for each **Experience** spent. You recover the highest result rolled. However, you apply a number of **Mishaps** equal to the total number of **Mishaps** rolled across all of the dice, not just the highest result.

When you roll on a **Mishap Table**, you can choose to roll again on the column to the left of your original quality on the recovery table to rest again. You apply this result in addition to the first one. If you **Mishap** again, you can continue to re-roll on the column to the left until you run out of tables.

### Recovery Table

Dice	Shocking	Poor	Basic	Good	Special
1	Mishap	Mishap	Mishap	Mishap	Mishap
2	Mishap	Mishap	1 <b>Vigour</b>	1 <b>Vigour</b>	Mishap
3	Mishap	1 <b>Vigour</b>	D3 <b>Vigour</b>	1 <b>Vigour</b>	Mishap
4	1 <b>Vigour</b>	D3 <b>Vigour</b>	D3 <b>Vigour</b>	D3 <b>Vigour</b> and 1 <b>Grip</b>	D6 <b>Vigour</b> and 1 <b>Grip</b>
5	1 <b>Vigour</b>	D3 <b>Vigour</b>	D6 <b>Vigour</b>	D6 <b>Vigour</b> and 1 <b>Grip</b>	D6 <b>Vigour</b> and 1 <b>Grip</b>
6	D3 <b>Vigour</b>	D6 <b>Vigour</b>	D6 <b>Vigour</b>	D6 <b>Vigour</b> and 1 <b>Grip</b>	D6 <b>Vigour</b> and D3 <b>Grip</b>

## Urban Mishap Table

- 1 Missing In Action
- 2 A Little Too Much Fun
- 3 I Was Just Minding My Own Business
- 4 Target Of Enterprise
- 5 Making New Friends
- 6 No Longer Welcome Here

**Missing In Action:** Maybe you decided it was time for some shore leave, maybe you had a bit too hard of a bender. Your character is absent for the next D3 adventuring sessions. Roll a D6 on their return:

- 1-2 Remove an **Affliction**
- 3-4 No effect
- 5-6 **Wanted For Desertion**

If you ever roll a second **Warning For Desertion**, remove the character from play. They are no longer welcome at the company. If the player really doesn't want to lose their character, impose some other heinous consequence.

**A Little Too Much Fun:** You came back to the surface and let yourself loose too much. Roll D6 on the following table:

- 1 Gain **Silver Fingers**
- 2 Gain **The Glorious Blaze**
- 3 Gain **Solace In The Bottle**
- 4 Lose D3 **Grip**
- 5 Lose 1 **Grip**
- 6 No Effect

**I Was Just Minding My Own Business:** You somehow got into a fight. Roll D6 on the following table:

- 1 Roll an **Injury**
- 2 Lose D6 **Vigour**
- 3 Lose D3 **Vigour**
- 4 Lose 1 **Vigour**
- 5 No Effect
- 6 Gain 1 **Experience**

Your buddies will always drag you back if you are hurt in a bar fight. If you are reduced to zero **Vigour** this way, you are always **Unconscious**, and never dead.

**Target of Enterprise:** You were robbed, fleeced or blinded by charlatans, pickpockets or other unsavoury types. **Experience** lost represents stolen treasure or wages. Roll D6 to find out what happens:

- 1 Lose D3 **Experience**
- 2 Lose random piece of equipment from character sheet
- 3 Suffer **I Was Just Minding My Own Business** or lose 1 **Experience**
- 4 Lose 1 **Experience**
- 5 No Effect
- 6 Gain 1 **Experience**

**Making New Friends:** You met some people while on the town. Generate either another Cryptdigging company or choose a contact from **Chapter 6: Worlds of the Crypt**. Roll D6 to find out the relationship:

1-2 Contact now enemy

3-4 Aware of contact

5-6 Contact now friend

**No Longer Welcome Here:** You might have offended the host or said something rude to someone important, but for whatever reason you and your friends are no longer welcome here. You will have to rest someplace else in the future. If you want to know how this happened, roll again on the **Urban Mishap Table** and apply the result.

## Camp Mishap Table

1 Evening of Festivities

2 Something From The Deep

3 The Boss Is Pissed

4-6 Quiet Night In

**Evening of Festivities:** You get a little bit too drunk while relaxing around the camp fire. Roll again in the **Urban Mishap Table**.

**Something from the Deep:** Maybe you camped a little too close to the Crypt... Roll again on **Crypt Mishap Table**

**The Boss Is Pissed:** You did something to annoy a Council Member, and the next time you head into the Crypt you will have been given a new set of orders. There is a 50% chance of these being complicated or vengeful.

**Quiet Night In:** You sit around the camp fire trading stories and getting some rest. No effect.

## Crypt Mishap Table

1 Rest Interrupted

2 Scrapings at the Walls

3 Equipment Ruined

4 Food Spent

5 False Alarm

6 Unearthly Silence

**Rest Interrupted:** You were sleeping, but whoever was on watch obviously didn't do a good enough job. Roll on the Random Encounter table for the Crypt.

**Scrapings At The Walls:** While you sleep, you hear sounds from the unexplored regions of the dungeon. Each character must make a **Grip Check**.

**Equipment Ruined:** There is a small accident at camp and a random piece of equipment for each character is wasted, lost or otherwise destroyed.

**Food Spent:** Some of your food is spoiled. Double consumption of rations for this rest.

**False Alarm:** You thought you heard something, but it turned out it was nothing. Roll again on the table, if you roll a **Mishap** there is no further effect, but if you don't, recovered half the stated amount of **Grip** and **Vigour**, rounding down.

**Unearthly Silence:** You sit, patiently waiting for monsters, but nothing comes. No effect.

*'They passed beyond the door into the tomb. Killian lit a torch and heard the soft click of the bulkhead sealing behind them.*

*At the edge of the peeling torchlight was a great stone coffin, bearing faint ageing emblems of red and gold upon the lid. Gunther edged forward, scratching at the lid with his fingernails. Real gold, not foil. They plied it out with chisels and knives.*

*They broke the tomb with a crowbar, and unearthed the corpse beneath. It was unnaturally tall and haggard with age, the silk wrappings almost fading from its flesh. It seemed to peel away in the torchlight. He bore a crown of ancient rusting metal, adorned with bone torn from some great beast.*

*They were so enamoured by its strange beauty, they did not see the dead behind them.'*





# Chapter 8: Lord Edmund's Barrow

**Lord Edmund's Barrow** is a starter adventure designed for *Best Left Buried*. It is meant to act as a fun, quick-to-pick-up dungeon for your early sessions, or as a style guide for you to help create your own Crypt.

The site is a religious temple, where priests of a God of Death mummified the ancient royals of a ruined civilisation. If the dungeon is a part of the Thirteen Duchies of Lendal, then the ancient civilization is the Royal Family of the Emperor of Norui and the god is Vashni the Slayer, but this has been left ambiguous in the text so you can use it for whatever setting you choose.

The Crypt has been recently breached by another Cryptdigging company, led by Lord Edmund, an influential member of the local aristocracy. The characters' party has likely approached the tomb due to them being hired by Lord Edmund's family, or being aware of the bounty they have placed on his return. Edmund has been slain by Mother, an enraged Mothbear, and his company mostly wiped out, except one survivor – Arteux, who lives on level 1. Edmund's family know he is likely dead, but they will pay significant money for the return of his body, signet ring and sword. The

ring is held by Arteux, the sword is owned by the Gurrigan and the body is wrapped in silk inside Mother's cave.

Everything you need to run the dungeon should be on each page, except for the information about the monsters, which can be found on the following pages.

Roll a random encounter whenever significant time passes, or whenever a significant amount of noise is made. If nothing is happening, and your players spend a long time deliberating or talking about something unimportant from the real world, spring a random encounter on them. Most of the random encounters should be something sensory or not relating to certain combat, as Crypts in **Best Left Buried** typically have less monsters than non-horror dungeons.

Tools have also been included to allow characters to search piles of rubble, crates or corpses that might contain valuables. If the same result is re-rolled, then ask for a re-roll or declare the container empty – perhaps it has already been looted.

# Level One

## Regions of Map

**Ravine:** Mountains climb above, sky visible. Eerie quiet. Gravel floor. Walls marked with screen. Slight, unhealthy vegetation litters the floor.

**Tunnels:** Dank, winding passages. Tight crawlspaces. Mushrooms and lichen decorating the walls. Sound of distant water. Rapid changes in altitude.

**Halls:** Geometric hallways. Cut stone. High ceilings. Dark. Cold. Spent torch sconces scattered for light. Heavy stone doors that make noises when opened.

## Rooms

**Secret Door:** Inaccessible from outside. Obvious switch visible from inside.

**Abandoned Camp:** Scrap of tools, weapons and camping equipment left behind by previous **Cryptdiggers**. D6 random items from Weapon/Equipment Tables (pg148) can be found here.

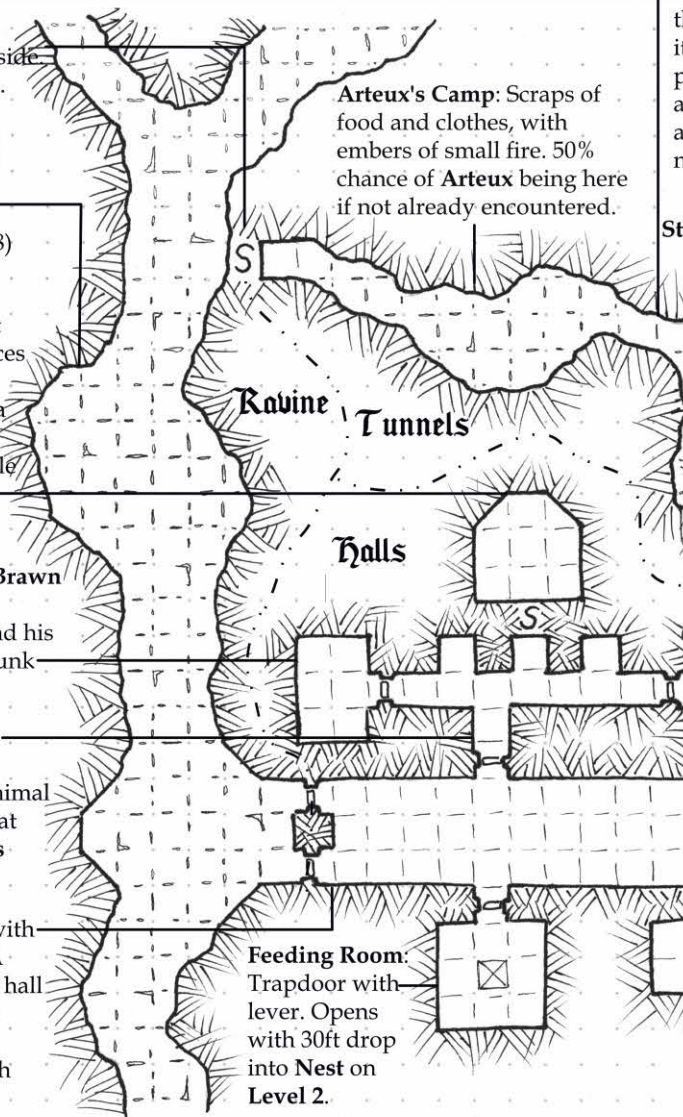
**Priest's Chambers:** Behind a secret door is the living quarters and offices of the Chief Embalmer. Treasure: Strange preserving chemicals and a book on ancient embalming techniques. Both are highly valuable to necromancers, undertakers or biologists if translated.

**Sealed Tomb:** Heavy stone door (**Brawn Check** to open) conceals dusty sarcophagus of one **Royal Dead** and his worldly effects, including a lot of junk and a **Luminescent Potion**.

**Canopic Hallway:** Stacked shelves containing canopic jars of temple guardians, marked with various animal heads. Removing the jar with the cat head opens a secret door to **Priest's Chamber**.

**Entrance Hall:** Looming hallway with flaking paintings of **Royal Dead**. A **Celeghthuros** is hiding at far end of hall and will flee if significant sound is made. Remains of battle between **Cryptdiggers** and **Royal Dead** with corpses picked clean.

**Arteux's Camp:** Scraps of food and clothes, with embers of small fire. 50% chance of **Arteux** being here if not already encountered.



**Wiretrap:** Arteux has threaded a length of wire at ankle height. If it is struck by any force, a small bell will ring and alert Arteux to the party's presence. If in his **Camp**, he will flee through the secret door and loop around to sneak up on the party.

**Stalactite Chamber:** Acid drips from stalactites above and gathers into hissing pools on the floor. Characters must pass **Wit** check to safely cross the room, else they suffer D3 Vigour damage. Any tool or item subjected to the acid is damaged as per the **Acidic Adaptation**. Anyone seeing another creature take damage from the acid must take a **Grip Check**. Arteux can navigate this area flawlessly.

**Mossy Stairwell:** Leads to Level 2.

## 1 Loot The Body (Or Crate)

- 1 Embalming Scissors
- 2 China Plate
- 3 Ancient Signet Ring
- 4 D6 heavy bronze coins
- 5 Scrap of silk wrappings
- 6 Corpsemover Diadem

**Corpse:** Wisps of warm, chemical air from the chamber beyond. A **Cryptdigger** corpse has been savaged by **Mother**, but not dragged back to her den, as the corpse has been kept fresh by the toxic pool of embalming oils he died in. He carries a large bag of bronze coins, but these are submerged in the oil, which will cause severe pain to living skin.

## Random Encounters:

- 1 Sound of canopic jar smashing on floor
- 2 Sound of door opening
- 3 Omen of **Celeghthuros**
- 4 Signs of combat between **Cryptdigger** and **Royal Dead**
- 5 **Celeghthuros**
- 6 **Arteux**

**Bucket Room:** A small quantity of water drips from the ceiling into a hanging bucket which Arteux uses as drinking water. It tastes of iron, but is safe.

**Storage Room:** Amongst this mess of pots, urns and tools is a **Celeghthuros** den, with small trophies of hunts, a number of large bronze coins, and a few balls of yarn. If a large urn, whose lid is fashioned like a cat's head, is moved, a secret door to the **Stalactite Chamber** is revealed. 50% chance of a **Celeghthuros** sleeping here.

**Dry Stairwell:** Smells of vegetable rot. Leads to Level 2.

**Ruined Library:** Shelves full of rotten scrolls. One wall carved with the same paragraph written in six ancient languages, including that of the Crypt's inhabitants. Recovery could be of academic significance to linguists.

**Breached Tomb:** As **Sealed Tomb**, but **Royal Dead** is defeated and looted.

**Workshop:** A **Royal Dead** lies half embalmed on the table with its long rotten offal spewed on the floor. Take a **Grip Check**. The operating tools are made from bright silver. The **Royal Dead** will animate if it or the tools are interfered with.



# Level Two

**Gurrigan Camp:** 2d6 Gurrigan will reside here at any one time amid the filth, half are children. They nest in the shallows of the underground river. One will speak a debased dialect of the Common Tongue. **Lord Edmund's Sword** is hidden beneath the muck. **Mother** fears it.

## Random Encounters

- 1 Omen of **Mother**
- 2 Omen of **Gurrigan**
- 3 Faint Rumbblings from **The Pit**
- 4 **Arteux**
- 5 D3 **Gurrigan**
- 6 **Mother** has caught your scent.

**Nest:** **Mother** is here 50% of the time, either sleeping or tending her 8 young. The corpses of **Lord Edmund** and 3 **Cryptdiggers** are wrapped in mothbear silk. Take a **Grip Check** to search through the wrappings. The rest have been eaten. The cubs are harmless.

**Swift River:** Runs from south to north. Waist deep at middle. Pass a **Brawn** check to move or attack while in the deep, else **Restrained**.

**Battlefield:** Signs of a struggle between **Mother** and the **Cryptdiggers**. Take a **Grip Check**. Corpses all dragged back to the **Nest**. Valuables picked clean by **Gurrigan**. Claw marks on walls, shattered stone and scant mauled body parts remain.

## Cryptdigger Corpses Where is Mother?

- |                           |                                          |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1 Random Brawn Weapon     | 1 Waiting near <b>The Pit</b>            |
| 2 Random Wit Equipment    | 2 Stalking the <b>Battlefield</b>        |
| 3 Random Will Equipment   | 3 Sleeping in <b>Nest</b>                |
| 4 30ft Mothbear Silk Rope | 4 Tending young in <b>Nest</b>           |
| 5 Shards of Fine Pottery  | 5 Hunting <b>Gurrigan</b> in their caves |
| 6 Random Mortal Treasure  | 6 Hunting <b>Gurrigan</b> in Halls       |



**The Breach:** Filled with rubble and splattered with **Crypdigger** blood. **Mother** destroyed this section of the wall from outside.

**Dashed Lines** mean a short cliff. The dashes face downhill.

**King's Chamber:** Dominated by sealed sarcophagus marked with unholy runes. If the coffin is interfered with, two **Royal Dead** animate behind it. Inside the coffins is a corpse with the trappings of a king, including a pair of silver armbands and a **Crown of Otherworldly Gaze**.

**Warning:** This sealed door bears the mark of a crown and the following text in the language of the inhabitants: "Bear not light on the contents of the chamber." The door will slam shut and lock with an audible click if exposed to any light. In darkness, it will slide open easily.

**Shrine:** Empty dias where corpses would be prepared. Contains silver icon of God of Death (**Grip Check** to handle) and several blessed candles. Smells of old incense.

**Dry Staircase:** Leads to **Level 1**

**Storage Room:** Contains a huge wheel of refined Mothbear silk for crafting bandages. Strong and valuable.

**Gurrigan Crawlspace:** These gaps have been dug to flee from **Mother**. Filled with nutritious mushrooms that taste of bitter dirt. Within each passage there is a 1 in 6 chance of meeting D3 **Gurrigan**. They will flee if possible.

**Corridor:** Dusty canopic jars on bottom wall filled with long-rotten organs and the occasional gold coin.

**Portcullis:** Two linked portcullises moved by great winch marked \*. When one is opened the other closes. Acted as airlock to prevent **Mother** entering the **Halls**. Currently, **Mother's** door is open. If **Mother** was truly enraged she could destroy it in D3 minutes. Otherwise this requires engineering tools.

**Narrow Passage:** **Mother** cannot fit. Filled with bats and the stench of guano. Mostly harmless. Bats are prey of **Gurrigan** and **Mother**.

**The Pit:** This chasm is at least 200 metres deep and swallows all light dropped into it. Utters occasional grinding sounds. Likely point of passage into the **Great Dark**. Inhabitants of the Crypt avoid it.



# Monsters

## Royal Dead

These mummified ancients were the aristocrats of whatever society that used this ruin as a temple. They were taken here after death, embalmed with traditional sacred oils by the priests who call the temple home, before being taken off to their correct place of burial. The few **Royal Dead** remaining here did not have their rites completed, or were pre-transition.

The **Royal Dead** are mummified skeletons, of enormous height wrapped in mothbear silk bandages. They will attempt to destroy those who defile the barrow and steal their treasures, and, being undead, cannot be negotiated with.

Each **Royal Dead** wears a cursed bronze torc. It is **Hex-Proof**, but makes the wearer's skin cold and pale. There is a 50% chance this has been looted from any **Royal Dead** already defeated.

**Brawn: 2+ Wit: -1 Will: -1 Vigour: 9**

**Adaptations: Fear of the Light, Weakness (Fire), Undead**

## Arteux

Arteux is a Cryptdigger from Lord Edmund's company. He is a rogue, scout and trap maker. His main objective is to survive, kill Mother, and reclaim his company's treasures, namely Lord Edmund's sword. If he can recover corpses of his company

members for proper burial, he will do so. He is a middle-aged man with dark hair and ragged clothes, with whatever accent from the North of England you can muster.

While initially seeming fairly normal, Arteux has spent too long underneath the earth drinking cave water and eating rat meat, and snapped some while ago. When alone he talks to himself, and is deeply paranoid, hence the traps set up near his camp. While he initially comes across as a potential ally of the party, he will quickly double cross them if it suits his means.

Whenever possible, he will avoid direct combat when outnumbered and flee to re-engage at his advantage. He knows the layout of both levels, with the exception of the secret doors not next to his **Camp**. He is familiar with all of the other monsters of the cave, and will share accurate information about them with the party, understanding the party can be used as tools to deal with the monsters and vice versa.

**Brawn: 0 Wit: +3 Will: +1 Vigour: 8 Grip: 3 Armour: 7**

**Advancements:** Shadow Glamours, Nimble Dodge, Toxic Blade

**Equipment:** Knives (Light and Throwing), Steel Wire, **Amorphous Potion**, Dulling **Poison** (Throwing Knife), Paralyzing **Poison** (Dose)

## Mother

Mother is a mothbear. She and her cubs ("caterpil-bears") are hybrid bear-caterpillars bred by the tomb's ancient inhabitants, who used their silk to provide the funeral wrappings for the **Royal Dead**. Like most mothbears, Mother is huge, vicious, animalistic and fiercely territorial. She aims to accumulate enough food to allow her cubs to gestate from larvae into full adults.

She was previously sleeping in the dungeon and was significantly injured by Lord Edmund, making her slightly less fearsome than before. As a result, she walks with a slight limp. At her full strength, and if nurtured back to health, she might have as much as 50 **Vigour**. Attacks made with her front left claw are **Against the Odds**. Describe her limp to the players when they first encounter her walking casually.

If she kills or otherwise incapacitates an enemy, she will immediately grab the corpse and then disengage to carry the corpse to her cubs for feeding. This should hopefully prevent the otherwise practically unkillable Mother from slaughtering the entire party at once.

Mother also loves lights. She will pursue light sources and pat at them. If possible, she will carry light sources back to her lair for her cubs to play with. All of the torch sconces in the lower dungeon have claw marks from where Mother has savaged them. Smart characters can use this information to lure or direct Mother.

**Brawn: +3 Wit: 0 Will: +1 Vigour: 25 Grip: 1 Armour: 9**

**Advancements:**      **Bloodthirsty, Fearsome, Hulking, Rampage**



## Celeghthuros

Celeghthuros are cat mummies the rough size of Maine Coon cats. The Celeghthuros were mummified by the ancient civilisation to guard the tombs and accompany their masters to the afterlife. The three that remain here are the former pets of the Chief Embalmer.

They spend their undeath acting out many of the catlike activities they enjoyed in life, such as hunting, sleeping and playing with balls of string. They are not overtly hostile or predatory against the characters, and will only attack if provoked. They will, however, often stalk the characters to get a greater idea of their numbers and power, before reporting back to their absent (and long dead) master. There are three Celeghthuros in the Crypt.

**Brawn: +1 Wit: +1 Will: +1 Vigour: 6  
Armour: 7**

**Advancements:** Nimble,  
Shadowclad, Undead

## The Gurrigan

The Gurrigan are a tribe of goblinoids who have dwelled in the caves surrounding Lord Edmund's Barrow since its original ruination. They are small, decrepit creatures with bulging eyes who subsist on a diet of mushrooms and cave water.

They fear Mother. She has eaten many of their kin. Equally, they know how to hide from her. Their lair is concealed up in high tunnels, where she cannot reach. They have also worked out how to use light to guide her away. They want her dead, and have the Sword of Lord Edmund: they will willingly give it to the party if they promise to use it to kill the Mother.

**Brawn: -1 Wit: +1 Will: 0**

**Equipment:** One of **Ranged** or **Light** or **Throwing Weapons**, tools for making traps, almost endless supply of poor-tasting food.

**Advancements:** Disorganised,  
Paltry

**Special Advancements:** Paltry: The monster is **Against The Odds** on attack rolls.



# Timeline

??? - The noises from the great pit begin.

1500 years ago - Ancestors of the **Gurrigan** enter the Crypt.

1000 years ago - Norui explorers find a cave entrance leading to a pool of acid. This acid is vital for mummification, and the explorers begin extraction.

800 years ago - Temple is built, expanding to the first and second levels of the Crypt. The process of mummification of Norui **Royal Dead** begins.

750 years ago - First Mothbear captured in Junkai. Silk deemed ideal for mummification process, so is transported to Lord Edmund's Barrow.

650 years ago - Last Norui Emperor dies, is buried in the Throne Room.

630 years ago - Following Norui Civil War, the temple is abandoned and forgotten. **Mother** (still a Mothbear spawn) enters hibernation.

600 to 1 years ago - **Gurrigan** expand in power.

6 months ago - Lord Edmund's scout, **Arteux**, finds the temple and deems it ripe for expedition.

3 months ago - Lord Edmund's Company secures extraction rights and mounts an expedition. Over several weeks they push into the complex, fighting pitched battles with the **Gurrigan** in the halls and caves.

2 months ago - The **Gurrigan** open the Nest and awaken **Mother**. Edmund and most of his company are slain. Diminished, the Gurrigan retreat to their caves for breeding season.

Present day - Mother roams the tomb. **Arteux** engages in guerilla war with the **Gurrigan**.

## What Happens Next?

After you have finished running this Crypt, you need to seed this into the rest of the campaign.

- Find a new Crypt, continue more dungeon exploration.

- If your players befriend **Arteux**, he might join their company or offer to scout new expedition sites for them?

- If Lord Edmund's possessions are returned, his family might withhold payment, heap additional demands upon the company or offer more work.

- If **Mother** or a cub is tamed, this spawns entire realms of adventure.

- The company may investigate the rumbling from the Pit, and enter the Great Dark.

Brawn

Wits

Will

Name:

Archetype:

XP

Advancements

Equipment

Consequences

Treasure

## Weapons

Description	Type	Range	Attack Stat	Damage Modifier	Initiative

Armour

**BEST LEFT  
BURIED**

Vigor

Max

Current

Grip



*There are things that dwell in the Crypt, and some  
are Best Left Buried.*

Best Left Buried is an fantasy horror game where the monsters are scary and the players are scared. Within the Crypt, these adventurers will be beset by strange monsters, bizarre environments and eldritch magics, which will take them on their journey from freshfaced recruits to grizzled survivors.

Within its 80 pages, this book contains an array of rules, advice and material for the Doomsayer. Inside are the rules for making characters, as well as the monsters and magics used to drive challenge their minds and bodies.

Await the forthcoming Deluxe version of Best Left Buried for even more soul shattering goodness.

