

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS[®]



INTO THE UNKNOWN

The Dungeon Survival Handbook[™]



ROLEPLAYING GAME SUPPLEMENT
Logan Bonner ♦ Matt Sernett ♦ Jeff Morgenroth

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Dungeon Delvers

Black passageways stretch out in all directions. The still, stifling air swirls gently with each cautious step forward. The clank of armor and the crunch of footsteps on gravel are the only sounds in the deep chambers, but their soft echoes seem deafening.

Around the next corner, faint lights are visible down the corridor. With no way to gauge distance in the darkness, they could be anything: far-off torches, nearby glowing fungi, or the eyes of a lurking beast reflecting the flame. After sharing a glance with the others, the party leader lifts the shutter of the bull's-eye lantern to reveal what lies ahead. . . .

Dungeons hold everything an adventurer could want: untold riches to plunder, new areas to explore, dangerous beasts to challenge, and strange societies to interact with. An ordinary adventurer accustomed to a soft life in the surface world might get a short distance into a dungeon and consider it a glorious victory. But hardscrabble Underdark natives and veteran delvers know just how difficult survival is down there in the darkness, and that the tunnels keep descending into realms of ever greater danger.

A dungeon adventure is all about huge risks and even greater rewards. You (as well as your character) need careful preparation, problem-solving skills, nerves of steel, and a healthy dose of good luck to take on a dungeon crawl and succeed. Around every corner is some unexpected threat, deadly mystery, or never-before-seen Underdark horror. If you can't step up to the challenge, you'll never make it out.

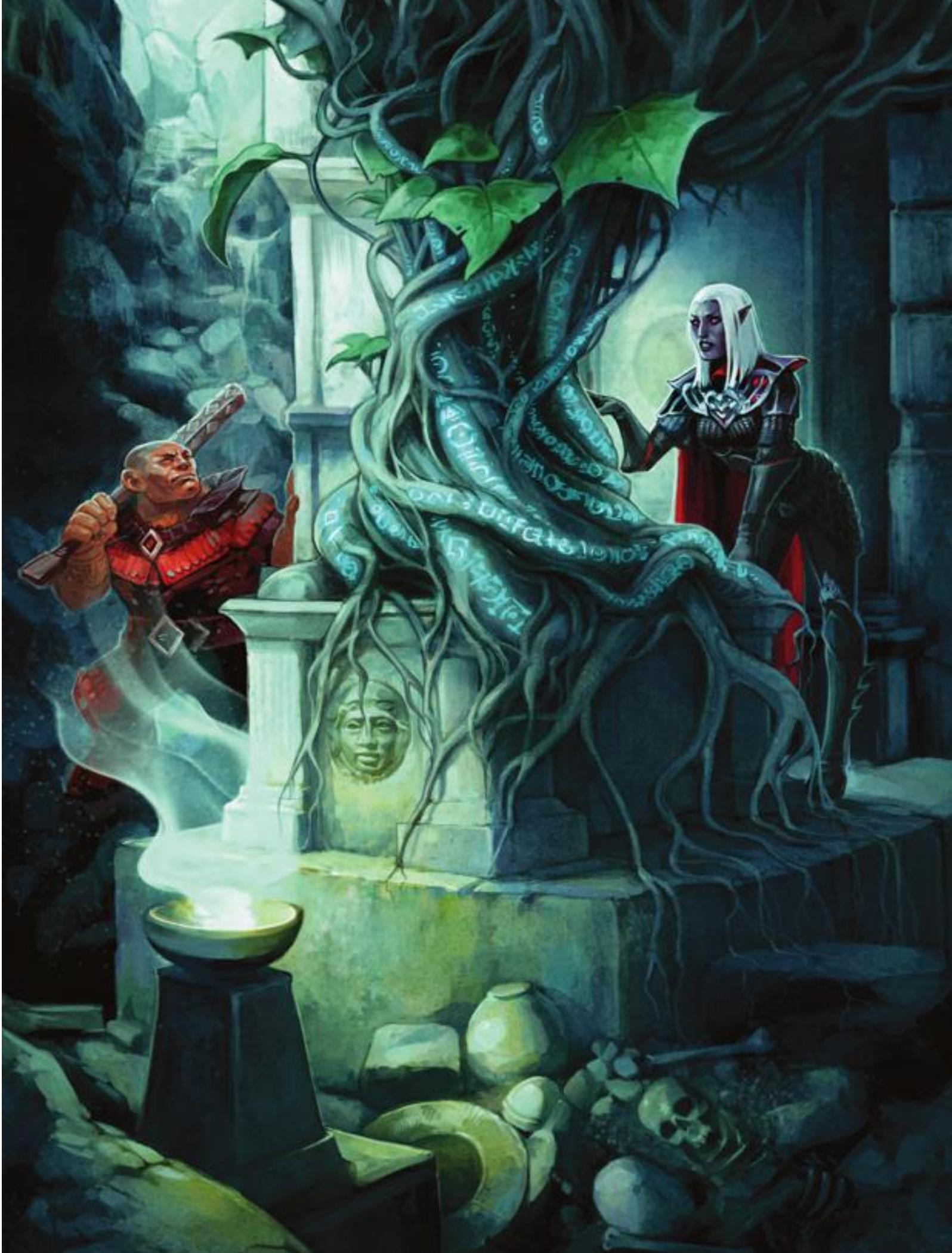
New Character Choices

The character options presented in this chapter can help increase your adventurer's chances of survival. Become familiar with the minds and methods of the most successful dungeon explorers, and maybe—just maybe—you'll stand a chance. Even so, death can strike at any time, and a party might have to improvise or bring in new recruits from the Underdark just to see the light once more.

Character Themes: To tie your character more closely to dungeons or the Underdark, you can choose a theme that fleshes out his or her backstory or represents a delving-related profession. Each theme's entry includes unique features, as well as optional powers that supplement the choices available to you at various levels. It also includes some suggestions about how to introduce the theme into a game and a sample character. As well, you'll find some in-world advice and background information in the form of sidebars in each entry.

Races: Three dungeon-dwelling races—the goblin, the kobold, and the svirfneblin—appear here, with complete descriptions, roleplaying hooks, and optional racial feats and powers. Their adaptation to a life underground and their specific survival skills make members of these races excellent candidates for the adventuring life, even though they might face suspicion or outright hostility from topsiders. Unlikely though it can seem, under the right circumstances even a kobold can become a hero.

Dungeon-Themed Powers: The challenges of dungeon delving give rise to specialized techniques and dedicated explorers' guilds. Sometimes, too, a character's background or unique experience spontaneously gives rise to survival abilities that can't be taught. This section describes some of these possibilities, ranging from a widespread organization of Underdark guides, to the hard-knocks training that comes from years spent below ground, to the mind-ripping insights that arise from exposure to unspeakable evil. Here you'll find new attack powers for a variety of classes as well as skill powers available to any character who has training in the relevant skill.



Character Themes

Just as race and class help to define who your character is in the world, theme adds an optional third component to refine your story and identity. The themes presented here explain what your character knows about adventuring in dungeons and provide story hooks that you can use to roleplay him or her.

A theme generally embraces characters of many different classes. A few more narrowly focused themes are limited to a small selection of classes or races—for example, the Underdark outcast must belong to a subterranean race. Any such restrictions are noted in the theme's entry.

Each theme's entry includes a sample character. These characters' background stories can give you some ideas for playing that theme; in a pinch, if you have no character prepared, or if a character's back-story appeals to you, you can roleplay him or her.

This section presents the following themes.

- ◆ **Bloodsworn** go into a dungeon to kill a specific enemy, who defines the character's life and quest for vengeance. The eladrin Meliera changed from a peace-seeking diplomat into a bitter hunter after a drow betrayed her.
- ◆ **Deep delvers** expertly explore underground environments, preferring the dark tunnels of the Underdark to the sunlit hills above. Karl Deepwalker saw his companions slain by grimlocks, and now the human youth searches for the traitor he's sure was in their midst.
- ◆ **Escaped thralls** tore themselves free from the mental control of other creatures. They still bear the physical and mental scars of their imprisonment. Mord lost his childhood memories but sees flashes of his enslavement while he dreams. The half-orc has found some measure of peace as a servant of Ioun.
- ◆ **Trapsmiths** create deadly and debilitating devices. They get by on ingenuity, adrenaline, and elbow grease. Thorry the Unlucky lost a couple of fingers to a kobold trap when he was a young svirfneblin. He left his people to pursue safer work but keeps getting pulled back into the dungeon-delving life.
- ◆ **Treasure hunters** seek glory and wealth, setting their sights on specific items of considerable worth. Ella the halfling was saved by the mysterious Green Man, along with her siblings—at a price. Unless she finds his crown, scepter, and armor, she'll never see her brother and sister again.
- ◆ **Underdark envoys** act as diplomats for Underdark societies. They might be spies, delegates for dark

masters, or merchants. Khiira the bard uses her wiles, honed as the seventh daughter of her house, to hide both from the other drow who hunt her and from the topsiders who fear and hate her kind.

- ◆ **Underdark outcasts** are disgraced exiles from their societies, forced to wander the lightless realms in a struggle to survive. Through his hubris, Korag made it possible for grimlocks to slaughter many of his dwarf clan, and he was cast out in shame.

Choosing a Theme

A character can have only one theme. You typically choose a theme at character creation, although the DM might allow you to choose a theme at a higher level, particularly if the campaign's story justifies making the choice later.

Character themes are optional; you don't have to select one if you don't want to. When you select a theme, it grants you the following benefits.

Starting Features: Each theme includes one or more features that you gain when you select it.

Additional Features: Most themes offer additional features at levels 5 and 10. You gain these features automatically when you reach the appropriate level; they don't replace your normal class features.

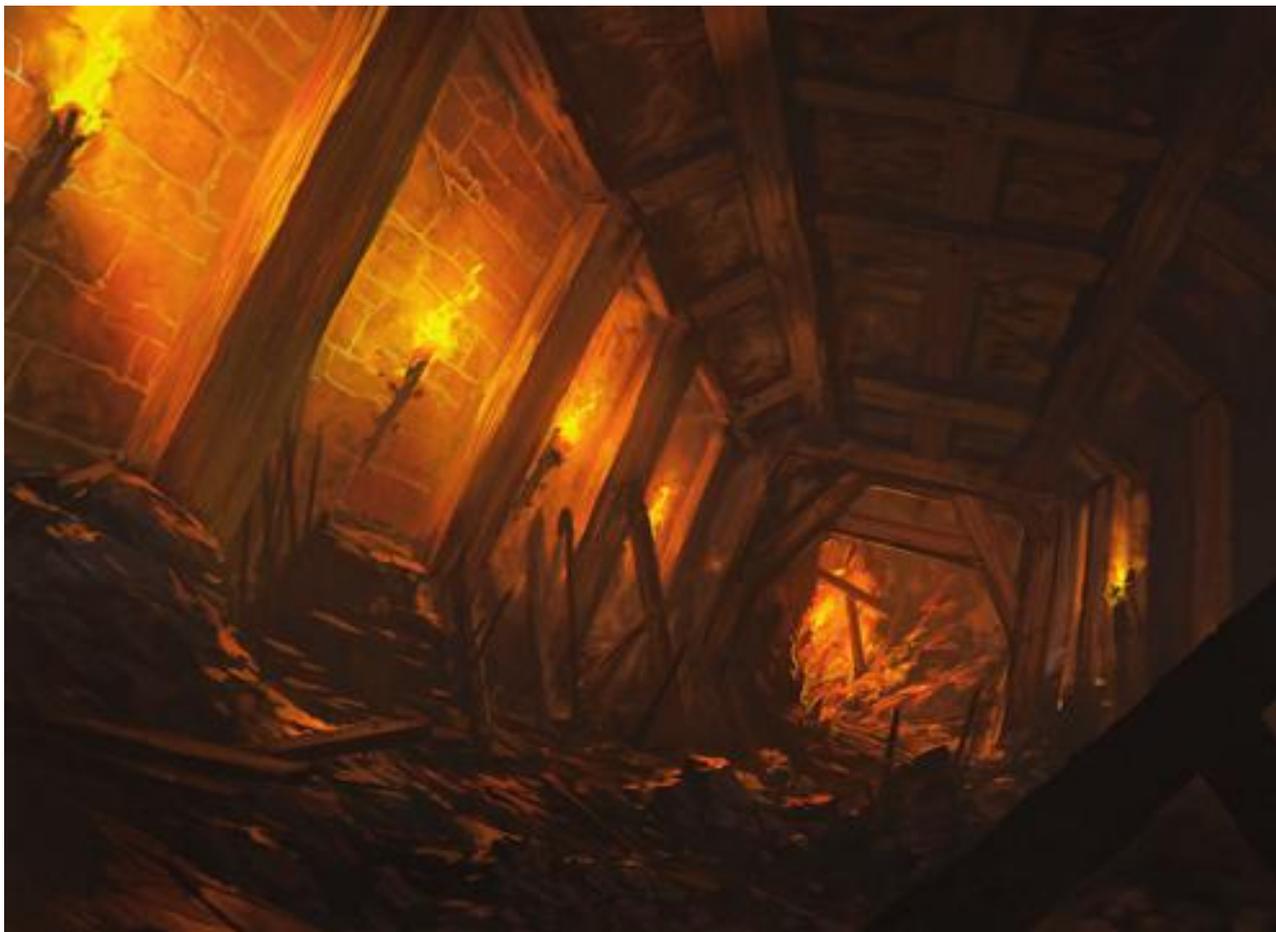
Optional Powers: Each theme includes a small number of attack powers, utility powers, or both that become available at level 2 or higher. These powers are in addition to the list of powers you can choose from when you gain levels. For example, if you're a 6th-level fighter, you can choose a level 6 fighter utility power or a level 6 utility power from your theme.

You can use retraining to replace a class power with an optional theme power or vice versa, exchanging one power for another power of the same type (at-will attack, encounter attack, daily attack, or utility). The new power must be of the same level as the old power or lower. You can also replace an optional theme power with a different optional power of the same theme, as long as the new power is of the same type and is of the same level or lower.

Prerequisites: Just like classes and races, themes can be prerequisites for feats, paragon paths, and other features.

Changing a Theme

Although a theme can last throughout your character's career, circumstances might arise in which it makes sense for your theme to change. For instance, a character might begin play as an Underdark envoy and eventually suffer a horrible betrayal at the hands of a villain in the subterranean depths. The character consequently leaves the envoy theme and adopts the bloodsworn theme, consumed by a need for revenge.



The world beneath the world awaits those who cross the threshold of a dungeon

When you can retrain, you can exchange your theme for another theme, instead of using any other option for retraining. To retrain a theme, you must have none of the theme's optional powers, and you must have neither feats nor a paragon path for which the theme is a prerequisite. A paragon path that requires your current theme prevents you from retraining that theme, since paragon paths can't be retrained. But if you have only optional powers or feats that prevent you from retraining your current theme, you can retrain those powers or feats to others that don't require the theme. Once you have retrained all character elements that require your current theme, you can then retrain your theme at your next retraining opportunity.

Themes as Story Tools

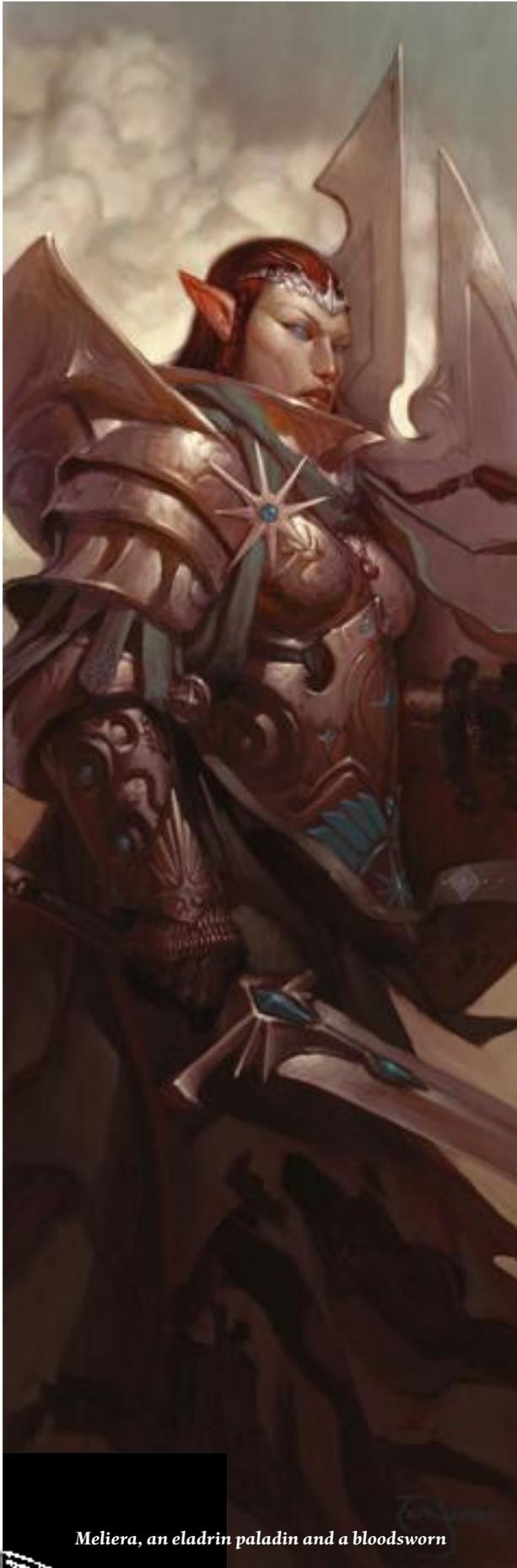
Themes offer a wide array of character creation tools. You might choose your theme first and then pick a class or race to reinforce your identity. For example, a character who has the trapsmith theme can be of any class, but choosing the rogue class lets you reinforce your character's talent for disarming traps with the tools to create them as well.

You can also use a theme to take your character in a new direction, adopting a story role that your class

or race might not otherwise provide. For example, if you play a dwarf fighter with the Underdark envoy theme, the combination can offer new opportunities for story hooks and roleplaying. What ancient text or scroll has your character been tasked with retrieving from a rival city? Which of your ancestors is connected to a drow merchant consortium through a shocking secret?

The themes in this section can provide story elements that are unique to your character. Perhaps you have knowledge that you want to keep secret from other party members, or you might have a hidden agenda. Such secrets are meant to create fun roleplaying opportunities, not to set one character against the others. Every theme in this section has a good reason to want to work with the others.

Think about your character's theme and how he or she would interact with the other party members. Multiple characters could be looking for buried treasure, or several could have connections to drow society. Discuss these possible interactions with the DM and the other players in the same way that you might talk about each party member's class or race.



Meliera, an eladrin paladin and a bloodsworn

BLOODSWORN

“My enemies must pay for their crimes, and the only payment I will accept is in blood.”

Evil emerges from below to work villainy on the innocent. Those of good heart stand against its machinations and struggle to rebuild in the aftermath of the conflict. For bloodsworn, though, guarding against wickedness is not enough. They take the fight to their enemies in a quest to destroy them all.

Evil creates the situation that brings a bloodsworn into existence. Some terrible event sows the seeds of vengeance in an individual’s heart, goading him or her to take up sword and staff to fight back against the darkness and ensure that evil never rears its head again. Often, bloodsworn are survivors of slaughters, whether from goblin marauding, a dark cult’s sacrifices, or grimlock raids. Swearing bitter vows to the gods or to their dead comrades, bloodsworn travel a path of righteous vengeance.

Playing a Bloodsworn

Bloodsworn lead lonely lives that too often end with promises left unfulfilled and bodies broken by the very enemies they pledged to fight. You take no heed of such risks; if you did, you wouldn’t have chosen this life. Most people who encounter you fear that your obsession will bring attention to their peaceful and quiet lives. To those who have also endured suffering, however, you are a savior. These unhappy souls give what they have left to aid you in your quest.

The moment you made the commitment to destroy your enemy, any chance of your having a normal life disappeared. As long as that evil darkens the world, you will never rest. But no matter how hot your hatred runs, you do not throw your life away against a foe you can’t hope to defeat. You understand that you have to train your skills, hone your abilities, and perfect your techniques before to the final confrontation. For these reasons, you undertake other missions, venturing into ruins and dungeons and fighting alongside your companions, all in preparation for the duty fate has laid at your feet.

Building a Bloodsworn

Bloodsworn exist among all races, classes, and cultures. One tragedy is enough to set an individual on the path of vengeance. When creating a bloodsworn character, consider the following story elements.

Choose Your Enemy Every bloodsworn has an enemy that defines him or her. You can choose any individual, creature, or institution to be your enemy. Think about who your enemy is, what it did, and why it did so.

POETIC JUSTICE

Putting enemies to death at the point of a sword is satisfying, but not enough so for many bloodsworn. Some concoct elaborate schemes to get their revenge in the most fitting way possible. For example, someone whose brother was killed by duergar might go after the siblings of duergar rulers before attacking the rulers themselves.

Other bloodsworn look for ways to ruin their enemies in the most demeaning way possible. The nature of such humiliation depends on the enemy society.

Cult: Nothing frustrates cultists more than destroying their temples, killing creatures they summoned, and blaspheming against their beliefs. Destroying holy writings can also demoralize cultists and set back their plans.

Drow: Betrayal and mistrust run rampant in drow society, so orchestrating an enemy's fall in status is readily accomplished. For an even greater insult, the puppet who overthrows the enemy should be of low rank.

Hobgoblins: Because hobgoblins take pride in military might, undermining their war efforts makes them look weak, cowardly, or incompetent. A hobgoblin leader so disgraced is unlikely to survive for long.

Orcs: The best way to humiliate an orc is to defeat it in single combat. An orc's friends will gather quickly for revenge, and in large numbers, so don't hang around after striking the final blow.

Tailor your training to better defeat that hated foe and counter its capabilities, tactics, and motivations. A bloodsworn who drives back orc hordes is very different from one who is committed to wiping out the Cult of the Elder Elemental Eye or one who has sworn to destroy giants. As you make decisions about feats, powers, and other game elements, keep your chosen enemy in mind and pick options to help you bring it down.

Keep in mind your foe's level relative to your own. If you are pursuing dark elves, you probably won't encounter them until the heroic tier's upper reaches at the earliest. On the other hand, goblins will cease to be a meaningful challenge once you hit the paragon tier. Be sure to talk with your Dungeon Master to make sure your chosen enemy fits into the campaign's story and level range.

You should also consider the scope of your vengeance. A limited goal makes defeating your chosen foe reasonable and achievable. Do you really want to exterminate all dark elves (an impossible task) or only the drow of House Eilserv?

Finally, think about your character's life before the tragedy changed you. What did you want to become? What were your dreams? What did you value? Do you

still hope to reclaim the life that was taken from you, or have you given up all such expectations, knowing the road you now walk leads only to death?

Vengeance's Inspiration Your enemy could inspire the choices you make about your character. Consider deciding on your enemy before you select your class or race to guide you and suggest a character who best reflects your choice of adversary. If you prefer to choose your race and class first, those details in turn might suggest certain enemies.

Many races in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS world have natural enemies. The history of the fey folk pits drow against eladrin and elves. Dwarves fought giants and orcs in ancient times. Dragonborn and tieflings have good reason to hate each other. The reasons behind these conflicts could be lost in the past, but the animosity remains very much alive. Choosing an enemy that has strong ties to your race helps reinforce your character's place in the world.

Just as race can help determine your chosen foe, your choice of class can suggest certain opponents and bring your character to life. Most classes have no particular animosities, but divine characters often pit themselves against servants of other gods. A priest of Corellon might vow to fight Gruumsh's servants, and the Raven Queen's paladins despise Zehir's priests. A psion or an ardent might venture into the Underdark to seek out a portal to the Far Realm and prevent a flood of monstrosities from reaching the world.

An unexpected choice for your hated enemy can create interesting dynamics in the group. For example, everyone expects a dwarf to hate orcs and giants, but you might create a dwarf fighter who has sworn to defeat an Underdark merchant consortium that exploited your people and emptied their vaults.

Starting Feature

The dead haunt your dreams, a constant reminder of your failure to save those closest to you. Your friends, your community, your former life—all were lost forever in one moment of violence. You refuse to let another misstep keep you from getting revenge. You are singularly focused on defeating your enemies. As your injuries mount, you find the will to succeed where another might fail.

Benefit: You gain the *bloodied determination* power.

Bloodied Determination

Bloodsworn Utility

When you are in dire straits, failure is not an option. You adjust your attack at the last moment to deliver a strike.

Encounter ♦ Martial

Free Action

Personal

Trigger: You miss with an at-will attack power while you are bloodied.

Effect: You reroll the missed attack roll.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature To confront your foes, you must descend into their lairs, contend with the tricks and traps blocking your way, and still have strength enough to do battle once you find your quarry. Constant training and preparation boosts your stamina so you can press on while channeling your fury into more focused attacks.

Benefit: When you use your second wind, you gain a +2 power bonus to attack rolls until the end of your next turn.

Level 10 Feature Bloodsworn never back down from a fight. Battle-tested and courageous, they commit themselves to every contest. Flinching even a little can give an enemy the advantage it needs to win a decisive victory.

Your intensity in battle is unmatched as you lead the offensive with a swift attack. Your enemies sense your determination and quail before you.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to initiative checks and Intimidate checks.

Optional Powers

Level 2 Utility Power In battle, one foe might stand out from the rest. The *forced advantage* power lets you focus on it so you can bring it down more quickly and shift the battle to your favor.

Forced Advantage Bloodsworn Utility 2

You fix your attention on one opponent to the exclusion of all other foes.

Encounter ♦ Martial

Minor Action Close burst 5

Target: One creature you can see in the burst

Effect: Until the end of your next turn, you gain combat advantage against the target and a +2 power bonus to all defenses against the target's attacks. You also take a -2 penalty to attack rolls on attacks that do not include the target.

Level 6 Utility Power Tragedy birthed you, and the memories of that event haunt you still. From time to time, they resurface with such intensity that you are driven even harder to make your enemies pay.

Urgent Aggression Bloodsworn Utility 6

The enemies you face bring back memories of your loss and sorrow, feelings you use to push yourself beyond your normal limits.

Daily ♦ Martial

Free Action Personal

Trigger: You roll initiative.

Effect: You gain an extra move action during your first turn in the encounter.

Level 10 Utility Power Until your chosen foe has paid the price, not even the specter of impending death can turn you from your path.

To the Death Bloodsworn Utility 10

You refuse death's call and push yourself to keep fighting.

Daily ♦ Healing, Martial

Immediate Interrupt Personal

Trigger: You drop below 1 hit point.

Effect: You use one of your at-will attack powers. If the attack reduces its target to 0 hit points or fewer, you can spend a healing surge.

Sample Bloodsworn: Meliera

"They took my husband and destroyed my life. I have nothing left but hatred."

Some wars never end. Some hate never dies. A litany of wrongs keeps the fires of vengeance hot and fixes retaliation firmly in one's mind until there is no recourse, no solution other than total war.

Yet some try to find a path away from the bloodshed, to bury the past and forge a new peace. Sometimes such noble efforts work. Most times they end in tragedy, as Meliera knows all too well.

Origin Story Meliera and her husband had long insisted that the eladrin people should make peace with the drow and end the long-standing animosity between the two races. Disturbed by growing aggression in their home city of Mithrendain against the exiled dark elves, they abandoned the Feywild for the natural world. There, they believed, they could help drow refugees who objected to their people's corruption and sought to make new lives on the surface. The two settled into an old castle not far from tunnels that led into the Underdark, brought in servants and guards to patrol the lands, and worked with adventuring groups to infiltrate drow enclaves and liberate the oppressed.

The first, and only, dark elf to enter their lives was the mysterious Rook. He claimed to be a lesser son of an important house who escaped certain death after killing an elder sister in a confrontation. The eladrin couple welcomed him into their home, tended to his injuries, and fed and clothed him. They treated him as one of their own, and Rook seemed grateful for their aid.

Routine business in the nearby Valley of Obelisks drew Meliera away, so she left Rook in her husband's care. When she returned, she found her home in ruins. Servants, guards, and worst of all, her husband, lay dead—throats cut, corpses bristling with poisoned bolts. Of Rook there was no sign.

In that moment, Meliera's life changed. Her sympathy for the dark elves died as quickly as her

husband had. Her people were right, she realized. Drow are dark-hearted, and they would do anything to gain an advantage. With her husband's head cradled in her lap, she whispered a vow to Corellon, promising to hunt down those responsible and kill them all. If she discovered that Rook was involved, that he had played her false, she would make him beg for death.

Values and Motivations A mix of emotions holds Meliera in its sway. Her guilt at being absent when her husband was killed compels her to don armor and heft blade. She feels stung by the idea that perhaps she was wrong about the nature of the dark elves, and the ease with which she first entertained this doubt about their nature makes her wonder if she ever really felt sympathy for them or if she was paying lip service to ideals that her husband once held. Questioning herself in this way also causes Meliera to feel as if she has betrayed her husband not only by being absent during the slaughter, but also by not cleaving firmly to his beliefs in the face of the greatest of losses ever: the death of her most beloved in the world. All this and more swirls darkly within Meliera's heart and mind in a haze of grief and anger that never lifts and that causes her to push onward to bring justice's sword down on her foes.

Roleplaying Meliera Cold, withdrawn, and aloof, you possess none of the elegance and grace of other eladrin. Your purpose keeps you detached. You lack compassion for allies, though you would never abandon or betray them. Indeed, you feel obliged to protect them to make up for failing the people you loved. You understand your limits, though, and know those at your side will eventually come to harm no matter how hard you fight. So you keep your distance to insulate yourself from the grief their loss would undoubtedly bring.

You know that wiping out all drow is neither practical nor possible. Instead, you seek the villains who killed your husband. You suspect they were tied to Rook's house, so finding that missing dark elf is your first concern.

Creating Meliera Meliera swore to protect the world from the drow and avenge the loved ones who suffered at their hands. She made this oath to Corellon and trained to become a paladin in his name. With the eladrin's optional Charisma bonus, the protecting paladin build in the *Player's Handbook* serves Meliera best.

If you choose to play Meliera, you can choose her race and class to suit your interests. She might be an elf or a half-elf instead of an eladrin. In this case, a different defender class might work better, such as the fighter, the knight, or the cavalier.

DEEP DELVER

"Only here, with the weight of the world above my head, am I home."

Beneath the tramping of nations and the roots of forests is a world that surface dwellers can barely imagine. Countless tunnels and caverns, rivers and oceans form a fantastic, globe-spanning environment. To the unprepared, though, the underground wilderness is as ruthless as it is wondrous. Those who survive these wilds are among the greatest explorers in the world. For these deep delvers, an expedition to the Underdark is no more threatening than a stroll through the woods.

Deep delvers are driven by an unquenchable desire to pit themselves against the challenges of the subterranean world. Some seek to map out the spiraling highway-tunnels of the Underdark. Others are naturally drawn to the seclusion of caves, preferring to abandon life on the surface. Yet others are born to the Underdark and still call it home.

Playing a Deep Delver

Deep delvers are rarely seen on the surface; the lure of underground adventure is too strong to keep them topside for long. As experts in navigating the treacherous depths, some deep delvers profit from their skills as guides or cartographers. Most surface dwellers see you as a bit mad, unable to understand how you go for so long without seeing the sun. You shrug your shoulders and wonder if they are the mad ones, uninterested in spending their lives gazing upon the Underdark's wonders.

Most deep delvers who were born on the surface are drawn below by a thirst for adventure. You are addicted to the thrill of exploring the vastness of the Underdark. For you, knowing the ways of caverns is as essential to survival as a surface dweller's understanding of woodcraft. Those who cannot learn quickly are consumed, while those who survive become masters of their trade. You might undertake expeditions for the promise of treasure or fame, but you would enter the Underdark for no other reason than the chance to breathe the cavern air and tread the stone highways of a subterranean world.

Building a Deep Delver

Deep delvers are a diverse lot, united only by their will to thrive in the caverns they call home. Though deep delvers come from all races, few surface dwellers other than humans are likely to choose this path. Many deep delvers come from races native to the Underdark, such as dwarves and svirfneblin, who have a natural affinity for dungeoneering. Classes that specialize in survival skills, such as druids,



Karl, a human ranger and a deep delver

rangers, and rogues, also excel as deep delvers. Consider the following story elements when creating a deep delver character.

Born Above If you belong to a race native to the surface, something uncanny must have inspired you to favor a life below ground—and to enable you to survive there. The Underdark’s scope and geography are unlike anything aboveground. Think about why you decided to live below the earth, and thus how you approach its many challenges.

Are you constantly in search of new sights and experiences? Is the physical challenge of getting there half the fun? You might revel in the rush of descending a miles-deep chasm or swimming through a flooded cave. The thrill of being the first to see such a sight is its own reward.

You might instead be a deep delver out of necessity. Perhaps you live in a community located near an entrance to the Underdark that must contend with raids by monsters or savage humanoids, so that patrolling the tunnel and the area around it is essential to your home’s survival. Alternatively, your livelihood might depend on searching the Underdark for precious resources, such as rare minerals and magical components, or simply for food. In either case you must become a master of underground tracking and observation to succeed.

The most well-known deep delvers have patrons who pay them to explore the Underdark. You might be the employee of a wealthy monarch, hired to map an extensive series of passages discovered in one of the realm’s mines. Does your patron plan to open up trade with Underdark civilizations, or hope to use the tunnels to launch secret attacks against rivals? The results of your exploration could trigger far-reaching events in the campaign.

Consider also what you’re leaving behind as you delve. Your connection to family and friends on the surface is cut off during your ventures, but maybe that is the point. Did you become a deep delver to escape something? If so, what better place to hide than the limitless depths of the Underdark?

Born Below For deep delvers who hail from the Underdark, the subterranean realm isn’t a mystery—it’s home. What topsiders see as a place of legendary dangers, mythic locales, and otherworldly beasts is just what you deal with every day. If your character is a member of an Underdark race, you probably have little patience with the blundering surface dwellers waving torches in your backyard.

Consider how your character’s home and culture fits into the campaign. Dwarves, renowned for their tremendous underground cities, live in the upper reaches of the realm and regularly deal with surface communities. The same goes for savage humanoids

such as goblins or kobolds, though their behavior is far less civil. These races live close enough to the surface that their domains have the feel of a nearby wilderness, much as a human or elf hunter would see a forest or swamp close to home—a place to be taken seriously but lacking mystery.

Races that dwell deeper, such as the svirfneblin, are one with the Underdark, which provides them with shelter and sustenance. Deep delvers of these races see the world above as a place of wonder and legend, and they view explorers from the surface as sightseeing nuisances.

Starting Feature

For you, a trek to the Underdark is all in a day's work. Your keen senses pick out lurking dangers that would spell doom for the less experienced. You've steeled your nerves against the hazards that threaten your every step. You know that you need to be on your toes when navigating the depths, but you wouldn't have it any other way.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Dungeoneering checks.

You also gain the *subterranean survival* power.

Subterranean Survival Deep Delver Utility

You thrive in the unforgiving caverns of the Underdark.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

Free Action **Personal**

Trigger: You make a Dungeoneering check and dislike the result.

Effect: You reroll the Dungeoneering check.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature A life spent underground has given you a diverse range of knowledge concerning subterranean ecology and terrain. From spotting the territory markers of hook horrors to knowing which pools of slime to avoid, you're the authority when it comes to Underdark lore.

In addition, the claustrophobia that rattles the nerves of some explorers doesn't even faze you. You descend feet first through cramped tunnels without a second thought, moving as quickly as a cave lizard while others squeeze by at a crawl.

Benefit: Your power bonus to Dungeoneering checks increases to +4.

Also, when you squeeze, your speed is not halved, and you take a -2 penalty to attack rolls instead of the normal -5.

Level 10 Feature When you spend weeks, months, sometimes years underground, even the flickering light of a torch can be as intense to you as the full brilliance of the sun. The best delvers sharpen their other senses to the point that lack of light does not hinder them. Subtle vibrations in the ground, the movement of drafts of air, or the echoes of sound against cavern walls let you find your way effortlessly.

Benefit: You gain blindsight with a radius of 2 squares.

Optional Powers

All deep delvers are experts at surviving underground, but for some this specialization is an all-consuming passion. They don't just survive, they thrive underground. Some become so adept at navigating the depths that they are uncomfortable anywhere else.

Level 2 Utility Power Most battles underground don't offer the luxury of an open field to maneuver: Swords rake against cavern walls, and combatants are forced into corners. You, though, take advantage of the cramped conditions, placing yourself where foes cannot easily reach you and using the walls as cover.

Up against the Wall Deep Delver Utility 2

You find ways to take advantage of close-quarters environments.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: Until the end of your next turn, you gain partial cover while you are adjacent to a square of blocking terrain, and any enemy that misses you with a melee attack while you have partial cover grants combat advantage to you until the end of your next turn.

Level 6 Utility Power At this point in your career you know just about everything about exploring caves, and this knowledge lets you overcome obstacles where once you might have struggled.

Cavern Lore Deep Delver Utility 6

Your talent for exploring caves gives you the edge needed to overcome unexpected challenges.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

Free Action **Personal**

Trigger: You fail an Acrobatics, Athletics, Endurance, or Perception check while underground.

Effect: You make a Dungeoneering check and use its result instead.

Level 10 Utility Power When the lights go out and you are suddenly tumbling into a ravine or in the path of a landslide, your skilled senses kick in to let you respond.

Spelunker's Instincts Deep Delver Utility 10

Your cave-delving reactions can save you from a sudden misstep or a serious injury.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

Immediate Interrupt **Personal**

Trigger: You take damage from a trap, a hazard, or a fall.

Effect: Reduce the damage by 5 + one-half your level.

Level 11: 10 + one-half your level.

Level 21: 15 + one-half your level.

Sample Deep Delver: Karl Deepwalker

"Don't worry. I'll get us back to the surface . . . somehow."

Nothing tests an explorer's mettle like a journey in the Underdark, as Karl Deepwalker has learned. Cut off from the support of his fellow delvers, the young human must rely on his untested wits to survive in the deepest of wildernesses as he seeks to discover who is behind the deaths of his former companions.

Origin Story Eager to strike out on his own and make his fortune, Karl signed up with the Deep Guides as soon as he turned eighteen, just a few months ago. The Deep Guides keep the routes open between the surface and the Underdark, blaze trails through the warrens, and protect the caravans they accompany on the way to destinations such as Deep-Delve and Maelbrathyr. (See page 55 for more

about the Deep Guides.) As tough as the work was, exploring the deep caverns and encountering fascinating people gave Karl a passion for delving. But now he is on his own.

A few days ago, grimlocks wiped out Karl's company of Deep Guides, though Karl managed to escape. His company had recently concluded a deal with an up-and-coming merchant house to create new markets in Underdark communities just beneath the surface. The Guides' leader had returned to headquarters to give the others the rundown when grimlocks spilled in through the doors, hacking at everyone in their path.

Karl survived by running into the depths, but now he is hounded by guilt. If he had stood by his companions, perhaps he could have made a difference in the fight, but he'll never know. He's also suspicious about the attack: The timing was too perfect, and the grimlocks tripped none of the company's alarms. Karl believes that someone in the organization was behind it—and he aims to find out who.

Values and Motivations Karl is set on discovering the traitor who sent his fellow Deep Guides to their deaths. He'll do whatever it takes to avenge his friends. Karl plans to search the former headquarters of the Deep Guides, though he knows it will mean viewing the horrific aftermath of the attack. There he hopes to find clues that will lead him to the traitor, and maybe signs that some of the other Deep Guides escaped the slaughter.

Roleplaying Karl You are overwhelmed by strong emotions, but you have come to terms with your friends' deaths. Now you must recover your courage and sense of self-worth to do what you must to avenge them. Your fledgling dungeoneering skills were put to the test as you fled, and you're unsure whether they will be enough.

You crave the fellowship of strong-willed companions to lean on emotionally as well as in combat. Your time with the Deep Guides instilled in you an industrious work ethic, though your youthful enthusiasm has been suppressed by the harsh reality of life in the Underdark. You always feel a moment of hesitation when faced with a dangerous situation, but you have vowed to never again abandon your comrades in time of need.

Creating Karl Karl's quest for answers in the Underdark requires a diverse range of skills, as well as the grit to take on the enemies he's sure to face there. A human's versatility serves him well, and the ranger is a good class fit.

If you prefer to change Karl's race or class, he could easily be a dwarf instead of a human. Any class that grants training in Dungeoneering, such as rogue, enables him to explore dungeons successfully.



ESCAPED THRALL

"I can still feel them crawling in the back of my mind, but they'll never get me again—not if I have anything to say about it."

In the deepest caverns, where the sun is but a myth and the weight of the world crushes all hope, abominations haunt the dark. These perverse beings—aboletths, mind flayers, and worse—exert a loathsome control over the minds of others. Few who become their slaves ever return. Yet some of dauntless resolve do escape, though they are forever burdened by the scars of their slavery. The lingering voice of the master echoes just beyond comprehension in the backs of their minds.

Playing an Escaped Thrall

Escaped thralls flee as far and as fast from their captors as possible. Only then do they try to recover physically and mentally, though some are never able to heal the scars of their captivity. These poor souls become mad, unable to coexist with a society that cannot understand their pain; most die alone and penniless. Escaped thralls who can control themselves develop a strong sense of purpose. Some are driven to do good in the world, while others simply try to make the most of their existence.

For you, your new life began with a thought, one that was not your own. The psychic domination burrowed into your mind like a ravenous worm. You didn't realize that it was happening, as all purpose, memory, and individuality vanished. Yet some tiny fraction of your identity remained, hidden within the mental labyrinth created by the insidious master. Your will was strong enough to find the way out of this maze and escape.

The call of an escaped thrall's former master beckons, and for some this pull is too much to ignore. Many escaped thralls venture back into the caverns of their former existence to satisfy a maddening compulsion. Those whose will is strong return to their old homes of their own accord, not out of curiosity but for revenge. Escaped thralls who become adventurers are grim and determined. As one of these, you have survived horrors that crushed the spirits of lesser folk and would gladly face any danger to confront your tormentor. This singular goal demands that you become a master of exploring the dungeons that your former captor calls home.

Building an Escaped Thrall

The aberrant entities that enslave the minds of mortals care little what they prey upon, so escaped thralls can be from any race, class, or culture. Many adopt psionic classes, their liberation having awakened new mental

WILLIAM O'CONNOR



ESCAPED THRALL

Mord, a half-orc and an escaped thrall

abilities. When creating an escaped thrall character, you should consider the following story elements.

Monstrous Enslavement The nature of your captor plays a huge part in how you portray your character's theme. The haunted visions, physical marks, and story elements can vary wildly depending on what creature enslaved you. In a way, your former master is the most important part of your background.

Whatever the creature that enslaved you, its motives are likely mysterious. The identity of your captor might be a secret that is slowly revealed to you over the course of your dungeon expeditions. Keep in mind that many such monsters are of very high level, so if you want any chance of success, you can't just storm into your captor's lair until you have improved your own capabilities.

Shattered Body Most thralls bear physical marks of their imprisonment. These might be the lashes made by a drow whip across your back, or scars on your neck from a vampire's bite. These injuries testify to the horrors you endured and might make others feel pangs of pity or revulsion. Do you try to conceal your scars so as not to draw attention to yourself, or do you proudly bear them as proof of your indomitable will?

Perhaps instead of physical scars, you wear an air of illness. Your skin hangs loose and sickly from malnourishment during your time underground, or dark bags under your eyes reveal that your torment robs you of sleep. Sometimes the signs of your ordeal are subtle, such as the trembling of your hands.

Scarred Mind Your psychic enslavement has left its mark on your mind. You gained freedom—but at what cost? Do you fear that your master will come for you, or worse, that you might surrender your sanity and return to be enslaved again? Perhaps you cling to ideals or goals to focus your mind, suppressing the memories through force of will. Either way, others might find you enigmatic or even dangerous.

Even if you have recovered well, your mind has been permanently altered by your captivity. Casting off mental domination has awakened psionic talent in you that had lain dormant until the moment of your freedom. Do you embrace this strange force, or hate it as you hate your former master?

Starting Feature

Your psychic imprisonment did more than just change you emotionally and psychologically, it fundamentally altered your mind. By recognizing and controlling these new abilities, you can do things you were never capable of before.

Most of the theme's powers involve the use of power points. See the *Rules Compendium* or *Player's Handbook 3* for how to use power points with powers that have the augmentable keyword.

Benefit: You gain 1 power point. You regain all your power points when you take a short rest or an extended rest.

You also gain the *my mind is my own* power.

My Mind Is My Own

Escaped Thrall Utility

Your passion for freedom drives out the presence of insidious entities from your mind.

Encounter ♦ **Augmentable, Psionic**
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**

Trigger: You are hit by a charm or a psychic attack.

Effect: You gain resist 5 psychic until the end of your next turn. Also, you gain a +2 power bonus to saving throws against charm effects and psychic effects until the end of your next turn.

Level 11: Resist 10 psychic.

Level 21: Resist 15 psychic.

Augment 1

Effect: As above, and you can make a saving throw against any charm effect and psychic effect at the start of your turn, instead of at the end, if a save can end the effect. This benefit lasts until the end of the encounter.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature Whether they communicate in fevered babbling or maniacal whispers, escaped thralls often slip into their former master's alien language. Some gain a mastery of this tongue, wresting an understanding of mysteries from subconscious messages.

You have gained insight into matters you shouldn't be able to comprehend. By carefully bringing this knowledge to the surface, you can use it to your benefit.

Benefit: Add Deep Speech to the languages you can speak, read, and write. You also gain a +2 power bonus to Dungeoneering checks.

Level 10 Feature Escaped thralls who survive the trials and creeping madness of their ordeal become calmer, able to focus on reality in a way that brings peace.

Benefit: You gain a +1 power bonus to Will.

Optional Powers

An escaped thrall's scars never fully heal. Some pretend to live normal lives unafflicted by corruption. For others, the lingering torment becomes an obsession. Your freedom becomes your identity. These optional powers let you harness the clinging madness of your enslavement, turning it into a weapon against your enemies.

THE GIFTS OF TORTURE

Thrallmasters inflict unspeakable horrors on their captives, but such maltreatment sometimes instills useful abilities along with the residual scars. The sort of marks an escaped thrall bears might indicate a particular boon.

Psionic Seeds: Icy fingers crawl across your mind, grasping at your thoughts, trying to control your actions. As long as you can hold them back, your altered mind can accomplish great feats.

Augmented Flesh: The alien scars that cover your body make you look like a freak. In the rush of combat, your muscles distort and ripple. The feeling is horrific, but the effect sometimes lets you transcend your body's normal limits.

Dreams and Visions: The nightmares that wrack your sleeping mind leave you on edge when you wake. Still, glimmers of prophecy are hidden within those visions and might prove useful—if you can decipher them. Perhaps priests experienced with such foresight can guide you.

Level 2 Utility Power Sometimes your mind seems no longer your own. It operates in ways you can't understand, sometimes pulling up knowledge you never realized you had. You have learned to rely on this alien influence to protect yourself.

Protective Trauma Escaped Thrall Utility 2

A hidden bit of memory has placed an accessible psionic defense in your mind.

Encounter ♦ Augmentable, Psionic

Minor Action Personal

Effect: You gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses until the end of your next turn.

Augment 1

Effect: As above, and allies gain a +1 power bonus to Will while adjacent to you. This benefit lasts until the end of your next turn.

Level 6 Utility Power At times a flood of memories comes rushing back to you, imparting a random bit of information amid the confusion of sights and sounds. The *alien insight* power lets you sift through these visions, though who can say if they arise from your experience or from within the mind of your monstrous slaver?

Alien Insight Escaped Thrall Utility 6

A confusing barrage of sensations left over from your imprisonment flashes before your eyes, giving you an advantage if you can make sense of them.

Daily ♦ Augmentable, Psionic

Minor Action Personal

Effect: Roll a d4 to determine the power's effect.

1. You gain an extra move action this turn.
2. You gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses until the end of your next turn.
3. You gain a +2 power bonus to the number of squares you can pull, push, or slide creatures with attacks and effects before the end of your next turn.
4. You regain 2 power points.

Augment 1

Effect: As above, but roll twice and use either result.

Level 10 Utility Power As time goes by, some thralls are able to turn the deep scars of their torment outward, using it to assail the minds of their enemies. These visions rock the sanity of the onlooker, bombarding their senses with darkness, pain, and the maddening whispers of the thrall's former master.

Opening this doorway is often as shocking for you as it is for your opponent, since you each relive the horrible events of your capture. Yet the advantage goes to you, for only you know that freedom waits at the end of the road; your opponent knows no such reprieve.

Window into Madness Escaped Thrall Utility 10

You make mental contact with your enemy, giving it a brief yet vivid taste of the torment you endured as a thrall.

Daily ♦ Psionic

Minor Action Close burst 5

Target: One creature in the burst

Effect: Until the end of your next turn, you grant combat advantage, and the target gains vulnerable 10 psychic.

Sustain Minor: The effect persists until the end of your next turn.

Sample Escaped Thrall: Mord

"The deeper we go, the more wary I become. There's something evil down here. It makes my scars itch."

All beings long for freedom and will do anything to shatter the yoke of slavery. But what hope is there for escape when the master chains not only the body but the mind? Not one in a thousand possesses the iron will to break free, but Mord did—at a terrible price.

Origin Story Nightmares have haunted Mord since his childhood. He doesn't remember anything before he was about ten, when he emerged alone and frightened from a cave on a barren hillside during a downpour. He would have died from exposure had not a traveling priest named Michelson happened by and found the young half-orc shivering in the mud.

The priest was a hermit sworn to Ioun, but Mord's plight stirred his heart, and he forsook his isolation to care for the child. Despite this kindness, nightmares assailed Mord in his sleep. Many nights he woke up screaming, believing himself to be drowning.

Though Mord was ill suited to the intellectual pursuits demanded by Ioun's dogma, he was fervent in his faith and learned the prayers as best he could. Now an adult, and having buried the old priest long ago, Mord travels the world to spread Ioun's teachings and fight the horrors of the dark.

What he has yet to discover is that aboleths enslaved his people, dragging them into the Underdark to transform them into hideous servitors. Although he escaped their clutches, their evil has infected his thoughts. If that infection flares up, the aboleths might regain their hold on him forever.

Values and Motivations Mord clings to his faith, using it as a shield against the darkness brooding in his mind. He is frightened by the alien thoughts that plague him and ashamed of his inability to overcome them. As a devout follower of Ioun, he should be able to control his emotions through logic and concentration—so he tells himself.

Mord's mission takes him around the world. His only goal is to do the will of Ioun; the only direction he travels is away from the cave where Father Michelson saved him.

Roleplaying Mord Though you are faithful to Ioun and try to be as good as you can be, you constantly feel that you fall short of Father Michelson's teachings. Are you too hard on yourself, or are your doubts stirred by a darker force?

You are inspired most by the desire to repay Father Michelson's kindness by doing good works on behalf of others. You avoid probing too deeply into the secret of your childhood enslavement, for fear that learning too much will give your former master control over you. You know, however, that you cannot escape the truth forever.

Creating Mord Mord's adolescence spent studying with Father Michelson has given him an uncommon combination of intellect and poise, especially for a half-orc. His commitment to his adopted faith, along with his natural strength and athleticism, make Mord a natural warpriest of Ioun.

If you choose to play Mord as a member of a different race and less of an outsider, he could be human instead. Changing his class gives him a different feel: A more pacifist cleric build emphasizes Mord's subtle qualities, while as an avenger he is more impulsive, perhaps influenced by his lingering scars.

TRAPSMITH

"Don't touch that."

Some things you just don't fight. To take on adversaries that have superior strength, cunning, or resources (or all three), you need to remove their advantages. Such an alternative approach is the job of a trapsmith.

Humanoids have been building traps since the earliest times, developing techniques to take down big game for food and clothing. According to loremasters, goblin tribes were the first to perfect this kind of hunting. They were able to obtain and store more food than their competition, allowing them to survive harsh winters and increase their numbers. Many years later, other races came to appreciate the ingenuity of their counterparts—mainly through direct interaction with goblin traps.

Playing a Trapsmith

Trapmaking started out as an essential survival tool but became more advanced as technology improved and magic was discovered. Dwarves developed methods of blasting stone with black powder and incorporated the new techniques into traps to create terrifying inventions. Arcane practitioners also began



STEPS IN SETTING A TRAP

Placing a trap always comes with the risk of setting it off. Trapsmiths follow these careful steps so they can keep their extremities and improve the chance of having their traps work as intended.

1. Pick the Right Spot: Place traps in narrow tunnels or around valuable objects. Don't give anyone room to skirt around them.

2. Avoid Collateral Damage: Don't let your trap hurt anybody or anything it's not supposed to. Also watch out that you don't place a trap where it can damage the thing it's meant to protect.

3. Use the Right Tools: Don't cut corners. If you don't have the tools to make a particular trap, make a different trap. End of story.

4. Keep Your Distance: If you stay close to your trap while you set it, you're begging to get yourself maimed. Long-handled tools, such as tongs, and ten-foot poles were made for a reason. Protective goggles can't hurt, either.

5. Don't Test It: It's disappointing when a trap fails in the field, but it's not worth risking your life to try the trap out. Far better to be known as the trapsmith who set a couple of duds than as the one who got killed by your own trap.





Thorry the Unlucky, a svirfneblin and a trapsmith

their own experiments, which ultimately led to the development of magical traps that used special sigils and runes. As great kingdoms and empires arose, traps became tools of warfare in addition to protecting valuable people and possessions. The new reality required masters of both disarming and creating traps. That's where you come in.

You're not just an expert in all things relating to traps. You see every new trap as a puzzle to be solved, its secrets waiting for you to bring them to their highest expression. The physical and emotional scars of your profession are small costs to pay for the sense of aliveness you experience as you practice your trade.

Trapsmiths are rare, so you have little difficulty gaining employment. Adventuring parties, military expeditions, and explorers all value your efforts and often call upon you for follow-up duties if you perform well. You command higher payment for dungeon expeditions than most other adventuring professionals, due to the danger involved in your work as well as your specialized skill set. Indeed, the older you are, the more you can charge for your services, since most young and inexperienced trapsmiths die early.

Building a Trapsmith

Trapsmiths prefer to live in solitude, honing their skills and mastering their trade. You spend your free

time researching new and exciting places to go. You might have a core group of friends, but beyond that, you are not very social. Ironically, you might feel like a prisoner in life—with death the ultimate trap to be defeated.

You might become a trapsmith if you enjoy creating dastardly devices to hinder and harm foes; rogues and possibly rangers are typical classes. You might also choose this theme if you like to play clever tricks or conduct intricate research. A mage or bard makes a good trapsmith. Members of any race might take up such a career, but those with an aptitude for mechanical constructions (such as dwarves, gnomes, or svirfneblin) find greater success, as well as those with some magical aptitude. When creating a trapsmith character, consider the following story elements.

Analytical Mind You understand physics innately and see life's challenges as equations to be solved, using strict logic to determine the likely success or failure of a course of action. You might not be conscious of this thought process; even in social situations, you tend to analyze the situation coldly instead of considering body language and emotion. Thus, others might think you odd. You prefer to live in solitude, honing your skills and mastering your trade, and you spend your free time researching new and

exciting places to go. You might have a core group of friends, but beyond that, you are not very social.

Adrenaline Rush Nothing is more exciting than disarming a trap that could splatter you across the room. You love getting into the face of death and kicking it hard. You also enjoy the accolades for overcoming dangerous challenges and might purposely seek out bigger and more hazardous traps. The knowledge you win when you survive such dangers lets you make your own creations that much more fiendish. Your creations are feared by all and coveted by those who need to protect something precious.

Your profession is not a risk-free one. You have suffered for your art and are likely to have scars, welts, or even a missing limb. Rare is the trapsmith who has not had a mishap while setting or disarming a trap. You might also bear emotional scars, which, though not visible, can have longer-lasting effects.

Starting Feature

You can create and disarm elaborate traps, but sometimes a simple device is all that's needed to stop an enemy in its tracks.

Benefit: You gain a trap-making kit (15 lb.), which you use to lay your traps. If you ever lose the kit, it costs 40 gp to replace.

You also gain the *trip the trap* power.

Trip the Trap

Trapsmith Attack

An enemy's approach triggers a nasty trap you prepared just for this occasion.

Encounter

Immediate Reaction Melee 1

Requirement: You must have a trap-making kit on your person.

Trigger: An enemy enters a square adjacent to you.

Target: The triggering enemy

Attack: Intelligence + 2 vs. Reflex

Level 11: Intelligence + 4 vs. Reflex

Level 21: Intelligence + 6 vs. Reflex

Hit: 1d6 + Intelligence modifier damage.

Level 11: 2d6 + Intelligence modifier damage.

Level 21: 3d6 + Intelligence modifier damage.

Effect: The target grants combat advantage until the end of your next turn.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature Few professions rival the trapsmith's trade for the inherent danger it holds. You are intimately aware of the threat that any hazard or trap presents, and you have honed your ability to sense when one might be nearby.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Perception checks and Thievery checks.

Level 10 Feature Once you have mastered your trade, you can modify the traps you create on the fly to create specialized effects.

Benefit: You can forgo dice of damage from your *trip the trap* power for one of the following effects. You choose to forgo the dice after you know you hit, but before you make the damage roll.

If you forgo one die of damage, the target falls prone.

If you forgo two dice of damage, the target is dazed until the end of your next turn.

Optional Powers

Level 2 Utility Power You can rig a simple alarm system to warn your party of intruders.

Alarm Trap

Trapsmith Utility 2

A few specially enchanted bells can suss out a hidden foe.

Daily ♦ Arcane

Minor Action

Personal

Requirement: You must have a trap-making kit on your person.

Effect: You set an alarm trap in one unoccupied square adjacent to you. It lasts until the end of your next extended rest. If an invisible creature enters a square within 5 squares of the trap, the trap is destroyed, and the creature loses invisibility and takes a -10 penalty to Stealth checks (save ends both).

Level 6 Utility Power You have refined your skills to the point that your simple alarm can surprise and upset those who trigger it.

Disorienting Trap

Trapsmith Utility 6

You lay a magical trap designed to bewilder an enemy.

Daily ♦ Arcane

Minor Action

Personal

Requirement: You must have a trap-making kit on your person.

Effect: You set a disorienting trap in one unoccupied square adjacent to you. It lasts until the end of your next extended rest. If an enemy enters a square within 5 squares of the trap, the trap is destroyed, and the enemy and each creature adjacent to it grants combat advantage and falls prone if hit (save ends both).

Level 10 Utility Power Sometimes you run into situations that require just a few moments more.

It's a Trap!

Trapsmith Utility 10

You sense that something bad is about to happen.

Daily

Immediate Interrupt

Close burst 5

Trigger: A hazard, object, or trap within 5 squares of you triggers.

Target: You and each ally in the burst

Effect: Each target shifts up to half his or her speed and gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses against hazards, objects, and traps until the end of the encounter.

Sample Trapsmith: Thorry the Unlucky

“Always double check. Else? Boom! There goes yer hand—if yer lucky.”

Kobolds took two fingers on Thorry’s left hand, or rather, a trap set by kobolds did. That Thorry didn’t lose his arm and bleed to death earned him the moniker “the Fortunate”—a name he hates. Wish him good luck, and he winces; comment on a winning streak, and he spits a curse. Thorry calls himself “the Unlucky” and believes luck favors him only if he doesn’t acknowledge it. Yet he won’t admit this idea even to himself, lest luck somehow find out.

Origin Story As a young svirfneblin, Thorry had ambitions to be a baker, but the elders noticed he had quick reflexes and steady hands. So he was tasked with rooting out and dismantling traps set by kobolds around his warren, deep in the Feydark. Crawling through cramped passages, dagger clenched between his teeth, and carrying an oilcloth

filled with tools, Thorry got to know all sorts of diabolical devices hatched from the wickedest minds.

He discovered he had a knack for analyzing traps, a talent that helped him figure out how to disarm one after just a few seconds of study. Whether a mundane pit or scything blade, or a magical glyph or curse, he could see the patterns and know just what to do to mess up the works. He was a natural, and thus he unwillingly found his calling.

Even the best trapsmith can’t handle the strain forever. After a decade spent pulling apart kobold traps, losing his fingers along the way, Thorry had had enough. He sneaked away one night and slipped through a portal to the natural world, where he thought to earn a livelihood in a less dangerous profession. The trouble was, he didn’t know how to do anything else. So he ended up hiring himself out to adventuring parties as a trapsmith. Figuring that dungeons hold fewer traps than he encountered on the front lines against the kobolds, he hopes to do this job only for a few years and then retire. Thorry is good at what he does, and despite everything he usually enjoys it. He has come to realize that he is a valued master of his trade, and he makes sure he is rewarded appropriately.

Values and Motivations Thorry is in this strictly for the money, though he does like to keep his hand in. He isn’t willing to take stupid chances, with retirement so close. When hired on to an adventuring team, he bluntly advises the others on the best course of action. If he can pass on even a fragment of his experience and knowledge, he considers himself obligated to make the attempt. He takes pride in his work, though, and once he has started a task, he is unwilling to leave it unfinished.

Roleplaying Thorry In your line of work, being a little paranoid is an important survival trait. You come across as dour and suspicious to those who have never spoken to you. That trait, along with your matted hair, disfigured hand, and scarred face, make you hard to approach. Those willing to make the effort, though, find you to be excellent company. You like to speak with people, having been a loner for most of your life. You have a dark sense of humor and tell quirky stories about your prior employment. Though you hope to escape that life forever, you’re always willing to help—if the pay is right.

Creating Thorry If you choose to play Thorry, you need not keep him a svirfneblin. He might instead be a surface-dwelling gnome, or perhaps a former kobold trapmaker or a goblin scout making his way in the wider world. His talents are best suited to the rogue class, but the skill set of a ranger also works well for trapsmiths; you could consider a hybrid of both.

DEALING WITH TRAPS

Some traps are designed to capture, others are meant to maim or kill, and certain traps delay or misdirect intruders. As a trapsmith, you’re going to have to deal with someone else’s trap at least as often as you set your own.

No matter the exact function of a given trap, it falls into one of two categories. Mechanical devices use physical components, such as tension coils, levers, and special releases that activate when triggered. Even a simple mechanical trap, such as a covered pit, is quite effective. Magical traps are more difficult but can be tailored to specific situations. For example, a rune might trigger a *sleep* spell only when unidentified intruders enter the warded area.

Disabling a trap doesn’t have to mean destroying it. At the DM’s discretion, you could make a hard Thievery check to reset a trap that is disabled if its requisite components are still intact. Alternatively, you could repurpose a trap by moving it to a more useful location.

In some situations, delaying a trap is just as useful as disabling or destroying it. When time is short, or you face other more pressing threats, you might want to hold off a trap’s activation for a few moments until your companions get past. You can always devote your complete attention to analyzing the trap later. Such a check might be of moderate or hard difficulty for the trap’s level, at the DM’s discretion.

TREASURE HUNTER

"X never, ever marks the spot."

Attaining wealth and glory might be a shallow and selfish goal, but treasure hunters are fine with that. They take on great risk and danger to dig up great riches. Treasure hunters also enjoy the thrill of the chase when seeking out valuable finds, sometimes to the point of addiction, and this adventurous spirit can be contagious.

Finding lost or buried treasure is much harder than it appears at first. Treasure hunters constantly crave more wealth. They generally learn just enough to find their quarry and care nothing for confirming legends or ancient texts—other than to plunder whatever they refer to. Some, though, learn to love the unique history of the antiquities they seek. Those without a formal education might study a subject related to their quest on their own, even becoming specialists on specific topics.

Treasure hunters are typically self-sufficient. Occasionally several work together to meet similar goals, but they do not trust each other. Each views the others as brigands and mercenaries out to steal their finds.

Playing a Treasure Hunter

Treasure hunters are viewed as money-grubbing and selfish, for good reason. They are out for fame and fortune, but they aren't necessarily shallow. They bring considerable expertise to dungeon expeditions.

Treasure hunters who can operate without seeking employment are usually already wealthy. They do their job for the thrill of it, or to further their own collection. Many have been treasure hunters for years and have acquired the necessary experience to survive such a dangerous profession.

For your part, you despise the label of mercenary as insulting and inaccurate. Although you hire out your services to the highest bidder, fighting wars and obtaining antiquities are very different tasks—as you are quick to point out. You are pragmatic, insisting on a contract to ensure you have the resources needed to complete the job.

Pragmatism does not mean ruthlessness. Although you tend to your own interests first, you take care of those who travel with you. Treasure hunters worth their salt understand the value of a satisfied adventuring party and are more than fair when negotiating terms for the expedition. Many develop long-lasting relationships with their fellow delvers, bonded by the danger they face together.

Building a Treasure Hunter

You can apply the treasure hunter theme to any character concept that thrives on risk-taking and

exploration (even more so than the average adventurer). You might enjoy this theme if you wish to play a cunning character who enjoys overcoming difficult challenges through unconventional thinking. When creating your treasure hunter character, keep these story elements in mind.

Adroit Dungeoneer You are a skilled adventurer, able to adapt to any situation. Although your yearning for wealth and recognition drives you, you have earned a reputation for cleverness. You enjoy finding solutions to problems and applying your unique logic when dealing with unusual situations.

Throughout your career as a treasure hunter, you have had to deal with threats that are common in dungeons. Although each dungeon is unique, all share some features. You know these by heart and know how to handle each of them.

Your reputation speaks volumes about your sense of adventure and your proven experience. Employers love your attitude and are confident in your success at acquiring an relic or treasure.



EFFICIENT TREASURE COLLECTION

It happens to every explorer (or so every explorer hopes): You find a hoard so big you can't take it all. At first you're excited, then frustrated. You have no choice but to prioritize the importance of treasure. Here are the key factors to consider.

Portable: Gems! What wonderful little things. Worth so much money but with far less weight. Skip the gold idols and pry the gems loose from their eyes instead.

Rare: Art objects and rare weapons fetch a pretty sum. Study up on the ancient civilizations of a region so you can grab the rarest stuff. When in doubt, go with whatever looks old (but not rusty).

Magic: With training in arcane matters, you can learn enough about spells to detect magic. You never know when some cheap-looking trinket turns out to have a great enchantment on it.

Popular: Finding a buyer isn't always easy, and human creations won't fetch the best price even if they're old. Go with antique items made by dwarves, cyclopes, eladrin, and tieflings (but only those from Bael Turath).

Not Cursed: Sure, every treasure hoard has some rumors of a curse floating around it. You'll figure out when to believe those rumors, one way or another. First piece of advice? Mummy treasure is always cursed. Always.





Ella, a halfling warlock and a treasure hunter

Recognized Expert Many of the world’s famous treasure hunters are renowned for their expertise in recovering specific types of treasure and overcoming the threats that guard them from plunderers. You make sure to be as informed as possible about the places where you will be adventuring.

Another reason to specialize is simply a matter of business. Your choice is based on a given treasure’s value, availability, and salability. You might be inclined to let the small fish fight over the latest fad while you bring back more lucrative pieces. On the other hand, you might join the crowd, knowing you are much more likely than the rest to get the goods.

Living on the Edge You are a thrill-seeker, constantly on the lookout for adventures that will satiate your hunger for danger. Riches and fame aren’t enough—you love living by the seat of your pants. You feel most alive whenever you get into a precarious situation and manage to avert the danger, all while showing off your skills.

Not many can boast of a life as exciting as what you have experienced, and you have no intention of slowing down now. To you, life is a one big treasure hunt, and the ultimate prize is a sense of accomplishment mixed with plenty of thrills. You will look back

when you are old and say to yourself, “Whoa! I lived an amazing life!”

Starting Feature

Treasure hunters develop something of a sixth sense when it comes to detecting the presence of a relic.

Benefit: You gain the *treasure sense* power.

Treasure Sense

Treasure Hunter Utility

You have an innate sense of where treasure is located.

Daily

Minor Action

Effect: Choose a single item. For the next hour, you gain a +4 power bonus to any knowledge check, Perception check, Streetwise check, or Thievery check that relates to finding or identifying that item.

Personal

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature You have become accustomed to dealing with rival treasure seekers as well as the hazards that face any adventurer. Because of this, you can better handle a particular type of peril, whether physical, social, or intellectual.

Benefit: You gain Skill Focus as a bonus feat.

Level 10 Feature Whether it be a tight dungeon corridor or an altar room of a forgotten god, treasure hunters are always fighting in close quarters. You have learned how to maneuver and fight in these environments and have adjusted accordingly.

Benefit: You do not take the normal attack roll penalties for squeezing or being prone.

Optional Powers

All treasure hunters realize that situations can change at the drop of a hat and have honed their ability to survive. You can choose one of the following powers instead of one given as a class or race option.

Level 2 Utility Power With a well-placed attack or a lightning-quick disarming of a trap, you can make your own luck, allowing you to dart away.

Stick and Move Treasure Hunter Utility 2

You take advantage of a chance to act freely.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

Free Action **Personal**

Trigger: On your turn, you succeed on a Thievery check or hit an enemy with a basic attack.

Effect: You shift up to 2 squares, and you can draw or stow one item.

Level 6 Utility Power Having no situational awareness can be a detriment to you and your party. You are able to bark out a quick order and keep everyone's attention on what's important.

Pay Attention Treasure Hunter Utility 6

Often, allies don't look out for the dangers found in dungeons. Sometimes you need to remind them.

Daily ♦ **Martial**

Free Action **Close burst 3**

Trigger: You roll initiative.

Target: You and each ally in the burst

Effect: Each target gains a +2 power bonus to his or her initiative check, and a +2 power bonus to all defenses during the first round of combat.

Level 11: +4 power bonus.

Level 21: +6 power bonus.

Level 10 Utility Power In order to have a successful and long-lasting career, you have to know your limits and how to push yourself beyond them.

Exertion Treasure Hunter Utility 10

You know how to dig deep to meet a challenging situation.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

No Action **Personal**

Trigger: You make a skill check or a saving throw and dislike the result.

Effect: You reroll and must use the new result.

Sample Treasure Hunter: Ella

"Look, the Green Man saved me and he gave me these spells and all. Great, nice of him. But that weirdo also has my brother and sister, so I gotta get these treasures and finish this deal."

The world is full of treasure waiting to be found. Seeking it is not only the sport of mortals—even otherworldly beings play this treacherous game. The Green Man changed Ella's life. She never knew his true name or where he came from, but she owes him a debt that she must repay.

Origin Story Not long ago, Ella and her halfling clan navigated the waterways as they had for generations. Simple folk, they traded and fished as they followed the rivers.

One day the clan headed into unknown territory. Other travelers warned them of the lands ahead, reputed to be haunted by will-o'-wisps and other strange things, and infested with goblins. The halflings ignored the warnings and pressed on. Goblins ambushed their flotilla, launching flaming arrows from all sides. The halflings fought back as best they could, but they were outmatched. Ella feared for her brother and sister, who were many years younger than her. She scooped them up, leaped overboard, and swam for shore.

They clambered up the bank and ran into the forest as fast as they could, but the goblins saw them. Wolf riders pursued them over rocks and fallen trees, filling the woods with howls and laughter. On and on Ella ran, dragging her brother and sister with her, until the three stumbled into a clearing where a great, grassy hill rose like a turtle's shell from the forest floor. They climbed the hill, the goblins at their heels, but just as their pursuers were about to strike, a green figure erupted from the hillside. It slashed and cut at the goblins with an emerald blade, and in moments they and their wolves lay dead.

The figure turned to the halflings he had saved and said, in a musical voice, "I have given you three lives. Now you owe me a debt." The fey lord, who called himself the Green Man, explained how his enemies had bound him to this hill long ago and stolen his crown, scepter, and armor. In exchange for saving the lives of Ella and her young siblings, he demanded that she find the stolen treasures and bring them to him. To ensure she did as he demanded, he would hold her siblings hostage until every item was returned. If she failed or did not return, her brother and sister would remain with him forever.

The Green Man did not make such a terrible demand without giving the untested Ella some hope of success. They made a pact on that sylvan hill, an agreement that bound their fates and bestowed on Ella some of the Green Man's witchery. She emerged from his demesne armed with fey abilities, and now she scours the world in search of the stolen treasures.

Values and Motivations Ella never wanted this life, but it is hers now. She must seek out the treasure that the Green Man wants if she is ever to save her brother and sister again. To free her siblings from the archfey's prison, Ella cannot fail.

Roleplaying Ella You are strong and energetic, able to suppress your inner strife while you plunge into perilous dungeons. You are extremely protective of your family and clan, even though you try to seem carefree. You have become a real adventurer's adventurer and like to maintain that reputation. When no one is around to see, though, you weep for the lives of your brother and sister and vow silently to do whatever is necessary for their release. Nothing in the world matters more to you, and you will take any steps to see them home once more. Once they're safe, though, you might well jump right back into the adventuring life.

Creating Ella Ella is emboldened by the warlock powers bestowed upon her through the Green Man's fey pact. With the halfling's optional Charisma bonus, the deceptive warlock build from the *Player's Handbook* is the best choice.

If you choose to play Ella, you can have her belong to another race with strong family bonds, such as dwarf, gnome, or svirfneblin. Such a choice would require some changes to the circumstances of her quest and possibly involve a different class choice.



UNDERDARK ENVOY

"The dungeon you're heading into is inhabited. This expedition needs a face—and frankly, yours won't do."

The Underdark is a dangerous place, and not just for the horrors that lurk in the darkness. The cities and enclaves that dot its murky caverns are hotbeds of spite and political intrigue. To survive for long in such societies, you have to know how to play the game. Physical prowess is no match for the wits of a skilled diplomat.

The great city-states of the Underdark were first established as collections of tribes with a shared need for survival. As the centuries rolled by, these settlements developed into self-sufficient communities and grew into nations. Their growth was aided by individuals who could seek out and interact with the other city-states to establish lines of communication. These representatives grew experienced at dealing with the different Underdark races and became expert diplomats and negotiators.

Playing an Underdark Envoy

The power of persuasion can be a mighty weapon against any would-be foe. Underdark rulers have a vested interest in having the best envoys around. They appreciate the power of a well-placed rumor and greatly value those who, like you, can best advise them how to plant it. With a well-placed word, an envoy could single-handedly take down an entire community. In addition, constant political wars require specialized agents who can act as both messengers and spies.

As an Underdark envoy, you have trained within your city-state to refine your diplomatic skills, according to the houses and organizations that depend on your abilities. You spend much of your time studying the cultures of the various races you deal with, as well as the intricacies of interracial politics. Delivering a message in an unsatisfactory way during a crucial negotiation could severely damage an employer's plans.

Building an Underdark Envoy

You might become an Underdark envoy if you delight in political intrigue, spying, and social maneuvering. Many successful political leaders were once envoys, whether due to merit and ability, or because they were able to orchestrate the removal of their predecessors.

Bards and rogues are natural class choices for this career path, as well as any character who has diplomatic talent, including clerics and warlords. Beings of



Khiira, a drow bard and an Underdark envoy

a gruff or introverted nature, such as dwarves, rarely become envoys. The drow have mastered the skill of diplomacy over centuries of cutthroat politics, and they have the most capable and dominant envoys in the Underdark. Consider the following story elements when creating your Underdark envoy character.

Dark Delegate You are an extension of your master's will, an instrument to further his or her interests. On returning from a mission, you are expected to relay not only the response of the other party, but also its tone and attitude. The more information you convey to your employer, the greater advantage he or she will enjoy in political power plays and future exchanges. If you are a freelance envoy, not bound to one employer, you seek to make a name for yourself as a neutral third party. In this capacity you manage labor disputes, conduct trade negotiations, and perform similar tasks, commanding a high wage for your services.

Yours is a precarious path. You not only deliver communications from your masters, but you also glean whatever information you can while on the job. Anything might give you a crucial advantage in future employment. Thus, you have to be very clever and perceptive, while at the same time appearing inoffensive.

This sort of agent works against expectations and can include dwarves, duergar, or svirfneblin.

Double Agent A few Underdark envoys serve as double agents for a faction, generally to facilitate the collapse of a powerful political entity. Such people are rare, for the role is exceedingly dangerous. If you became a double agent, you likely received an offer to betray an employer after delivering a message on his or her behalf—along with a suitable financial incentive to secure such services.

As a double agent, you remain under cover much of the time while you work on behalf of another entity. You maintain your status within your ostensible employer's organization while feeding vital information to the other side, revealing yourself only if your activities are found out. In this role, you must be extremely skilled in both providing misinformation to your target and locating other agents who might have infiltrated the organization. You carefully collect information on everything that has been said and done to support your complex web of political scheming. Should you fail, you're likely to end up dead in some dark alleyway or Underdark corridor. Why do you take such risks? Was your choice

personal, to take revenge on a cruel master, or did you do it just for the money?

Mercantile Advantage Not all Underdark envoys are spies or political plotters. You might use your skills to expand your own wealth and that of others by negotiating merchant treaties between powerful cities. Influential members of Underdark communities employ individuals such as yourself to help increase their economic power while protecting their political interests. Sometimes you manipulate markets to help your employer gain a monetary advantage over rivals.

Envoys of this sort can come from any Underdark race, and they might even include topsiders who are trusted in their dealings with those below. You could be a former explorer who decided to turn your talents to more profitable interests while still keeping your hand in the adventuring business.

IT'S BETTER TO GIVE

For an envoy, bestowing a proper gift can quickly build a connection with the leaders of a city or group. The trick is to offer something that has greater value among that group than it does elsewhere.

Dwarves and **svirfneblin** both desire gems and precious metals. Svirfneblin have simpler tastes and accept uncut stones, but the pride of dwarves is insulted by such basic treasures. They prefer to receive artistic items crafted in the styles of different cultures. They'll sneer and deem these items inferior, too, but at least they're inferior and novel.

Kobolds are pathetically delighted by just about any gift—so rarely do they receive any—but bringing them dragon relics really earns their loyalty. Dragon scales or teeth appeal most to them. Statues or other representations of dragons pique their interest, too.

Goblins prefer simple pleasures: food, drink, and nasty weaponry.

Drow want slaves. A great many envoys object to slavery, though, so they instead offer items they claim were stolen from elves. Drow also accept monetary gifts, which they prefer in the form of silver coins.

Beholders shoot first and ask questions later as a rule. Those who do accept gifts enjoy seeing their own likenesses.

The simple, blind **grimlocks** take anything that has an interesting texture. They're unreliable allies at best, though.

Starting Feature

An Underdark envoy is first and foremost a master of manipulation. Your well-chosen words unsettle your opponent, leaving it more susceptible to real damage.

Benefit: You gain the *insidious commentary* power.

Insidious Commentary Underdark Envoy Attack

Your words are disarming to a potential foe and give you just enough of an opportunity to make an effective attack.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

Minor Action

Ranged 5

Target: One creature

Attack: Charisma + 2 vs. Will

Level 11: Charisma + 4 vs. Will

Level 21: Charisma + 6 vs. Will

Hit: The target grants combat advantage until the end of your next turn, and your next attack against the target this turn deals 1d6 extra damage on a hit.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature You understand the cultures of the Underdark better than most. You use this talent to your advantage whenever you are below.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Bluff checks and Diplomacy checks.

Level 10 Feature You are fully integrated into the market system of the Underdark and appreciate the subtlety of its inner workings.

Benefit: Add Deep Speech to the languages you can speak, read, and write. You also gain a +2 power bonus to Streetwise checks.

Optional Powers

Underdark envoys must keep their attention focused whenever dealing with others, and they use a unique set of skills to be successful in their line of work.

You can choose one of the following powers instead of one given as a class or race option.

Level 2 Utility Power Sometimes the secret to good diplomacy is knowing when to exploit a social situation to get the drop on enemies. Doing so might not be honorable, but it keeps you and your friends alive.

Practiced Herald Underdark Envoy Utility 2

You and your allies are not greeted with hostility, and thus you find a way to take advantage of a momentary lapse in your enemy's defenses.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

Minor Action

Close burst 5

Target: You and each ally in the burst

Effect: Until the end of your next turn, each target gains a +1 power bonus to attack rolls, damage rolls, and saving throws.

Level 6 Utility Power Sometimes darkness is not enough of a cover for your activities. Learning some of the magic of the drow, you can make yourself literally disappear for a short time.

Cloak and Dagger Underdark Envoy Utility 6

You vanish from the vision of those around you.

Daily ♦ Arcane, Illusion

Move Action Personal

Effect: You become invisible until the end of your next turn. If you attack, the effect ends, and if you move, you cannot sustain it.

Sustain Minor: The invisibility persists until the end of your next turn.

Level 10 Utility Power A swift word can be better than a swift sword. You have learned how to defuse a situation quickly. When you speak about the virtues of cooperation, you can command a large audience.

Pacifying Presence Underdark Envoy Utility 10

Your soothing tone lulls your enemies into hesitation.

Daily ♦ Charm

Free Action Close burst 10

Trigger: You and your enemies roll initiative.

Target: Each enemy that can hear and understand you in the burst

Effect: Each target takes a -10 penalty to its initiative check.

Sample Underdark Envoy: Khiira

“No harm was intended, I’m sure. Now just take the dagger from my companion’s throat, darling, and we’ll talk alone.”

The life of an Underdark envoy is perilous, but never more so than for a drow who has spurned her house. Khiira did what she thought she must to survive, but she pays the price every time she draws breath.

Origin Story Khiira never let her status as seventh daughter stop her ambition. Anyone else in her position might have had her life cut short with a one-way trip to the sacrificial altar, or been forced to spawn draegloths. Khiira survived by talking her way out of any dire situation. Her mother, one of Lolth’s nastier priestesses, recognized her daughter’s talents and thought to use them to her advantage.

Before she could become another weapon in her mother’s arsenal, though, Khiira chose her own path. She cultivated the acquaintance of Riellenzen, who acted as an envoy to a duergar outpost about ten miles away, and soon became his consort.

Khiira played her part well. She seduced the diplomat, earned his trust, and then, en route to

the outpost, stuck a knife in his throat. Riellenzen’s guards did not realize their master was dead until the party arrived and Khiira announced herself as the envoy. The guards dared not expose her lest the duergar take offense, so they played along. Khiira managed to negotiate a trade agreement with the infernal dwarves and earned their help, if not their friendship. She sent the drow guards back to her city with a letter explaining the terms and also Riellenzen’s tragic end, and then she slipped away to the surface to escape what she believed was certain retribution.

Suspicion and hostility met Khiira at almost every turn in the upper world. Few people were willing to deal with a dark elf, for fear of opening their doors to drow legions. So, Khiira found other ways to put her talents to good use. She joined a few Underdark caravans, lending her expertise in the subterranean peoples and their language to help the merchants negotiate deals and gain safe passage. She gained a reputation for being someone in the know about Underdark folk and won a place in an adventuring group. She maintains as low a profile as she can, using false identities and disguise to stay a step ahead of the assassins she is sure her mother and Riellenzen’s family have sent. Her caution might have been dismissed as paranoia—until her party was attacked by Lolthbound goblins. That encounter shook her enough that she now spares no effort to hide her trail.

Values and Motivations For Khiira, it’s all about gaining the advantage, over any drow pursuers or anyone else she deals with. She walks a delicate line between earning a reputation as a negotiator and keeping a low profile. She hopes above all to one day be free of pursuit and to live as she wishes, but she knows how unrealistic such an expectation is. Honeyed words and a ready blade are the tools of her trade. She is coldly calculating in all her dealings, but her expertise with a rapier makes her more than capable in combat if things come to that.

Roleplaying Khiira You take great pleasure in your work, despite the constant danger. You come across as seductive yet coy, but you employ a sardonic manner of speech when not buttering up a potential contact. You always wear a crimson cloak over your chainmail—a color associated with your house—as your only concession to your origin. Your winning smile hides the constant terror just below the surface.

Creating Khiira Khiira is a drow bard who is unparalleled in her profession. If you choose to play her, you might instead make her a rogue, a ranger, or a hybrid incorporating two of those classes. Alternatively, she could multiclass in ranger or fighter.



Korag, a dwarf barbarian and an Underdark outcast

UNDERDARK OUTCAST

“I have nothing left to rely on but myself.”

A lone figure, haggard and lean, scrambles through the tunnel as he peers fearfully over his shoulder. He bears marks of shame—scars from lashes and manacles, bruises, brands. Behind lies his home, from which he has been exiled forever. A pained look crosses his face before it is replaced by a determined grimace. The Underdark is not kind to the weak.

Underdark outcasts did not start out as subterranean vagabonds. Some were proud members of their underground society, exemplars of their race’s customs or beliefs. They might have been dwarf artisans in the service of a king, or tribal warriors amid chanting goblin hordes. Something happened to disrupt their existence and drive them from their communities. Perhaps they committed a crime or dishonored the family name, or became disgusted by their people’s ways. Whatever the reason, they have been cast into the depths to live or die as fate wills.

Underdark outcasts wander far from the place of their disgrace in search of a new life. Usually hated by members of their own society, they must rely on their own wits or the kindness of strangers to survive. Most remain underground out of habit, it being their

birthplace, but others deliberately venture to surface realms—though they rarely find refuge there.

Playing an Underdark Outcast

Everything was taken away when you were banished into the depths. If you can adapt to your new reality, you can survive and become self-reliant; if not, you will be an easy meal for a lurking predator. You have become as hard and relentless as the environment that created you. Even the lowliest goblin outcast has faced challenges that would make surface dwellers quake in fear.

As an outcast, you might live your whole life in the deep wilderness, whether as a hermit eking out a lonely existence or a mercenary hiring your sword or skill to explorers. Underdark outcasts are among the toughest individuals to be found in dungeons, and you make it your business to stay that way.

Your enforced solitude, shouldering the burden of shame or dishonor, has made you a sullen loner. In your heart, though, you crave to belong to something, and you seek out folk like yourself. Some outcasts shun the company of others, but you cannot bear the emptiness of the cruel caverns forever. As you brood on the events that led to your exile, you might wonder

what you could have done differently. The wilds close in around you, and that the only thing that can help you now is courage.

Building an Underdark Outcast

Underdark outcasts come from races dwelling underground, such as dwarves, goblins, or svirfneblin. Many belong to folk who get a hostile reception from surface dwellers. They might be of any class or alignment, united only in their common disgrace. Your unique background inspires your personality, class, feat, and power selection. When creating an Underdark outcast, consider the following story elements.

Disgraced Exile Behind every Underdark outcast is a story, though it never ends well. You are defined by the circumstances that led to your banishment. The nature of your transgression varies wildly depending on your race and culture. Dwarves, with their emphasis on duty to the clan and personal honor, expel those who fail to live up to their responsibilities—a traumatic experience for any dwarf. Monstrous races, such as kobolds or orcs, are more likely to cast out one of their own because of a petty or violent disagreement, with the outcast the loser. The nature of your disgrace affects the way you interact with others in a group, especially if members of your race are among them.

What were the events of your exile? Were you a petty criminal, punished for your crimes? Did you break a dire social taboo, robbing you not only of home but of your dignity as well? Perhaps you betrayed someone important or failed to honor an agreement. Whatever your crime, why were you exiled rather than punished some other way?

The consequences of your banishment matter as well. Maybe you had to leave behind a promising life or something of importance, such as an estate or family. Consider also how your exile has changed you. Are you filled with bitterness and hate, plotting revenge against those who hurt you? Did you go as far away as possible and never look back? Maybe you were falsely judged or made a mistake you regret. Your circumstances might motivate you to undertake a quest to clear your name or undo a wrong.

Outcast by Choice Some Underdark outcasts leave their homes willingly. Such a choice is most common among evil Underdark societies, such as those of drow or kobolds. Once in a great while, circumstances can force one of their number to rise above the rest. Striking out into the deep caverns alone took uncommon courage, but you were driven by your convictions.

As a youngster, did you realize that there was something different about you? Perhaps your peers fought and cursed at each other while you were busy thinking. You might have been something of a social revolutionary, trying to drag your incorrigible folk out of their petty ways. How were your efforts viewed by your kind? Did some of these ideas start to catch on, challenging your chief's rule? You might have had no choice but to ostracize yourself; perhaps you are being hunted through the tunnels around your home.



REASONS FOR EXILE

Given the variety of Underdark cultures, the reasons for being exiled are equally numerous. Here are some crimes for which exile is the usual punishment.

Drow: Consorting with slaves, blasphemy against Lolth, conspiracy against the leader of a conclave, dealing with devils or elves. (Such crimes are punishable by death, so drow who commit them usually choose exile before they are caught.)

Dwarves: Disobedience to a superior, dereliction of duty, cowardice in battle.

Goblins: A prank gone awry, overpopulation, a failed assassination attempt.

Kobolds: Blasphemy against Tiamat or a dragon, leading enemies back to the warren, setting a trap that caused kobold casualties.

Orcs or Half-Orcs: Physical weakness, seeking peace or diplomacy.

Svirfneblin: Theft, bringing shame to the family, unsafe or unsanctioned exploration or mining, repeated refusal of expected duties.



Starting Feature

You can never go back. As you brood on the events that led to your exile, you might wonder what you could have done differently. The wilds close in around you, and the only thing that can help you now is courage. You are used to being a lone wanderer in the depths, and you rely only on yourself for survival.

Benefit: You gain the *alone and unafraid* power.

Alone and Unafraid Underdark Outcast Utility

Although you crave companionship, you have learned to survive without anyone at your side.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

Minor Action

Personal

Requirement: You must be at least 5 squares away from your allies.

Effect: Until the end of your next turn, you gain a +2 power bonus to attack rolls and all defenses.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature Being alone in the Underdark forces the outcast to become resilient and resourceful. Finding food and shelter becomes an everyday struggle, as does enduring the rugged caverns without assistance. Underdark outcasts learn to get by, or perish.

Your time spent wandering the Underdark as an outcast has given you a practical knowledge of underground survival. Furthermore, you are used to disease, starvation, and exposure.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Dungeoneering checks and Endurance checks.

Level 10 Feature Having survived the wilds for so long, an outcast becomes toughened to even the most extreme long-term punishment. Whether made hard through physical ordeals or driven by a strong sense of self-confidence, you can go longer, farther, and deeper than any other dungeon delver.

Benefit: Whenever you spend a healing surge to regain hit points, you gain temporary hit points equal to 2 + your Constitution modifier (5 + your Constitution modifier at 21st level).

Optional Powers

Even though Underdark outcasts might find companionship among dungeon explorers, many carry the weight of their exile for the rest of their days. Some of them lament the events that led to their exile, never letting go of their shame. Others embrace their banishment as a badge of honor, their bitterness and resentment giving them new strength.

Level 2 Utility Power Haunted by dishonor, many Underdark outcasts brood on the unfairness of their exile. Some let themselves wither away from this guilt, but others turn it into an affirmation. *Cast off disgrace* lets you negate a past failure so that you can excel in the future.

Cast off Disgrace Underdark Outcast Utility 2

Though you shoulder the burden of failure, you promise yourself it won't happen again.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

No Action

Personal

Trigger: You miss with an attack roll or fail a skill check or a saving throw.

Effect: Before the end of your next turn, you can reroll a single attack roll, skill check, or saving throw, but not the triggering one. You must use the new result.

Level 6 Utility Power Many Underdark outcasts live for years alone, scraping together sustenance. Even though you are in a group now, your sense of self-preservation still comes in handy.

Self-Reliant Underdark Outcast Utility 6

Your ally gives a revitalizing healing effect to another, knowing that you are capable of fending for yourself.

Encounter ♦ **Healing, Martial**

Immediate Reaction **Personal**

Trigger: An ally within 5 squares of you is the target of a healing power that does not heal you.

Effect: You spend a healing surge.

Level 10 Utility Power Used to lurking at the fringes of societies, an Underdark outcast is expert at avoiding notice in time to escape danger. If you're quick enough, *slink away* will get you out of range of an enemy attack.

Slink Away Underdark Outcast Utility 10

You skulk to safety just before your enemy uses a powerful area attack.

Encounter ♦ **Martial**

Immediate Interrupt **Personal**

Trigger: You are hit by a close or area attack.

Effect: You shift up to your speed.

Sample Underdark Outcast: Korag the Clanless

"This expedition will finance my passage to Cor Talcor. Should you think I do this only for coin, you insult my people—though they disown me."

Among the dwarf clans, no crime is worse than abandoning one's comrade to death in the Underdark—and no punishment is worse than exile. For any dwarf, the burden of dishonor is an unbearable weight. For Korag, first son of the chief and the clan's most courageous warrior, the outcast's collar weighs heaviest of all. The blood of his clan is on his hands, and the mark of the outcast will forever be on his brow.

Origin Story The proud son of Beltag the Dutiful, clan chief of Barduum, Korag distinguished himself from his fellow warriors and tunnel wardens through unflinching courage and battle prowess. Beltag groomed his son to be his heir and to lead the clan deeper inside the mountains to coax gemstone and gold from the unyielding depths.

Although smitten with the lust for riches that affects his people, Korag believed mining was a task better suited to lesser dwarves. He saw himself as a great warrior who would lead his fellows to reclaim their primacy in the world. So when his father assigned him to watch over the workers in the

deep tunnels and patrol the nearby halls, he bristled. Where was the glory in being a guard? Despite his protestations, though, he knew enough not to argue with his father, and so he went into the Underdark to do as he was told.

Guard duty proved as dull as he had anticipated, and Korag chafed at what he felt was meaningless work—especially when reports reached him about orcs in the nearby mountains. To break the tedium, he befriended other dwarf warriors. One night, after swapping kegs and boasts, Korag talked the group into going orc hunting. The dwarves exited the mines and hunted down and slaughtered a number of orcs. They triumphantly returned to Barduum—only to find, to their horror, that the holdfast had

been attacked in their absence. While Korag and his fellows were out hunting orcs, grimlock slavers had came up through secret ways, slaughtering the miners and nearly one-third of the clan.

Beltag confronted his son, demanding to know where he had been. Korag admitted his failure and took the blame for the warriors who went with him. He vowed to recover the abducted dwarves, but his father would not listen. Instead, he commanded the priests to shave and brand his son before the surviving clan and then cast him out for the rest of his days. Ever since, Korag has wandered alone, bearing his shame in silence while fighting to redeem himself.

Values and Motivations Korag wants more than anything to be accepted by his people, but the marks of shame that he carries will forever label him as a clanless exile. Dwarves shun him, viewing him as an animal or worse. Korag's faith in himself has been rocked by this treatment, and he struggles with feelings of resentment toward his people, which only adds to his shame. He craves acceptance and mutual respect among a group of brave companions.

Korag also longs to do something to redeem himself in his people's eyes. To accomplish this he has set a course for Cor Talcor, the fabled Fortress of Grudges (see page 69). Korag hopes that the ruthless warmasters of Cor Talcor will give him the training and discipline to perform the heroic deeds needed to reclaim his lost honor.

Roleplaying Korag You are outwardly proud, determined, and intense. Under the surface, though, you are a desolate soul tormented by the guilt of failure, though you would never show this side to your companions. You were raised to believe that strength and honor are everything, but your exile has tested both to the limit. You cling to the hope that you can one day return to your clan, but you know deep down that you will never live down the dishonor. You do everything you can to push these thoughts from your mind, usually by throwing yourself into whatever needs doing.

Creating Korag Korag's deep respect for his people and desire for redemption govern his actions. Growing up in a noble family has given him the poise and martial training suited to the warlord class.

If you choose to play Korag, you could instead make him a svirfneblin or a goliath—both peoples with strong community ties. Changing Korag's class will give him a different feel. As a paladin, he might be driven by shame to perform heroic deeds; on the other hand, he could be a rogue, demonstrating his fall from proud warrior to slinking outcast.



FOR THE DM: THEMES FROM OTHER SOURCES

This book capitalizes on the themes that have been presented here in various ways in later chapters. If a character has a theme from another source, you can still use the ideas from later sections of *Into the Unknown* by associating the character's theme with one from this book. Alternatively, you can devise a way that the character's existing theme relates to dungeon delving.

The alchemist from *Dragon* 399 can search for rare ingredients and the secret mixtures of races that dwell underground, making elements associated with the lore hunter theme appropriate. The animal master from the same issue might seek to train subterranean beasts and is a good match to the deep delver.

If characters from the *Neverwinter Campaign Setting* delve under the earth, some of the themes are excellent fits to those you'll find here. The heir of Delzoun could be associated with the deep delver. The Dead Rat deserter might be associated with the treasure hunter or trapsmith. The Bregan D'aerthe spy works well if associated with the Underdark envoy theme or perhaps the Underdark outcast.

Even themes that originate far from any dungeon or cave can be used with material here if you put a creative twist on the concept. The dune trader from the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting* might be sent to make mercantile contact with those who live beneath the sands, making elements designed for both the Underdark envoy and deep delver appropriate. An Uthgardt barbarian from the *Neverwinter Campaign Setting* might have escaped the captivity of a mind flayer, making a character with that theme a good fit with the bloodsworn or the escaped thrall.



The glow of a lantern reveals the aftermath of a struggle on the stairway

Races

Numerous races call the Underdark and its dungeons home, though many of them are monstrous or hostile. Their distinct ways of life are adapted to the harsh realities of underground existence. Though they are viewed with suspicion or hatred by other races, these dungeon dwellers can be every bit as heroic as their surface-dwelling counterparts.

Goblin: Pint-sized rascals that infest dungeons the world over, goblins are endlessly curious.

Kobold: Small and weak, kobolds depend on their traps and each other to survive in the Underdark.

Svirfneblin: Many believe these mysterious Underdark gnomes to be only a fable.

GOBLIN

Pint-sized rascals known throughout the world for their spitefulness and thievery

Racial Traits

Average Height: 3'4"-3'8"

Average Weight: 40-55 lb.

Ability Scores: +2 Dexterity; +2 Wisdom or +2 Charisma

Size: Small

Speed: 6 squares

Vision: Low-light vision

Languages: Common, Goblin

Skill Bonuses: +2 Bluff, +2 Stealth

Goblin Reflexes: You gain a +1 racial bonus to Reflex.

Goblin Tactics: You have the *goblin tactics* power.

Goblin Tactics

Goblin Utility

You avoid your enemy's blow and cleverly dodge away.

At-Will

Immediate Reaction **Personal**

Trigger: An enemy misses you with a melee attack.

Effect: You shift 1 square.

The image of puny, nose-picking, knife-wielding goblins is common throughout the world. Most adventurers believe in a keen sword and room to swing as the best way to deal with them. Goblins might be the most numerous humanoids in the world, with a reputation for infesting every dank hole and tormenting the countryside with never-ending raids, violence, and maniacal scheming. The majority of them are rapacious and vile, but some have the intellect and attitude to join the ranks of heroes. Though they might face prejudice, goblins can be independent, cunning, and crafty adventurers.

Goblins are highly social creatures, dwelling in tightly packed warrens with hundreds if not thousands of individuals. Individual goblins are weak, but early on, each strives to be king of the hill. Goblins become surprisingly willful by competing with their peers, maturing—for better or for worse—when they can assert themselves. A goblin sees itself as cunning and dangerous, even if it is the wimpiest member of the warren. Such independence borders on arrogance, but it prompts a goblin to attempt daring actions that larger races would think twice about.

A goblin finds a sense of itself from the time it begins life as a crawling, biting infant. Goblin mothers give birth to litters numbering around a dozen, giving the youngsters plenty of siblings to interact and compete with. Juveniles possess an impulsive curiosity that makes them crawl into every cranny of the warren, always craving the new and undiscovered. Most are noisy and selfish, demanding attention by forcing their way into every activity.

Upon adulthood, most goblins find that they are good only at hurting or stealing things. Exceptional individuals develop a knack for leadership, crafting, navigation, problem solving, or other valuable skills—even magic. Goblins take immense pride in their talents, even if it's just a honed ability to knife people in the back. Practicing a skill gives them an identity within the community, which in turn makes them feel important or useful.

Goblins love to brag and get attention; they are instigators who poke and prod at anything to get a reaction. In the warrens, they behave like petulant brats, vandalizing, insulting, hitting, or whining to be noticed. This need for attention might explain their kind's violent attacks on the other races of the world. After all, what better way to get someone's attention than by attacking their homes? Countless raids and wars have been committed by goblins to satisfy this impulse, but the smart ones realize that this sort of behavior won't get them far if they wish to interact with others in any meaningful way.

Independent goblins, especially those who leave their warrens to become adventurers, have learned to tone down their selfishness. Though not nearly so crude or vicious as others of their kind, they are nonetheless rascals at heart. Curious to the point of recklessness, yet cunning enough to escape many dangers, goblin adventurers embody the best of their kind's adaptability. Their companions might have to put up with nonstop chattering or poor hygiene, but they can be trusted friends eager to take in all the danger and excitement the adventuring life has to offer.



Small but endlessly curious, goblins can be stouthearted adventurers

Physical Qualities

Goblins stand just over 3 feet tall, with wiry frames that resemble those of human children. Sometimes humorous, sometimes frightening, each goblin's features are unique and often reflect its personality. Some goblins have long hooked noses and pointy ears, while others have exaggerated fangs or eyes that seem to bug out of their faces.

Most goblins have knobby joints and skinny limbs, though a few are flabby or even roly-poly. Their skin tone ranges from bright greens and oranges to dark, earthy browns. Some are hairless, with oily hides, while others are covered in mangy hair from brow to back. Many goblins ignore hygiene and are accompanied by an ever-present stink. Some even take pride in their disgusting habits.

Goblins wear whatever is available, usually incorporating small trinkets, trophies, or interesting things they've stolen in their travels. These objects usually seem weird or pointless to others, who don't understand the value goblins place in these treasures. A goblin's clothes are a patchwork of different materials stitched together over the course of years. Its equipment is usually rusty or ramshackle but serviceable, thanks to goblin-kind's innate knack for tinkering.

In theory a goblin's life span is equal to that of humans, but most goblins come to an early end because of their unbridled curiosity.

Attitudes and Beliefs

In matters of belief in specific deities, following codes of conduct, or showing loyalty to a leader, goblins quickly get bored and move on. They are motivated by novelties, be they stolen treasures or new sights and sounds, or even bodily sensations unique or bizarre. Goblins live for sensation, going out of their way to explore, open, prod, taste, or rub up against new things—often to the disgust of non-goblin companions.

Goblins' perceptiveness is curiously selective. They might not notice hidden traps or monsters, but they latch onto weird old graffiti, bits of rotten food, scraps of ruined scrolls, and other interesting rubbish. Living in an overpopulated warren teaches goblins that quantity is more important than quality. A goblin would pass over one great treasure to grab a whole bunch of baubles.

Goblin curiosity also drives them to pilfer and plunder. They carry out raids and burglaries so they can acquire new things to take back to the warren. However, goblins don't covet in the conventional sense. Few maintain ownership of an item or value

the trinkets they've collected. They simply take what interests them at the moment, then discard it and move on to the next. Their warrens are cluttered messes, overflowing with everything from golden treasure to shiny rocks.

Many goblins are consummate schemers, concocting plans of startling complexity that they hope will generate excitement or riches. Though few goblins are book-smart, their devious minds can outpace those of other folk. Goblins rarely think in ways that are linear or even logical. They love investigating weird possibilities, improbable outcomes, and unlikely courses of action. Such scheming sometimes triggers calamities that cascade like dominos—much to the goblins' delight.

Goblins have few orthodox beliefs, but they love to create myths, rituals, and laws—most of which are arbitrary. They imitate anything they think is neat, such as some newly discovered custom of a nearby culture, although the original intent is usually lost in translation or warped to suit goblin ends. Isolated goblin tribes in the deep wilds might hear the call of the primal spirits, though they might envision those spirits as unpleasant or slimy, such as Ska'nug the Skunk or Blhorgg the Whelk.

Goblin Communities

Goblins are found in any climate, at any altitude, in any environment, and at any distance from the settlements of other races. Their ability to adapt and thrive is second only to that of humans, and goblin wanderlust—combined with their speedy life cycle—encourages rapid expansion into new realms. They are tenacious, finding a way to sneak into any place they can exploit, from dungeon caves to sewers beneath the streets of a human city.

Regardless of where goblins dwell, they prefer cozy underground quarters. Only the smartest are any good at creating new homes, so most goblin tribes are more like squatters, taking advantage of an empty lair or even bullying out an original resident. The goblins quickly turn their usurped warren into a cluttered, stinking, crowded mess, filled to the brim with stolen trinkets from the surrounding countryside. Some rooms might have a single purpose—such as larders, armories, or meeting places—but to an outsider a goblin warren is an undifferentiated mass of junk and chattering, filthy bodies.

Signs that a goblin settlement is nearby are obvious. Trails of litter or graffiti surround the warren, and goblins' typically poor treatment of their environment makes their territory easy to identify. However, finding the entrance to the warren is another matter. Goblins post guards at all times, and they use small entrances that bigger creatures have trouble squeezing through. They are quick to rally when they have

a tough leader to bully them into order, but they don't follow blindly. When serious danger arises, goblins prefer to slink away through one of the warren's numerous exits and plan a counterattack.

Goblins are also known for keeping the company of a variety of beasts with which they have a natural affinity. Bigger creatures, such as wolves or carrion crawlers, join goblin raiding parties. Rats, bats, and snakes serve as spies or distractions. Regardless of the beast's use, it's treated like a beloved pet, not just a tool. Goblins bond with their creatures, and if one dies, its master is distraught. A goblin might care more about the well-being of its pet than it does about that of other goblins.

Goblin Adventurers

A goblin's natural curiosity, cunning, and explorative spirit lends itself well to the adventuring life. Many goblins are drawn to the excitement that comes with battling monsters, rescuing grateful victims, and bathing in plundered loot—anything that gets them attention. Of course, interacting with other people demands that a goblin at least partially put aside its natural tendency toward pettiness and violence. With the right guidance, a goblin can be a hero.

Rogue Goblins are such stereotypical rogues that envisioning them as anything else takes effort. Motivated by thievery, antics, and adventure, goblin rogues use their diverse skills and craftiness to get into secret places. These troublemakers go out of their way to discover dangerous things to overcome, as well to befuddle folk of other races who underestimate their cunning. Goblin rogues might not possess the stature or presence of their companions, but they get their hands on the best loot.

Assassin For goblin assassins, killing isn't just a means to an end—it's the fun part. They enjoy dispatching targets in novel ways. Playing with different poisons and weapons keeps a goblin assassin from losing interest. As long as it has something new to kill or a new way to do so, it is ruthlessly efficient in its task. A routine murder, though, isn't likely to be worth a goblin assassin's time regardless of the pay.

Wizard Magic looks really fun to young goblins, and some of them search for ways to learn those neat tricks. No goblin warren has a wizard school, so such arcane aspirants must teach themselves through trial and error. (Not many survive the process.) A goblin wizard usually relies on a couple of standby spells but continually switches up the others when preparing for the day. Big, explosive effects and tricky illusions that fool people or move them around really pique goblins' interest. They also are fascinated by magical



For a goblin bard, it's all about audience appeal

creatures. Most goblin wizards have familiars, and they're big fans of the "summon a big monster and run away" school of spellcasting.

Bard Given the goblins' love for ribald antics and revelry, a bardic lifestyle is a natural choice. Being adventurers gives goblin bards the best opportunity to spread their brand of shenanigans to the uptight folk of other races. They are often more buffoon than inspiration, replacing song and poetry with lewd rhymes or slapstick comedy. Such bards should not be underestimated, though: Their cunning, feistiness, and occasional mean streak make them dangerous to cross.

Roleplaying a Goblin

When creating a goblin adventurer, here are a few points to consider.

You're a sociable scoundrel. Though goblins don't exactly look out for each other, they gain a feeling of independence and security when around their peers. Your adventuring companions might fill the social void left since you departed the warren. Their presence gives you the chance to brag and demonstrate your usefulness. You are self-reliant enough to survive the dangers of the world, but showing off when others are around to see is much more fun.

You're tricky. Goblins are fiendishly sneaky. Few races can prowl or scheme as well as these pint-sized scoundrels, and even fewer can string together bluffs with such casual ease. You might spend most of your time lurking behind the legs of your allies or in the shadows just out of sight. On the other hand, you might also constantly tell outrageous fibs or exaggerated war stories to make yourself and your encounters sound more interesting.

You crave new experiences. Goblins live for the novel. You're at your happiest when reveling in some new treasure, food, or sensation—even unpleasant ones. This desire encourages goblins to go out into the world, exploring and touching anything they can. You might be obsessed with a particular type of object or feeling, or you might have left the tribe out of curiosity over what lies beyond the next horizon. Either way, you are likely the first of your party to handle new items or prod something best left undisturbed.

You have a bad reputation. The rest of the world sees goblins as pests and villains—with good reason. The majority of your kind deserves their bad reputation, and facing discrimination will be a constant challenge. You might be an enlightened goblin doing your best to show that not all of your kind is evil. Perhaps you are as untrustworthy as the majority of your folk, but tempered somewhat by the influence of your adventuring companions.



A FRIENDLY GAME OF CARDS WITH GOBLINS

As told by Seth the Shark

I guess it was about six years back. The goblins wanted to kill us, the kobolds wanted to kill us, the goblins and the kobolds wanted to kill each other, and we'd lost half our supplies in the night because our hireling got careless. I tried a big gamble when I said, "Let's settle this over a game of cards."

So there I am, dealt into a game of Three-Dragon Ante with the goblin chief's brother and a kobold who the big dragon licked once or something. My life is literally on the line, but I'm ahead after a color flight and a timely Bahamut draw.

I can see this goblin getting antsy, and he keeps moving his hand toward his pocket. I'm sure he's got a good card tucked away and is just waiting for the right hand to play it in. As much as I don't want to let him cheat, I'm afraid if I call him out the other goblins will start firing. The kobold doesn't even seem to notice.

Then the goblin gets that hand he's been looking for, and I see his hand slip into his pocket. I hear this *snap*, and he pulls his hand out again really fast. His fingers are all mangled and bloody, stuck in a tiny little bear-trap-looking thing. The kobold starts tittering to itself.

To my surprise, all the other goblins have a pretty good laugh at their buddy's expense. Then they called off the game and the whole gang had a celebratory feast. I was sick for days after that.

The lessons? Never cheat a kobold, and never eat a goblin's food.





To a goblin, size (or lack of it) doesn't matter

Goblin Characteristics: Adaptable, boastful, curious, crude, humorous, impressionable, instigating, reactionary, sneaky, willful

Goblin Male Names: Floo, Grot, Grub, Itch, Rort, Splik, Snag, Splug, Squintch, Zix

Goblin Female Names: Borb, Fee, Flert, Gretch, Gyik, Nibb, Nyx, Pinch, Pook, Wort

Goblin Tribal Names: Batbiter, Frog-Gagger, Grumblegut, Ratskinner, Stinkdrinker

Goblin Feats

The diminutive goblins don't let their size and low place in the dungeon pecking order get them down. They learn from childhood that they need to be tricky and tenacious to survive.

Ankle Biter Many things are bigger than goblins—many dangerous things. You learn from infancy how to get in every little attack you can against those big brutes.

Prerequisite: Goblin

Benefit: You gain a +1 feat bonus to damage rolls against creatures larger than you. This bonus increases to +2 at 11th level and to +3 at 21st level.

Also, when you score a critical hit against a creature larger than you, the creature takes 1d6 extra damage.

Desperate Goblin Tactics Panic takes over when you're near death, and you rush away from the fray even faster than usual.

Prerequisite: Goblin, *goblin tactics* racial power

Benefit: When you use *goblin tactics* while bloodied, you can shift up to 2 extra squares.

Goblin Feint The big folk think they can smash a little goblin easily. You know how to use their mistakes against them by sneaking past their guard when they try to attack you.

Prerequisite: Goblin, *goblin tactics* racial power

Benefit: When you use *goblin tactics*, you gain combat advantage against the enemy that missed you until the end of your next turn.

Shadowcreeper When you dash away from an attack, you take to the shadows. A dash through the darkness leaves you protected in shadow and better set up to strike.

Prerequisite: Goblin, assassin, *goblin tactics* racial power

Benefit: When you use *goblin tactics*, you can shift 1 extra square, and you gain partial concealment until the end of your next turn.

Sneaky Stabber You know how to attack from a low angle to do the most damage to a bigger creature. Being below notice makes it easy to get at vulnerable points.

Prerequisite: Goblin, rogue, Sneak Attack feature

Benefit: When you deal Sneak Attack damage to a creature adjacent to you, you can reroll any Sneak Attack damage die that results in a 1 until it no longer results in a 1.

Wrist Biter When you slip away from an attacker, you can't help but get in one last jab. Your quick retaliation might not hurt much, but as the old goblin saying goes, "Death by a thousand cuts is the best kind of death."

Prerequisite: Goblin, *goblin tactics* racial power

Benefit: When you use *goblin tactics* in response to an adjacent enemy's attack, the enemy takes 1d4 damage right before you shift. This damage increases to 2d4 at 11th level and 3d4 at 21st level.

Goblin Utility Powers

Every day is a struggle in the dungeon, especially for goblins. Survival is never guaranteed. Goblins interact with other creatures for a chance to beat the odds. They quickly pick up tricks to get ahead, whether from goblins or other dungeon dwellers.

When your goblin character gains a class utility power after 1st level, you can forgo taking a power granted to you by your class. Instead, you can choose a goblin utility power of the same level or lower.

Fast Filch Goblins are nimble and quick, and their deft little fingers make them excellent pickpockets. A team of goblin thieves usually has one member distract the mark so another can quickly snag some valuables. Of course, you never know when your teammate might run off before giving you your cut.

Fast Filch Goblin Utility 2

In the blink of an eye, your tiny fingers relieve someone of a few prized possessions.

At-Will

Minor Action **Melee 1**

Target: One adjacent creature granting combat advantage to you

Effect: You make a Thievery check against the target to pick its pocket or perform sleight of hand.

Leg Up Goblin society is like a big game of king of the hill. Life is a scramble to the top, and only the most devious make it. You have to be willing to put others through a little discomfort if you're going to succeed.

Leg Up Goblin Utility 2

By bouncing off or scabbling up the body of a nearby creature, you fling yourself through the air.

Encounter

Move Action **Personal**

Requirement: You must be adjacent to a creature.

Effect: You jump up to your speed horizontally or up to 10 feet vertically.

Little Green Lie Goblin mothers everywhere give the same advice to their litters: The only time to lie is when you don't know the answer, or telling the truth will get you hurt, or somebody has something you want, or when you can make up another reason.

Little Green Lie Goblin Utility 2

At the last moment, you realize the best course of action here is to lie.

Encounter

Free Action **Personal**

Trigger: You fail a Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate check.

Effect: You reroll the check. If the triggering check was a Diplomacy or Intimidate check, use your Bluff modifier instead.

Living Shield Even adventuring goblins prefer not to get hit if they can avoid it, and they master the ability to quickly find cover behind pillars, boulders, or altars. But what if nothing in the environment can provide cover? Other people soak up attacks just as well. The more considerate goblins redirect enemies only against those who are willing.

Living Shield Goblin Utility 6

You dive behind a companion to avoid an attack.

Encounter

Immediate Interrupt **Personal**

Trigger: An enemy hits you with a melee or ranged attack while you are adjacent to your ally.

Effect: You shift 1 square, and the attack hits the ally instead of you.

Unwitting Guardian It's not hard for a little goblin to find a good hiding place. The best places, though, make your enemies look like fools. Creeping between a roper's loose plates, ducking under a mind flayer's robes, or clinging to the belly of a big spider is way more fun than standing behind a boring pillar or stalagmite.

Unwitting Guardian Goblin Utility 6

You duck under the bulk of one of the big folk, and it keeps you from being seen by the others while you make mischief.

Encounter

Move Action **Melee 1**

Target: One adjacent Medium or larger enemy

Effect: You shift 1 square into the target's space. Until the end of your next turn, you can occupy the same space as the target. Additionally, until the end of your next turn or until you and the target no longer share the same space, you are hidden from all creatures except the target. This effect ends immediately after you attack.

Down and Through Humans and their sort spend so much effort trying to look tall! The way they hold their chins up high makes slipping past them all the easier.

Down and Through Goblin Utility 10

All of a sudden, you're beneath your clumsy foe and then out the other side.

Encounter

Move Action **Personal**

Effect: Choose a Medium or larger enemy adjacent to you, and shift up to 5 squares to a different square adjacent to that creature. You can move through that creature's space during this shift.

KOBOLD

Reptilian tunnel dwellers who stick together to survive

Racial Traits

Average Height: 3'6"-4'0"

Average Weight: 60-75 lb.

Ability Scores: +2 Constitution; +2 Dexterity or +2 Charisma

Size: Small

Speed: 6 squares

Vision: Darkvision

Languages: Common, Draconic

Skill Bonuses: +2 Dungeoneering, +2 Thievery

Reptile: You are considered a reptile for the purpose of effects that relate to the reptile keyword.

Trap Sense: You gain a +2 racial bonus to all defenses against attacks from traps.

Shifty Maneuver: You have the *shifty maneuver* power.

Shifty Maneuver

Kobold Utility

You call on your natural ability to dodge danger, taking your tribemates along for the ride.

Encounter

Move Action

Close burst 2

Target: You and each ally in the burst

Effect: Each target can shift 1 square as a free action.

Kobolds overrun dungeons and caverns, relying on vast numbers and wicked traps to make up for their deficiencies in size and strength. Their ability to survive among the bigger and tougher monsters of the world shows just how well their tactics have worked.

Kobolds gather in large tribes, reproducing quickly to replenish their numbers. Group pressure and the dictates of charismatic leaders compel all members in the community to work together toward whatever ends they need to survive. No matter what an individual kobold feels or believes, the community expects obedience, and every kobold in the tribe tries to behave in the expected way. Some kobolds have good hearts, but their chieftains believe only ruthlessness will keep the tribe strong. Thus most kobold tribes commit evil acts, or at least self-serving ones.

Kobolds have few illusions about their place in the world. They are scavengers and thieves. They do not grow their own food and would rather deprive others of their goods than craft anything. They lurk on civilization's fringes, raiding farmsteads and ambushing caravans. They settle in old ruins and dungeons, choosing places they can readily defend and fortify. Even with their great numbers, kobolds know they cannot hope to protect themselves against

a determined attacker. For this reason, most tribes raise monstrous allies for added muscle or give in and become servants of dungeon rulers.

Of all the monstrous allies kobolds can make, dragons are best of all. Dragons are everything kobolds are not: enormous, majestic, and powerful. They are gods to the kobolds, their idealized selves, and thus are worthy of worship and service—should any dragon accept the little creatures. Any sign of a dragon sends the tribe into a flurry of activity. The kobolds track it to its lair and present it with sacrifices, pageants, and anything else they think it would like. Of course, a dragon presented with so many willing victims indulges its appetite and gobbles up as many as it can. But death by dragon is no deterrent to the kobolds' efforts. They see being eaten by a god as a great honor, and clamor for their chance to climb into the dragon's maw.

Older dragons see kobolds as nuisances. A quick blast of a breath weapon suffices to eliminate an infestation. The trouble for the dragon is that the kobolds do not give up and might try to serve in secret even if rejected. Younger dragons, however, might see the advantage in a loyal clan of guards and attendants to protect their hoards and warn of adventurers who come calling. Once a kobold tribe installs itself around a dragon, everything they do serves their god.

A kobold's life is unpleasant to say the least. Very few kobolds live to reach old age. Attrition claims most before they get too far into adulthood. Hunger, thirst, and want are constant companions, and even the dimmest kobolds learn to watch their backs. Kobolds are subject to the same greed as dragons, though far less intense. Most of them keep small stashes of coins or other treasure secret from the tribe, even though they know they're duty-bound to pool such resources.

Kobolds understand that they are stronger together than they are apart. All grudges are forgotten when the tribe faces an outside threat. Kobolds demonstrate surprising cunning when dealing with intruders, as evident in the traps they design to level the playing field. Kobolds' skill in trapmaking is amazing. With only minimal supplies—mostly junk—they can fashion crafty snares and clever alarms. Even intrepid explorers know that entering a kobold warren invites disfigurement and death.

The harsh reality of kobold existence demands absolute obedience to the leader's demands. Kobolds who lack the killer's instinct, show any weakness, or disobey orders are shunned and driven to the tribe's periphery. If not devoured by a passing predator or sacrificed to a bloodthirsty god, such exiles might seek their fortunes beyond the tribe. Survival is by no means assured, but such action at least gives them a chance to survive.



This kobold avoids being skewered by a trap of flying needles as it prepares to strike at what lies ahead

Kobolds are survivors first. They are not above prostrating themselves before enemies if it means buying a little time. A lone kobold survivor after a raid, a prisoner, or one otherwise cut off from its fellows must adapt to avoid death. A kobold who was part of an evil tribe might reform its behavior in the presence of others who are willing to guide and support it, and might even find this new “tribe” more comforting than the old one. Such individuals find the adventurer’s life suits them—not because they crave danger or excitement, but because their talents make them useful to other adventurers who protect them in return.

Physical Qualities

Their spare frames and stooped postures don’t inspire fear in others, which suits kobolds just fine. They would rather look nonthreatening but not quite vulnerable. A few brave kobolds emulate their honored dragons. They put on a little muscle, raise their snouts high, and roar with a ferocity no one would expect such weak-looking creatures to muster.

Kobolds’ long muzzles are lined with tiny teeth and lolling tongues similar to those of a dragon or crocodile. Their slitted eyes are usually red, gold, or

yellow. Small horns angle backward from a kobold’s brow, and bony barbs stud its forearms to its elbows. Its fingers end in stubby talons, as do its long toes. Fine scales cover a kobold’s body, usually some shade of green. Brown, red, and orange scales appear among particular tribes, as do mottled hides of several colors.

Their reptilian anatomy hides kobolds’ physical expressiveness from other races. Their facial construction lacks the anatomy to display the same range of emotions as other humanoids. Kobolds who need to deal with warmbloods develop broad arm and head gestures to convey how they feel.

Since kobolds have to make do with what they scavenge, clothing is limited and functional. A loin-cloth serves the least among them, while warriors cobble together armor from scraps they harvest from the dead. Crude weaponry suffices until they can steal something better.

Kobolds grow quickly. They can walk and talk within hours after hatching and reach their full height after about a year. Kobolds can live longer than a century, though very few make it through their first decade.

Attitudes and Beliefs

Kobolds look after the tribe foremost, and they take whatever steps they deem necessary to ensure the community's survival. The more populous the tribe, the lower the chance any individual will come to harm—even though such large numbers invariably attract attention. Thus, kobolds nurture their eggs in communal nesting grounds to ensure the next generation will preserve their numbers.

Even kobolds who leave their tribes retain the instinct to survive and find comrades. An adventuring kobold regards the party as a small tribe and finds a place to contribute to the group's success. He or she shows an immediate willingness to work within the team, especially if the kobold can tackle a job nobody else in the group is suited for.

Even good-aligned kobolds see little point in fighting with honor. A fair fight achieves nothing if you die. Instead, kobolds admire trickery and subterfuge as virtues and deride as foolish any notion of fairness. The best fight to a kobold is one in which no kobold blood is spilled.

Kobolds see dragons as living gods and offer sacrifices, prayers, and anything else they find to honor their masters. Their devotion stems from their connection to Tiamat, whom they see as their ultimate goddess and mother to all dragons. Kobolds also worship their ancestors, chief among them being Kurtulmak, a figure thought to be one of Tiamat's exarchs. Adventuring kobolds never quite escape their devotion to Tiamat and continue to worship her even if doing so is offensive to their new companions. No kobold wants to face the repercussions of angering such a threatening god.

Kobold Communities

Anyone who examines kobolds' traps can see their ingenuity in construction, yet kobolds do not raise their own towns or strongholds. Instead, they squat in places other peoples have abandoned. A kobold settlement's location must be defensible, offer shelter, and provide enough water and food to support the tribe.

A typical kobold community includes a large common room where the rank and file gather, cook, and sort through the plunder. Nearby is a temple or shrine dedicated to Tiamat, along with chambers set aside for the high priest, the chieftain, and the most accomplished warriors. These rooms offer privacy for the higher-ups without sacrificing the security of having the rest of the tribe nearby.

The passages leading into the warren look safe enough to an outsider, but hidden throughout are all sorts of nasty traps to discourage intruders from venturing too far. Kobolds favor devices that humiliate as much as harm their victims. An adventurer who



Kobolds offer a dragon whatever it wants in exchange for its favor

WILLIAM O'CONNOR

survives a kobold's trap usually does not do so with pride intact. The tribe might also use rats, scorpions, slimes, or drakes to help guard their warrens.

Kobold tribes not affiliated with dragons freely abandon their lairs if they come under attack. They fight to protect themselves, but should the situation become untenable, they are not above pulling up stakes and settling somewhere else. A dragon's involvement shores up the tribe's courage, and kobolds fight with uncommon boldness to protect their god.

Kobold Adventurers

Adventuring might seem an unlikely occupation for kobolds, but they have several talents that make them well-suited to the life. They can see in the dark, anticipate and avoid traps, and stay a step ahead of their enemies. Kobolds can be useful and effective allies in almost any adventuring group.

Very few kobolds become adventurers by choice, however. Some catastrophe must befall them before they traipse off looking for danger. Most take up this life after being captured by adventurers or separated from their tribes.

Rogue Growing up in environments where any misstep can bring death, poisoned darts fly with a stumble, and pits bristling with spikes lurk in every corridor, kobolds learn a healthy respect for traps. Familiarity with such hazards, combined with their furtive natures, make kobolds a natural fit for the rogue class. Kobold rogues are among the best at locating and dismantling traps. This talent, combined with their great mobility, makes kobold rogues particularly dangerous.

Sorcerer Kobolds have strong arcane traditions, and most who follow those traditions become sorcerers. They like to think that dragon's blood flows through their veins, and they believe that the best of them can tap into this essence and become like the gods they worship. Most kobold sorcerers choose the path of dragon magic.

Warlock A kobold who cannot harness the magic within might seek out other sources of power. Many kobolds make unwise bargains with strange entities, offering their souls to make themselves strong. Most kobold warlocks look to the stars and the beings that reside there for magical power, though they bargain with anything that offers to make them strong.

Assassin Kobolds avoid direct confrontation. They employ poison, traps, and ambushes to deal with enemies, all tactics that make them eminently suited to the assassin's trade. Kobolds rarely become assassins for profit, though most accept payment for

their work. Instead, their techniques are natural outgrowths of how kobolds normally fight.

Roleplaying a Kobold

When creating a kobold adventurer, here are a few points to consider.

You know your way around traps. Even if another character handles the task of disarming traps, you know enough about their construction to help dismantle them when they are discovered and avoid them when they attack. Traps fascinate you, and any new device is an opportunity to add a weapon to your arsenal. Don't pass up opportunities to tackle a trap and, if possible, try to find ways to turn it to your advantage.

Fair fights are for suckers. Concepts such as honor, nobility, and fairness make little sense to you. Death comes soon enough without inviting it through some foolish belief. You use trickery and planning to defeat your enemies. You lure them into danger, drawing them into positions where your allies can finish them off. You hit enemies when they're down, dazed, or otherwise incapacitated. Your survival depends on your willingness to do whatever it takes to win.

Dragons are gods. Dragons represent everything kobolds hope to become. Everyone fears them. If dragons are not true gods, they are close enough for you. Encounters with dragons awe you, far beyond the threat they pose. You feel conflicted about fighting dragons and seek a peaceful way out of such an encounter, such as by making an offering or spouting excessive flattery. Should your efforts fail, you still support your allies, but killing the dragon should be the last resort.

You know your place. Every kobold in a tribe knows that for the rest to survive, each member must do his or her duty. As an adventuring kobold, you see your companions as your new tribe and search for a way to contribute outside of combat. You might cook meals, mend clothing, or polish armor in addition to fulfilling your role during exploration and combat.

You exercise caution. Taking heedless risks can get you killed. Better to be prepared and know what you're getting yourself into. If you get in over your head, fleeing is an important tactic. An enemy that gives chase enters unfamiliar territory, often protected by traps. As a kobold, you feel no shame in running away and expect your companions to do the same should the situation turn against you.

The world hates you. Being considered vermin by most people you meet is bound to take a toll. No matter what you accomplish, others might be anything from suspicious to hostile. Even most other reptilian humanoids look down on you, though they're more likely to show you some respect if you prove yourself. When traveling through civilized lands, consider concealing your features to avoid conflicts.

Kobold Characteristics: Ambitious, cooperative, fawning, greedy, loyal, obedient, quick, timid

Kobold Male Names: Bont, Dartak, Deekin, Forgen, Kol, Meepo, Nin, Speelok, Zeem

Kobold Female Names: Capax, Eenith, Foruul, Gumba, Iimen, Lorpe, Rowatak

Kobold Tribal Names: Black Death, Broken Fang, Gouger, Red Moon, Skull Kicker, Torn Ear

Kobold Feats

Each kobold tribe has its own methods and specialties, but all of them have a few things in common. Dungeon travel and dragon worship both hold a prominent place in kobold society. Trapmaking and evasive maneuvers let kobolds get the upper hand in battle, and they take great pains to improve these abilities.

Dragon's Indomitability You're not entirely fearless, but you try to follow the example of the great dragons.

Prerequisite: Kobold

Benefit: You can roll two dice and use either result when making saving throws against effects that daze or stun you.

Eldritch Momentum In the kobold tradition, warlocks learn to warp arcane energy with their movement and use it to break through enemies' defenses. Your attacks zig and zag in an unpredictable fashion that catches enemies off guard.

Prerequisite: Kobold, warlock, Warlock's Curse class feature

Benefit: If you move at least 3 squares away from where you started your turn, you gain combat advantage until the start of your next turn against creatures subject to your Warlock's Curse.

Kobold in a Corner Getting trapped in a dead end and surrounded is the worst danger a kobold can face. When enemies surround you, your instincts to escape kick in, and you fight back angrily.

Prerequisite: Kobold

Benefit: You gain a +1 bonus to damage rolls against creatures that have combat advantage against you. This bonus increases to +2 at 11th level and +3 at 21st level.

Shifter Maneuver Carefully skulking around the battlefield is the kobold way to victory, and everyone in the tribe should be good at it. Your expertise is infectious.

Prerequisite: Kobold, *shifty maneuver* racial power

Benefit: When you use *shifty maneuver*, one target of the power can shift up to 2 extra squares.

Trapbuster You understand the mechanisms used in all sorts of traps, and your ability to disarm them is second to none.

Prerequisite: Kobold, training in Thievery

Benefit: You can roll two dice and use either result when you make a Perception check to detect a trap. In addition, you never trigger a trap when you fail a Thievery check to disable it.

Kobold Utility Powers

Kobolds don't like to venture too far out of their comfort zone, so they stick to what they are best at: canny movement, teamwork, and careful exploration. Many kobolds carry strange gadgets created from scrap metal and other refuse. They make these items using formulas handed down by the tribe and their own ingenuity, honed by years of trapmaking.

When your kobold character gains a class utility power after 1st level, you can forgo taking a power granted to you by your class. Instead, you gain a kobold utility power of the same level or lower.



NEW ITEM: HURLER-SNATCHER

With some foraged twine, a supple reed, simple pulleys, and a soft cloth bundle, a kobold can piece together a crude device for getting around obstacles. These hurler-snatchers, as kobolds call them, have long been used to fling objects across gaps safely and retrieve small items lost down narrow chasms.

Using a hurler-snatcher (4 lb., 10 gp) requires a move action. When you do so, you either transfer one item you have that weighs 5 pounds or less to an unoccupied space or a willing character within 5 squares of you, or you take one similar item that the character or the space has and transfer it to yourself. If you intend to transfer the item to a character, he or she has to have a free hand and must use a free action to catch it. Otherwise, the item lands in that character's space.

The 5-pound limit on a hurler-snatcher is enough to carry most simple objects. If items are bundled together in a backpack or a sack, they're usually too heavy to flick around. Some items are too unwieldy to be transferred in this way; your DM ultimately makes the call.

The hurler-snatcher is constructed to protect what it carries, even glassware, as long as the intended receiver can catch it. Objects break in transit only in a very small number of cases. Kobolds offer no warranties on items sent by way of a hurler-snatcher.



Flee! A kobold knows better than to fight against overwhelming odds. Sometimes the only way to win a fight is to escape and fight another day. When it's time to retreat, a kobold leads the way to safety.

Flee! Kobold Utility 2

You lead your tribemates in a hasty retreat.

Daily

Move Action Close burst 2

Effect: Each ally in the burst gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses against opportunity attacks until the end of your next turn. You then shift up to your speed.

Load Slingpot Kobolds create special sling ammunition made of various substances stored in tiny clay pots. You have learned how to exercise this art through a bit of draconic magic. The magic is unpredictable, however, so you're never sure which enchantment you're going to get.

Load Slingpot Kobold Utility 2

You hurl a hastily enchanted projectile from your sling.

Encounter

Free Action Personal

Requirement: You must be wielding a sling.

Effect: You load your sling with a random type of ammunition. The next time you hit with a ranged basic attack with this sling before the end of your next turn, it has one of the following additional effects. Roll a d6 to determine the ammunition type.

- 1-2 **Stinkpot:** The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of its next turn.
- 3-4 **Firepot (Fire):** The target takes ongoing 2 fire damage (save ends).
- 5-6 **Gluepot:** The target is immobilized until the end of its next turn.

Tunnel Scuttle Living in the tight tunnels and unpredictable pathways of a dungeon taught you how to move quickly over precarious terrain. You can climb natural chimneys and fit through tiny spaces, and do it all quickly enough to get away from danger.

Tunnel Scuttle Kobold Utility 6

You scramble up walls and through narrow spaces with ease.

Encounter

Move Action Personal

Effect: You move up to your speed. During this movement, you have a climb speed equal to your speed, and can move at full speed while squeezing.

Frantic Shift Cold-blooded kobolds might not look like the quickest creatures, but they can spring about with surprising speed. They prize the ability to move safely and quickly.



Every kobold believes it has the heart of a dragon

Frantic Shift Kobold Utility 10

You hustle in and out of the fray quickly.

Encounter (Special)

Minor Action Personal

Effect: You shift 1 square.

Special: The first time you are bloodied in an encounter, you regain the use of this power.

Trap-Gang Method When kobolds go searching in corridors they believe to be trapped, they work in teams. Working together increases the odds of survival, either because teammates can warn each other or because they can distribute the brunt of a triggered trap's effects. Most big folk don't go in for this sort of thing, so adventuring kobolds "recruit" enemies for the job.

Trap-Gang Method Kobold Utility 10

You treat an enemy like a trusted member of a kobold trap-gang team. That is, you shove it in front of the trap.

At-Will

Immediate Interrupt Special

Trigger: You are damaged by an attack from a trap or a hazard while a nonminion creature is adjacent to you.

Effect: You take only half damage from the triggering attack, and one nonminion creature adjacent to you takes the other half.

SVIRFNEBLIN

Subterranean gnomes dedicated to community who make strong bonds of friendship

Racial Traits

Average Height: 3'2"-3'6"

Average Weight: 55-80 lb.

Ability Scores: +2 Wisdom; +2 Strength or +2 Constitution

Size: Small

Speed: 5 squares

Vision: Darkvision

Languages: Common, Deep Speech, Elven

Skill Bonuses: +2 Dungeoneering, +2 Perception

Earth Walk: You ignore difficult terrain that is rubble, uneven stone, or an earthen construction.

Fey Origin: Your ancestors were native to the Feywild (specifically the Feydark), so you are considered a fey creature for the purpose of effects that relate to creature origin.

Under-dweller: Dungeoneering is always a class skill for you.

Stone Camouflage: You have the *stone camouflage* power.

Stone Camouflage

Svirfneblin Utility

Your body becomes stony and magically blends with the terrain around you, making you harder to pinpoint.

Encounter ◆ **Illusion**

Minor Action

Personal

Effect: You gain partial concealment until the end of your next turn, and you gain 5 temporary hit points.

Level 11: 10 temporary hit points.

Level 21: 15 temporary hit points.

Commonly referred to as deep gnomes, svirfneblin live primarily in the Underdark and rarely associate with their kindred on the surface. The two bloodlines separated so long ago that few similarities remain between them beyond a natural connection to magic. Many who don't understand the svirfneblin's way of life assume they are as dark and sinister as other creatures that live deep below the earth. For this reason, the "deep gnomes" must be vigilant against not only threats from their environment, but also from those who travel down from the surface. They have grown dour and insular by necessity, but they remain fundamentally good at heart. In a world of eternal darkness, where death lurks around every corner, a svirfneblin community provides a welcome contrast.

The deep gnomes' muted expressions convey a sense of dreariness to most outsiders and certainly don't seem welcoming. Svirfneblin act standoffish to

newcomers to protect their community, but anyone who gains their trust quickly learns they form close bonds of friendship. They focus on fulfilling their duties through hard work, either in the mines or around their settlement. In their off hours, svirfneblin enjoy telling stories in the company of their family and neighbors.

Svirfneblin are a proud race that respects strength in numbers. They work well with others and value community over individual tastes. Constantly beset by threats, deep gnomes band together and form bonds of friendship that last a lifetime. They will die to protect the people they bond with.

Physical Qualities

At a distance, svirfneblin look much like their surface-dwelling cousins but are distinguishable by their generally darker skin and gaunt bodies. They have little body fat, which makes them appear emaciated. They are very short, slightly smaller than surface gnomes, and stand no more than 3½ feet tall. Females are taller than their male counterparts, though males are often stockier. Though they appear frail, svirfneblin are just as heavy as other gnomes. Their sturdy build results from the hard labor they undertake, which produces lots of muscle mass and a strong bone structure to support it.

A svirfneblin's appearance is also unique to its community's Underdark (or Feydark) region. The skin color of deep gnomes varies according to the depth and location of their residences. In places where mineral-rich soil has formed veins of gray and black stone, svirfneblin populations have a darker skin tone. In areas where lava predominates, the gnomes' skin might display shades of maroon and brown.

Attitudes and Beliefs

Svirfneblin are content folk who enjoy hard work and love seeing the results of their strenuous labor. Their close-knit community is central to their lives and an intrinsic part of their values; they maintain their discipline and will as long as their work serves the greater good. They believe in shared sacrifice for the survival of the community. Individual needs are rarely counted, a trait that leads svirfneblin to omit words such as "I" and "my" from their vocabulary even among family. These words are foreign to their life experiences, and it takes them time to learn that other creatures single out one person as distinct from the people as a whole.

Religion has an important place in deep gnome society. Svirfneblin spend much time and preparation honoring the various gods they serve, and religious duties go to only the most respected and trusted among the clan. The most prominent svirfneblin religious figure is Callarduran Smoothhands, the Master



A svirfneblin warlock leads a band of miners in a battle to protect their home

of Stone. Outsiders, and many svirfneblin priests, believe Callarduran to be an exarch of Moradin, especially in the world of Abeir-Toril. Most dwarves hold him to be a mask Moradin wears when speaking with the deep gnomes. Svirfneblin legends tell that after the Dawn War, Callarduran gave the first free svirfneblin the resources they needed to live underground, and that he set prized stones deep within the rock. Clerics of Callarduran often have the ability to summon and befriend elementals.

A small number of svirfneblin revere Torog, the King that Crawls. These worshipers can't live within a normal svirfneblin community. They either band together to form their own settlements far away from the others or join up with darker creatures of the Underdark, betraying their kin.

Svirfneblin History

Gnomes can be careless about historical documentation. Rather than put down records in stone or on paper, they pass down their tales by word of mouth.

It is known that svirfneblin lived among the other gnomes when all were still imprisoned by the fomorians. When the gnomes escaped their fetters, most of them traveled to the surface. The svirfneblin instead



SVIRFNEBLIN SPEECH

For an example of how svirfneblin speech patterns differ, imagine a surface dweller going to the market to buy a tool. That person might say, "I would like to purchase a hammer from you." A svirfneblin might instead say "We would like to purchase a hammer from you."

You can adopt this sort of dialogue when you play a svirfneblin, but keep in mind that it might be confusing at first (both in the world and at the game table). If your svirfneblin has been away from home for an extended time, he or she might have started speaking more like a surface-dweller.



went deeper underground, away from the fomorian realms but still within the Night Below.

Most svirfneblin tales remain secret, repeated only among the clan. The few stories they tell to other people make the svirfneblin people look cordial and helpful.

Svirfneblin Society

Svirfneblin communities are organized into clans and are located exclusively in subterranean settlements deep within the Underdark. Specialized engineers constantly seek out large caverns that can sustain the clan's population growth and societal needs, as well as the evolving nature of their environment. When a town is first settled, the leaders claim the more stable areas of the cavern and build complexes out of stalagmites located within. Remaining members of the clan choose the location of their home in order of priority, based on many factors such as position, lineage, and wealth.

Of all the treasure that the svirfneblin gather, they cherish their children the most. Many families include four or more children, and rarely fewer than two. Repopulation is so important to the deep gnomes that the largest families often earn rewards and benefits. The parents of six or more children are rarely impoverished.

The majority of male svirfneblin work in their community's mining operations. Those who do not are either physically disabled or are part of the political and religious structure of the community. Even those who are not capable of helping in the mines find jobs processing raw material as it returns, or operating businesses that help support the town. Female svirfneblin are the masters of the domicile and venerated for their hard work. Their ability to manage a household, raise children, and keep the miners of their family healthy makes them the cornerstone of svirfneblin life—a concept not lost on the ruling family of any given clan.

Governance of a deep gnome settlement varies depending on the clan. Some towns operate on a purely democratic principle, giving an equal voice to all in the community. Others form committees that manage the overall direction of the clan and are empowered to make decisions on the town's behalf. The most common form stays close to the communal beliefs on which the race was founded. Both a king and a queen rule these svirfneblin towns, each holding the position for life. The king oversees mining operations, while the queen manages infrastructure. Though each takes pride in friendly competition between the sexes, both are ultimately responsible for the community's defense.

Svirfneblin Adventurers

Few svirfneblin travel outside the safety of the community. The race has grown to know strength in numbers, and for this reason alone individuals have a hard time breaking free. Those enterprising souls who yearn for adventure succeed in overcoming this fear, but do so with some remorse and regret.

Svirfneblin keep these feelings to themselves: To reveal them might weaken the bonds of the group. A svirfneblin away from home constantly longs to go back underground and would rather explore an unfamiliar dungeon than travel through a forest or surface city.

Druid Svirfneblin feel a natural connection to the world around them and many hear the call of the wild even in the Underdark. Many svirfneblin druids operate subterranean farms to train beasts of burden for daily tasks. Some also specialize in knowledge of unique terrain found only in the Underdark. The rulers of deep gnome city-states use this information when directing the expansion of their communities.

Cleric Priests in svirfneblin communities teach that Callarduran Smoothhands gave svirfneblin the tools to thrive in the Underdark. Their teachings and magic are practical rather than flashy. An adventuring cleric prepares meticulously for battle and travel, always carrying his or her own weight so as not to force the burden of upkeep and defense on others. In a group of explorers, a svirfneblin cleric puts an emphasis first on cooperation, settling disputes and making sure the others communicate effectively.

Ranger Svirfneblin rangers are some of the best in the Underdark. They spend a great deal of time away from the cherished comforts of their homes to hunt, fish, and scout. The strongest deep gnome communities are protected by hundreds of rangers, who are responsible for detecting and responding to incoming threats before they arrive.

Warden Wardens are the core of a svirfneblin militia. They are stalwart guardians of their kin and trusted defenders of home and hearth. Having a unique relationship with primal forces of earth and stone, svirfneblin wardens are indomitable adversaries.

Roleplaying a Svirfneblin

When creating a svirfneblin adventurer, here are a few points to consider.

You are a team player. Whenever a problem arises, you always advocate for everyone to be involved in the solution. You are eager to contribute your skills and knowledge to the discussion.

Strength in numbers. An individual svirfneblin never confronts a physical threat alone unless forced. You understand the intrinsic value of a coordinated group attack against a superior challenge. You can help the team find the best way to tactically take down an opponent using all the resources available.

You know the depths better than anyone. You know your way around the Underdark. You might



Svirfneblin communities are well hidden and tightly knit

not like that fact, but it is true nonetheless. Travelers, adventurers, and other Underdark denizens seek you out for your expertise. Even if you don't know the exact path, you know the ever-changing landscape of the Underdark. It is a living entity to you, and you understand how it lives, breathes, and operates.

Thanks for noticing. You go about your life with pride in your people, your lineage, and your capabilities, but you can't shake the feeling that you aren't quite good enough. Having deserted or been forced to leave your community and clan, no longer having a designated place in a social order, you might sense that you've lost your purpose. This feeling might lead you to apologize for simple errors or go beyond the call of duty to prove yourself. The simplest compliment could mean the world to you.

Svirfneblin Characteristics: Proud, meek, lonely, curious, solemn, dour, cynical

Svirfneblin Male Names: Ashcoffer, Belwar, Boonler, Molgar, Sachelhoffen, Tassen, Victorbuff

Svirfneblin Female Names: Anselway, Dollidor, Fansel, Gretzlynn, Juile, Polliwopple, Wailee

Svirfneblin Clan Names: Dallydans, Jokulhaups, Mallywagers, Peppleponds

Svirfneblin Feats

The harsh life svirfneblin lead makes them tougher and more in tune with the forces of nature that shape the walls around them. Deep gnomes might not make many friends outside their settlements, but they know how to endure and survive without help.

Crew Savvy As a member of a mining crew, you learned how to use teamwork when delving.

Prerequisite: Svirfneblin, training in Athletics

Benefit: You gain a +3 feat bonus to Athletics checks to climb. In addition, whenever you make a Dungeoneering check or an Athletics check to climb, one ally adjacent to you gains a +2 feat bonus the next time he or she makes the same sort of check before the end of your next turn.

Deep Durability The primal spirits of earth and stone recognize you as their protector, and they shield you.

Prerequisite: Svirfneblin, warden, *stone camouflage* racial power

Benefit: When you use *stone camouflage*, you gain 3 additional temporary hit points for each enemy marked by you. The additional temporary hit points per enemy increase to 5 at 11th level and 7 at 21st level.

Deepstone Blessing Since svirfneblin first learn to heal their own kin, their prayers confer distinct blessings. Anyone healed by a svirfneblin prayer feels his or her skin toughen and turn stony for a brief time.

Prerequisite: Svirfneblin, cleric, *healing word* power

Benefit: When you use *healing word*, the target also gains temporary hit points equal to your Constitution modifier.

Fade to Gray The gnomes who live above have a stronger affinity for illusion than svirfneblin do. You're one of the few deep gnomes with a greater connection to such magic than to the magic of stone and earth.

Prerequisite: Svirfneblin, *stone camouflage* racial power

Benefit: When an attack hits you while you have partial concealment from *stone camouflage*, you can become invisible until the end of your next turn or until you attack.

Svirfneblin Utility Powers

Ancient connections made by the svirfneblin's ancestors give them the ability to draw on the magic of stone. The spirits of rock and earth found only cruel and evil beings in the reaches of the Underdark, until they met the deep gnomes—the first creatures who wanted to preserve the tunnels. Even though they mine and carve their settlements in the living rock, svirfneblin don't engage in wanton destruction or rituals that corrupt nature.

Each svirfneblin learns some different part of this ancient magic based on his or her role in society. It serves more as tradecraft than a magical tradition or school. As with svirfneblin history, no written record exists of how to obtain these powers: The teaching are passed down through storytelling.

When your svirfneblin character gains a class utility power after 1st level, you can forgo taking a power granted to you by your class. Instead, you gain a svirfneblin utility power of the same level or lower.

Ring of Rubble Svirfneblin guards contain themselves and their foes within ramparts of broken rock to keep enemies from escaping without a fight.

Ring of Rubble Svirfneblin Utility 2

You stamp your foot, and the earth around you ripples and furrows.

Daily ♦ **Zone**

Minor Action Close burst 2

Effect: The outermost squares in the burst become a zone of difficult terrain for creatures that lack earth walk. The zone lasts until the end of the encounter.

Words from the Deep The rules of svirfneblin society reinforce the community to such a degree that little politicking is needed. Svirfneblin know to do what's best for the community. Translating the ways of the isolated Underdark settlements can be difficult when dealing with surface dwellers, but sometimes a svirfneblin can make the connection.

Words from the Deep Svirfneblin Utility 2

You call on your experience with the people of your deep home to be outgoing in the presence of other people.

Encounter

Free Action **Personal**

Trigger: You would make a Diplomacy check or a Streetwise check.

Effect: You make a Dungeoneering check in place of the Diplomacy check or Streetwise check.

Deep Senses Stone might seem to be immobile and inert, but the svirfneblin understand that even the great caves shake when trod upon. By attuning your senses to pick up these vibrations, you can detect the presence of other creatures.

Deep Senses Svirfneblin Utility 6

You extend your mind into the stone, and you feel it shift and reverberate with the motion of your enemies.

Daily

Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You gain tremorsense 5 until the end of the encounter. Once per round, you can spend a minor action to increase the radius of the tremorsense by 1 (to a maximum of 10).

Stony Disappearance Your race has a natural ability to blend in with your surroundings underground, as reflected in your *stone camouflage* racial feature. Harnessing a more potent version of this magic makes you even harder to find. Successful svirfneblin scouts master this power.

Stony Disappearance Svirfneblin Utility 6

You tap into your natural magical abilities and use them to blend in with your surroundings perfectly.

Encounter ♦ **Illusion**

Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You become invisible until the end of your next turn or until you attack.

Stony Durability You have a boon of the earth that strengthens your ties to rock and stone. Most svirfneblin can make their flesh a bit tougher, but you can turn your skin hard as rock. Many of the guards who protect svirfneblin communities possess this power.

Stony Durability Svirfneblin Utility 6

A thick barrier of stone covers your skin, deflecting blows of all kinds.

Daily

Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You gain resist 5 to all damage until the end of the encounter.

Crystal Shield Svirfneblin artisans keep well hidden the secret of crafting with crystal. Such creations don't last as long as those of rock or metal, but they serve certain purposes very well. The *crystal shield* was created as an emergency measure for soldiers who needed to be able to move unencumbered but sometimes required extra protection in battle.

Crystal Shield Svirfneblin Utility 10

You throw a handful of crystal powder in the air, and it forms a protective barrier of clear crystal.

Daily ♦ **Conjuration**

Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You conjure a shield of crystal that surrounds you and moves with you. The shield has hit points equal to your healing surge value, and it lasts until the end of the encounter or until it is reduced to 0 hit points.

While the shield remains, you gain a +2 power bonus to AC and Reflex. When an attack hits your AC or Reflex, you can use the shield as a free action to absorb some or all of the damage. You still take all other effects from the attack, as well as any damage that exceeds the shield's hit points.

Summon Earth-Friend Similar to earth elementals, the minuscule earth-friends dwell in Underdark caverns rich with mineral deposits. Veins of certain metals trap earth-friends, and sometimes svirfneblin miners free the little creatures. A single earth-friend might serve a svirfneblin family for generations. As long as it is left to its own devices most of the time, the creature allows itself to be summoned as a scout.

Summon Earth-Friend Svirfneblin Utility 10

You call on an ancient friend of your people to assist you in scouting the dungeon.

Daily ♦ **Elemental, Summoning**

Minor Action **Ranged 5**

Effect: You summon a Tiny earth-friend in an unoccupied space within range. The earth-friend is an ally to you and your allies.

The earth-friend lacks actions of its own. Instead, you spend actions to command it mentally, choosing from the actions in the earth-friend's description. You don't need line of sight to the earth-friend to command it. When you command the earth-friend, you and the creature share knowledge, but not senses.

When the earth-friend makes a check, you make the roll using your game statistics, not including temporary bonuses or penalties.

The earth-friend lasts until it drops below 1 hit point, at which point you lose a healing surge (or hit points equal to your healing surge value if you have no surges left).

Otherwise, it lasts until you dismiss it as a minor action or until the end of the encounter.

Earth-Friend **Level 10 Summoned Creature**

Tiny elemental magical beast (earth)

HP your bloodied value; **Healing Surges** none, but you can expend a healing surge for the earth-friend if an effect allows it to spend one

Defenses your defenses - 2, not including any temporary bonuses or penalties

Speed 5, burrow 5 **Tremorsense** 5

Earth Glide

The earth-friend can pass through earth and rock as if it were phasing.

Nonthreatening

The earth-friend cannot flank.

Standard Action (teleportation) ♦ **At-Will**

Effect: The earth-friend teleports to a square adjacent to you, without needing line of sight.

Minor Action ♦ **At-Will** (1/round)

Effect: The guardian walks, shifts, runs, stands up, squeezes, or crawls.

Walk through Stone Most people can't see how all stone belongs to one family. Svirfneblin know that ancient paths connect the rock, and their explorers learn to walk these paths.

Walk through Stone Svirfneblin Utility 10

You step into the stone and emerge from the stone, walking through pathways older than the world itself.

Encounter ♦ **Teleportation**

Move Action **Personal**

Requirement: You must be on a stone surface or adjacent to blocking terrain made of stone.

Effect: You teleport up to 10 squares. You don't need line of sight to the destination space, but you must end the movement on a stone surface or adjacent to blocking terrain made of stone.

Dungeon-Themed Powers

Your character's class, theme, and other background information probably say much about why he or she braves the depths (or intends to). The following sections discuss different ways for players to put a sharper focus on why their characters do what they do. Each section is about a type of people or an organization and elaborates on or is connected loosely to one of the themes presented earlier in this chapter. For example, the Deep Guides is an organization of Underdark explorers that works well with the deep delver theme.

Each of the entries that follows includes a number of attack powers for certain classes. Each entry also includes skill powers associated with useful subterranean exploration skills. You can choose these powers to flesh out a character with an associated theme, but anyone who wants to explore under the earth can benefit from them.

Gaining and Using Skill Powers

Skill powers, which first appeared in *Player's Handbook 3*, present an alternative to class utility powers. You can gain and use only the skill powers associated with your trained skills. Whenever you reach a level that grants you a utility power from your class, you can choose a skill power in place of a class power. The skill power you choose must be of the same level as or lower in level than the class power you would have gained.

You can use retraining to replace a class power with a skill power and vice versa, as long as the new power is of the same level as or lower in level than the replaced power.

You cannot replace a utility power from a paragon path or an epic destiny with a skill power.



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FEAR OF THE DARK

“This tunnel reminds me of a place my little brother and I went exploring in when we were little. Well, little for a half-ling, anyway. It only took a couple of weeks for the others to find us. That’s when I found out how bad rat tastes.”

—Ella, treasure hunter

Adventurers stomp through the caverns of the Underdark, spools of rope and lanterns in hand. Their boots smash patches of phosphorescent fungus, leaving a trail of black footprints. Suddenly rocks fly out from the darkness and smash the lanterns, leaving the party bewildered and lost as grimlocks emerge from the tunnels to surround it.

A mistake often made by neophytes in the Underdark is to treat it as just another dungeon. In fact, it is a world in its own right, with its own rules. It’s as wide open as the wilderness above but far less forgiving to unprepared explorers. Drow city-states and enclaves command grand caverns, kuo-toas perform obscene rituals in stinking underground seas, and savage grimlock tribes prowl the tunnels, killing and eating anything they can catch. The civilizations that gained a foothold in the depths had to adapt to the dark tunnels and twisting geography. Only then could they flourish.

No topsider can hope to survive without training in the same techniques those deep dwellers developed to battle their primary enemy: the dark. The illumination cast by a wizard’s *light* cantrip only goes so far. A sunrod lasts only so long. When the last light gutters out, nothing is left to show the way or break the oppressive, endless blackness. Beyond the light’s edge, all sorts of horrors lurk, waiting for that moment when darkness falls and fear grips the heart.

Veteran adventurers who have survived expeditions into the Underdark did so by adopting the tactics and survival techniques used by its denizens. Return trips to the surface are difficult and time-consuming, so such explorers must learn to negate their enemies’ advantage.

Classes and Themes

No particular class is required to deal with the darkness, although those that are best equipped to get around in difficult circumstances have advantages. Rangers and rogues can use nonvisual methods of finding their way, but anyone who can create light magically can overcome the dark in the most basic way. Assassins and paladins, by their nature, interact with darkness in radically different ways.

Deep delvers must often make their way through the blackness, so this theme is a natural fit. Escaped thralls, who have dwelt long in haunted depths, might have uncanny senses or psionic abilities to help in this hostile environment. Underdark outcasts, forced to survive along in the unforgiving dark, are also well suited to this suite of powers.

Attack Powers

Underdark peoples use the darkness to their advantage when they ambush unsuspecting travelers, snuffing out their light sources and ripping them to pieces while they can’t see. These monsters expect surface dwellers to be easy pickings, and anyone who can overcome their foes’ advantages can turn the tables.

Blinding Menace The biggest obstacles assassins face in eliminating their enemies are the other foes standing between them and their targets. *Blinding menace* originated with drow assassins who use this hex and similar powers to make surgical strikes against enemy leaders and thus cause confusion among their foes.

Blinding Menace

Assassin Attack 7

Cloaking yourself in nightmare, you hide from any creature that might interfere with your attack against your foe.

Encounter ♦ **Illusion, Implement, Psychic, Shadow**
Standard Action Ranged 5

Target: One creature

Attack: Dexterity vs. Will

Hit: 2d10 + Dexterity modifier psychic damage.

Effect: Until the end of your next turn or until you attack, you are invisible to all enemies other than the target, including those that have blindsight or tremorsense.

Dispel the Darkness Legends about drow, derro, and other Underdark peoples suggest they cannot abide the light, so accustomed are they to the dark. *Dispel the darkness* gives truth to the legend by dazzling enemies with wholesome light. By stripping enemies of their ability to see in the dark, you take away one of their strongest advantages.

Dispel the Darkness

Paladin Attack 9

Brilliant light flows through your weapon and fills your surroundings with purifying radiance.

Daily ♦ **Aura, Divine, Radiant, Weapon**
Standard Action Melee weapon

Target: One creature

Attack: Charisma vs. AC

Hit: 3[W] + Charisma modifier radiant damage.

Miss: Half damage.

Effect: You activate an aura 3 that lasts until the end of the encounter. The aura is brightly lit. Any creature that starts its turn in the aura cannot benefit from any concealment until the start of its next turn.

Blinding Assault The blind grimlocks navigate the Underdark’s tunnels with other senses. Keen hearing, sense of smell, and instinct help them make their way. When they attack, therefore, they do so under cover of darkness, hoping to prey on disoriented enemies. *Blinding assault* takes its cue from the grimlocks, taking down the enemy while it struggles to find you.

Blinding Assault

Ranger Attack 5

Delivering a wicked strike, you momentarily rob your opponent of sight and then take advantage of its fumbling.

Daily ♦ **Martial, Weapon**

Standard Action **Melee or Ranged weapon**

Target: One creature

Attack: Strength (melee) or Dexterity (ranged) vs. AC

Hit: 1[W] + Strength modifier damage (melee) or 1[W] + Dexterity modifier damage (ranged), and the target is blinded and cannot shift (save ends both). Until this effect ends, you can shift 1 square as a free action whenever the target misses with an attack.

Miss: Half damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Killing Shadow No race fights in the Underdark quite like the drow. Raiders spring up from hidden positions, attack, and then duck away. Emulating these tactics, *killing shadow* helps you make the most of your superior positioning and reach a new spot before your enemy can react.

Killing Shadow

Rogue Attack 13

Springing out from hiding, you deliver a swift attack and move away before your enemy can figure out what just happened.

Encounter ♦ **Martial, Weapon**

Standard Action **Melee or Ranged weapon**

Requirement: You must be wielding a crossbow, a light blade, or a sling.

Target: One creature from which you are hidden

Attack: Dexterity vs. AC

Hit: 2[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.

Effect: The attack doesn't cause you to stop being hidden, and you can move up to your speed as a free action.

IMPROVISING A LIGHT

Absent a light source, the Underdark seems pitch black. Veteran delvers, however, know light is not impossible to find. Luminescent fungi, crystals, slimes, and other materials can be used as light sources if you can find them.

At the DM's discretion, characters trained in Dungeoneering can search for appropriate materials underground during a short or an extended rest, making a Dungeoneering check against a hard DC of the character's level. On a success, the character creates a light source that sheds dim light out to 10 squares and lasts for two hours. On a failure, the character finds no usable materials and cannot attempt again within the same general area until after his or her next extended rest.

Skill Powers

When the lights go out, you need specialized ways to find your way around. Training in the Perception skill lets you learn some of these techniques as well as improve your nonvisual senses. You also should have training in Dungeoneering to forage in the Underdark, as well as to use some skill powers that negate the disadvantages of darkness.

Stealth is a useful choice for scouting if you have darkvision, enabling you to avoid detection even by enemies that are likewise unimpeded by the dark.

Stay Back When you use *stay back*, you magnify a light source until it becomes uncomfortable to enemies accustomed to darkness. The stronger the light source, the greater the power's effect becomes.

Stay Back

Dungeoneering Utility 2

You sweep your torch or lantern around you to dazzle enemies accustomed to total darkness.

Encounter

Minor Action

Personal

Requirement: You must be carrying a light source.

Effect: Until the end of your next turn, enemies in the squares illuminated by the light source you are carrying take a -2 penalty to attack rolls.

Foil Ambush Surface races rarely make much headway into the Underdark since the denizens know how to exploit their environment to get the drop on intruders. You have studied their tactics.

Foil Ambush

Perception Utility 6

Something out of place alerts you to imminent danger, letting you foil an enemy's ambush.

Daily

No Action

Personal

Trigger: You are surprised while conscious.

Effect: You are not surprised, and you are aware of the location of any enemy within 10 squares of you that is hidden. You then shift up to half your speed as a free action.

Immersed in Darkness Shadows offer little concealment from those able to see in darkness. No matter how well you think you have hidden, such creatures can find you at a glance. This power is an advanced hiding technique that lets you almost merge with shadows to elude even the sharpest eye.

Immersed in Darkness

Stealth Utility 10

You know how to use shadows to stay concealed even from creatures that can see in the dark.

Encounter

Minor Action

Personal

Requirement: You must be in dim light or darkness.

Effect: You become invisible until the start of your next turn, until you attack, or until you enter bright light.

SECRETS OF THE DEEP GUIDES

“This is a bottomless pit, my friends: two miles straight down. Hang on tight, and stick close to me.”

—Karl, deep delver

The foremost explorers of the Underdark’s countless caverns, the loose organization called the Deep Guides is made up of peerless delvers. These talented survivalists, scouts, cartographers, and navigators range throughout the depths, ensuring open lanes of travel. Motivated by both a desire for exploration and the patronage of wealthy merchants, these trailblazers of the Underdark bring civilization into the Night Below.

History

The Deep Guides began with an unlikely friendship that developed over forty years ago. Two rival adventurers, the human Jasyn of Therund and the dwarf Marholt Arlestone, found themselves trapped in the Underdark in the aftermath of an expedition gone bad. For years the two had competed to find the legendary ruby of Sereth Van, and both arrived at the gem’s location serendipitously. The treasure hunters, however, didn’t plan for a nest of purple worms surrounding the ruby, and they were driven back into the tunnels. Each blamed the other for their mutual failure, and they lost the path during their bickering. Just as they realized their predicament, a violent quake trapped them in a hitherto unknown region of the Underdark.

Forced to rely on each other for survival, Marholt and Jasyn set aside their differences and, after a four-month trek, found refuge. They emerged in a huge lava tube that held a river teeming with subterranean life. When they finally reached the surface, Jasyn realized that the two were in the immense Dawnforge mountain range, an imposing barrier to trade for the many realms nearby. The two, now fast friends and keen for any opportunity to amass wealth, came up with the same idea: They could use the underground river to bypass the Dawnforges, opening up new trade routes and earning a fortune. The Deep Guides organization was born.

Jasyn and Marholt approached local lords and merchants, and they obtained supplies and resources to map the river way beneath the mountains. Marholt gained support from nearby dwarf chiefs as well, and the Deep Guides soon grew to boast dozens of members throughout the surrounding regions. Trade, community, and travel between nations swelled, making the Deep Guides’ founders rich enough to become lords themselves.

The Schism

As the years passed, Marholt and Jasyn eventually withdrew from active leadership of the Guides to live in comfort in their home cities. Old age finally took Jasyn, who succumbed to illness and died in bed. Marholt, with some years left thanks to his dwarven vitality, grieved for his friend but was determined not to leave the world in the same way. He had one more journey to make. The founding Deep Guide gathered his pickaxe, ropes, and torches, and descended alone into the resting place of the ruby of Sereth Van. He never returned.

Both Jasyn and Marholt had many sons and daughters, whose petty squabbles over inheritance jeopardized the fate of the Deep Guides. Political allegiances, racial bias, and unabashed greed broke the organization into several independent factions, sometimes hostile to one another, and each with its own motives and methods.

The Deep Guides Today

Little consensus exists today among the bickering factions of Deep Guides. Each claims to be pursuing the original intention of the organization: exploring and mapping the Underdark. However, their motives vary wildly. No company of Deep Guides is evil, but the groups’ mutual resentment prevents them from cooperating as the organization did in early days. The bitterness between Jasyn’s and Marholt’s children doesn’t usually affect individual guides, who spend most of their time in the Underdark on missions. Confrontations between rival companies have become tense and even violent on occasion, however.

Each company of Deep Guides operates independently, making alliances with caravan masters, lords, and travelers at its own discretion. Each has a different leadership style and its own priorities, though most members are still explorers at heart. Some companies are run like mercantile enterprises, while others are relaxed with a rugged feel, like the camaraderie of a hunting lodge. Each has a similar organization. Typically, the company’s leaders negotiate contracts, providing equipment and recruiting laborers as needed to its members. A typical task can range from clearing out a nest of monsters to mapping a newly opened tunnel; after its completion, the guide receives payment.

The explorers of the Deep Guides are an adventurous lot concerned mostly with discovery and excitement. They leave the politics to those who stay behind at headquarters or on the surface. Individual guides are allowed to operate independently, as long as they give the company’s leaders a portion of earnings under the Deep Guides name.

Joining the Deep Guides

As a member of the Deep Guides, you are among the world's premier underground explorers. Before you decide to join up, though, be aware that you'll be sent deep into uncharted territory where you are prey for any number of Underdark monsters.

If you're daring enough to make the commitment, you can expect journeys that make surface explorers weak in the knees. You have the support of other guides, who can provide you with refuge, equipment, and sometimes information to aid you in your delves. The Deep Guides don't accept just anyone, though—you need to prove that you have what it takes to survive in the depths.

Classes and Themes

Your choice of class goes a long way in determining your role as one of the Deep Guides. The majority of members are rangers, since that class enjoys a useful variety of skills and has the combat prowess needed to survive underground. Rangers excel at exploration, being self-reliant in areas without established roads or reliable sustenance. Rogues are also common, since they are experts at negotiating treacherous terrain and hazards. They are often assigned to disable traps in the path of caravans, or to set some of their own to clear out skulking monsters.

More combat-oriented classes, such as wardens, are always welcome in any company of Deep Guides. Their strength and toughness are invaluable when clearing a lair of monsters or guarding vulnerable caravans and travelers.

Druids, despite their aboveground inclinations, bring much to the Deep Guides. The druids' *wild shape* power lets them move through caverns in the form of native beasts, and those who have training in both Perception and Dungeoneering are as valuable below ground as they are on the surface.

The deep delver theme is a natural choice for your Deep Guides character. It gives you an edge when exploring subterranean environments that could mean the difference between life and death. The Underdark envoy is a good fit as well.

Even without those themes, training in Athletics is helpful for the rigorous physical demands needed to move through the wild places of the Underdark. Since many of the Deep Guides' expeditions bring you into contact with cultures of the Underdark, don't forget Diplomacy.

Attack Powers

Conventional battle tactics and abilities don't always work in the Underdark. Cramped fighting conditions, limited line of sight, and monsters adapted to that environment can deny victory even to experienced adventurers. Members of the Deep Guides bring their knowledge of subterranean survival to combat as well as exploration. They can turn the tables on dungeon-dwelling foes, using the Underdark's terrain as a weapon or denying subterranean creatures their natural advantages, to give cave-dwelling beasts a nasty surprise.

Writhing Earth A constant challenge to battling underground is contending with the rugged terrain that is ubiquitous in caverns. Deep Guides who speak the primal language of earth and rock can sweep this terrain aside using *writhing earth*, sending a blast of rubble into their foes while clearing a path for themselves.

Writhing Earth

Druid Attack 9

The earth groans all around, constantly creating and dissolving debris to block your enemies and smooth paths for your allies.

Daily ♦ **Implement, Primal, Zone**

Standard Action Close blast 5

Target: Each creature in the blast

Attack: Wisdom vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d6 + Wisdom modifier damage, and the target falls prone.

Miss: Half damage.

Effect: The blast creates a zone of difficult terrain for your enemies. The zone lasts until the end of the encounter.

Rattle the Senses The most dangerous enemies of the Underdark are able to detect you without light, and in some cases even without eyes! Through preternatural hearing, echolocation, or even detecting vibrations in the ground, these enemies can feel you coming, but *rattle the senses* denies them this natural advantage.

Rattle the Senses

Ranger Attack 5

A precise strike makes your enemy reel in disorientation, robbing it of its ability to use its specialized senses.

Daily ♦ **Martial, Weapon**

Standard Action Melee or Ranged weapon

Target: One creature

Attack: Strength (melee) or Dexterity (ranged) vs. AC

Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage (melee) or Dexterity modifier damage (ranged), and the target is dazed (save ends).

Miss: Half damage.

Effect: The target loses blindsight and tremorsense until the end of your next turn.

Tight Squeeze The narrow spaces in many caves can be the downfall of some heroes. Even skilled warriors, trapped in a corner with no room to maneuver or swing a weapon, are easy prey for the mandibles of an umber hulk. *Tight squeeze* lets you outmaneuver your enemies, ensuring that they're the ones trapped in cramped areas, instead of you.

Tight Squeeze Rogue Attack 7

With a daring movement, you strike your foe and trick it into a narrow space.

Encounter ◆ **Martial, Weapon**

Standard Action Melee weapon

Target: One creature

Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex

Special: If you're squeezing when you use this power, you don't take the penalty to the attack roll from squeezing.

Hit: 2[W] + Dexterity modifier damage, and you swap places with the target if possible, forcing it to squeeze if necessary. You then shift up to half your speed.

Expulsion Creatures that burrow or cling to walls can be tricky to deal with. Deep Guides of the warden class use *expulsion* to keep such enemies on the dungeon floor.

Expulsion Warden Attack 7

You strike the ground and send a rolling tremor through the earth.

Daily ◆ **Primal, Thunder, Weapon**

Standard Action Close blast 3

Special: You ignore blocking terrain when determining line of effect for this attack.

Target: Each creature in the blast

Attack: Strength vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1[W] + Strength modifier thunder damage, and the target is slowed until the end of your next turn. The target emerges to the nearest unoccupied space if it is burrowing or falls if it is climbing, and it cannot burrow or climb until the end of your next turn.

Skill Powers

Training in the Dungeoneering skill should be a priority for your character since you'll be spending much of your time underground. Stealth and Perception are also useful choices for guides who scout into unknown places.

As well, a little bit of magical talent (represented by the Arcana skill) can give you the edge when ordinary senses fail.

Cave Sight Inspired by the echoing chirps of cave-dwelling creatures, spell users of the Deep Guides have developed methods of their own for mapping out caverns. Using *cave sight*, you can get a clear vision of the dungeon's geography, as well as sense hidden passages or threats that wait beyond.

Cave Sight Arcana Utility 2

You close your eyes, projecting arcane awareness to give you a mental picture of the cavern ahead.

Daily

Minor Action Close burst 20

Effect: You learn the general layout of terrain features in the burst. You cannot sense through solid objects, such as cave walls, but you do sense around corners and into narrow gaps. Additionally, you can make a Perception check to detect hidden creatures, objects, and traps as though you were within 10 squares of them.

Dungeoneer's Guidance The best Underdark guides always keep an eye on their companions, intervening before missteps or accidents send the party tumbling into a bottomless pit or into the jaws of a waiting monster.

Dungeoneer's Guidance Dungeoneering Utility 6

Your survival skills step in to support an ally.

Encounter

Immediate Interrupt Personal

Trigger: An ally you can see and who can hear you makes an Acrobatics, Athletics, Dungeoneering, Nature, or Perception check and dislikes the result.

Effect: Make a Dungeoneering check. The triggering ally can use the result of your check in place of his or her own result.

Elude Senses For most, no amount of sneakiness can foil the keen senses of beasts native to subterranean environments. The Deep Guides, however, developed *elude senses* to ensure that creatures relying on senses other than normal sight cannot detect them.

Elude Senses Stealth Utility 2

You slip past the notice of creatures that have adapted to life underground.

Encounter

Minor Action Personal

Effect: Until the end of your next turn, creatures can't use darkvision, blindsight, or tremorsense to detect you. You can be detected with other senses as normal.

SHADOW OF THE ZIGGURAT

"I must confess these caverns fill me with dread. They feel different from the corridors before . . . familiar in a way I can't understand."

—Mord, escaped thrall

Something disturbs the oily surface of the Dark Lake. Ripples spread slowly, washing against the eight sides of the enigmatic structure that rises sheer from the fathomless depths, its black stones brooding in oppressive silence. The surface of the lake breaks, revealing for a moment a shape not meant for mortal eyes before it slips again beneath the stygian waters.

Growing Madness

The Dark Lake Ziggurat (*Underdark*, page 42) is a place of terrible import. An artifact created by entities from the Far Realm, it exudes an alien unwholesomeness. Heroes of the sane world point to the dreadful structure when rallying forces against the aberrations of the depths.

Yet the ziggurat is but one of many such places in the Underdark that spread evil to the world above. In recent years the traffic to these insane locales has increased, pointing to the growing influence of the Far Realm. Individuals affected by this horrid presence are being drawn to the dungeons and caverns of the Underdark. The weak-willed never return; the strong triumph over madness.

Insane Masters

Aberrant creatures are the true lords of the Underdark, more so than even the drow. The dark elves possess a culture and history that the surface races can comprehend, but aberrations are inscrutable. They seem intent on dominating all life, though scholars can only speculate on their true nature and motives.

Aboleths, beholders, and mind flayers are the best known of these monsters, but the weird darkness holds numerous others. Their presence portends dire things to come as the Far Realm slowly uncoils its tentacles across the world. More and more incidents on the surface are being instigated by intellects from below—sometimes subtle, sometimes catastrophic.

Few individuals realize the truth behind these malignant events. Only those who have encountered the Far Realm's corruption and survived its maddening influence understand the threat. They are compelled to explore and overcome the terrible dark, even when their instincts scream at them not to. Whether they experience very strong emotions or are

acutely sensitive to psychic phenomena, they hear the Far Realm's call more clearly than others.

Making Contact

Every adventurer in the Underdark eventually comes across the aberrant horrors lurking in its darkest corners. Such an encounter changes a person—even one with the iron will of a hero. Those most committed to defeating the corruption of the Far Realm, though, usually feel it long before they descend below the surface.

For you this influence might be subtle, something lurking in the back of your mind that made you odd or unapproachable during your youth. Did you suffer from nightmares or visions as a child? If so, how have they guided your life? Maybe you dreamed of writhing shapes in the dark and are drawn downward out of a desire to understand what you saw. You delve into dungeons not by choice, but by some impulse that you don't quite understand. Do you fear what lies below, or push on into the depths hoping to discover what awaits you?

Your experience with aberrants could be much more terrifying and personal. These creatures are notorious for enslaving mortals, dominating the mind and crushing the soul. Were you once a slave who managed to escape? You might be following an echo of your old master's voice in your mind.



TOUCHED BY MADNESS

Anyone who has experienced the insidious horror of aberrant monsters isn't likely to be completely normal. The Far Realm's influence seeps unnoticed into the surface world, and those touched by it might not even realize their corruption. If your character suffered this experience, you can express it through roleplaying. You might portray your character as driven by ominous thoughts he or she doesn't understand. Such barely controlled madness offers a way to inject a bit of Far Realm weirdness into the game. Take care not to dominate the group, though—others want to express their characters too.



Staying Sane

You risk more than your life when you confront aberrations. Prolonged exposure to their sickening mental contact can harm your mind as much as their tentacles rend your flesh. This damage might not be immediate; it burrows into your psyche to manifest days or weeks later. Confusion, déjà vu, nocturnal terrors, and hallucinations are all symptoms of having one's mind touched by these monsters. Those who



The Dark Lake Ziggurat is home to a host of unimaginable aberrant monstrosities

have been mentally dominated experience these symptoms worse than others, but simply being the target of a psychic attack can be enough to disturb your mental balance. How do you succeed in holding onto your sanity?

Fighting aberrations has affected the way you look at the world. Have you become numbed to their hideous physical forms, or does each glimpse of an aberrant creature make your skin crawl? Perhaps you developed an aversion to natural things, such as insects or worms, that remind you of them. Peering into the maw of the Far Realm might eat away at your moral or religious sense, making you nihilistic or withdrawn.

The greatest weapon of the Far Realm is its assault on intellect; the more you know about it, the more susceptible you are to its horrors. Characters who deal with aberrations at sword point don't concern themselves with understanding their foes. Scholarly characters who probe into reality-bending paradoxes open themselves up to the Far Realm's madness, obsessed with things no mortal mind is capable of understanding.

Classes and Themes

Not all classes are equally suited to wandering the depths, and fewer still to combating aberrations. Those who use the psionic power source are the most likely

to seek out and engage aberrant foes, being highly sensitive to psychic energy since the shattering of the Living Gate. Such characters are naturally drawn to dungeons stained by the Far Realm's influence. Although their psionic powers can be potent weapons, they are also easily corrupted by aberrant foes. In the quest to learn more about mental horrors, many a battlemind or psion has opened one door too many, only to find a monster of nightmare waiting for them.

Arcane dungeoneering characters are often drawn to the lairs of Far Realm monsters, usually out of a desire for knowledge and power. Some pursue aberrations to discover ancient lore connected to their origins, or to acquire forbidden secrets that no sane master would teach; warlocks in particular might be brazen enough to try to control them.

Since many aberrations rely on psychic manipulation, themes that enhance Will are best suited to this area of lore. The escaped thrall theme is ideal for such a background; alternatively, a bloodsworn character might be seeking vengeance against an aberrant mastermind that attacked his or her family or community.

Attack Powers

Adventurers who face aberrant creatures too often end up devoured, enslaved, or driven mad. Those

who survive such encounters have developed effective methods to defeat them. Such techniques exploit aberrant creatures' psychic abilities or use specialized magic to burn away their otherworldly flesh.

Living Shard In the dim epochs of history, the Living Gate held back the terrors of the Far Realm. Though the gate has long since been shattered, *living shard* enables you to manifest a tiny fragment of the gate's energy. This shard overwhelms the minds of your enemies and disintegrates the bodies of aberrations.

Living Shard **Battlemind Attack 15**

Your strike embeds a crystalline fragment in your enemy's flesh, overwhelming it with psionic energy channeled from the Living Gate.

Daily ♦ **Psionic, Radiant, Weapon**
Standard Action **Melee weapon**

Target: One creature
Attack: Constitution vs. AC

Hit: 2[W] + Constitution modifier damage, and the target is dazed and gains vulnerable 5 psychic (save ends both).

Miss: Half damage, and the target gains vulnerable 5 psychic (save ends).

Effect: Until the vulnerability ends, the target takes 10 radiant damage whenever it uses a psychic power.

Telepathic Wail The aberrant creatures below rarely communicate in ways familiar to surface dwellers. Most transmit their sickening thoughts with telepathy, which makes them especially receptive to the mental activity of their prospective victims. With *telepathic wail*, you ensure that they hear your thoughts loud and clear.

Telepathic Wail **Psion Attack 13**

You project a keening psychic scream into the minds around you and rob nearby creatures of hearing.

At-Will ♦ **Augmentable, Implement, Psionic, Psychic**
Standard Action **Close burst 2**

Target: Each creature in the burst
Attack: Intelligence vs. Will

Hit: 1d8 + Intelligence modifier psychic damage, and the target is deafened until the end of your next turn.

Augment 1

Hit: As above, and the target loses any psychic resistance or immunity until the end of your next turn.

Augment 4

Hit: 2d8 + Intelligence modifier psychic damage, and the target is deafened and dazed until the end of your next turn. If the target deals psychic damage before the end of your next turn, it is stunned instead of dazed.



For some, the evil of the Far Realm is never far away

KIERAN YANNER

Command Insanity Though many aberrant creatures can enslave the minds of mortals, they themselves are subservient to the insane laws of the Far Realm. With *command insanity* you control its otherworldly nature.

Command Insanity Warlock Attack 9

Your eyes reflect the madness of the Far Realm, crushing your enemy's will with the overwhelming weight of insanity.

Daily ♦ Arcane, Charm, Implement
Standard Action Ranged 5

Target: One creature

Attack: Constitution or Charisma vs. Will

Hit: The target is dominated (save ends). If the target is aberrant, it takes a -2 penalty to saving throws against this effect.

Aftereffect: The target is dazed (save ends).

Miss: The target is dazed (save ends).

Skill Powers

Only a fool dares face aberrants without training in Dungeoneering—especially since most such horrors make their lairs in the Underdark. Not only does this skill help you navigate and survive the depths, it can also give you vital insight into your foe. Knowing the unique strengths, vulnerabilities, and behavior of these alien beings can mean the difference between striking a victorious blow and having your brain sucked from your skull.

Sometimes an aberrant's tricks are more subtle, involving illusions. Training in Insight and Arcana are handy for distinguishing between reality and delusion.

Peer Through the Void Some adventurers, especially those whose minds have been touched by aberrant creatures, view the world through different eyes. By using *peer through the void* you shut off the sane part of your mind, welcoming the chaos of senses to better combat aberrant terrors.

Peer Through the Void Arcana Utility 6

You part the veil between worlds, seeing creatures from the Far Realm as they really are.

Encounter ♦ Arcane, Stance

Minor Action Personal

Effect: You assume the peer through the void stance. Until the stance ends, you gain blindsight 3, and aberrant creatures grant combat advantage to you. You take a -2 penalty to attack rolls against creatures outside the range of your blindsight.

Insane Logic Though creatures from the Far Realm obey laws from a different reality, they can still be made vulnerable to worldly forces if their true nature is understood. *Insane logic* gives you that momentary flash of madness needed to face aberrant creatures on equal terms.

Insane Logic Dungeoneering Utility 10

You abandon conventions of the world's natural laws to break through an aberrant creature's defenses.

Encounter

Minor Action Personal

Effect: Choose one aberrant creature that you can see within 5 squares of you. Make a Dungeoneering check to determine that creature's resistances and vulnerabilities. On a success, your attacks ignore the creature's resistances until the end of the encounter.

Conceal Psyche Those who have survived encounters with aberrant beings have instinctively learned to shield their thoughts. *Conceal psyche* protects you from psychic attacks by burying your intellect in the deepest corners of your mind.

Conceal Psyche Insight Utility 6

You hide the core of your identity deep in your subconscious.

Encounter

Minor Action Personal

Effect: You gain a +4 power bonus to Will and a +4 power bonus to saving throws against charm and psychic effects until the end of your next turn.

Special: If you are dominated and a save can end the domination effect, you can expend this power at the start of your turn to make a saving throw to end that effect.

FIGHTING THE ABERRANTS

You'll need every advantage to overcome the aberrant monsters of the Underdark. Here are some tricks the best delvers have picked up over the years.

- ♦ Items, feats, or class features that grant psychic resistance can greatly improve your odds of survival.
- ♦ Use attacks that target defenses other than Will, since many aberrations are controllers with strong mental resilience.
- ♦ Few aberrant creatures are minions, so powers that deal high damage to a single foe are more useful than close and area effects.

SEEKERS OF LOST LORE

“Have you heard of the Library of Darkness and Light? Over a hundred volumes on the magic of good and evil, compiled from thirteen ancient civilizations and written in four living languages and two dead ones—and that’s before we crack open the vault!”

—Ella, treasure hunter

The forces of good and evil rise and fall like the tides of the ocean. Both sides amass strength only to lose it again, leaving a wealth of lost knowledge for future generations to discover. As time moves on, the world becomes cluttered with great tomes, talismans, relics, artifacts, and other products of these times long past.

Many explorers and adventurers, whatever their professed motivations, have some amount of greed in their hearts. They might think most often in terms of how much a recovered treasure would bring if it were sold, or turned in for a reward. For others, the potential monetary return means nothing in comparison to what can be gained from possession of the treasure. The temptation of lost lore is strong, and many search the corners of the world to dig it from its resting place. Amateur scholars from all walks of life assemble teams to quench their thirst for knowledge. Their reasons for taking up such a career are usually

benign, but some have selfish and devious purposes. Seekers of lost lore meticulously research the locations and history of mighty items in libraries, temples, and other storehouses of scholarship. They spend a lot of time learning how to deal with the threats they might face. Only after assembling enough information do they set out to claim their treasure.

If the supposed location of a piece of lost lore is not a secret known only to the heroes, then more searchers might enter the fray as time moves on. Multiple groups of creatures often race to recover the same artifact, hurrying through an ancient dungeon complex to get there first. Even in a situation when the characters have no competition in the form of monsters and other enemies, every seeker of lost lore knows well that the treasure is being protected by the dungeon itself, likely through the use of hazards and traps. For all these reasons, those who quest after bygone knowledge need to be as capable and determined as they can possibly be.

Classes and Themes

Any sort of character can be drawn to the promise of more power through knowledge, but those who specialize in ancient lore more often pursue lost relics that embody long-buried truths.



Will this explorer succeed in grabbing the prize of lost lore, or suffer the same fate as those who came before him?

Perhaps understandably, the characters who gravitate toward being seekers of lost lore are predominantly users of the divine or the primal power source. Many deities (and their counterparts in the spirit world) have a special appreciation for knowledge and lore, and they engender that appreciation in their worshipers. A religious character might follow this path to suss out a legendary weapon or artifact dating back to the Dawn War, or search out an irredeemably evil object to destroy it.

Characters with the treasure hunter theme often also consider themselves seekers of lost lore, since those characters already specialize in seeking out great artifacts (most of which also happen to be worth a lot of gold).

Attack Powers

Adventurers who have taken on the life of a seeker of lost lore must be clever and able to adapt to any situation, because they are liable to be competing against many others—not just rival adventurers, but great entities that would do anything to acquire the object of their search.

Admonition of Oghma Seekers of lost lore can be consumed by their work. They spend most of their waking hours entranced in the study of the items they seek, possibly due to a residual property of the magic that binds the items to ensure they are never forgotten. The god of knowledge opens a conduit to such seekers, compelling them to go out and retrieve the items rather than remain forever studying, with timely warnings to protect them during their travels.

Admonition of Oghma Invoker Attack 7

A split-second view of the future flashes before you, revealing a threat to come.

Encounter ♦ **Divine, Implement**

Immediate Reaction Ranged 5

Trigger: An enemy ends its turn within 5 squares of you.

Target: The triggering enemy

Attack: Wisdom vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d6 + Wisdom modifier damage, and the target is slowed until the end of its next turn.

Rune of Divine Providence During the Dawn War, each god created a unique icon of divine power to serve his or her purposes. Many of these were shattered or lost during the clash, and after it had ended, the gods sought their restoration. Rune-priests are natural seekers of lost artifacts, envoys of the gods sent to recover their ancient relics, and benefit from their patrons' protection.

Rune of Divine Providence Rune Priest Attack 9

You strike your enemy and call upon your god to wrap you and your allies in divine supremacy.

Daily ♦ **Aura, Divine, Weapon**

Standard Action Melee weapon

Target: One creature

Attack: Strength vs. AC

Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier damage.

Effect: You activate an aura 1 that lasts until the end of your next turn. While in the aura, your allies gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses.

Sustain Minor: The aura persists until the end of your next turn.

Short Shot Onslaught Fighting in close quarters can be a daunting and difficult proposition. Some delvers have developed superior tactics to overcome this challenge through training and persistence.

Short Shot Onslaught Seeker Attack 13

Your time spent underground has forced you to adapt to skirmishing in close quarters.

Encounter ♦ **Primal, Weapon**

Standard Action Close burst 3

Target: One, two, or three creatures in the burst

Attack: Wisdom vs. AC

Hit: 1[W] + Wisdom modifier damage.

Effect: After all of this power's attacks are resolved, you can use a free action to shift up to 2 squares for each attack that hit. You ignore difficult terrain during this movement.

Ancient Progenitor Spirit The spirit world frightens the ignorant. It is associated with death and the great passing. Shamans understand that life extends beyond the mortal shell and that great ancestors wait to welcome us home once more.

Ancient Progenitor Spirit Shaman Attack 5

With a low hum, your spirit companion fades and the essence of an ancient ancestor comes to your aid, invading the minds of enemies foolish enough to stay close.

Daily ♦ **Implement, Primal, Psychic, Spirit, Zone**

Standard Action Close burst spirit 2

Target: Each enemy in the burst

Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1d10 + Wisdom modifier psychic damage, and the target grants combat advantage and cannot benefit from any concealment (save ends both).

Effect: Your spirit companion disappears, and the burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. Enemies in the zone take a -2 penalty to attack rolls, and any enemy that ends its turn in the zone takes 5 psychic damage.

Sustain Minor: The zone persists until the end of your next turn.

Skill Powers

If you seek that which is lost, make sure you know what you're doing. Training in Dungeoneering is essential for navigating the many perils of ancient ruins, temple complexes, and Underdark lairs. And Acrobatics helps you negotiate narrow ledges and avoid the inevitable pitfalls.

Timely Dodge Your peripheral awareness has been honed by years of exploring underground. Sometimes you can avoid an attack without being conscious of it, realizing the danger only after you have escaped.

Timely Dodge

Acrobatics Utility 6

Something out of the corner of your eye causes you to step out of the way of danger.

Encounter

Immediate Interrupt **Personal**

Trigger: An enemy targets you with an attack.

Effect: You shift up to half your speed. The triggering enemy can choose a new target for the attack if you are now out of range.

Ripples in the Air It is said that the world is a living being, caught between the gods and primordial beings during the Dawn War. Each ebb and flow from creation rippled throughout the world and finite vibrations echo with it. You have spent so much time beneath the surface that you can see the vibrations in your mind—giving you clarity and sight where light might not exist.

Ripples in the Air

Dungeoneering Utility 10

You can navigate even in complete darkness.

Daily

Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You gain tremorsense 5 until the end of your next turn.

Sustain Minor: The tremorsense persists until the end of your next turn.



THIEVES' GUILD OF MAELBRATHYR

"Maelbrathyr? I've heard of the place. Nice work, if you can survive it."

—Khiira, Underdark envoy

When Torog dragged the city of Maelbrathyr down into the Underdark (see the sidebar), no one expected it to survive, let alone turn into a breeding ground for ruffians and miscreants. Few who live there question the methods that keep the city running.

Resettling the city and giving it life once more required a large undertaking and an immense amount of money. Maelbrathyr's unique new structure also inspired a group of entrepreneurs to call the shattered city their home. In the shadow of Torog's revenge, influential individuals established crime guilds, which are now flourishing with the covert assistance of the city's de facto ruler.

Hidden Organization

The thieves' guild of Maelbrathyr has a rigid cell-based structure, difficult to fully comprehend and nearly impossible to track. If the organization has a head, his or her identity remains a secret to all. Even the most senior captains are unsure where their orders come from. Most outsiders give up on trying to solve the enigma of the guild. Those who persist soon disappear and are never heard from again.

The guild has eyes and ears everywhere. Potential members do not seek it out but are recruited from the streets. Waylaid and knocked out, they awaken in a secret location to undergo a horrific initiation. Those who survive this ordeal start out serving as footpads. As they accomplish more missions and goals, they move up in rank and are given greater responsibility.

Aleeria's Influence

Aleeria Salitzar is one of the broken city's three mad rulers, and the only one who wields any real authority at the moment (see the sidebar). Changeable and cruel, she inspires terror in her enemies—and only slightly less fear in others. Even so, Aleeria knows that her grip on the city is only as strong as her alliances.

Aleeria knows that to maintain any semblance of power, she needs to manage those who control the city's wealth. To that end, she has been working closely with the thieves' guild in her city. It took some time, but she ingratiated herself with an insider in the organization. Through this secret contact, she attempts to direct the guild's activities—although its decentralized structure and her own fits of rage make such efforts only intermittently successful. Still, she enjoys some of the fruits of their illicit trade.



The darkness of Maelbrathyr is excellent cover for criminal activity

Classes and Themes

As befits a criminal organization, rogues are the most common class in this thieves' guild. However, Maelbrathyr's unique situation means that other sorts of characters with specialized talents are desirable to the organization.

Warlocks are often connected to dark forces, and their arcane talents are valuable for certain jobs that ordinary criminal practitioners just can't handle. They tend to be morally flexible, a useful quality. In addition, the guild places a high value on members who have expertise as artificers, because their skill at tailoring armor and other equipment is hard to find elsewhere in the city.

The Underdark envoy theme is extremely useful to members of the thieves' guild, since navigating the maze of Maelbrathyr's politics requires the most subtle touch. Relationships within the guild are tricky as well, especially considering Aleeria's influence through her anonymous contact. An Underdark outcast might find a home in the thieves' guild after losing all hope of return to his or her former society.

Attack Powers

Members of the Maelbrathyr thieves' guild must call upon a wide variety of abilities. Success comes only from the right combination of secrecy and capability.

THE FALL OF MAELBRATHYR

Maelbrathyr was pulled down into the Underdark centuries ago by Torog, the King that Crawls. The god of torment took revenge on the proud city when its champions dared to enter his torture dens and rescue a prisoner known as the Ruby Wizard.

The surviving heroes returned triumphant to the surface—only to be greeted by disaster. Torog dragged Maelbrathyr into the depths, shattering the city as it fell. Much was lost forever, but the parts that survived came to rest in four pieces. Most of the buildings remained intact, and much of the population survived.

They were the unlucky ones. The maimed god first reclaimed his prisoner, then spent years slowly and painfully killing everyone who still lived in Maelbrathyr. The three heroes were transformed into ageless forms condemned to eternal torture. Maddened by pain and unable to escape, they have become its insane lords.

Aleeria Salitzar is frozen with unending ice from the waist down, while her upper body is consumed with eternal flame. Her mood swings between dark brooding to furious rage. She is the ostensible ruler of Maelbrathyr, since the others are too distracted by their torments. Hannault Thrayban is possessed by the souls of two fellow adventurers whom he murdered, and the trapped personalities constantly struggle to gain ascendancy. Ordu Dekaan, flayed in a rolling cage of blades, is too indecisive to stick with any course of action for long.

Armor of Darkness Maelbrathyr is home to unique artisans, armorsmiths, and weaponsmiths. Many of them have trained as artificers to create special arms and armor. Inevitably, some of these craftspeople experimented with the shadowy forces at play in the forsaken city, imbuing their creations with a dark energy.

Armor of Darkness

Artificer Attack 7

Your armor is imbued with a tenebrous and chaotic shadow, which lashes out in defense, sapping your foes' life force to bolster your own.

Encounter ♦ Arcane, Cold, Implement, Necrotic

Immediate Reaction Melee 1

Trigger: An adjacent enemy attacks you.

Target: The triggering enemy

Attack: Intelligence vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1d6 + Intelligence modifier cold and necrotic damage.

Effect: You and each ally adjacent to you gain 5 temporary hit points.



THE BLEAK CARNIVAL

The chaotic environment of Maelbrathyr admirably masks clandestine activity, but things get even more out of hand when the Bleak Carnival arrives in town. During the annual event, visitors from all across the Underdark flock to the event along with shady dealers from the surface. The festival offers a chance to buy and sell just about anything, licit or not. The thieves' guild makes valuable contacts, transacts in special wares (including slaves, contraband, and stolen goods), and obtains new assignments during the carnival. It's also a good time for clandestine assassinations; the bodies are often not discovered until the tents and stalls have been packed away once more. "Recruitment drives" (that is, kidnapping) also coincide with the festivities.



Startling Offensive The thieves' guild teaches that in the Underdark, you don't have to be the strongest or the most accomplished fighter. You just need to strike first and strike to kill.

Startling Offensive Rogue Attack 3

You strike before your foe even realizes that you are a threat.

Encounter ♦ **Martial, Weapon**

Immediate Reaction **Melee 1**

Requirement: You must be wielding a light blade.

Trigger: An enemy enters a square within 3 squares of you.

Effect: You shift up to 2 squares to a square adjacent to the triggering enemy and make the following attack with combat advantage.

Target: The triggering enemy

Attack: Dexterity vs. AC

Hit: 1[W] + Dexterity modifier damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of your next turn.

Skill Powers

Members of the guild share a general pool of skills, but each has a specialized role. One might be a "face," learning how to read and trick people, while another is an acrobatic cat burglar who climbs walls and walks tightropes. Maelbrathyr has a unique position in the Underdark, and its thieves become experts in dealing with its challenges.

Familiar Footing Skilled acrobats can improvise and adapt to any situation with balance, grace, and skill. In an unforgiving setting, they quickly adjust to meet the challenge.

Familiar Footing Acrobatics Utility 10

You are comfortable maneuvering around precarious terrain.

Daily

Minor Action

Personal

Effect: You ignore difficult terrain until the end of the encounter.

Calculated Acumen In warfare, information can be a deadly weapon. Knowing your enemies' weaknesses helps you and your allies overcome them.

Calculated Acumen Insight Utility 2

Your understanding of battle gives you information on your enemy's tactics.

Encounter

Minor Action

Personal

Effect: Choose one creature within 10 squares of you. You learn the vulnerabilities of that creature, and it grants combat advantage to you until the end of your next turn.

Failed Diplomacy When talking won't get the job done, and a fight is imminent, you need to be ready before the other side is.

Failed Diplomacy Streetwise Utility 2

Negotiations are breaking down and will end in bloodshed. You realize this fact a split-second before your enemies do.

Daily

Free Action

Close burst 5

Trigger: You and your allies roll initiative.

Target: You and each ally in the burst

Effect: Each target gains a +2 power bonus to the initiative check. In addition, the target has combat advantage against all enemies until the end of his or her next turn.





A night sky shines underground in the Vault of the Drow

FROM THE VAULT OF THE DROW

“The place is said to be as lovely as it is terrible: an entire realm of drow and dark creatures in service to Lolth. I would wipe such evil from the world if only I were able.”

—Meliera, bloodsworn

A gleaming but sinister gem, the Vault of the Drow is one of the most spectacular and awe-inspiring locations in the Underdark. Traveling to the great cavern is treacherous and extremely dangerous, a journey that only experienced adventurers should consider. Within its immense breadth, though, lies a place of great beauty and mystery.

Only one known road gives access to the area. An approaching traveler is greeted by bizarre sights, accompanied by a chill breeze. Countless mauve, violet, and deep blue crystals sparkle like stars in the ceiling and walls of the vault. These formations are remnants of unfinished creation, suspended in the cavern since the days of the Dawn War. Below these faux constellations, growths of pale fungus shimmer with golden, sapphire, and ruby hues. A soft hum buzzes within the vault, the product of native cricket-like insects that inhabit the fungal patches. To those

who can see into the darkness, the walls of the vault appear hazy and somewhat insubstantial.

The road continues down into a gorge between steep cliffs. Crushed crystals faintly shimmering with blue light keep visitors from wandering off the path and falling into the darkness. From there, the road leads into an Underdark countryside that is filled with fungi of varying sizes, crystalline columns, and immense spans of lichens and molds.

The Black Tower

Roughly a mile from the entrance to the vault, a great mound of rock and crystal rises to dominate the road. This obsidian tower forces all who approach to choose between going around it to the right or left, into dark and unwelcoming reaches, or entering through the well-traveled middle way.

The black tower is the first line of defense for the infamous drow city of Erelhei-Cinlu. Soldiers patrol the area, challenging visitors to report to the tower and state their business. Officers conduct routine checks of travelers and seize their weapons and armor during questioning.

Noncitizens are issued cloaks that glow with a light visible only to drow nobles and senior military officers, and to bounty hunters who have received

a special tattoo that confers this sight. However, individuals who display a brooch of one of the merchant clans or noble houses need not wear the cloak as long as they wear the pin at all times. (Travelers from outside the city might gain such favor with a house for accomplishing a requested task.) Any who do not follow these rules, or try to circumvent them in any way, are slain.

Erelhei-Cinlu

The gem of the vault is the vast and vibrant city-stronghold of Erelhei-Cinlu. Crenellated obsidian walls 30 feet high surround this centuries-old settlement, punctuated at irregular intervals by towers tall enough to repel the largest of creatures.

Erelhei-Cinlu is a metropolitan hub of political intrigue, rivalries, and secrets. Female drow known as the matron mothers rule their noble houses through intimidation and magical might. Their goddess, Lolth, rewards their faith with special abilities. Arcane academies train favored male drow as potent spellcasters specializing in necromancy and nethermancy. The vast majority of the males, though, are considered inferior and relegated to militia duty. These small military forces are led by a house's weaponmasters, elite soldiers who have demonstrated leadership and courage in defense of the city.

Classes and Themes

The dominant females of Erelhei-Cinlu (and thus of the vault) are clerics who lead the worship of Lolth. As such, female drow characters with a connection to the city are most often clerics, although a female who fled or otherwise became separated from that society might adopt another class.

Male drow who show promise are given training in the arcane arts. A male drow character who grew up in or around the city might be cultivated as a bard or a sorcerer, both professions that females rarely undertake.



Underdark envoy is a likely theme for a character connected to Erelhei-Cinlu. Perhaps you are a representative of a matron mother, or (much like Khiira) you fled the city and came to depend on social expertise to make your way in the Underdark. Deep delver would be an interesting theme for a character who has abandoned the Vault of the Drow, whether you are an escaped slave or a drow who does not want to accept the life dictated for you.

Attack Powers

Each of the unique powers that are a hallmark of Erelhei-Cinlu and the vault has its foundation in one of the multitudinous facets of drow culture. These powers are often the province of soldiers, emissaries, and other non-drow in the service of Lolth.

Ballad of the Zombie King Over the centuries, many folktales and stories have been passed down in Erelhei-Cinlu. One tells of the zombie king, a dreadful monster that lies in stasis somewhere near the Vault. The location of his resting place is unknown, but stories say that at some secret time, he will be unleashed upon the city. Behind him will be an immense sea of the dead—souls claimed in the many wars the city has endured. Recounting this tale unnerves all who hear it.

Ballad of the Zombie King Bard Attack 3

The mere mention of the zombie king sends chills down the spine of even the most fearless.

Encounter ♦ Arcane, Fear, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action Close burst 2

Target: Each enemy in the burst

Attack: Charisma vs. Will

Hit: 1d8 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of your next turn.

Horde of Spiders Loyal priestesses of Lolth are gifted with unique abilities by the Demon Queen of Spiders. With a single prayer, such a cleric can summon a swarm of arachnids to consume any who dare defy Lolth's will.

Horde of Spiders Cleric Attack 1

Tiny black spiders assault your enemy, burrowing into its skin and causing terrible pain.

Daily ♦ Divine, Implement, Necrotic, Poison
Standard Action Ranged 5

Target: One creature

Attack: Strength or Wisdom vs. Fortitude

Hit: 2d8 + Wisdom modifier necrotic damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and grants combat advantage (save ends both).

Miss: Half damage, and the target grants combat advantage (save ends).

Stormy Emotions Sorcerers are considered heretical arcane practitioners in Erelhei-Cinlu. If they are caught casting spells without having been certified by one of the magical academies, they are thrown in prison for decades, if not slain outright. Because they lack formal training, sorcerers must harness magic through other means, such as channeling their tempestuous feelings.

Stormy Emotions Sorcerer Attack 3

Weaving raw emotion into your spell, you unleash a brutal attack against those around you.

Encounter ♦ Arcane, Cold, Implement, Lightning
Standard Action Close burst 2

Target: Each creature in the burst

Attack: Charisma vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d10 cold and lightning damage, and you can push the target 1 square and knock it prone.

Skill Powers

Denizens of Erelhei-Cinlu have to be resourceful to deal with the unique and interesting situations that are part of their existence. Each house has its own specialty.

In an environment where a mere slip of the tongue can mean horrible death, learning to read nuances is essential to survival. Training in Insight, Arcana, or Perception represents the ability to use those cues to your advantage.

Demonic Bargain Many drow treat with demons, harnessing the power of those destructive creatures to further their twisted plans. Working with the beasts of the Abyss is never without risk, however.

Demonic Bargain Arcana Utility 6

You call on a demonic entity to wreak greater destruction, but you tear part of your own mind in the process.

Encounter ♦ Arcane, Psychic

Free Action Personal

Trigger: You roll damage and dislike the result.

Effect: You reroll the damage and must use the second result. You then take psychic damage equal to twice your level.

Despana's Stratagem House Despana is known for both its pride and its martial prowess. Its warriors, gladiators, and soldiers are renowned for their tactical and strategic superiority. Those who gain favor with this house might learn some of their battlecraft.

Despana's Stratagem Insight Utility 16

You watch as the battle unfolds and direct your party to gain the advantage.

Daily ♦ Martial

Minor Action Close burst 3

Target: You and each ally in the burst

Effect: Each target does not grant combat advantage or provoke opportunity attacks until the end of your next turn.

BATTLE TACTICS OF COR TALCOR

"I will stand in the crucible of the warmasters and prove myself."

—Korag, Underdark outcast

The gong echoes as another warrior falls to the cavern floor, blood trickling into the dwarven runes etched across its surface. Onlookers staring from the carved balconies grumble pitilessly. "He's too slow, too weak," they say. "Let this one ponder his failure alone in the chamber of shame." The victor stands at attention as the surgeons carry away his defeated opponent, watching the warmasters on their golden thrones amid the chamber's great columns. Again the gong sounds, but this time an umber hulk is unchained and prodded from its cell. It immediately closes on the lone dwarf champion, but only when the warmasters signal their readiness to the dwarf does he raise his weapon to face his foe.

The legendary dwarven citadel Cor Talcor—the Fortress of Grudges—is a place like no other, above or below the surface. It is far deeper than other dwarven settlements, so much so that it challenges the drow and mind flayer kingdoms of the depths. Here ruthless warmasters mold warriors into champions, passing down generations of specialized combat tactics. Only the strong are accepted as candidates, and only the mightiest among them survive the training. Those who emerge are among the most feared combatants of the Underdark: cold, calculating, and merciless.

The warmasters of Cor Talcor practice ancient traditions, some so esoteric that they have been forgotten by even the oldest dwarf clans. Some scholars believe that these reflect dwarven culture as it existed under the enslavement of the titans—disciplined and focused, without any shred of fear or hesitation. Trainees are immersed in these traditions, hammering out weakness through physical and mental ordeals. Those who pass become champions who hold back the horrors below, sometimes returning to their clans to lead armies. Other veterans of Cor Talcor venture into the heart of their enemies' realms to challenge them directly.

Refuge of the Unwanted

Though Cor Talcor has a storied legacy among dwarves, it is shunned by other clans. Its warmasters owe allegiance to no one, waging war as they please. They have toppled sovereign realms, broken alliances, and roused the anger of the creatures below on many occasions. Their actions supposedly benefit the greater good, but many clan leaders resent the warmasters' cavalier attitude. Moreover, the Fortress

of Grudges openly accepts candidates from among the dregs of dwarven society. Thieves, debtors, and even outcasts are welcome, for the warmasters know that those who do not bow to their authority will perish. The survivors are purified and transformed in the crucible: as strong as steel and as keen as a dwarven battleaxe.

Classes and Themes

The Fortress of Grudges produces warriors. Those without the will or the skill to wage brutal warfare do not emerge alive. Fighter and warlord are the most common classes among those who overcome the many challenges of Cor Talcor. Barbarians are normally heedless of their lives, but those who survive the crucible are fearsome indeed. Wardens learn to draw even more deeply on their earthborn strength. Other martial classes might make the cut occasionally, but Cor Talcor is not kind to characters who rely on subtlety or magical arts.

Underdark outcast is the obvious theme for a character who has passed the rigorous tests of the warmasters. Such characters seek acceptance here, among others cut off from their people, or hope to win redemption on its blood-soaked floor. A blood-sworn who is dedicated to the destruction of a mighty enemy might face Cor Talcor's challenges to gain the combat expertise needed to win out.

Attack Powers

The battle tactics of Cor Talcor reflect the fortress's pitiless demands. Its champions are brutal and efficient, mastering the subterranean environment and punishing enemies of their people. Adventurers who would learn their techniques must prove themselves on the crucible floor.

Crushing Charge The warriors of Cor Talcor have learned to wield the rocky terrain of their underground homes as a weapon. *Crushing charge* not only slams your foe into a wall, but does so hard enough to make the wall hit back.

Crushing Charge Barbarian Attack 7

The impact of your charge smashes your foe back to crush it against solid terrain.

Encounter ♦ Primal, Weapon

Standard Action Melee 1

Target: One creature

Attack: Strength vs. AC

Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage, and you push the target up to 2 squares. If the target ends this push adjacent to blocking terrain, the target takes damage equal to your Strength modifier.

Special: When charging, you can use this power in place of a melee basic attack.

Pitiless Grapple An esoteric form of ritualized dwarven wrestling enables warriors to defeat larger foes even without a weapon. Students of Cor Talcor practice these skills by grappling with cavern-dwelling beasts.

Pitiless Grapple Fighter Attack 9

You grip your foe mercilessly, striking terrifying blows as it struggles to escape.

Daily ♦ Martial, Weapon

Standard Action Melee 1

Requirement: You must have at least one hand free.

Target: One creature

Attack: Strength vs. Reflex

Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier damage, and you grab the target. Until the grab ends, your melee attacks against the target can score a critical hit on a roll of 18-20.

Miss: Half damage.

Pulverizing Impact The solemn stones of Cor Talcor reverberate with a mystic strength. Wardens draw on this power to smash enemies against jagged rocks or other rough terrain.

Pulverizing Impact Warden Attack 13

You drive your weapon into the earth, shattering rock and spraying debris into nearby enemies.

Encounter ♦ Primal, Thunder, Weapon

Standard Action Close burst 1

Target: Each creature in the burst

Attack: Strength vs. Reflex

Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier thunder damage. If the target is in difficult terrain, it takes extra damage equal to your Constitution modifier.

Earthstrength: Add 5 to the extra damage.

Terrain Dominance No race is more adept at waging war underground than the dwarves. With *terrain dominance*, you use their battle planning to incorporate the rocky terrain of the Underdark into your strategy.

Terrain Dominance Warlord Attack 5

You drive your foe into hindering terrain, showing your allies how to utilize the battlefield to their advantage.

Daily ♦ Martial, Weapon

Standard Action Melee weapon

Target: One creature

Attack: Strength vs. AC

Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage, and you slide the target up to 3 squares. If the target ends this slide in difficult terrain, it falls prone.

Miss: Half damage.

Effect: Until the end of the encounter, you and your allies gain a +2 power bonus to attack rolls against targets on difficult terrain.

Skill Powers

You need more than weapon prowess to survive the crucible of Cor Talcor. The warmasters' harsh training deals with all aspects of battle, from dressing wounds to mental conditioning.

Crushing Escape The warriors of Cor Talcor spend long hours wrestling in the stone arenas until the impact of their bodies against rock is nothing to them. With *crushing escape* you punish anyone foolish enough to attempt to grapple you, not only freeing yourself but also setting the foe up for a painful counterattack.

Crushing Escape Athletics Utility 6

You smash free from your enemy's grasp, sending it reeling and making it susceptible to your next attack.

Encounter

Free Action **Personal**

Trigger: You make an escape attempt using Athletics.

Effect: You gain a power bonus to your Athletics check equal to your Strength modifier. If you escape and a creature was grabbing you, that creature gains vulnerable 5 to your attacks until the end of your next turn.

Enter the Crucible Cor Talcor's warriors become physical exemplars of their race, able to withstand punishment that would crush lesser combatants.

Enter the Crucible Endurance Utility 10

Your body returns to the disciplined stance that enabled you to survive Cor Talcor's crucible, giving you a ceaseless resilience to attacks.

Daily

Minor Action **Personal**

Requirement: You must have at least one healing surge remaining.

Effect: You lose a healing surge. Until the end of the encounter, you cannot be weakened, and you gain resist 10 to all damage.

Iron Resurgence The surgeons of Cor Talcor practice harsh methods of healing, meant to test the recipient's threshold for pain as much as to repair injuries. With *iron resurgence* you forcibly set bones and bind wounds.

Iron Resurgence Heal Utility 2

Though your hands do little to comfort the wounded, you ensure that an injury will not keep an ally out of the battle.

Encounter ♦ **Healing**

Minor Action **Melee 1**

Target: You or one ally; must be bloodied and have at least two healing surges remaining

Effect: The target loses a healing surge and can then spend one or two healing surges. The target also gains temporary hit points equal to half his or her healing surge value.



Korag holds back a rampaging troll at Cor Talcor

Scatter the Cowards The weak and infirm are quickly weeded out in the crucible, leaving behind only the strong. You have bested dozens of these individuals during the trials, giving you a warrior's discipline that promises death to the cowards that close in around you.

Scatter the Cowards Intimidate Utility 6

The fearsomeness of your presence sends foes slinking away.

Encounter

Move Action **Personal**

Effect: You move up to your speed. During this movement, minions cannot attack you, and you can push any creature that misses you with an attack 1 square as a free action.

Strive to Survive

Physical training, proper gear, and growing up in the Underdark don't guarantee success when you delve into a dungeon. It's all about knowledge. Listen to the scarred old folks at the inn who have tried raiding dungeons and failed. Try to find copies of the few books written by successful adventurers who retired wealthy.

This chapter doesn't cover all the details that can be gleaned from those sources, but it's a good start.

Top Five Rules of Dungeon Delving

If you know nothing else before you go into a dungeon, remember these five tips. They are about pure survival. You'll need more than these tricks if you hope to beat the monsters, best the traps, and haul out the treasure, but at least these rules will keep you from dying like a complete fool.

1. Don't split the party. The biggest rule in the dungeon is the same as anywhere else. If only the halfling can fit through that narrow tunnel, nobody can go to his rescue when a monster on the other side paralyzes him and starts nibbling away.

2. Map everything. Learn the standardized symbols for mapping, and pace out every passage you go through. Whenever you get a chance to rest, review your maps and plot the best course of retreat in case you need to make a quick escape. A word of warning if you're traveling in the Underdark: That place has a way of reshaping itself from time to time, so your map might not be trustworthy. Take extra precautions down there.

3. Gear up. Use good judgment when buying your equipment and supplies. Sure, plenty of gadgets will help out in specific situations, but don't purchase too much stuff or you'll end up loaded with junk you never use. Better to bring more rope, pitons, and rations that you know will come in handy than a dozen tools you might not need.

4. Track time. Without the course of the sun to guide you, it's easy to lose track of time in a dungeon. Keeping a regular sleeping schedule is tough, too, when you're constantly looking out for danger. Use

a candle clock (see *Mordenkainen's Magnificent Emporium*) or some other means, mundane or magical, to keep time.

5. Know when to turn back. Plenty of adventurers press on deeper into a dungeon even when they know the odds are against them. We call those people corpses. You'll probably meet a few, or you'll become one yourself if you make the same mistake.

Further Studies

If you're not in too big a hurry to get yourself killed, familiarize yourself with the rest of this chapter before you pack up and hit the dungeon.

Expert Delving Tactics: Learn how to travel in a dungeon carefully and safely. You might run into ancient traps and strange environmental hazards, but this advice can help you best all challenges.

Dungeon Types: Dungeons come in many forms, from working prisons to lost mines to active volcanoes. Understanding variations in dungeon design lets you prepare for a dungeon's unique dangers and challenges, including what creatures might live or lurk within and what special rewards might hide in its depths.

Dungeon Denizens: Read up on the creatures that walk, slither, or flap through hellish underground tunnels. Identify the signs of danger before you stumble into a stirge nest, literally walk into a gelatinous cube, or get eaten by what you thought was a treasure chest.

Infamous Dungeons: Think you've mastered the previous advice and are ready for the big time? These extremely dangerous dungeons are the ones you've always heard about in tall tales. Separate the facts, however scant and disheartening they might be, from the fiction.

Dungeoneers' Tools: Smart dungeon delvers know that the ordinary supplies in an adventurer's kit don't always get the job done. Items such as a mirror or a rubbing kit might not seem like much, but they can mean the difference between a delve's success or failure. This section also provides alchemical items adventurers might take into a dungeon or make from raw materials found there.



Expert Delving Tactics

Knowing how to explore is a skill set that many adventuring parties overlook. Brash heroes can be reckless after accepting a job from an employer, and they might tromp off to a dungeon without considering the dangers that lurk within it. A skilled dungeoneer anticipates challenges and makes sure the group is well prepared for any contingencies.

CLIMBING

Climbing is a requirement in many dungeon complexes, where rope, crampons, and a strong arm are necessary to make progress. Whether you're scaling a cavern wall or climbing out of a pit trap, expert tactics can help.

When climbing, you can eke out a +2 bonus to your Athletics check by using a climber's kit, and you can get another +2 bonus with dagger boots (*Mordenkainen's*). Of course, your allies can use the aid another action to give you a further +2 boost. But the key to ensuring a safe trip up or down lies in the humble rope.

The Athletics DC to climb a rope is 10. Even if you're scaling a sheer wall of smooth glass covered in duck fat, the task has a DC of 10—as long as you can figure out a way to affix a rope. A grappling hook (included in a climber's kit) is the normal way to accomplish this, but on occasion, lassoing something might make more sense. Don't forget magical options such as the *climber's rope*, the *elixir of climbing* (both from *Mordenkainen's Magnificent Emporium*), the *rope of climbing*, and the *flying hook*. *Boots of spider climbing* (*Adventurer's Vault*) are mighty nice as well.

Reducing the DC when you climb means that Athletics checks are easier if you take damage or if you have to catch hold when something threatens to knock you off. Because a rope has only a few hit points, it can be a huge liability if you're in a situation where it can take damage. One area fire attack is likely to destroy it, and a melee attack with an edged weapon—or even certain ranged attacks—could also sever it.

One way to avoid combat while climbing a rope is to rappel down to a position of safety, moving more quickly than normal. When rappelling with a single rope, you wouldn't gain much speed without increasing the danger (and thus increasing the DC). The DM might allow you to risk climbing down at full speed with a DC of 15.

Finally, remember that you can use the run action while climbing. Running gives you a boost of 2 to

your speed and thus nets you 5 extra feet of movement with each move action to climb. Plus, you take no penalty to skill checks while running. It's a fine tactic as long as nothing is trying to kill you.

DARKNESS

If everyone in the party has darkvision, you might not care about the blackness of the dungeon, but as long as someone needs light to see, you'll need to combat this problem. In such situations, some adventuring parties rely on the trusted spell of a wizard or the ritual of an expert practitioner, but what do you do when neither is available?

For expert delvers, the most commonly used sources of illumination are sunrods, lamps, and torches, but other sources of light might be close at hand—literally. Does your magic weapon or implement glow? How about your other magic items? Such light sources are dim but serviceable.

You can also pick up unusual backup sources of illumination as you find them. Whenever you encounter phosphorescent fungi, glowing crystals, or strangely radiant liquids bubbling in some wizard's lab, make sure to fill your pockets. In general, such improvised light sources shed light equivalent to a candle. Another advantage is that they don't need flint and steel to function.

Remember too that various magical effects can dispel darkness, at least for a brief moment. When the lights suddenly go out, the flare from a wizard's *magic missile* or a cleric's *sacred flame* can give everyone an idea of what's around you and who stands where.

Carrying a torch or other handheld light source can interfere with your ability to wield a weapon and a shield in combat. But just because such an item is handheld doesn't mean you literally have to hold it in your hand. Invest in a miner's helmet (*Mordenkainen's*) for 10 gp, and stick that sunrod or candle on your head and out of the way.

A word of warning: Even though your light illuminates only a limited radius, you and your light can be seen from much farther away. The human eye can detect a light as small as a candle flame from miles away in the dark, so spotting your sunrod's brilliant radiance will be easy for any dungeon denizen. A bull's-eye lantern (page 115) is an excellent investment that limits the amount of light visible from a distance. Taking advantage of powers or items that confer darkvision, even for a limited time, also lets you avoid notice by Underdark beasts when you need it most. The *cat's-eye headband* (*Adventurer's Vault* 2) and *unguent of darkvision* (*Adventurer's Vault*) are both relatively low-cost magic items.

SECRET DOORS

Locating a secret door can equate to finding hidden treasure, a safe route around danger, a good place to rest, or a way to “skip to the end” and go straight to the villain’s lair. You might spot a secret door passively, but most of the time such passages are hidden well enough that you must actively search. You can give yourself a bonus to the Perception check, or automatically find the door, by using these tactics.

Little cracks are inevitable around even a well-concealed door. Pass a candle slowly near the wall and look for a flicker in the flame due to airflow, or watch smoke pooling on the ceiling and see if it escapes through cracks. You can also pour water on the floor and watch to see if it drains away.

Sound can help you find a secret door, as long as you aren’t worried about someone hearing your efforts. Knock on stone with a crowbar or rap on wood with your knuckles to listen for changes in tone, and put your ear up against a wall to listen for noise beyond. A listening cone (page 115) is invaluable for this purpose.

Many secret doors are operated by levers or buttons that are concealed in nearby features or objects. Try pushing, pulling, and twisting accoutrements such as torch sconces, the arms and eyes of statues, and books on shelves. Run your hand over walls and floors to see if you can detect edges or depressions.

Finally, don’t neglect the obvious. Pick up the rug. Move aside the bed. Pull the bookshelf or the tapestry away from the wall. You might just find a trapdoor or a hatch.

STEALTH

Nothing favors dungeon delvers as much as silence and the advantage of surprise. Of course, not everyone is cut out to be a footpad, but it takes more than being quiet to move stealthily through a dungeon.

In the echoing halls and dark chambers of an underground environment, succeeding at being stealthy means controlling three factors: noise, light, and changes to the dungeon that can reveal your presence. You’ll have no chance of surprise if enemies hear you coming or see light suddenly splay out from the crack under a door. If the dungeon’s inhabitants wander across your path and find that details of the environment have been altered (be it a chalk mark on the wall or dead bodies strewn about), they’ll likely raise the alarm and follow your trail.

If someone in the party is wearing heavy armor, chances are that character’s Stealth check won’t measure up to those of others in the group. You can make a bad situation a little better with items such as footpads or *boots of elvenkind* (both in *Mordenkainen’s Magnificent Emporium*), but the small bonus usually

isn’t worth the effort. In any event, don’t fret too much about that dwarf paladin in plate. The kind of stealth you really need in the dungeon isn’t the kind that lets you sneak up on the monsters in the next room. Instead, you should think about not drawing the monsters from a few rooms over. The best way to accomplish that is to fight as quietly as possible. *Fireball* and *lightning bolt* dish out a lot of damage but also make a lot of noise. Plenty of other spells are just as effective and less thunderous. The best way to minimize noise is to keep the fight brief so that enemies don’t have a chance to raise an alarm; stunning attacks are particularly helpful in this regard. Essentially, though, battles are noisy affairs. If you want to dramatically increase your chances, take a few minutes to use a Silence ritual from a scroll and burst into a room just as you finish it. Better yet, learn and use the Eavesdropper’s Foil ritual (*EBERRON® Player’s Guide*) so that the sound suppression moves with you.

Light in a darkened dungeon is sure to give you away. When the rogue carefully opens the door a crack to peek in the next room, torchlight leaking in over his or her shoulder advertises your presence as much as shouting does. You can avoid giving early warning of your approach by dousing the lights and having someone with darkvision take the lead. Use a light source that you can activate quickly so you can see what’s going on. A cover over a sunrod or a lantern with shutters works well, too.

If you really don’t want anyone to know you’re in the dungeon, always leave things as you found them as much as you can. Relock doors and treasure chests, close secret passages, and reset any furniture you moved. After a battle, hide the bodies in an out-of-the-way location and clean up the blood and scorch marks; *prestidigitation* works well for this task. If you can’t hide a permanent change, disguise it: You could make an attack look like it came from some other dungeon denizens, for example. Even if your efforts aren’t fully convincing, you might gain some time as your enemies try to figure out exactly what happened and which way you went.

CLEAR THE ROOMS

If you leave places unexplored in your wake, you can get into trouble fast in the dungeon. Foes you’ve left behind might come out of their rooms and surround you, or you might face more subtle threats such as traps being reset and doors being relocked and barred.

Keep things simple by exploring in stages. When you enter an area that has many exits, figure out a way to bar the ones you’re not using. Then proceed into the next area and repeat. If you can’t lock or block an unexplored door, you can at least stack objects against it. That way, when something opens

the door, the objects will fall and give you a chance to hear the commotion. You can bring noisemaking material with you, such as bells strung on a cord, but you can also use handy dungeon furnishing, including chairs or barrels. If you can manage it, try to arrange different noises to occur in different areas behind you. Then you'll know if the door that opened is in the crypts or near the sewers, and you might be able to draw conclusions about what's coming.

As you progress, you also need to figure out what to do with the doors you've opened. In some circumstances, if you simply close them but don't lock or bar them, you might be endangering yourself more than if you left them open. Closed doors block noise, so pursuers can creep up on you that much more easily. Leaving a door open also lets you more easily hear any noise from a more distant door against which you've stacked objects. Finally, if you need to run for it, having a bunch of closed and barred doors in your way makes escape more difficult.

If leaving doors open feels too risky, you can close, bar, or stack objects against only the nearest one. You'll gain at least a moment's warning against any attack from that quarter, and you'll have to open only one door if you need to flee. Consider creating a regular door-alarm object that you can place and pick up quickly. A staff with metal rings fastened to the top works well and doubles as a walking stick or makeshift weapon.

Although magical ways exist to set alarms or lock doors, such as the Arcane Lock ritual, they are costly and time-consuming. Save such precautions for when you rest.

REST STOPS

Taking a good long rest in the dungeon can be critical to your success and survival. You have two options when resting, and which you should use depends on how you have explored.

If you've been trying to be stealthy and covering your tracks, your best bet is to hide. Pick a location far from the main thoroughfares and as tucked away as you can manage. If you want early warning of foes on their way, leave the door to your rest area open and affix some noisemaking device to the next most distant door. Alternatively, you can heavily barricade the entrance so that enemies have to batter their way in, giving you time to prepare.

If you've been clearing rooms and leaving a path open behind you, then lock or bar every nearby entrance and rest in a place with good sight lines to distant points. You can place lights away from your camp at entrance points and keep illumination to a minimum where you are resting. That way, you'll have a good chance of seeing enemies long before

they see you and be able to attack at range as they close the distance.

If you have the resources, another option is available to you: magic. The Rope Trick ritual (*Manual of the Planes*) works well, but it takes time. Instead, you could use an *exodus knife* (*Adventurer's Vault*) to get virtually the same effect in a matter of seconds. Rituals such as Eye of Alarm and magic items such as a *watchful eye* (*Adventurer's Vault 2*) can warn of enemies sneaking up on you. The alarm traps that a trapsmith can create are useful for protection while you rest.

SUSTENANCE

Maybe it should go without saying that you probably shouldn't eat or drink any substance you run across while you're underground. Bring enough food and water for many days when you enter a dungeon—more days than you anticipate you will be staying. That way you can be sure you'll have enough for your needs and those of fellow adventurers who happen to lose their stores. Extra food is also a handy way to distract hungry monsters; you can make a trail of morsels to lead an enemy into a trap. If you don't want to be loaded down with provisions, and money is no object, you can use magical means to provide sustenance, such as the Traveler's Feast ritual.

All that said, a dungeon is not necessarily devoid of its own dependable food sources. For one thing, intelligent creatures that live in dungeons usually store or carry supplies. When you're running low, you might have to steal from them to survive.

Likewise, you might be able to replenish your drinking water. In a natural cavern, look for places where you can collect runoff from stalactites in a waterskin or, in a pinch, a cup-shaped piece of leather or metal. In a worked dungeon, look for deposits of fungi to reveal the presence of water. Use caution with any pooled water. Boil before drinking!

If you must forage in the dungeon, follow the lead of the party's dungeoneering expert (such as a deep delver). Edible fungi or lichen and pools of brackish water, though unappetizing, are preferable to tasty-looking but hazardous sources such as ancient fountains or the vittles in an ogre's kitchen. The fountain might be enchanted with evil magic or harbor a disease, and the meat hanging in the ogre's larder might not be pork.

WATER DANGERS

Water is a key consideration when you prepare for an expedition into the depths. Many dungeons have underground rivers or lakes, treasure might be hidden at the bottom of a temple pool, and you never know when those stone doors will seal behind you and the water will come pouring in. Heavy armor



Heavy armor can be a fighter's worst enemy in water

makes swimming difficult, but don't fret. With a little preparation, you can make your way through most water hazards without having to strip down.

If you know you are going to enter deep water, start out by holding your breath. You've got at least 3 minutes (30 rounds) before you start to drown—likely longer than that if you have training in Endurance. Pair weak swimmers with strong ones, tying one of each together, so the entire party can muddle through to the other side. Alternatively, once some of the group makes it to dry land (paying out rope behind them as they go), they can haul across companions who can't swim well. Even in rough and stormy water, this strategy should work as long as someone in the party has a decent chance of succeeding on the Athletics check to swim.

The real danger in water is having to fight while submerged. If you've taken any damage since your last turn while holding your breath (even if the 3-minute grace period has not elapsed), you must make a DC 20 Endurance check at the end of your turn. Each time you fail, you not only lose a healing surge, but the next time you need to make the check, the DC increases by 5. A character who has many surges, such as a fighter, might be okay for a while, but most adventurers will lose all their surges very quickly—especially if they're using some of them to

heal combat damage as well. At that point, death is assured unless you can start breathing again within a round or two.

If you aren't holding your breath, damage does not provoke these Endurance or Athletics checks, so stay on the surface as much as possible when a fight breaks out. A *floating shield* (*Adventurer's Vault*) is an inexpensive and helpful item for this purpose, but a simple flotation bladder (page 114) should keep you from sinking below the surface.

You can find ways to eke out bonuses to your Athletics checks to swim or Endurance checks to hold your breath, but the best solution is some means of breathing water. The Water Breathing ritual is great, as are *elixirs of water breathing* (*Mordenkainen's*).

TRAPS

Dungeons are full of traps, and you never know how many you will face or what they will be like. You can't be too cautious when preparing for nasty surprises that could end your expedition immediately. Many delvers either become trap experts or hire one to accompany their group and perhaps teach them the ropes. The trapsmith theme is an excellent choice for a party member or a companion.

Those who have such training are always conscious of the possible presence of traps. Other explorers have to try harder to remain alert. When you are venturing underground or moving from one dungeon area to another, pay attention to the places where a trap would do the most harm. For instance, always check before traversing a narrow corridor. In a tight space, a trap can deal the greatest amount of damage to the largest number of intruders. Keep an eye out for hints of hidden trip wires, pressure plates, and elements that seem out of the ordinary.

Be most wary of traps in places where they would be most useful to the trapper and have the least impact on the day-to-day lives of things living in the area. Putting a trap along a main thoroughfare makes little sense—it's far too likely for the trap to catch unintended victims. For the same reason, a creature wouldn't usually trap its own bed or a drawer in its everyday worktable. You should, though, expect to find traps in places and on objects that need to be guarded or are near defensive positions. A treasure chest in the middle of a room or a jewel-encrusted sword displayed on a pedestal just scream of trap potential, and a secret door or compartment is likely to be trapped as well. The more a place is meant to be a defensive structure and the less it is a living space, the more likely it is to be protected. If you're assaulting the redoubt of kobolds or the sanctum of a mad wizard, expect traps on doors, in floors, on the ceiling—entire rooms and passages might be designed to kill. A royal tomb or an imperial treasure vault might be nothing but one gigantic death trap.

If you're the one placing and setting the traps, think about the above advice so you can counter the expectations of enemies. For example, if you know that a trip wire is often set low and in a specific place, try putting the wire higher up or in an unusual spot. The intruder might miss it completely while focusing on the expected location.

HAZARDS

Show an expert delver a dungeon, and he or she will show you a collection of hazards—the most common threats for any subterranean explorer. Many hazards are natural and include such dangers as cave-ins, floods, fires, and pockets of poisonous gas. How you prepare for these dangers will determine your chances of surviving them.

Cave-ins are frequent occurrences in dungeons, due to the age of the complex, earthquakes, or other natural reasons, but sometimes they are triggered by traps. If your group is caught in a cave-in, the first thing to do after the dust has settled is to ensure that no one is trapped under rubble. Once everyone is accounted for, and you don't see an obvious exit, try

sniffing around for a source of fresh air that might indicate an opening. You'll also need a way to move the rubble or bypass it. Magic that enables you to burrow or gain phasing makes getting out a lot easier, or you can create a teleportation circle with the Linked Portal ritual (assuming you've got a portal outside). The Clear the Path ritual (*FORGOTTEN REALMS® Player's Guide*) is tailor-made to clear away a cave-in. It not only permanently removes dirt and debris, but clears difficult terrain as an added benefit.

Floods that might be messy nuisances on the surface can be lethal in caverns and tunnels deep below the ground. Enclosed spaces fill up with water rapidly, and strong currents can sweep away even the strongest delver. As soon as you realize water is rushing toward you, get to higher ground as quickly as possible. If no such ground is immediately available, run—you might be able to stay ahead of the flood for a short time and perhaps find a better spot. Take precautions in case you can't get away. Squeeze your waterskin dry and breathe into it—even that stale air is better than trying to breathe water. Flotation bladders (page 114) can also serve this purpose. If you wind up underwater, you can still use magical lights such as sunrods to illuminate your way. Try to find areas where pockets of air can form, such as in caverns with high or irregular roofs. These small bubbles of safety might buy you enough time to come up with an escape plan.

Poisonous gas is a less common hazard, but an expert delver must be ready for anything. Traps can release noxious fumes, and pockets of gas are scattered throughout the Underdark. When exploring, you might accidentally rupture a pocket and release the contents. You can't combat this hazard effectively; it's best to leave the area as quickly as possible. If you must continue forward, provide an alternative air supply for all party members, such as inflated waterskins. You have 3 minutes of holding your breath to make it past the danger, but if that isn't long enough, or if you end up in combat, you face the same issues as with holding your breath while swimming.

RITUALS

Rituals can be valuable resources when exploring a dungeon. The ability to perform tasks that would overburden a group is worth its weight in gold. In addition to the rituals mentioned earlier in this section, the following are examples of heroic tier rituals that could benefit a party of delvers.

Dark Light (*FORGOTTEN REALMS Player's Guide*): As with the Explorer's Fire ritual (see below), Dark Light creates a way for you to see without your light being visible. The light source is portable, which makes moving stealthily in a dark dungeon much easier.

Detect Secret Doors (*Player's Handbook*): This ritual should be in every spellbook. When you

perform it, you immediately find any secret or hidden doors in sight. The ritual can also help you out of a bind in dungeons that have special tunnels designed to give residents a timely escape from harm.

Explorer's Fire (*Dragon* 366): This ritual creates a campfire that cannot be seen beyond the area it immediately illuminates. It's perfect for those times when you're resting in an open location with long sight lines. You can remain in a warm and bright area without being seen until enemies approach.

Hand of Fate (*Player's Handbook*): Divine spellcasters favor this ritual, which lets you ask up to three questions about possible courses of action. A translucent blue hand appears and indicates the most rewarding course of action based on the available options. This ritual is especially helpful when your party must choose whether to go down the left or right tunnel, which lever to pull to deactivate a trap, and so on.

DUNGEON DON'TS

Novices at dungeon exploration mistakenly do things that might seem like smart tactics but can easily go awry. Avoid these common errors and live a little longer.

Herd Animals: If the dungeon is loaded with traps, surely a few cows or a herd of sheep can clear them out. Plus, if there's a fire trap, lunch is taken care of!

Well, no—things don't work out quite that way. For one thing, farm animals can't open doors, so you'll have to get in front of the herd whenever a door blocks your way. And if you're behind the herd, you can't control what direction it will take or even whether all the animals will go in the same direction. Food and water for the animals is problematic as well. If you can't be sure of forage, you'll be laden down with extra supplies. In the end, all you're likely to do is draw attention to yourself, slow your progress, and feed the dungeon denizens.

Check Everything: Poke the floor with a ten-foot pole as you move through the hall and check every door for traps. Better safe than sorry!

This cliché ignores the fact that greater risks can net greater rewards. Plus, if you have your head down and are moving at a crawl, you're giving enemies more time to rally their forces and set up ambushes or surround you. If you're unwilling to open a door before tinkering with it for several minutes, you won't surprise anything lurking on the other side. More than anything, though, checking every square inch of an area for traps is boring. It's no fun for the group or the DM. You'll use your time more profitably by checking only in likely spots.

Knock (*Player's Handbook*): With this ritual, you can open a locked door, chest, gate, or some other object—even a portal that has been sealed with Arcane Lock or barred on the far side. It works well when combined with the Detect Secret Doors ritual.

Lower Water (*Arcane Power*): Performing this ritual takes too long to help you during a flash flood, but it can tip the odds heavily in your favor if you know a foe lurks in a body of water. Instead of fighting an aquatic enemy at a disadvantage while swimming, you could try to force it onto dry land.

Magic Mouth (*Player's Handbook*): You could buy higher-level and more expensive rituals with more bells and whistles, but the humble Magic Mouth has a feature that can't be beat: You define the trigger for making the mouth speak. Set the right condition, and the ritual is a flawless detector of creatures. The rules don't specify what conditions can be set, so check with the DM first. If the required conditions are too narrow, consider Skull Watch (*Open Grave*) or Wyvern Watch (*Player's Handbook 2*) instead.

Shrink (*Arcane Power*): The ritual does what it says. Reducing an object in size by 25 percent or more can help you get that big chest out the door or make a solid gold idol more manageable, but other uses can be even more helpful. A shrunken door doesn't fit its hinges anymore. A trap with a miniaturized part probably won't work. And if you need to hide the corpse of a monster, making it smaller always helps.

Speak with Dead (*Player's Handbook*): If you can't capture an enemy and get it to talk, you can always get answers from its corpse. Need to circumvent a trap, find a secret door, or learn which hall leads where? Ask all three questions of the dungeon dweller you just killed. Hungering for long-lost lore about the tomb? Ask the bones interred there.

Traveler's Camouflage (*Primal Power*): With this ritual, you can cloak yourself and your allies in a camouflaging shroud. Not only do you become stealthier, but other creatures cannot track your movement easily. It's a great way to flee from a dungeon or sneak into a chamber unnoticed.

Undead Servitor (*Open Grave*): With this ritual, you imbue a humanoid corpse of natural origin with the ability to move under its own power. Furthermore, the corpse understands one language of your choice. Although the servitor is of no use in combat, it never tires and obeys you at all times. It's perfect for opening a suspicious chest, leading guards on a wild-goose chase, scaring superstitious humanoids, carrying heavy bags of gold, and any other task you can think of. Keep in mind, though, that if it takes any damage, you're out 150 gp (as well as the time needed to perform the ritual again). On the other hand, if you keep it safe from harm, it lasts indefinitely. You can think of it as the party mascot—assuming you can sweet-talk the paladin and put up with the stench.

Dungeon Types

A dungeon is always created for a reason, and almost always that reason is directly tied to the physical nature of the place. Some dungeon builders need a place to live, such as kobolds that stake out a warren. Others want to get at the riches under the earth, as with dwarves and their mines.

A dungeon's creator might use it as a place to hide secrets, whether a lich performing dark rituals in a laboratory or a group of mighty beings that have imprisoned a demon far from civilization. The type of dungeon you're heading into, and the reason for its existence, are the major factors that affect your preparation. Anything you can learn about what's ahead of you before you get there will improve your chances of success and survival.

CAVE

Caves are the most common dungeon type in the natural world. Many were formed during the last days of the Dawn War, when the violent earth finally began to settle. Even today, mountain ranges continue to push up from the core of the world, creating underground complexes that can stretch for miles.

Caves feature in the history and folktales of many races, whether as settings of grim stories or metaphors in parables of morality and might. They are dark, mysterious, and, yes, spooky. Whether the way in is a narrow fault or a yawning chasm, a cave waiting to be explored by intrepid heroes stands at the beginning of a great story.

Variations

Many types of caves exist, but the following are the most common. The real world has many examples of these varieties of caves, and plenty of photographs exist in reference sources, so finding visual inspiration should be no problem.

Solution caves form when soft rock such as chalk, gypsum, or limestone is dissolved by groundwater seeping down through the earth to form a weak natural acid. Here's where you find the classic cavern dressing of stalactites, stalagmites, and columns.

Primary caves arise at the same time that the rock surrounding the cave is laid down. For example, when a volcano erupts, pockets can form within the lava as it cools and hardens. (In fact, the volcano cave is a type unto itself, discussed later in this section.)

Sea caves are found in coastal areas. Waves crash against a rocky shore, eroding it over time to form caverns. Underground rivers can also create caves where their waters breach the earth to reach the sea.

Glacier caves appear deep within the ice of glaciers. As water melts, it flows down and away through cracks and fissures, carving out passages. Weird entities or creatures that were frozen long ago might await in or near these formations.

Exploring

A cave can be deceptively large. What looks like a small cleft in a hillside might be the entrance to a vast network of tunnels and chambers.

Dangers Any cave can feature a host of dangers, from challenging terrain to the risk of cave-ins to hostile and hungry creatures that dwell there. Particularly in the Underdark, isolated caves are attractive to monsters or humanoids that are seeking a sheltered and defensible lair.

Inhabitants A cave can be inhabited by any kinds of creatures. Bears, some dragons, primitive humanoids, and many other monsters dwell in caverns; plenty of creatures (including adventurers) use caves as temporary refuges. A cave might also serve as an enemy's base of operations, perhaps a seaside cavern where a band of pirates stores its treasure or the catacombs beneath a city occupied by a thieves' guild.

Rewards What you find in a cave depends largely on its inhabitants and their tendency to collect valuables. The cave walls might hold ore veins or valuable crystals. Beyond tangible rewards, a cave might also contain the seeds of future adventures, such as a message scrawled on a cavern wall.

CRYPT

Leaders with a lot of popularity whose subjects have a lot of money end up in tombs that have a lot of space for their dried-up remains and all their stuff. Crypt creators spare no expense in building these houses for the dead, and even the most remote hallways of a finely wrought crypt could be inlaid with fine stone tiles. Events over the passage of centuries can imbue such sites with dark magic or see protective wards become tainted with evil, turning a crypt into one part holy sanctum and one part deadly dungeon.

Variations

Plenty of crypts resemble other types of dungeons: collections of underground passages and chambers filled with traps to keep out intruders. A crypt might lie under an earthen barrow or beneath a temple. The first challenge in delving such a site is locating it—those who go to the trouble of digging a crypt beneath the ground do their best to prevent adventurers and other grave robbers from finding it later.



Crashing waves form a sea cave

In contrast, an ostentatious aboveground crypt has no qualms about making its presence known. Such a structure might contain deadlier traps and more dead ends than an underground crypt to make up for the larger number of intruders expected to assault it. Mausoleums fit into this category, such as those built for monarchs, high priests, and other lofty figures. Some aboveground crypts extend underground as well, with multiple levels of interior rooms, subterranean chambers, and sloping tunnels connecting them.

Exploring

Secret doors, false burial chambers, illusory walls—crypt builders do everything they can to trick intruders. Trust nothing. Even the loot you claim might be designed to throw you off the track of more valuable treasures.

Dangers By design, a crypt is no place for the living. A crypt's builder knows that after the tomb is sealed, no living guardians will remain behind to watch over it. For that reason, the traps protecting the treasures and bodies in a crypt can be extremely lethal. Prominent crypts feature at least a few corpses of would-be interlopers.

Many cultures hold great hostility toward those who defile the dead, and sealed tombs often have foul curses placed on them. Reading the wrong inscription or touching the royal treasure can inflict blindness, bad luck, a festering disease—or worse.

Inhabitants Places of death give rise to the undead, and even the savviest tomb builders can fail to predict whether a tomb's location holds the ambient magic to create those foul creatures. A buried monarch might return from the dead to guard his tomb personally, facing off against grave robbers while aided by the undead warriors and servants that were buried alongside him.

When tomb builders require guardian creatures within a crypt, they create constructs that need no nourishment or air. A dusty golem can remain vigilant for centuries, waiting to unleash the vengeance of its creator on intruders.

Rewards A crypt is stuffed with the material wealth of the figure or figures buried there, including gems, art objects, and ancient coins. Long-lost lore can also be found within a crypt, along with ancient technology, books of forgotten history, and maps to unknown lands.

DEATH TRAP

A death trap lures thrill-seekers with promises of great treasure. The foolhardy who set forth into it find only a grueling gauntlet of perils, half-starved guardian creatures, and tortures unimaginable—all culminating in imprisonment or a grisly death.

A death trap is the most extreme expression of the dungeon concept, merciless and fatal to all but the most skilled explorers. It has no purpose other than to kill or (sometimes worse) capture.

Variations

Beyond being “just” a killing machine, a death trap is usually created for a purpose that sets it apart from others of its type. It might have been built to test creatures of a certain race, to measure candidates’ skill with a specific type of magic, or to capture prey. In such a case, all the dungeon’s tests and traps contribute to fulfilling this purpose.

Some death traps are little more than random collections of rooms with plain corridors connecting them. In such a dungeon, the individual traps and encounters don’t follow a theme or serve a larger purpose. Other death traps exhibit a consistent style with repeated motifs that show the creators’ attention to detail. For such builders, a death trap is a work of art, and possibly the culmination of a life’s ambition.

The sheer lethality of a death trap means it can afford to draw attention to itself in a way other dungeons can’t. The greatest death traps are not secrets. People fear to speak their names, and the lands around them stand deserted. A death trap might be topped with a towering iron front gate or surrounded with warnings about the danger inside. It could be hollowed out of a rocky spire that has been carved to look like a skull. The entrance could be hidden among a row of magic portals, with a wrong choice meaning instant death.

Exploring

If you explore haphazardly in a death trap, you’ll quickly prove the appropriateness of that name. This type of dungeon demands discretion in your approach. Pick the right times to look for hidden passages and to study runes, but also know when to keep on a focused path and move quickly. Methodical mapping and the careful use of dungeoneering tools can’t guarantee your safety, but both tactics are necessary.

Watch for clues that can help you overcome traps and bypass hazards safely. No set of scratches on the floor is too minor, no drop of blood too small. Don’t read runes without taking precautions first. Above all else, never use a magic item found in a death trap before subjecting it to extremely careful study.

The heart of a death trap is a place of great significance, whether it’s the citadel of the dungeon’s creator, a shrine to an otherworldly entity, or the resting place of an artifact. Finding your way there is never easy, and a death trap might contain numerous false central chambers.

Dangers Anything goes in a death trap, where nothing is out of the realm of possibility as long as it’s dangerous. Any hallway could collapse to drop you into a pit of acid. Any door might be protected by explosive runes or some other magic trap. Any gap between bricks could spew poison gas. Any statue could animate and attack.

Inhabitants Any dungeon shows hallmarks of the creatures that created it, but a death trap reflects only the choices of its designer. One dungeon’s creator might be sadistic enough to build a death trap solely for entertainment. Another could be testing challengers for a specific purpose: worthy opponents, potential recruits for a great cause, sturdy humanoid stock for foul magical experiments, or the like.

Among the most common creators of death traps are liches, ancient dragons, mind flayers, and devils. These creatures have long life spans, high intelligence, and a consuming desire to test or torture others. The creatures set loose within a death trap are chosen for their toughness, their bloodthirstiness, and (if appropriate) how they conform to the dungeon’s purpose. A death trap is rarely a living, breathing ecology, however; the monsters within one usually have no relationship to one another.

Rewards Every death trap has a great boon at its heart, whether a hoard of treasure, lost lore, or a face-to-face meeting with a formidable being. Reaching the end can change your life, though you might pay a high price to get there.

FLOATING CASTLE

The antithesis of a typical dungeon, a floating castle, or cloud castle, is built high above the ground rather than deep below it. Defying nature, each of these great redoubts is enabled to float in the air by incredible magic. The building blocks of a floating castle might be composed of lighter-than-air material, or the clouds that are its foundation might have been transformed into a spongy yet firm surface.

A small number of cloud castles exist in the world, but the Elemental Chaos is rife with them. Many such places in the natural world are built on supernatural cloud-stuff manifested from the Plane Below, or constructed from the magically buoyant stone found in some locations there. The Feywild also contains a

large number of such citadels. The noble eladrin built them in ages past, and the secrets of their construction are now lost even to the noble archfey who rule from their high thrones.

Variations

Floating castles can be as different from one another as the shapes clouds take in the sky. Imagine some vision of the heavens, and you have the basis for a new kingdom of the air.

Storm Castle: A storm castle floats in the eye of a perpetual storm. Its walls are black thunderheads, and the bars of its prison are trapped lightning bolts. As you walk its halls, heat lightning flashes through the floors and ceiling, providing surprising instances of illumination.

Dawn Citadel: This palace of mandarin and rose is as much a product of light as mist. A dawn citadel floats across the world in perpetual flight from the sun, always keeping daybreak a heartbeat behind. The beautiful half-light of such cloud castles often obscures some darkness in the soul of its builder.

Drifting Dungeons: A floating castle can be encompassed in different layers of clouds like levels of a dungeon, yet in this case the connections between levels change as the different cloud layers shift with the wind. Different layers of cloud might plunge explorers into different environments: high white clouds in the sun, cold gray clouds filled with snow, and angry black clouds of rain and lightning.

Fog Fortress: A fog fortress lies hidden in the mists, its walls and floors indistinguishable from the surrounding clouds. Only experimentation or the keen senses of an inhabitant can determine where the structure lies. Tremorsense is a boon to explorers who find themselves unable to rely on their normal means of finding their way around.

Exploring

Traveling to a cloud castle can be an adventure in itself. You'll need access to a means of long-distance flight or a teleportation circle. (Giant beanstalks are generally not available.)

The architecture of a cloud castle is much like that of any castle on the ground, though its construction tends to sprawl vertically rather than horizontally. Visitors might need to negotiate tall spires, twisting staircases that rise through open air, and sky bridges arcing over a limitless void.

Not all such dungeons still house their original residents. An abandoned castle built by giants might now be full of manticores, wyverns, and other flying interlopers. Blue dragons in particular like to lay claim to floating castles, from where they can watch the world from on high as they scheme.



Djinns, eladrin, and other magical beings raise castles in the clouds



FOR THE DM: THE CLOUD CASTLE ENVIRONMENT

Since cloud castles defy gravity, their magic can affect how creatures move within their environs. The following variant rules reinforce the feel of adventuring in the sky.

Walking on Clouds: The magic clouds on which the castle stands are semisolid. Any creature that is knocked prone on clouds must make a moderate Acrobatics check. With a success, the creature bounces back to its feet. A failed check means that the creature sinks 5 feet into the clouds. The cloud functions much like water once the creature enters it.

Jumping and Gliding: The castle's magic enables those moving within it to float and leap to great heights. When making a high jump, calculate the height as though it were a long jump. Creatures also gain a +5 bonus to Athletics checks to jump or climb.

Falling into Clouds: A creature that falls into magic clouds takes half the normal falling damage, and falls a number of feet into the clouds equal to this damage. If this distance is greater than the clouds' thickness, the creature then falls as normal.



Dangers The most immediate danger of a cloud castle is its most obvious—if you fall off, you'll likely die. Beyond that, it can be home to the same sorts of monsters and traps found in any earthbound castle. Its unique dangers are environmental rather than being embodied in the creations of the castle's builders.

Elemental magic can go awry in a cloud castle, whose own magic keeps the air breathable and the severe high-altitude weather under control. Any effect that interferes with those forces might fail or have unpredictable results, at the DM's discretion. In other cases, a castle might not offer any protection from the elements. In particular, the hall of a storm giant lord might be located within a perpetual thunderstorm, featuring cloud-to-cloud lightning strikes, high winds, driving rain or hail, and other elemental features that threaten intruders.

Inhabitants Floating castles are built by djinns, storm giants, and other masters of the air, who consider anyone unable to fly unworthy of visiting their aerial domains. The djinns' sky castles were abandoned long ago but still float in the Elemental Chaos. Their caliphs gone, these great citadels await the rulers of the next age. In the natural world, if you see a great black thunderhead that seems to move

deliberately across the sky as it unleashes violence, you could be looking at a storm giant's home.

Lesser flying creatures often serve the builders of cloud castles as guards and messengers that carry out their master's bidding in the world below. Sphinxes act as the gatekeepers at many cloud castles, and even the death of its master does not end a sphinx's servitude. Such creatures can sometimes be found protecting abandoned fortresses, still awaiting visitors who can answer their riddles.

Rewards An extraordinary setting warrants extraordinary treasure. Plain coins and gems matter little to the ruler of a floating castle, who is more likely to collect ornate vases, fine art, magic devices, and even creatures of myth, legend, and folktale.

ICE PALACE

In snow-covered wastes and within forsaken mountains, ice palaces are home to some of the hardest, most violent creatures in the world. The icy tunnels and frigid rock of such dungeons require specialized resources and demand resilience in those who explore them.

Variations

Most ice palaces originate as natural caverns in frigid lands. Cold winds blow through tunnels in mountains, coating every wall with frost and leaving icicles hanging from the ceiling, slanting in the direction the wind blows.

More fantastical structures are dug out of glaciers or created with magic. Solid ice forms the entire complex: walls, sculptures, pillars, ornate ceilings, and even doors. These great palaces are the thematic opposite of natural caverns. Rather than inhospitable, austere hideaways, they are delicate-looking and elegant—almost welcoming.

The Elemental Chaos contains the largest and most extravagant ice palaces, many inhabited by frost titans. Innumerable ice dungeons are found in Cania, a frigid layer of the Nine Hells. Ice devils prowl them in search of new victims to capture in the name of their master, Mephistopheles.

Sailors sometimes encounter icebergs containing hollowed-out cavities. One of these iceberg dungeons might carry creatures of elemental cold into warmer climates, keeping them comfortable while they form plans for conquest.

Exploring

Adventurers must rely on climbing gear to explore an ice palace. One fall can land you in a pit whose slippery walls cannot be scaled easily. Even with the proper gear, climbing can be tricky. In many places,

the only surface to hammer a piton into is a sheet of ice that could be far less sturdy than it looks.

Even when you're not climbing them, walls can pose problems. Light glimmering through translucent ice can cast odd shadows in nearby areas, which might be real enemies or threatening phantoms. During battle, a wall might shatter to spill icy debris across the ground.

Dangers The main hazards of an ice cave are the extreme cold, slippery surfaces, and icicles and sheets of ice that frequently fall from the ceiling. Be careful when using magic that deals fire damage, or simply carrying a torch. Sources of heat can soften or melt the surroundings, making the environment even more treacherous.

Inhabitants White dragons, frost giants, and other creatures of cold rule over ice palaces. Dragons seek out existing caverns to use as lairs, filling them with treasure. Giants expand on natural cave systems to build large halls, usually with slave labor. A giant's hall has a severe appearance, with blocky stone columns and furnishings sheathed in ice and snow. Ice archons serve in the frozen domains of these creatures.

Cold-dwelling beasts such as winterclaw owlbears also make lairs in the ice, and the burrowing of one remorhaz can create an entire cavern complex. Few natural creatures can bear living in such an environment, however; conditions are too extreme even for most barbarian tribes. Goliaths are a notable exception, adept at turning mountainous ice tunnels into comfortable homes.

The forbidding nature of an ice palace makes it an excellent prison. Entities that cannot easily be killed are frozen by magic and buried deep in an icy catacomb in the hope that they will never be found.

Rewards The treasure you find in an ice palace depends on its residents. Dragons and giants amass great wealth, but the dens of lesser beasts contain little of value.

MAGIC LABORATORY

The darkest dungeon lords build vile laboratories in which they undertake twisted experiments. Necromancers, summoners, and artificers make use of magic laboratories, filling such sites with fanatical servants and vicious contraptions, as well as new kinds of monsters.

Variations

Magic laboratories encompass a wide variety of designs, each related to its creator and purpose. A necromancer's laboratory is filled with body parts

preserved in jars containing unknown fluids. A coniving artificer might create a magic machine shop featuring racks of tools and clockwork components used to build mechanical devices. No matter what the variation, however, every laboratory serves as a testing ground for some creation or experiment.

Necromancers use their workshops to create new and diabolical undead, weaving profane magic with the power of the divine. A necromantic laboratory has shelves filled with rare herbs and components, with preserved body parts and organs neatly organized nearby. A large worktable provides space to disassemble corpses and put them back together again. The smell is repulsive, testing the perseverance of even the hardest adventurers.

Summoners and artificers have less gory decor. Their shelves are lined with books, devices, and reagents that they use to call on and control their creations, whether monsters from other worlds or mechanical minions.

Exploring

Because a laboratory is typically a working dungeon, you can expect to encounter guardian creatures and traps. A laboratory's builder is by its nature detail-oriented, so the area might be filled with all manner of mysterious devices and decorative elements that have a common theme.

Dangers The dangers of a magic laboratory are usually obvious. Strange mechanisms and substances, traps, hazards, guardian monsters, constructs, and other threats lurk throughout the dungeon. Many of a laboratory's defenses could be bizarre-looking objects and creatures whose true nature might not be obvious at first.

Alchemical concoctions are common in magic laboratories. They might be used to form hazardous terrain in the form of pools or spills, augment guardian creatures, or serve as makeshift weapons.

Inhabitants The most common inhabitants of a magic laboratory are the unique creatures that have been created there or are assigned to protect it. Alchemical constructs, clockwork beasts, and golems of every material stand watch against trespassers. Necromancers employ ever-vigilant patrols of skeletons, zombies, and ghouls. Summoners deploy lesser elementals and savage monsters to guard their laboratories and lairs.

Rewards A laboratory environment holds exciting treasures limited only by its creator's imagination. Such loot can include unique new potions and elixirs, recipes, magic items, and even never-before-seen servant creatures.

MAZE

Mazes and labyrinths are expensive defenses, every one created by a wealthy ruler to protect something of great value: perhaps a secret lair, a unique spellbook, a peerless magic blade, or an artifact of legend. A few despots have been known to erect a maze out of sheer boredom, seeking entertainment from dropping unsuspecting mortals into its mind-boggling twists and turns.

Variants

The simplest maze is a dungeon whose halls bend in unfathomable ways and lead in confusing directions. Many passages lead to dead ends, forcing you to double back in search of the correct route. Many elements can be layered onto this basic construction; magical effects, puzzles, and other challenges add complexity and danger to a maze.

Teleportation Pads: These devices are usually small platforms, which might be concealed or obvious. Stepping onto one pad instantly transports you to another area within the dungeon.

Puzzles: Some maze dungeons require explorers to solve puzzles before they can advance through a particular area. In general, the greater the reward, the more difficult the puzzle.

The Third Dimension: The most complex mazes extend not only horizontally but onto multiple levels. Particularly when it incorporates teleportation, a three-dimensional labyrinth can pose a serious challenge to even the most careful adventurers.

Exploring

The best method for exploring a maze is a careful room-to-room search for clues to what lies ahead. You might want to designate one player as the mapper, who is responsible for keeping track of the characters' progress from room to room. As the dungeon unfolds, the map expands with it and keeps the party on track. Be aware, though, that some mazes change configuration at random intervals or teleport explorers between identical-looking areas, limiting a map's utility. In such cases, marking up the walls or floors as you go along can help you determine if you're visiting new territory.

Dangers A maze is designed to confuse and frustrate intruders, and it can disorient you if you decide to flee from some danger or if you become stuck trying to figure out a puzzle. In addition to well-hidden traps and fiendish puzzles, many mazes are stocked with monsters on ceaseless patrol (or perhaps they're as lost as you are).

Inhabitants The creator of a maze often fills the complex with creatures that terrorize, torment, and slow intruders rather than simply killing them. Expect such a dungeon to contain bizarre monsters and hazards whose existence together doesn't make sense in a natural environment. For example, a beholder might wander one part of a maze, while a colony of myconids inhabits a section of twisting corridors not far away.

Rewards Mazes that have stood unsolved for long years can hold substantial rewards. A maze might be the resting place of a unique item, an artifact, or a relic of the time before the Dawn War. In addition to whatever it was designed to hide, it might also contain the gear, magic items, and wealth of previous explorers who died trying to find its treasure.

MINE

Untold wealth resides beneath the surface of the world. Silver, gold, platinum, and precious gems have drawn nearly every humanoid race to construct mines for obtaining those riches. Cut into mountainsides or down the tunnels of the Underdark, mines are the conduit through which pours the treasure of clans and empires. When a mine's wealth has been depleted, the shafts and other workings of the construction remain, offering a way for mysteries and monsters to descend into their depths.

Variations

Most mines are lengthy tunnels dug into the earth, extending downward from a handful of entrances on the surface. Smaller passages spread out from the main shafts as miners follow promising veins of ore and pockets of gems.

When active, a mine is abuzz with activity and workers toiling day and night. Dormant mines are different. Their tunnels are no longer maintained, so occasional collapses and cave-ins seal off old passages or create new ones. These played-out mines become more like natural cave complexes, drawing creatures to take shelter in them. Large populations of subterranean monsters can occupy the biggest mines, or an abandoned shaft might become home to a single dark entity—some ancient creature that was disturbed when a mining operation dug too deeply.

Exploring

Mines created by humanoids feature passages that are easy to navigate, whether on foot or using carts designed to transport ore. Many mines have connections to deeper caves as well—even to the Underdark.

Dangers Even an active mine is dangerous, with cave-ins and pockets of poison gas a constant threat to workers and explorers alike. Skilled miners use struts to reinforce tunnels and carefully test new passages before fully excavating them.

When a mine has been abandoned, it holds different dangers. No matter how cautious you are, you might trigger a collapse as you explore, and the possibility of becoming lost in a mine is always a threat. Some dormant mines feature traps set by the previous miners, hoping to deter the greedy from following the tunnels to plunder new workings or carve out homes. These deterrents might be as simple as weakened supports to bring down the roof of a tunnel with but a nudge.

Inhabitants Humans, dwarves, svirfneblin, goliaths, gnomes, kobolds—members of almost all humanoid races hear the call to pursue resources and riches underground. While a mine is active, it is heavily populated by miners, most of whom don't take kindly to intruders snooping around their claim. This attitude is particularly prevalent among underground peoples, whose mines have strong connections to their ancestral holds. Outsiders caught trespassing in such areas can expect a hostile or violent greeting.

After the excavation in a mine has ceased, the inhabitants can be different—though the reception they give to interlopers is likely similar. Old tunnels are quickly repopulated by creatures looking for defensible homes, from goblin squatters to hibernating cave bears, nesting stirges to rust monster packs. If a mine connects to the Underdark, even fouler monsters might use it for access to the surface.

Rewards Most mines are empty for a reason: There simply isn't any more treasure to be found. In some cases, however, the miners might have decided not to venture into hard-to-reach areas that an adventuring group is perfectly suited to tackle. Miners might also be driven off their claim by monsters, leaving behind rich ore and precious gems for those brave enough to take them. The victims of these monsters might also hire adventuring parties to clear the threats that chased them from their excavation.

PRISON

Perhaps the most literal of all dungeon types, a prison dungeon is where the enemies of authority waste away behind bars. Such holes are synonymous with torture and darkness, and few ever return from one. Sealed away in a prison's depths are a thousand tales of hardship, testifying to the horrors that even civilized beings can visit upon one another.

Variations

A prison is built in a secure location, whether within the walls of a fortress, beneath a castle's inner ward, or even through a dimensional portal in another plane. Prisons for humanoids are cramped, depressing warrens of narrow tunnels and tiny, dark cells. Iron bars and sturdy doors separate each chamber, and the clamor of chains echoes throughout the depths. The stench of filthy bodies draws flies, and rats crawl among shackled inmates. Implements of torture dangle from the walls. Sunlight is a fading dream.

Some beings cannot be contained by conventional prisons. Fiendish villains, ancient monsters, and demigods or exarchs can be restrained only with great magic. Such a creature is held in isolation, with the location of its prison kept secret so that its followers cannot attempt to free it. The bonds or cells that hold such prisoners are strengthened by arcane spellcraft, the walls and doors ensorcelled with mystic wards.

Exploring

A prison has layers of defenses to prevent escape. Those jailed within one must contend with locked doors, barred corridors, patrols of guards, and other obstacles. (If you're on a rescue mission, you'll have to deal with those things as well—from the other side.) Rumors might circulate among inmates of secret paths left over from the prison's construction or created by daring escapees.

Dangers The challenges of a prison dungeon begin with the guards who patrol the entryway and corridors. They are quick to attack anyone they see moving unescorted through the complex.



FOR THE DM: JAILBREAK!

A prison jailbreak makes an excellent scenario for a dramatic adventure, particularly in the heroic tier. At this level, the adventurers don't yet have access to rituals or powers that let them easily bypass a prison's security, so coming up with a plan for infiltration presents a formidable challenge.

Offer the players several possible ways to break into the prison, then let them make choices based on their characters' abilities. These decisions can lead to exciting and memorable escapades that require the heroes to rely on timing, precision, and ability to avoid capture. A skill challenge played out in stages can simulate the progress of the jailbreak, perhaps with a few plot twists thrown in to keep things exciting.





A prison breakout is a classic adventure plot

Even if the guards can be eluded, a prison often contains hidden defenses or traps to deal with attempted escapes or to keep friends outside from supplying aid. Some prisons are laid out as mazes so that even in the event of a security breach, intruders or escapees will have difficulty navigating networks of identical corridors.

The biggest danger in a prison is often the prisoners themselves. These desperate individuals might attack adventurers who are breaking in, hoping to seize their weapons and magic.

Inhabitants A prison can hold any kind of creature. Humanoid prisoners range from hardened murderers to political iconoclasts. Such characters have usually done something to offend their society or ruler, though their actions weren't necessarily evil. Some were imprisoned unfairly or by mistake, or made enemies by taking a stand against corrupt laws. On the other hand, a prisoner might be an arch-villain, guilty of dreadful crimes, or a creature of such strength that no force or magic can destroy it.

Ultimately, no one wants to inhabit a prison—not even the guards employed to protect it.

Rewards Little tangible wealth is to be found in a prison, though its warden might seize captives'

goods for his or her own use or to turn over to the authorities. Escape or rescue is its own reward. In some cases, a rescued prisoner might be rich or influential enough to provide remuneration after the fact, or might offer valuable information. You could also break out someone wrongly imprisoned just for the warm feeling of doing good.

SEWER

Building a dungeon from scratch is difficult in an already existing urban environment. The sewers of a city, however, can exhibit many of the features of a dungeon, including access to secret areas and forgotten catacombs. Taking over a sewer complex might appeal to a villain whose plans are focused in a populated area or who must make use of an existing locale and isn't too fussy.

Variations

An undercity tunnel system might be a storm sewer, which collects excess rainfall and funnels it away from the city streets and into a nearby body of water, or a sanitary sewer designed to deal with refuse and waste. Sewers large enough to serve as dungeons can combine both designs, which makes living there unpleasant for most creatures. The only beings that

call a sewer home are those that can tolerate its filth or have no other place to go.

The main variant of a sewer dungeon is the abandoned system beneath a deserted city. Creatures looking for a home or a safe place might move into an abandoned sewer in the same way they do an abandoned mine. With no chance of attracting the attention of city authorities, they have no need to hide their activities in the sewer.

Exploring

A sewer has numerous entrances throughout a city, so adventurers can easily enter and leave the dungeon. Their enemies have the same advantage, which makes them that much more difficult to catch. Sewer dwellers might also open up new entrances to their tunnels by digging upward to infiltrate buildings for use as bases aboveground.

A sewer often has walkways on either side of the channel, so you shouldn't need to wade or swim under normal circumstances. Still, the place stinks, both from sewage and from the rot-feeding growth that flourishes within its dank tunnels. Sewers aren't built to be traveled through, and some sections might be blocked by bars or shrink down to narrow pipes or passages. Those that have long-term inhabitants are riddled with secret passages and loose grates that can be easily moved.

You could navigate a sewer using only the dim daylight that filters down through storm drains, though doing so can make for slow going. If the creatures living in a sewer have darkvision or other enhanced senses, you're better off carrying light despite the risk of detection.

Dangers Anyone traveling through or living in a sewer fears heavy rains. During a storm, the tunnels quickly fill with runoff, and creatures inside need to make for higher ground.

Sewer-dwellers that have a penchant for traps might build special dams with quick-release levers to open them and force pursuers back. A sewer's narrow walkways make traps somewhat more effective, since adventurers have less room to spread out while exploring.

Human and animal waste, poisonous liquids dumped by tanneries and other industries, and dead animals all float through a sanitary sewer. Sewer water also carries diseases such as filth fever, making moving through it as risky as it is disgusting.

Inhabitants Skulking creatures such as goblins seek out the familiar underground terrain of a sewer when they infest a humanoid city. Criminals and outcasts who want to remain close to civilization take refuge in a city's sewers. Thieves, particularly wererats, use sewer tunnels to move unseen beneath a settlement. A sewer might become contested territory

during a feud between gangs or underworld guilds. Criminals hiding out in sewers use simple shelters or collapsible tents and keep their gear packed at all times, ready to retreat whenever the weather or the law becomes a threat.

Sewers teem with scurrying rats, cockroaches, centipedes, and other vermin, but these creatures present no threat to adventurers. In fact, you can get early warning of the lairs of larger predators by watching out for locations free of vermin. Monstrous creatures also thrive in sewers: Otyughs are at home in the stench and filth, stirges swarm in humid tunnels, oozes drip from the ceiling, and carrion crawlers lurk on all surfaces, feeding on smaller vermin as they wait for better prey to come along.

Rewards The same thieves' guilds that use sewers for transportation also conceal their loot there. Loose bricks and false walls conceal hoards of coins, false identification papers, disguise kits, and useful magic items. In addition, a villain who controls a remote dungeon might create a teleportation circle in an urban sewer, providing a way to quickly enter the city or move supplies to operatives there.

VOLCANO

A volcano is a rupture in the surface of the world that allows boiling magma, searing ash, and dangerous gases to escape from below. The destructive and unpredictable nature of volcanoes makes them the most dangerous of natural dungeons.

Volcanoes embody the force of unfinished creation, providing a window into the Elemental Chaos, and are natural sources of gems and other riches. As streams of lava flow and cool, bubbles in the liquid form tunnels and caverns. These naturally strong shafts create a complex and formidable underground network.

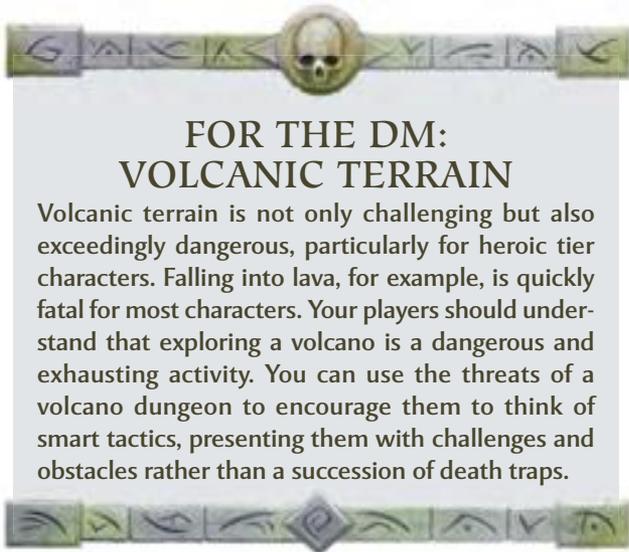
Variants

Unlike other types of natural dungeons, volcanoes can be found in most places in the world, from the remote Underdark to the mountain ranges of the most civilized surface lands. A volcano dungeon can be as small as a few interconnected chambers, or it can fill the interior of a mountain with twisting passages and vast vaults.

Exploring

The simplest volcano dungeon is a flat network of tunnels extending in every direction. Different areas can feature thematic terrain, such as rivers of magma, lava falls, and rocky bridges over burning lakes.

Dangers The searing heat and lack of oxygen in a volcano can tax even the most stalwart explorers.



FOR THE DM: VOLCANIC TERRAIN

Volcanic terrain is not only challenging but also exceedingly dangerous, particularly for heroic tier characters. Falling into lava, for example, is quickly fatal for most characters. Your players should understand that exploring a volcano is a dangerous and exhausting activity. You can use the threats of a volcano dungeon to encourage them to think of smart tactics, presenting them with challenges and obstacles rather than a succession of death traps.

Falling rocks, crumbling cavern walls, and unstable ground must all be taken into account.

Inhabitants Great monsters thrive in this landscape, whether they have a connection to elemental fire or simply seek the warmth of the caverns. Active volcanoes arise around rifts to the Elemental Chaos, attracting creatures of raw elemental energy. Fire elementals and fiery demons are the most common of these. Other creatures that lair in or near volcanoes include mephits, fire drakes, and red dragons.

Rewards Volcanoes carry rare gems to the surface inside streams of magma, and they can be a rich source of rare metals as well. Smiths are always looking for raw volcanic ore to create new alloys. When the lava from a volcano originates in the deepest reaches of the Elemental Chaos, it is often imbued with elemental magic, making it prized by artificers and other arcane practitioners.

Many ancient red dragons make their lairs in the cores of volcanoes, which provide maximum defensibility for their hoards. The oldest are said to possess lost artifacts, rare magic arms and armor, and unsurpassed wealth in coin and gems.

WARREN

The confusing dens of kobolds, goblins, ankhegs, and other subterranean creatures consist of unstable caverns connected by twisting, narrow tunnels. A warren dungeon is usually a shallow construction, dug down just below the surface or extending off naturally occurring underground passageways.

Variations

Intelligent creatures build warrens that resemble villages, divided into specialized sections. The hives and dens of beasts such as ankhegs and bulettes feature

a smaller number of chambers in which these monsters sleep and breed when they are not hunting.

Each intelligent race that builds warrens does so in a different style. Kobolds lair near underground hot springs or volcanic vents for warmth (and potential nearness to dragons). Goblins trap and breed beasts such as drakes, krenshars, wolves, and spiders to guard their warrens. Svirfneblin conceal their homes' entrances, using illusion magic to make their cozy dens look dangerous or abandoned.

Exploring

Even if a warren was built to be defensible, most of its rooms serve everyday needs. Bedchambers, kitchens, shrines, and privies are more common than armories and guardrooms. Trapped passages are common, however, particularly in kobold warrens.

Dangers Creatures that dig out warrens are typically of small stature. Their lairs are ill suited to the taller races, which face a considerable challenge when squeezing through low, narrow passageways. Becoming stuck in a narrow tunnel might seem a minor inconvenience at first, but even the stupidest goblin knows how to take advantage of a cornered foe.

Kobold warrens teem with traps, making them even more dangerous than other warrens. Their residents ably bypass hazards that can spell destruction for blundering intruders. Even if a trap doesn't kill its target, being tagged by one leaves a blood trail that kobolds can follow.

Inhabitants Kobolds, goblins, and the like viciously defend their warrens against intruders. This isn't some dungeon that they guard as mercenaries—it's their home.

Unlike an outpost full of soldiers, a warren can contain children, the elderly, and other noncombatants. Adventurers who avoid attacking such creatures can sometimes negotiate passage through a warren. Even noncombatants will take up arms quickly if they are threatened. Kobolds are able to use tooth and claw from the time they're hatched; elderly deep gnomes might fight with the desperation of having nothing to lose; and few creatures are more ferocious than mothers protecting their young.

Rewards Warrens are rarely filled with treasure, but they can be great sources of tools and supplies. For a group on a long expedition, a store of cured meats and ale might be worth more than coins or gems. Information is another valuable, if intangible, reward for entering a warren. As well, local rulers might pay well to have a nest of troublemakers cleared out.

Dungeon Denizens

Sometimes the best weapon a dungeon delver can have is knowledge of how to deal with the monsters that lurk underground. So lend an ear to the voices of experience quoted in this section as they tell their tales and dispense their advice, and grab a piece of parchment—you'll want to take notes.

This section spotlights a group of monsters that have a long history in the D&D game—including the beholder, the mind flayer, and the rust monster, to name a few. They've been “kept alive” as the game has evolved because they're just so . . . monstrous.

Aboleths

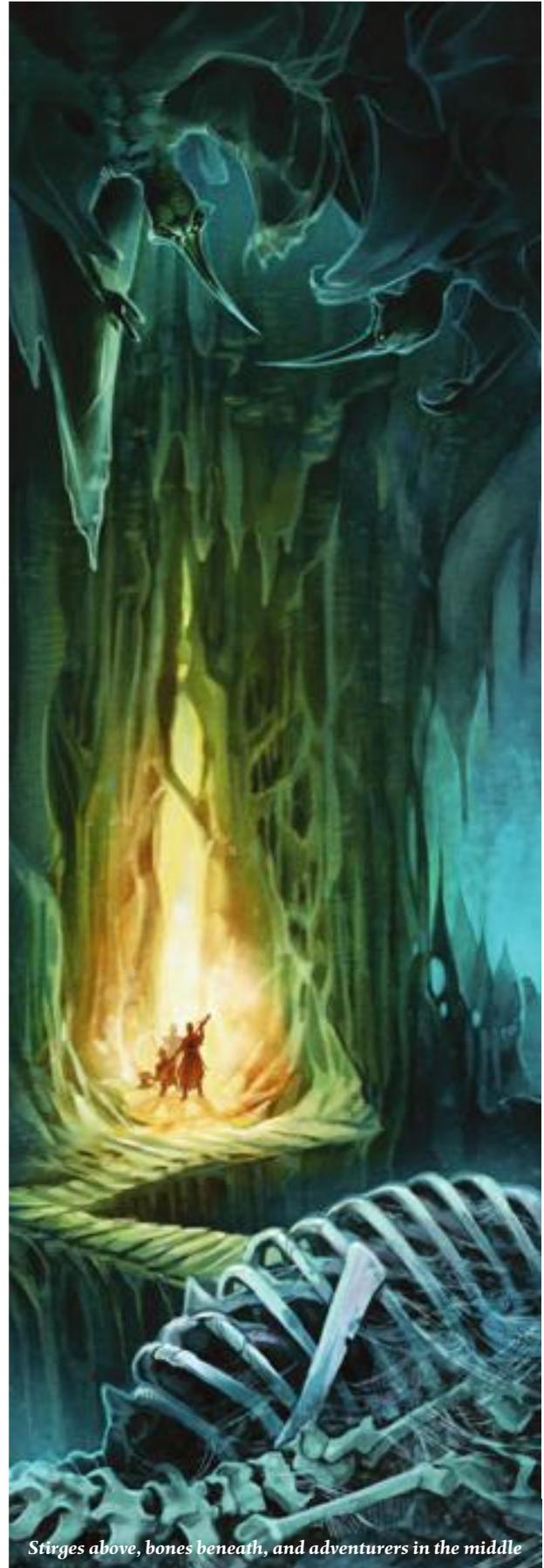
“Beware of what waits for us below, my friends. Drive any thought that is not your own from your mind, for it will betray you and leave you vulnerable to their corruption. Take solace in the knowledge that these horrors are flesh and blood, and they feel pain.”

—Mord, escaped thrall

Aboleths are the slimy overlords of the subterranean realm. Their bodies are bizarre and revolting, their abilities maddening, their motives and origins inscrutable. In short, aboleths embody the alien horror of the Far Realm. Their emergence is a sign that cosmic forces are turning their gaze toward the sane world.

Aboleths dwell in subterranean lakes and oceans, surfacing to bend others to their malevolence. With hosts of corrupted thralls in their service, they instigate schemes with far-reaching consequences. When confronted, an aboleth turns its attackers against themselves by dominating their minds. The lash of its slimy tentacles destroys an enemy's sanity, and those who fall to an aboleth are doomed to become victims of its desecration.

When an aboleth is the hidden master of an evil scheme, its enemies typically don't realize the truth until the monster reveals itself. This subterfuge makes preparing for battle difficult, so adventurers must learn the telltale signs of an aboleth's presence. The creatures frequently send thralls to the surface to spy and instigate their plots. These thralls can be identified by their emotionless insistence on completing their assigned tasks. Those who manage to escape sometimes feel a gibbering in their minds that crescendos when an aboleth is nearby, and observant delvers might notice trails of slime leading to the edge of a dark lake.



Stirges above, bones beneath, and adventurers in the middle

Ankhegs

“We didn’t get too many ankhegs back home. Too rocky. Usually they’d show up by accident, drawn to the sound of our smithies. When they’d appear, they’d get all riled up and spit acid everywhere. We had to take them down quick, before the acid tarnished the forge.”

—Korag, dwarf outcast

Ankhegs hunt humanoids, so they stick close to settlements to gain easy access to their prey. The burrowing creatures avoid detection by staying underground. When on the hunt, an ankheg comes to the surface just long enough to snatch a victim, then drag it into the beast’s tunnels to tear it apart with razor-sharp mandibles. The more the victim struggles, the angrier the ankheg gets, and the nastier the fight becomes. Since adventurers have a tendency to fight back, ankhegs can get extremely nasty.

The good news is that most ankhegs hunt alone. They don’t gather in large numbers because each one needs a lot of food to survive, and having too many ankhegs in one area depletes the food supply. They do work together during the mating cycle, though, digging a burrow where they drop their eggs. The parents grow more aggressive, both to drive off predators and to bring in meat for the broodlings when they hatch.

Beholders

“Don’t listen to the lies spread by gossipers! There is only one, and it is Xocol’yalax! Others are pretenders, not worthy of my sight! Now recount the ten thousand odes of my greatness that I taught you, and make them perfect this time!”

—Xocol’yalax, beholder

When people on the surface world whisper about the terrible creatures that lurk in far depths, they’re usually talking about beholders. Nothing compares to a beholder’s otherworldly appearance and capabilities. Its eyestalks writhe like a nest of snakes, spitting magic energy with every glance. It need only look at a victim to burn or freeze or disintegrate it. If a beholder’s enemy survives the barrage of eye rays, the floating creature simply opens its mouth to bring to bear its vicious bite.

Beholders’ megalomaniacal delusions are as dangerous as their abilities. They create subterranean domains for themselves, taking on titles such as “supreme majesty” or “all-seeing overlord.” A beholder delights in imposing its will on others, especially when the lesser beings consciously accept its superiority. Beholders build menageries of slaves and collect creatures that they find interesting. The superiority complex of beholders would be humorous if they didn’t insist on trying to rule the world.

Carrion Crawlers

“Whole nests of the things would gorge themselves in the killing caverns of the orc wars. The beasts were so intent on shoveling the dead into their mouths that you could slip right past them, if you could stand the stink.”

—Korag, dwarf outcast

Carrion crawlers wallow in filth, decay, and slime. They scour subterranean environments for easy meals among the dead or dying, but if they can’t find those, they ambush live prey with their poisonous tentacles. The caterpillar-like bodies of these creatures let them launch these ambushes from bizarre angles, attacking from dungeon walls or ceilings so that enemies cannot fight back easily. Experienced delvers know to watch out for pools of dripping slime in tunnels—a drooling crawler might be lurking overhead.

The sight and sound of a carrion crawler feeding can make the bravest adventurer queasy. The hideous sucking noises are more disturbing when you consider that their meal might still be alive. Being paralyzed by a carrion crawler’s poison is one of a delver’s worst fears: shoveled headfirst into the monster’s maw, fully aware but utterly powerless.

READING THE SIGNS

By Khel Nighteyes, veteran dungeoneer

Time and time again I hear of adventurers kicking in dungeon doors or stomping through caverns, practically ringing the dinner bell for monsters. We Deep Guides favor discretion. The best way to avoid monsters is to keep your eyes open; the signs are all around you. Let me give you some examples.

Abnormally clean dungeon walls are a good clue that an ooze is squelching around nearby.

Butchered bodies are a sure sign of grimlocks, but the savage creatures also leave greasy handprints and tufts of ropy hair wherever they go.

Think a bit of treasure scattered conveniently in your path is too good to be true? It is. It usually means that a roper is lurking overhead.

Aboleths have a fixation on bizarre shapes and angles, making their thralls build monolithic structures near their lairs.

Cave Fishers

“Meepo already feel like little worm all alone in the dark. Why nasty monsters hook him like one, too?”

—Meepo the kobold

These insectlike predators cast their sticky nets into the tunnels of dungeons, angling for everything from buzzing stirges to errant explorers. Cave fishers prefer overhangs or ledges in moist caverns. Their craggy carapaces let them hide perfectly against a cavern wall, where they wait patiently for prey to wander near. Some cave fishers spin a noose of filament that snatches a creature, strangling it. Others fire harpoon-like spikes into the flesh of their victims. Either way, a cave fisher immobilizes its prey, then carries it back to the nest to be feasted on by the beast’s ravenous brood.

Cave fishers rely on cunning rather than strength to catch their meals. They usually stay in areas close to the surface, which typically see heavy foot traffic by small humanoids. A lone goblin or kobold can’t put up much of a fight, but a fully equipped adventurer can take down a cave fisher—if you can close with the creature. There’s the problem. Cave fishers crawl along walls and ceilings like spiders, favoring ambush locations where their prey has limited maneuverability or cover.

Grimlocks

“Drow slave-pits are overflowing with grimlocks. Those brutes are as cruel as their masters and would fight to the death even if drow whips weren’t behind them. Against a grimlock, one blow—well timed, swift, and perfectly aimed to the heart—will do more than a dozen errant cuts.”

—Meliera, bloodsworn

Even among the harsh races of the Underdark, grimlocks stand out as some of the most savage and violent. The fearless raiders wander the endless caverns, always on the move and quick to slay whatever they encounter. Although they use only primitive stone or bone weapons, their brutish strength can overpower most humanoids. Untold millennia underground have given them uncanny senses, enabling them to function in complete darkness. This ability is a serious problem for surface dwellers—although grimlocks can’t see the flicker of torchlight, they can feel its warmth, and they go for the person with the light first.

The tiny glimpses of grimlocks’ tribal culture that adventurers have seen suggest that the creatures don’t spend all their time brutalizing and eating everything they find. They have an ingrained hatred of outsiders, though, so no one has been able to live among them. Grimlocks savagely attack dungeon delvers, but they battle other subterranean monsters

as well. This hatred might come from the fact that many Underdark creatures enslave them. Grimlocks attack mind flayers more zealously than they do any other race.

Hook Horrors

“We use t’ file down hook horror claws and use ’em as arches for our homes. Didn’t need keystones ’cause the claws were strong enough t’ hold up the entire roof without buckling. Findin’ ways to use the claws wasn’t hard. Getting ’em’s another matter.”

—Thorry, trapsmith

These creatures range through caverns in search of food. Similar to great bears of the upper world, hook horrors are renowned for their orneriness. They don’t go looking for fights, but if surprised, cornered, or wounded, they hit back hard. The creatures’ size and chitinous plating make them incredibly strong and resilient. Their claws are nearly six feet long, studded with jagged barbs and ending in a fishhook shape larger than a human hand. When angered, a hook horror smashes a foe with these claws, pulls an enemy close, and rends flesh with its beaked jaws.

Underdark explorers have suggested that hook horrors might be more than violent beasts. Solitary creatures have exhibited complex behavior that suggests intelligence. Additionally, hook horror clans, usually consisting of a handful of individuals, have been seen demonstrating teamwork, compassion, and ritualized behavior. Thus, some delvers say that avoiding their territory is not only safer but more respectful.

Mimics

“Look, when I tell you not to touch anything, I have a very good reason. Let’s just say that sometimes the dungeon bites back.”

—Karl, deep delver

Although mimics come from the Far Realm, they have found the world’s dungeons to be good hunting grounds. These amorphous, slime-like creatures take the forms of everyday objects in their chosen environments. Treasure chests, religious altars, and elaborate doorways are among their favorite shapes because they attract the attention of curious passersby. A mimic waits, indistinguishable from the surrounding features until prey comes within reach. Then the creature shows its true nature, becoming a writhing mass of ooze, teeth, and tendrils.

Experienced adventurers know to be alert for a mimic whenever they discover an interesting object while dungeon delving, and such caution has denied the creatures many potential meals over the years. As a result, some mimics have wised up, taking the forms of humanoids and actively hunting gullible

prey. As these mimics become more common in dungeons—and sometimes on the surface world—adventurers might start second-guessing everyone they meet, wondering if a new acquaintance is really a toothy mass of hungry slime.

Mind Flayers

“There were hundreds of skulls in that pit, practically spilling over the edge. But that wasn’t what made me run—it was the mangled holes in each skull’s forehead, like something had bitten right through it.”

—Risha, drow assassin of Maelbrathyr

No creatures haunt the nightmares of dungeon-delvers more than mind flayers. Their far-reaching schemes and boundless hatred of other races puts them among the supreme villains of the Underdark. Their combination of psychically enslaved servitors and withering mental attacks makes them a threat for any group of adventurers. Defeat at the hands of a mind flayer is a fate worse than death, leading to either slavery or a sickening feast on the victim’s brain.

Mind flayers are obsessed with the perfection of their species. They reproduce by corrupting other creatures and capture promising hosts that can be transformed into new mind flayers. This need spurs their cabals to expand into new realms, where they work to subvert existing centers of power. If an attempt at transformation produces disappointing results, the mind flayers might call for the systematic genocide of the host’s race. On the other hand, a successful transformation means that mind flayers seek out similar creatures to undergo the process. Unfortunately for adventurers, their skills and abilities make them attractive targets.

Myconids

“It started when we found spores clinging to the soles of our boots after we returned from the tunnels, and it just didn’t stop. Mushrooms began popping up over the whole village, crowding us out of our houses and smothering our gardens. It wasn’t long before they started moving around, wondering what we were doing in their home.”

—Durthee, svirfneblin refugee

The idea of walking mushrooms might make some adventurers snicker, but experienced delvers know that the implacable spread of myconids is no laughing matter. Colonies of these plant creatures are expanding throughout the world. Thriving in dank environments such as caverns and dungeons, myconids take hold of an area quickly. Their spores create huge fungal masses that crowd out other plants and animals. Their lairs are pungent with decay, and the growth is sometimes so thick that explorers have to

hack their way through. Myconids don’t take kindly to those who damage their colony, nor do they have patience for opponents who try to slow their advance.

Despite their hostility, myconids are not evil. Some people can understand and perhaps empathize with their need to expand. Opening negotiations with a myconid sovereign is a good tactic for those who don’t want to fight a charging army of spiny fungi. Once they are attacked, myconids pour from their lair like a colony of fire ants, and they don’t stop until they or their foes are compost.

Oozes and Slimes

“The trick to dealing with oozes is to give them something to focus on. They’re as brainless as they are deadly, so if you poke them with something, they’re likely to fixate on it. Just be sure it’s not something that dissolves too quickly.”

—Karl, deep delver

Clinging to dungeon walls or seeping formlessly through cracks, oozes and slimes exist only to feed on anything their acidic bodies touch. They don’t think or feel, and they barely react to external stimuli. They are driven by the instinct to consume and lurk in the moist darkness, waiting for a meal to pass by. Everything is food to them, and their goopy bodies scrub clean dungeon walls and adventurers’ bones alike.

The best way to protect yourself from oozes is to pay attention. The creatures are generally lethargic, especially after eating, when they become torpid masses of jelly. Even active oozes move very slowly; most adventurers can walk away from one without breaking a sweat. The danger is that oozes and slimes can become almost invisible in the right conditions. You could walk right into one before realizing it. Never stick your hand into a damp niche before checking first, and always prod pools of water before drinking.

Otyughs

“Ick! No want to smell fat stink-monster!”

—Splik, grudging goblin guide

Plenty of explorers attest that otyughs are the most foul, filthy, diseased sacks of tentacles and flesh in dungeons. Although the creatures are products of the natural world, they reek with what some swear must be a supernatural stench that is second only to the smell of troglodytes. It’s as if their bloated, flabby bodies absorb the rot and decay around them.

An otyugh is almost invisible when wallowing in a pile of filth, its skin adapting to match the color of the putrid surroundings. A consummate scavenger by nature, the creature’s aggression stems mostly from its territorial nature. It lays claim to a rich feeding ground and tries to drive off or consume all who intrude. An otyugh entangles a creature in its

tentacles, which are covered with vicious hooks that sink into flesh, then pulls the victim into its cesspool and chews it up.

Most otyughs are irritable loners, squatting idly in a noisome pit or slowly wandering through dungeons until they find a place disgusting enough to make their own. Only priests of Torog, god of the Underdark, show any affinity for otyughs, though the slimy creatures are exploited by troglodytes, hobgoblins, and other dungeon-dwelling races for both waste removal and defense.

Purple Worms

“Sing the tale of Vonak Bloodoath, who fought and slew the bale worm. For seven days he struggled in the belly of the beast, his golden axe painted crimson. Vonak knew no fear and felt no weariness, and at last he cleaved the monster’s heart. So mighty was the worm’s thrashing that it shook the mountains.”

—A dwarven legend told in Cor Talcor

Dungeon monsters don’t come bigger, nastier, or hungrier than purple worms. These hundred-foot-long horrors burrow through stone and earth at great speed, driven only to eat. One titanic worm’s burrowing can create tremors or sinkholes large enough to threaten whole communities. Like a force of nature, it can burst through a fortress wall, writhing and thrashing at armies that are helpless to stop it. The monster opens its huge mouth and simply crawls forward, shoveling masses of prey into its gullet. Inside its body, the victims are awash in digestive slime that quickly dissolves their flesh. Everything from a kobold to a giant is food to a purple worm.

As the apex predators in the Underdark, purple worms have a rich mythology. Their appearances have marked the destruction of cities, the creation of important underground landscapes, and speculation about the true depth of the Night Below. The drow consider the worms a test sent by Lolth to judge their worth. Goblins think that the worms are hungry gods that will shatter the world if not fed. Dwarves view them much as surface-dwellers do ravaging dragons.

Ropers

“How’s this for a trap idea? It blends perfectly into th’ wall and shoots out lines that grab ’n’ pull you up into it, where a bunch o’ sharp stuff tears you to pieces. Makin’ one? Who said anything about makin’ one? It’s already here. Just look up.”

—Thorry, trapsmith

Patient, ravenous, and cruel, a roper can wait weeks for prey to stumble within reach of its tentacles. When prey draws near, the roper hurls long tentacles to snare and reel the victim into its gaping maw. As if

that weren’t bad enough, ropers sadistically enjoy the struggles of their victims, laughing horribly as they chew their food.

Ropers are occasionally talkative, and one might converse with a likely meal before attacking (though it is hardly good company). Some dungeon-dwelling races, such as goblins, look to ropers as oracles or gods. A roper might offer guidance or protection in exchange for offerings of wealth—and the chance to snatch a supplicant here and there for an easy meal. Since ropers have tremendous life spans and can hibernate for decades, their gullets might hold ancient treasures.

Rust Monsters

“Oh, how I hate those things. Not because they eat swords or armor or all that nonsense, but because they ruin the nicest treasure! The best thing to do is blast them with something loud and flashy; it makes them scatter like cockroaches.”

—Ella, treasure hunter

A relatively docile and inoffensive rust monster can upset the nerves of mighty heroes more than can the most despicable demon. Physically, rust monsters are hardly threatening. They are spindly and flighty, their antennas atwitter as they scuttle, and are quick to flee unless someone is carrying metal objects. The smell of metal makes rust monsters aggressive, but adventurers clad in armor or laden with treasure drive them into a feeding frenzy. A hungry rust monster charges toward metal heedless of opposition, scampering back to safety only after it is sated.

Most people hate rust monsters with a passion that is astounding but fully deserved. If left unchecked,



THE ALBINO RUST MONSTER

A lament by Vanion Braveheart

They were on us like locusts, dozens of rust monsters pouring from the honeycomb of tunnels all around. I drew my sword *Red Wind* by instinct and immediately knew it was a mistake. A huge beast pushed through the throng and charged me. It was bigger than a horse, and its shell glistened pale white in the torchlight. I gave ground, but the monster came on, its mandibles clacking. It barreled over me, wrenching my sword from my hands. I watched in horror as *Red Wind*, an enchanted blade inherited from the knights of Nerath, withered to dust in the monster’s jaws.

We were overwhelmed and had no choice but to flee. That giant rust monster is still down there, fattened on the magic of my lost sword.



the beasts can cause havoc to whole communities. In dwarven culture, not killing a rust monster one encounters is a crime, and some adventurers claim that dragons hired them to clear out nests of the creatures lurking near their hoards.

Stirges

“There’s nothing worse than walking into a stirge lair unawares. They swarm you in seconds, sometimes so thick you can’t even see through them to find the way out. Experienced Deep Guides can read the signs that stirges are near and toss a rock down the tunnel to distract them long enough for everyone to run past.”

—Karl, deep delver

Among the world’s most widespread monsters, stirges infest underground environments just as they do the nooks and crannies on the surface. Cavern stirges swarm in colonies large enough to turn a cave’s ceiling into a writhing mass of spindly claws and leathery wings. Although some of these stirges find exits to the surface world at night to hunt, many are satisfied with the ample prey of the Underdark. In fact, some prefer to stay in dungeons, which have fewer places for prey to hide.

Trying to fight a swarm of stirges is a fool’s proposition, especially while underground, so travelers and explorers have developed other ways to deal with a colony. The drow use a particular type of spider that nests among the stirges and hunts the creatures to extinction. Svirfneblin poison a swarm by placing tainted animal carcasses outside its lair. Adventurers have found success using fires to smoke the stirges out of their caverns.

Troglodytes

“I remember that a troglodyte chieftain was brought before my mother in chains. She wanted to see if its kind could be hired as mercenaries or at least enslaved. The beast lashed out and tried to escape. The guards stopped it, but my mother slew them anyway—not because they failed to keep the creature chained, but because its stink couldn’t be washed from their clothes.”

—Khiira, Underdark envoy

These reptilian degenerates are known for their violence, barbarism, and nauseating stench. Nothing smells worse than a pack of troglodytes, slick with stink and slaving for fresh meat (though otyughs come close). A troglodyte raid is notoriously swift and ruthless, rarely driven by riches. The creatures attack groups that are vulnerable, whether a settlement of surface homesteaders or the families of dwarf miners. Most troglodytes carry some type of stone-tipped weapon, though they might revert to claws and fangs in the heat of battle. If their victims don’t choke from the stench, they’re slashed to ribbons by berserker talons.

Troglodytes form obsessively territorial clans. Sometimes these groups are as eager to kill each other as they are other races, though competing clans put aside their differences when given an opportunity to spill the blood of other creatures.

Troglodytes are well adapted to life underground. They scramble over rocky terrain easily and can go for days at a time without food.

Umber Hulks

“Umber hulk tunnels are risky for travelers. The creatures do so much thrashing when they burrow that their holes could cave in at any time. When you also consider that umber hulk migrations follow patterns, suddenly that purple worm tunnel sounds mighty appealing.”

—Jasyn of Therund, founding Deep Guide

Umber hulks are greatly feared in the Underdark, and not just because their claws rip through stone as if it were parchment. Their reputation is also due to their ravenous appetite. When hungry, umber hulks never stop looking for food. Their hunting methods aren’t subtle; an umber hulk typically bursts through a stone tunnel and tears its prey apart with savage blows. Their scimitar-sized mandibles bristle with serrations, and their armored shells are thicker than plate armor. Veteran delvers know that when the ground shakes, it’s time to take cover.

Umber hulks are solitary hunters, but their tunnels are thick with small creatures scavenging their kills or relying on the larger beasts for protection. After feasting, an umber hulk might let these vermin crawl over its mandibles and claws to pick clean any remaining scraps.

Umber hulks rest only when molting. This process leaves them in a torpid state for several days as they shed their exoskeletons and emerge even bigger, faster, and stronger. This period is one of the few times of vulnerability in an umber hulk’s life. Discarded shells are marvelous finds for dungeoneers because they can be sold or fashioned into supremely sturdy armor and shields.



DUNGEON VERMIN

Although dungeons are infested with monstrous vermin, all but the most desolate of caverns are rife with insects and other tiny creatures. Cave crickets up to a foot long feed on mold and algae. Schools of blind albino fish swim in drowned tunnels. Lizards skitter along walls and ceilings. Worms and beetles crawl in the muck under rocks and in decaying matter. These and other vermin provide sustenance for the larger creatures of the Underdark, including wayward adventurers who run out of rations.





Count Strahd von Zarovich of Castle Ravenloft—master of all he surveys, and much more

Infamous Dungeons

Explorers find plenty of dungeons throughout the wilderness, but only a handful of these complexes stand out. Fewer still become legendary enough to make the list of infamous dungeons. The locations described here are some of the greatest dungeons of all time.

Hints of the dangers and legends of the treasures that await explorers in these dangerous locales might be enough to draw your character to seek them out, so here you'll also get some advice for how to deal with what you might face when you get there. As you read about each dungeon, consider how you and your adventuring group might be linked to it. Perhaps you grew up in the shadow of one of these places. With the DM's consent, your character might be a veteran of an attempt on the dungeon and already have some special knowledge. Alternatively, a loved one might have disappeared in pursuit of the secrets of one of these strongholds, and you or a fellow adventurer hope to discover that person's fate. Whatever brings you there, one day you too might stand at the threshold of an infamous dungeon.

CASTLE RAVENLOFT

The towering Balinok Mountains crowd conspiratorially together, their hunched shoulders thickly cloaked by a forest of enormous pines. No road describes a path between the massed trees or wends up the treacherous slopes. The Svalich Woods are still, silent, and dark, the trees closely set and the undergrowth a tangle through which only the mountains' frequent fogs can easily pass. The lumberjack's axe and the hunter's bow have no place here. Those who briefly dare to ascend the Balinoks tell of the seemingly insignificant sights and sounds that drove them to flee: a sudden creak of tree boughs caught in an unfelt wind, or a great paw print in the mud that slowly fills with water.

Yet the Vistani—that insular tribe that travels the world in gaily colored wagons—say there is a way through the Balinoks, which one might stumble upon after struggling for days through the mists and brush of the Svalich Woods. If you follow that path, the Vistani claim, you come to a pair of great gates of iron bars, braced between tall stone pillars, that swing inward at the slightest touch. Once beyond the gates, you stand on the soil of the land known as Barovia.

The Barovians, if they truly exist, have lived for centuries in a valley within the Balinoks, never once traveling from their home. From first breath to last,

each Barovian labors within sight of the spires of Castle Ravenloft, a great keep perched a thousand feet above them on a pillar of rock that juts from the mountainside. The master of the castle, and of Barovia, is a self-styled count by the name of Strahd von Zarovich.

The Vistani who imparted this knowledge to you also carried with them a letter from the burgomaster of Barovia. In it he pleads for someone to come and help his lady love, Ireena, who has fallen ill from some strange malady. The burgomaster has promised all his wealth to any who could remove the affliction.

Another letter has recently surfaced in the Ivlis River, which flows out of the Balinok Mountains. Found on the bloated and clawed corpse of a man presumed to be its courier, the water-damaged dispatch tells a different tale. It was written in a different hand from the burgomaster's letter and is dated weeks before the Vistani came into possession of that message. The garbled text that remains legible reads as follows.

Hail thee of . . . and valor: I, . . . of Barovia, send you honor—with despair. My adopted d . . . fair . . . been these past nig . . . by a creature calling itself . . . For over . . . dear Ireena languishes and . . . from an unh . . . caused by this vile beast. Yet I fear, too, that the creatu . . . some more cunning . . . He has become too pow . . . be fought . . .

So I . . . leave us for dead and . . . encircle this land with . . . Let holy men call . . . that the evil may be held within . . . weeping Barovia. . . . save the world from . . .

There is much wealth entrapped in . . . Return for your reward after we are all departed . . .

Burgomas . . .

Playing a Vistani

The Vistani are a tribal people of humanoids of various races who share a common culture of nomadism and mystic arts. Their bands roam the world in house-wagons, often pausing near other communities until they wear out their welcome. These wanderers have a reputation for talents of foresight, black curses, and lax morals—some of it true to varying degrees. The Vistani might put on a bright face for the sake of outsiders, but they are secretive and insular, and their warm smiles can turn cold in an instant.

Even if the Vistani in the adventure are some of the villains, you could play a Vistani character who is working against them. Alternatively, your character might be from a Vistani tribe in another part of the world, seeking to discover what ties the Barovian Vistani have to their land and its master. For more information on creating a Vistani character, see “Playing Vistani” in *Dragon* 380.

SURVIVING ISN'T EVERYTHING

Throughout the history of the D&D game, certain adventures have become part of the shared experience. These adventures cause DMs all over the world to cackle with glee and give experienced players the shakes. This chapter presents eight of these D&D icons: the vampire's castle, the sealed mountain stronghold, the haunted ruin, the buried city, the pharaoh's pyramid, the volcano vault, the trap-ridden tomb, and the demonic temple. If you've never pitted your characters against these terrifying dungeons, then you are missing an important part of what it means to be a D&D player.

To say you explored the Tomb of Horrors is one thing; to say you lived through it . . . well, that's a rare honor. There's no better way to gain D&D player “cred” than to step through the gates of Castle Ravenloft and test your mettle against Count Strahd von Zarovich, or defy the wizard Keraptis by stealing *Wave*, *Whelm*, and *Blackrazor* from his insane dungeon below White Plume Mountain. The dungeons described herein are nasty, they're out to get you, and if you're not careful, they'll chew you up and swallow you whole.

This section provides fodder for your imagination, a “behind the curtain” peek at eight dungeons littered with the gnawed-on skeletal remains of adventurers from bygone D&D campaigns. If any of these descriptions whet your appetite, urge your DM to take a crack at running them. Although many of these adventures were written for earlier editions of the rules, a skilled DM can usually convert the necessary rules. If doing that sort of thing doesn't interest your DM, then at least you can use any description that sounds appealing to give him or her an idea of the kind of dungeon you'd like to explore.

Of the adventures presented here, the one I've run most often is *Tomb of Horrors*, and the end result was always the same: The player characters who went in never came out, usually falling victim not to the main villain of the adventure but to the dungeon itself. As a player, I've thrown characters into all eight of these dungeons and fared no better. In fact, of the dungeons presented here, I can claim victory over none of them, but I have many stories about how my characters perished, stories that resonate with other players who have suffered similar losses over the years, all in good fun. Often it's the ill-fated expedition into the dungeon that we remember best and which conjures the biggest laughs.

—Chris Perkins
D&D Senior Producer

Background: Barovian Escapee

Most of the time, you lived a pleasant life in Barovia. Simple rules guided your existence: Obey the burgo-master. Do not consort with the Vistani. Do not go out after sunset. And always do as Count Strahd von Zarovich commands.

Several times each year, some village residents receive invitations written in the count's hand and bearing his seal pressed into crimson wax. Those who return tell of lavish banquets and parties that last through the night. Some do not return, though. They are afterward said to be "living with the count," and they are never seen outside the castle again.

Or so you thought—until the night you saw your sweetheart for the last time.

You awoke to the sound of your name being called from the yard outside. Your love, who had answered an invitation from Strahd some time ago, and whom you had secretly grieved as lost to you ever since, stood beneath your window, pale in the moonlight. Her faint words warned you that your name was now on the guest list and that you must not come to the castle—in fact, you had to leave Barovia that night.

Of course you wavered, but nonetheless, fighting against everything you had been taught, you went out into the night and followed the one you loved most in the world down the road toward the gateway into the forest. She stood aside and implored you to pass through the gate. When you did so and turned back to look, no one stood behind you, but in the distance a pack of wolves crept out of the woods onto the road. You fled for your life into the forest.

You spent weeks wandering the mountains. Eventually you found a road, which led you to a new land. You're still not certain you did the right thing in leaving your homeland, even though life is better in many ways beyond Barovia's borders.

And . . . more than guilt haunts you. Recently you have heard stories of a black coach being pulled by exquisite black stallions. It appears from time to time, traveling the roads with no one driving it, and no passenger is glimpsed beyond its swaying velvet curtains. Its last reported location is always somewhere behind you, leading you to wonder if it is drawing closer.

It is, you fear, the same black coach that carries the count's guests to his castle.

Associated Skill: Perception or Stealth.

CASTLE RAVENLOFT, PAST AND PRESENT

Ravenloft has a lively D&D history since its debut as an AD&D adventure in 1983. The venue was developed as a full-fledged campaign setting throughout the 1990s, updated to 3rd Edition rules, and reincarnated as an award-winning board game in 2010. Nearly two dozen novels and a host of follow-on adventures in the same setting also contributed to Castle Ravenloft's fame.

The enduring popularity of the setting lies partly in its similarity to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, but the eerie mood and open structure of the first adventure, written by Tracy and Laura Hickman, is what really makes *Ravenloft* work. Strahd wasn't just waiting in a room in his castle somewhere. Instead he would go on the offensive, attacking the adventurers when they were in the most dire situations and then escaping before he could be cornered.

Continuing the Story

Clearly, something strange is going on in the shadow of Castle Ravenloft. Either the Vistani cannot be trusted, or they don't know about the earlier letter found on the dead courier. If that water-damaged message is true, then the missive the Vistani came into possession of must be a fake.

If that's the case, then someone—perhaps Strahd—wants adventurers to try to rescue Ireena, so desperately

that the earlier letter was brutally quashed. But why would a being who has existed securely for so long need the likes of you to upset his apple cart? So, does someone else want Ireena rescued? Maybe the Vistani want to keep access to Barovia open for some reason, and new visitors are somehow key to that plan.

Some magic must be at work if a castle and town can remain unknown for centuries. Strahd is probably a wizard of impressive ability, and likely undead if he has maintained control for so long. Unassailable, intelligent, and with a passive population of living people under his thumb—even without the evidence of the waterlogged letter, how could he be anything other than a vampire?

To discover the truth, you'll likely have to face Strahd in his castle. Taking on a vampire is difficult enough, but one who has access to the most potent spells and rituals presents a much greater challenge. If Strahd sent the letter that is held by the Vistani, then he is watching for your arrival. You'll have no hope of surprise. Perhaps the author of the waterlogged letter is right; maybe the best thing to do is somehow wall off Barovia and leave its citizens to their doom. But with so many innocent lives hanging in the balance, that approach would be anything but heroic. If you plan to end the vampire's existence, you'll need to find and destroy his coffin.



Moonlight reveals the central tower of the ancient wizard's fortress

GHOST TOWER OF INVERNESS

The four outer towers of Castle Inverness still stand above its ruins. They lean at different angles like tombstones guarding neglected graves, jutting from the ivy-choked rubble that was once the walls of a mighty fortress. Castle Inverness is one of the three infamous “ghost towers” of the Nentir Vale, but unlike the other two, it is not merely a focus for the activities of undead.

On certain nights, when the fog rises as high as the old walls' tops, moonlight seems to strike something in the mist. Clouds take shape, drifting around a huge yet unseen object between the four towers. Then, suddenly, the luminous cylindrical tower of the central keep stands once again, jutting boldly into the sky, defying death and time.

When clouds skirt across the moon's face, the Ghost Tower's image wavers. And when the moon is fully obscured, the tower vanishes into shadows and mist. The fog flows freely once more, and the apparition vanishes until some other bewitched evening.

Few willingly draw near this accursed place. Even without the appearance of the Ghost Tower, Castle

Inverness has long been shunned by the locals. The legends of its tyrannical rise, and of the supernatural perils that remain after its fall, are still the stuff of bard song and tavern tales.

Tales say that in elder days the great fortress called Inverness gave its lord mastery over all land that could be surveyed from its high central keep, and twice that distance beyond the bounds of mortal vision. The walls of this castle were proof against every enemy and all things magical or natural. In it dwelled the great wizard Galap-Dreidel at the height of his glory. He had lifted the keep from the bedrock to make a kingdom of others' lands for himself. When lords and royals came to challenge his claim, Galap-Dreidel's spells struck them down long before they could even see Castle Inverness. Thus were the boundaries of Galap-Dreidel's lands discerned.

Most grand and terrible of all Galap-Dreidel's work was the keep's great inner tower where the wizard's most prized possession, an eldritch jewel known only as the Soul Gem, was said to rest. Legend says that it was like a great white diamond that glowed with the brilliance of the sun. In years long past it had fallen from the sky and landed in the foothills, where Galap-Dreidel discovered it. Through magic most arcane and knowledge forbidden to mortals

THE GHOST TOWER, PAST AND PRESENT

“You are hereby granted title to, and ownership of, any and all treasures (save only the Soul Gem) that you remove from Keep Inverness and its grounds. These gains shall be subject to the Ducal treasure tariff of 20%.”

With these words, the adventure begins for players of the 1980 module *The Ghost Tower of Inverness*, by Allen Hammack. That publication was preceded by a tournament version that one could purchase only at WinterCon VIII in 1979 in a zip bag containing 40 loose-leaf pages. But even in its more professionally published form, the adventure’s tournament pedigree was on full display. Discussions of scoring the players’ efforts riddle the adventure text, which presents an oftentimes nonsensical dungeon full of desperation-inducing challenges. Instead of puzzles that players might figure out and solve, many rooms plunged them into life-threatening situations without any rhyme or reason. The players succeeded due to luck and sheer determination, or their characters died.

Since then, the Ghost Tower of Inverness has appeared from time to time in various products. Most recently, it was featured in the *D&D Encounters™* season *March of the Phantom Brigade*. In that adventure, the party travels with a group of would-be settlers to the ruined Castle Inverness, only to be attacked by spirits led by the ghost of someone who was killed while exploring the ruins.

Continuing the Story

What remains in the ruins of Castle Inverness is not clear from the legend, but even if the keep is gone, the

four outer towers yet stand, and dungeons might lie beneath the rubble. Given the frightening appearance of the tower, and the penchant for the other ghost towers of the Nentir Vale to attract undead, you’re unlikely to face living foes in the ruins. Prepare yourself for battling undead, but keep in mind that a great wizard built the place and supposedly set it apart from time. If the ghostly reappearance of the central keep is more than a mere haunting, the traps and monsters originally placed there by Galap-Dreidel might still exist. Summoned foes and enthralled minions of any kind could await more victims for sport. No recent stories mention the Soul Gem, so that dreadful artifact might still be protecting itself.

If you seek the Soul Gem, do so on a foggy but moonlit night when very few clouds are in the sky, just to be on the safe side. Otherwise, you risk becoming unstuck in time along with the tower, only to emerge months or even years later.



did he shape the stone to his will. Stories say that the light of the gem dragged souls screaming from their mortal flesh and trapped them within its many facets. They also claim that whoever controlled the gem could call forth the stolen souls and make them do his or her bidding. Galap-Dreidel harnessed this power and used it against those who opposed his will.

To protect the Soul Gem, Galap-Dreidel raised up the great central tower and filled his castle with horrible creatures and traps. Then, using a great incantation, he wrested the tower from the fabric of time so that those within would not be affected by the passage of years. Thus his traps never deteriorated, nor did his guardians age or need food. Some legends tell that he even taught the gem to protect itself from those who would take it from him. Of course, his creatures still had need of amusement, so at times Galap-Dreidel would take a prisoner from the surrounding lands and set the victim free in the tower for their sport.

A time came when Galap-Dreidel left his keep and did not return. When at last it seemed safe to assume that the wizard was not coming back, a mob of superstitious people from the surrounding lands laid siege to the castle. Without the wizard to protect it, its walls fell before the force of their rage, and they even threw down the great tower. Despite this victory over their former master, people feared the ruins—for on foggy nights the keep seemed to return. Did the old magic and monsters also return, or perhaps the ghost of Galap-Dreidel himself? No one knows for certain, but that’s what the bards seem to suggest.

In recent years, the infamy of Inverness has grown, causing storytellers to once more recount the old tales of its rise and fall. Heedless or ignorant of those stories, a group of settlers built a village within the area encompassed by the four towers. This irreverence eventually prompted a ghost to approach the gates of the village, but even the dire warning of that spirit could not shake the fools from their convictions.

Within a fortnight thereafter, an army of phantoms overran the village of Inverness, setting buildings ablaze with spectral fire and slitting throats with intangible blades.

Background: Inverness Survivor

You were there when the ghost of Salazar Vladistone demanded single combat with Brother Splintershield, the leader of the Inverness settlement. You watched as Brother Splintershield smugly renounced the spirit's claim to the place from inside the boundary of the cleansing ritual he had performed. You had heard some of the stories about the ghost towers of the Nentir Vale, and denying the ghost didn't seem right, with it standing there before you all. Deeply unsettled by the encounter, you left thinking that something bad was going to happen.

You were right. On a cold midwinter night you awoke to screams of terror, and you didn't have to wait long to understand why. Several ghosts of soldiers came through your walls and ordered you to leave. They needn't have bothered—the sight alone of the terrible apparitions had you scurrying for the exit. Some in your village tried to fight, but to no avail. Their pitchforks and swords passed harmlessly through the spirits, while the ghosts' spectral weapons slashed your friends' bodies. Phantom arrows flickering with pale flames ignited real fires in the buildings. Hot blood steamed on icy ground.

You fled with many others, and in the days of travel that followed, more died from starvation, sickness, exhaustion, and cold. With each new corpse in a grave dug shallow in frost-hardened ground, your desire for vengeance grew. You were lucky; you survived the ordeal. But how can you take revenge on the dead? When you got back to civilization, you resolved to find out.

Associated Skill: Arcana, Nature, or Religion.

Feat: Haunted

Your encounter with the spectral undead has haunted you with more than nightmares and terror. Somehow you seem to have acquired a spirit other than your own. You know you're not possessed. The ghost inside seems to be more of a passenger, subtly guiding you with feelings, drawing your attention to peculiar things, and occasionally warning you of danger. It has never spoken, and sometimes it doesn't seem to be there at all, but you know you aren't imagining. You are not mad. You're not.

Prerequisite: 21st level

Benefit: When you make a Perception check or an Insight check, you can roll twice and use either result.

THE LOST CITY

The city lay bejeweled and soft under the sun, wine-drunk and sated by plentiful fields. Those who might call themselves its enemy felt no hate for it, only envy and lust. Its beauty captured even the hearts of some gods, binding them to it so that they would be worshiped by no others. It was called Cynidicea, Jewel of the Desert, and it is still out there somewhere, buried beneath the sands.

Legend has it that Cynidicea's last and greatest king was a wise leader named Alexander. Under his stewardship, the harsh desert became fecund and pliable. The citizens of Cynidicea played beneath the groaning boughs of fruitful orchards, luxuriated in seductive pools of limpid water, danced over the black earth of verdant fields, and slept deeply, knowing that they were loved by their three patron gods.

When King Alexander at last died, his queen, Zenobia, and the other Cynidiceans turned their tear-streaked faces skyward and built a great tomb to bring their beloved leader closer to the gods. A mighty ziggurat, it reached one hundred feet into the air, and atop it stood statues of the three gods of Cynidicea, each holding up its hands, urging Alexander's spirit onward.

As long as Cynidicea's people looked to the heavens, all was well, but in the process of expanding the sacred tomb, they also delved downward into the darkness beneath the ziggurat. There they awoke something terrible, a beast of hunger with an evil mind.

Zargon had come to life.

Despite the swords and spells of great heroes, Zargon could not be killed. The grip of its tentacles crushed the resistance of Cynidicea, and it impaled every member of the royal line upon its horn to crown itself with their blood. Only one thing could save the Cynidiceans now: surrender and sacrifice. The beast vowed that if they were supplicant before Zargon and offered their lives to him, the beast would spare the city and enable it to prosper once more.

Supplicate themselves they did, and Zargon lived up to his vile words, but the city did not truly return to its former glory. The Cynidiceans fell into hedonistic behavior, holding wild feasts celebrated with savage glee. Embarrassed by their bestial behavior when control of their faculties returned, they began to wear masks during such debauchery so that others might not know them. Eventually the masks became the faces others recognized, but by then the Cynidiceans could not even remember feeling shame.

Its fields untended, orchards gone wild, pools stagnant, and walls unguarded, Cynidicea was ripe to fall. The barbarian horde that came to claim it found insensate citizens lying in the street. The barbarians obliged them with a different kind of oblivion and razed the city in their search for wealth.

They stole little, because Cynidicea took its riches to the grave: Most of its citizens had already moved beneath the tomb to serve Zargon in the depths. There the barbarians would not go. They left behind a dead city, and the unfettered desert buried its bones.

The ziggurat is out there somewhere, too great or too terrible for the sands to swallow entirely. No doubt the Cynidiceans' wealth too remains within its bowels, though what is left of the people or of Zargon none can say for certain.

Background: Blessed of Zargon

You were born to die. You have the sign of Zargon upon your brow—a birthmark that represents his horn—and your flesh is his food. You were raised in the mad, masked society of the Lost City, your life degenerated into a haze of animal frenzy and ignorant zealotry. When the time came for you to at last meet your dark god, you felt fear and doubt for the first time. That fear gave you strength—strength enough to disobey and run.

Your flight to the surface is a poorly remembered nightmare. Your head at last cleared when you removed the mask from your pale face and raised your awestruck eyes to the sun for the first time. You wandered in a trackless wasteland for days before a band of desert nomads found you, and they were kind. They took you to a distant city and introduced you to a world you could never have imagined.

Yet in dreams you still see the golden-masked priests and the blood-red eye of the god that marked you as his own. In your head you hear Zargon's terrible voice, and in your heart you feel the bestial urges of the Lost City's perpetual carnival. To your knowledge, no sacrifice has ever escaped Zargon's maw. Surely the Cynidiceans will come for you. Surely you must some day return to the Lost City.

Zargon has marked you as his own.

Associated Skill: Dungeoneering or Endurance.

THE LOST CITY, PAST AND PRESENT

The Lost City saw its first and most famous incarnation in 1982 as a Basic D&D adventure of the same name by Tom Moldvay. The dungeon in the ziggurat was



detailed room by room as in a typical module, but the underground city of the Cynidiceans was described in broader terms. The intent was to help DMs create their own adventure in the depths, with some inspiration. And did it ever! For most people who played *The Lost City*, the dungeon in the ziggurat was only the appetizer to the

feast that was ruined Cynidicea.

The city was described in *Dragon* 315 in "Mystara: The Lost City," and an adventure in *Dungeon* 142, "Masque of Dreams," took characters to the brink of entering the ziggurat. Zargon and the Cynidiceans received 3rd Edition interpretations in the *Elder Evils*™ supplement.

Continuing the Story

If you're going to explore the Lost City, you'll need to find it first. Ancient maps roughly place it in the desert (perhaps south of some mountains and east of another still-extant realm), but unless you like desert wandering, you'll need better directions. Perhaps the barbarians who raided the place have passed down knowledge of its location. Legend says they were known as the Heldann, but do they still go by that name? Do they even exist now?

When you set out for the ruins, prepare for a long desert journey as well as the hardships involved in delving into a dungeon beneath the sands. Lots of food and water are of paramount importance, and if you expect to haul out all the treasure of the city, make sure you have a way to bring it home. Consider hiring camels and experienced desert travelers as guides who will wait for your return after you enter the ziggurat.

Once in the dungeon, be especially wary of traps. The Cynidiceans haven't been seen in the sun for hundreds of years, so they clearly didn't intend to leave the ziggurat and have probably warded it against raiders. Undead are also likely in such a place. And, if Zargon still exists, no stories say how the great beast can be killed.



The desert sands hide the lost tomb of a cursed pharaoh

PYRAMID OF AMUN-RE

Those who travel the Desert of Desolation know to avoid the Ragged Man, a thin apparition that wanders the dunes clad only in rags. This creature is the spirit of Pharaoh Amun-Re. From a distance it does not acknowledge any sight or sound, but when someone foolishly draws near, the specter suddenly clutches at that person and moans its message, not releasing the listener until it has finished.

“I am Amun-Re, son of Takosh-Re of the house of Mo-Pelar. That which you see is but my shadow, which has walked these lands for time uncounted in search of mighty heroes of valor, to plead their aid.

“In my time was I Pharaoh of this land now before you. Then, Bakar was a green and beautiful land, blessed by the gods of Heaven Westward with the wondrous spring of Athis, which gave life to our land and nurtured our crops. Yet robbers did raid the tombs of my forefathers and take from them tokens of their passage into the lands of the dead, thus keeping them from their reward after life. I swore that, at all costs, I would not fall prey to their evil deeds.

“So it was that I made mighty and terrible war upon my neighbors, plundering their lands of wealth for my own passage. I did enter a contract with a great mage to work

a mighty wonder, and, upon the sweat and blood of my people, I did build a theft-proof tomb.

“My people turned against me with bitter hatred. I not only robbed our borderlands but taxed grievously my own people. They rose up in anger, demanding their gold and gems, their lives and freedom.

“I cursed them, saying, ‘By the ruling staff and the Star Gem of Mo-Pelar, I curse you. Threaten not my life, or by them and by the holy name of Osiris, will the stopping of my heart also stop the Spring of Athis from her life-giving flow. As the river slows and dies, so shall your land wither in the wilderness. This do I swear by Osiris’s holy name and these implements of my power.’

“From the sea of upraised fists before me, rose one with a spear. The shaft sped from the darkness, and so too that night did the Spring of Athis stop its flow.

“In death, my spirit gleefully approached my pyramid. But Osiris stopped my spirit from entering that tomb, for, said he, ‘Your monument to life was to be the benefit you brought to the people under your stewardship, not this edifice of stone. As you looked only to your death in life, so shall you look only to your life in death. I am bound to fulfill your curse, for you have called it down with power in my name. But I do curse you as well, Amun-Re. You shall not enter this tomb where the implements are of your voyage to heaven until some mortal soul does despoil this place,

taking your staff of ruling and the Star Gem of Mo-Pelar from your theft-proof tomb.’

“Even have I talked with the wind in hope of help.

Uncounted seasons have passed, and my kingdom is not now to be seen in these desert lands. Of it nothing remains save for my tomb, which stands now as then, untouched by time, sands, wind, or any living one. Though many have tried to plunder my wealth, none has succeeded, and I am forbidden passage to the afterlife until one succeeds.

“My wealth is thine if thou can but best that which I have built. Remove both my staff of ruling and the Star Gem

from my tomb. So then will you gain great wealth, and so then will you release me. Follow my path to wealth or woe, to thy destiny or thy doom.”

After this Amun-Re says nothing else, but he dogs the steps of those who heard his message, pointing to someplace far away through the wasted landscape—a location that was once his home and should be his resting place. Thus do people know that the Pyramid of Amun-Re lies hidden somewhere in the sands, and that his treasures remain untouched.

PYRAMID OF AMUN-RE, PAST AND PRESENT

The adventure that puts characters on the path to the Pyramid of Amun-Re starts with them being accused of a crime they did not commit and threatened with death unless they seek out the fortress of raiders in the desert. But the threat is a little . . . quirky.

“And, whereas those persons did attain entry to said residence and did short-sheet the wizard’s bed and do all manner of petty pranks and did leave for the wizard a certain maid for an alleged date with said wizard;

“And, whereas said wizard did return to said residence with yet another wench, whereupon both the first and the second did begin a loud commotion and disturbance the like of which has never before shaken this stately court and upset the wizard to no end . . .”

Published in 1982, *Pharaoh* was the first Egyptian-themed D&D adventure. It appeared on shelves a year after *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, but that timing was coincidental. The adventure had been written and self-published a few years earlier by Laura and Tracy Hickman for locals in Utah. Soon after, a business partnership went poorly and, driven into bankruptcy, Tracy sent the modules to TSR, Inc., “so that I could buy shoes for my children.” But TSR didn’t want just the module—it wanted Tracy as well.

Pharaoh became the first in the Desert of Desolation series, which also included *Oasis of the White Palm* and *Lost Tomb of Martek*. The three adventures were collected in 1987 in the *Desert of Desolation* compilation, at which point the series was placed in the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting in the desert of Raurin.

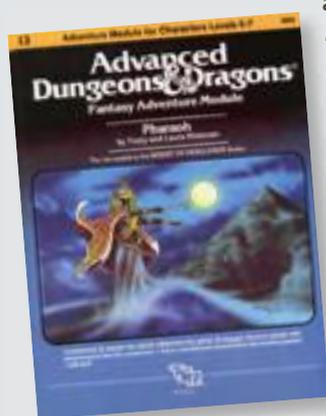
Continuing the Story

If you intend to explore the place, Amun-Re will lead you to his tomb, but first you must encounter his spirit, and then you must follow it for days or weeks to reach your goal. A magical means of producing food and water might serve you better than a dozen camels carrying your gear.

In life Amun-Re acted as a god-king, a mortal member of the pantheon that included Osiris. He was punished by that pantheon, but those gods vanished with the pharaoh’s civilization. Perhaps they took new names and still act as deities, or perhaps they died; in either case, they stopped answering the prayers of the people inhabiting the growing wasteland that became the Desert of Desolation. Despite this abandonment, some worshipers still hold the ancient sites holy. Known only as dervishes by outsiders, these people protect ruins throughout the Desert of Desolation. Since Amun-Re still seeks someone to plunder his tomb, the dervishes must be protecting it. From their point of view, the law of the gods is absolute—even after death. Osiris punished Amun-Re, and he must stay punished.

Within the pyramid, you are unlikely to find many living foes except those that are immortal or elemental. No doubt it is trapped, likely in ways meant to seal in thieves as well as lock them out. Prepare for undead monsters, and also consider magical ways to extract yourselves if things start looking grim.

If the pyramid contains a mummy (which seems a good bet) you should be concerned about mummy rot. The infection claims the lives of most victims in just a few nights and is extremely difficult to resist without magical help, so the Cure Disease ritual is essential. If you don’t have someone who can reliably perform the ritual from a book, purchase many scrolls. You’ll know when someone is infected: Healing, even from divine magic, has less effect than normal.



WHITE PLUME MOUNTAIN

*Search ye far or search ye near,
You'll find no trace of the three
Unless you follow instructions clear,
For the weapons abide with me.*

*North past forest, farm, and furrow
You must go to the feathered mound
Then down away from the sun you'll burrow—
Forget life, forget light, forget sound.*

*To rescue Wave, you must do battle
With the Beast in the Boiling Bubble.
Crost cavern vast, where chain-links rattle
Lies Whelm, past waterspouts double.*

*Blackrazor yet remains to be won
Underneath inverted ziggurat.
That garnered, think not that you're done,
For now you'll find you are caught.*

*I care not, former owners brave,
What heroes you seek to hire.
Though mighty, I'll make each one my slave
Or send him to the fire.*

—K

It happened in one night. Three of the mightiest weapons known to humanity vanished from the vaults and strongboxes of the people who claimed ownership of them. The owners scoured their homes for hidden places where the weapons might have been concealed. Neglectful guards and suspicious servants found their necks on the headman's block or in the grip of nooses. Bounty hunters filled their purses by rounding up known and suspected thieves. When the three owners discovered their shared plight, they took stock of their common foes and sent assassins to take revenge on those individuals. Still, no trace of the weapons—the hammer known as *Whelm*, the trident called *Wave*, and the infamous soul-rending sword, *Blackrazor*—appeared. Only when the owners relented and offered outlandish rewards for the weapons' return did a clue come forth.

Each former owner received a scroll upon which a poetic riddle had been written in a fine hand. It mentioned all three weapons by name and provided tantalizing hints to the weapons' locations. The con-ceited challenge of the last six lines appeared over the sign of Keraptis, an infamous wizard thought to have died more than a millennium ago. According to bards' tales, Keraptis ruled a kingdom, becoming ever more wicked and cruel as he grew in spellcasting

prowess. One day his long-suffering people rose up to depose him. Keraptis was forced to flee but could not find refuge in any land, for he had made many enemies during his time on the throne. At last he fled into a mountain, never again to emerge.

Many treasure-seekers came in answer to the posted rewards to meet with the owners, and the contents of the riddle have thus been spread far and wide—even the last six lines and the signature on the letters, which the owners often sought to hide for fear of frightening off all those who might take up the quest. They needn't have bothered with that precaution. To most people, the “feathered mound” seems to be a reference to White Plume Mountain—and that is terrifying enough.

White Plume Mountain looms over a maze of ogre-haunted moors and marshy valleys crawling with trolls. From its peak spews a great jet of water that spreads out high in the sky and falls as spray upon the mountain's eastern slopes. Smaller vents in the mountain hurl lesser columns of fog into the air, making the peak look “feathered.” Rumor has it that Dragotha, the so-called Death Dragon, soars silent and fleshless through these mists on flights from its nearby lair. And Thingizzard, Witch of the Fens, roams the damp canyons of the lowest slopes, her cackle echoing miles from the mountain's base. To make matters worse, White Plume Mountain has long been reputed to be the home of demons and other vile spirits.

Fireside tales told in whispers speak of just one entrance into the mountain other than the crater at its peak: the Wizard's Mouth. It is through this cave that the mountain breathes. A great sucking wind flows into the darkness, and a few faltering heartbeats later, a blast of fog moans out. Assuming that Wizard's Mouth was just a fanciful name for the cave, people have made up all sorts of stories about it, but in fact White Plume Mountain might be the very place to which Keraptis fled 1,300 years ago. Now, it seems, he yet lives and hides in the mountain with the three treasures—or at least, someone wants people to think so. There's only one way to find out the truth.

White Plume Quests

Adventurers can gain far more for braving White Plume Mountain than the rewards posted by the weapon's owners. The following additional quests might provide compelling reasons for venturing into the Wizard's Mouth.

Whelm's Savior: *Whelm* is a mighty warhammer crafted by dwarves, dedicated to the defeat of their enemies by a passionate warrior of Moradin. Surely it does not belong in the hands of those who locked it away in a vault, much less the wizard who has now

WHITE PLUME MOUNTAIN, PAST AND PRESENT

“*White Plume Mountain* was written as a sample document to persuade TSR to hire me as a game designer. I just plundered all the dungeons I’d designed over the previous four years, took out the best bits, and cobbled it all together. It worked; TSR hired me, bought the scenario, and published it as a module without changing a word. I’m a little embarrassed to this day by *Blackrazor*, inasmuch as it’s such a blatant rip-off of Elric’s *Stormbringer*; I would not have put it into the scenario if I ever thought it might be published.”

— Lawrence Schick, from an interview with James Maliszewski on Grogardia.blogspot.com

White Plume Mountain’s odd funhouse mix of elements made it a popular adventure after its publication in 1979, despite the fact that the characters never face Keraptis, the nominal villain of the dungeon. Nor do they learn why he stole the items from their unnamed and mysterious original owners, or why he lured adventurers to come and get them. The assumption, which has proved largely correct over the years, is that once characters get their hands on the three weapons and escape *White Plume Mountain*, the players don’t really care.

Lawrence Schick’s original adventure was revised and expanded in 1981, and eighteen years later it received a sequel in the form of *Return to White Plume Mountain*. In 2005, fans of the original could get a version updated to the 3.5 rules, and since then the elements of *White Plume Mountain* have made sporadic appearances. The 4th Edition incarnations of *Wave* and *Whelm* appeared in *The Plane Below* and *Open Grave*, respectively, and the Thrall of *Blackrazor* was a miniature in the *Unhallowed™* set of *Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures*.

Continuing the Story

Before you run off in pursuit of *Wave*, *Whelm*, and *Blackrazor*, it pays to learn something about their former owners. Just who are these individuals who once claimed them, and how did they come by such legendary items? Which is worth more, the rewards or the weapons? Are the owners likely to pay? If you do not relinquish such treasures, how long will you have to keep looking over your shoulder and watching the shadows for the glint of an assassin’s blade?

Stealth is your best asset as you approach the mountain. Even the smoke of a cook fire might draw monsters from miles around in the moors, or pique the curiosity of *Dragotha* or *Thingizzard*. *Keraptis* will know soon enough once you are inside the mountain, after all—if he does yet live. The wizard (or whoever sent the notes to the owners) has some plan, perhaps one that requires heroic individuals to serve as slaves, so you should prepare by obtaining ways to guard your mind against domination.

If *Keraptis* still exists, he might be a lich, a vampire, or some other sentient undead with spellcasting ability. Arm yourself against such creatures as a precaution, but remember that the wizard could also have living minions of any sort.



stolen it. It belongs with dwarves, and dwarves should reclaim it.

Blackrazor’s Promise: *Blackrazor* is rumored to have many powers, but the one that interests you is its supposed ability to destroy souls. Such hunger might sound evil, but is allowing even greater evils to roam the world any better? With such a sword, you could slay vampires easily and destroy liches without fussing over a phylactery. You might even use the weapon against *Keraptis* himself. Who knows what other deeds you might accomplish with such a weapon? You might destroy the supposedly immortal *Zargon* of the Lost City (page 102) or put an end to the legendary *Acererak* in the Tomb of Horrors (page 108).

Wave’s Tyranny: The trident *Wave* has one purpose: forcing others to acknowledge the primacy of

the sea. All the works of elf, dwarf, human, and more are sand castles built on a beach between tides. Soon the sea will reclaim all, and the empires of the deep shall once again reign supreme. *Wave* might be the key to bringing this apocalypse to pass. It has championed this cause in the name of *Melora* and also in the name of primordials such as *Solkara the Crushing Wave*. In the hands of the faithful, *Wave* deals death or disfigurement to all who refuse to submit. This weapon could do no harm while it was secreted in its owner’s vault, but the one who holds it now taunts challengers to come and claim the weapon. Destroying the weapon is the only way to be certain it stays out of the hands of those who would drown the world.

TOMB OF HORRORS

Day 123

Much has happened, and my heart is sorely heavy; we lost Tiefon yesterday. Today, Grunther lost an arm.

A damnable patch of green slime covered Tiefon head to foot in but an eyeblink. The dwarf didn't even have a chance to scream before he was rendered into so much putrescent plasma. We couldn't even recover his belongings in the mess. Never has a companion been lost to me so suddenly or so completely; we don't even have a body for Sather to restore the soul's connection to.

To compound matters, Grunther the big warrior and Falon's friend stuck his arm where he shouldn't have during one of our backtracks. With a horrible scream he pulled it back, but it was completely gone, cut as if by a razor. . . .

Day 124

Disaster seems to dog our every step now. It seems that with every chamber we win through by using our wits as our guide, we pay the price of another life. It is Aron to whom I allude. The archer was felled by a strange gas, and before we could retrieve him, a huge, magical juggernaut

on stone rollers issued forth from a hidden door and rolled over the supine elf, crushing him to a pulp. When the gas cleared and the juggernaut retreated, we recovered the body. Sather tried her best, but the damage was too extensive; Aron's life had permanently fled from him. Sather was heartbroken. I think she and Aron were very close, closer than the rest of us ever realized. We composed the remains as best we could, but Sather sits and stares now, and the rest of us worry about her. We shall rest another day before we attempt to persuade her to venture onward.

Day 127

How arrogant of me to think that with but a hop, skip, and jump I should have delivered into my hands the singular material necessary to move on to the lost city and fortress which I seek. I should have done more research, I should have been more careful, I should not have brought my friends here to die.

—From *Journal of the Tomb*, by Desatysso

The great mage Desatysso held sway over the mountains, using his wizardry to subjugate the many giants that plodded over their peaks and crawled through

TOMB OF HORRORS, PAST AND PRESENT

Gary Gygax designed *Tomb of Horrors* for the first Origins Game Fair in 1975. "There were several very expert players in my campaign, and this was meant as yet another challenge to their skill—and the persistence of their theretofore-invincible characters. Specifically, I had in mind foiling Rob Kuntz's PC, Robilar, and Ernie Gygax's PC, Tenser." The adventure quickly became infamous among D&D players for its deadly tricks. It didn't matter how tough or skilled you were; if you weren't cautious and clever, the dungeon got its due.

In 1998, Bruce R. Cordell's *Return to the Tomb of Horrors* took players back to the legendary dungeon. In it, the adventure picks up many years after Acererak is presumed to have been destroyed by adventurers going through the original *Tomb of Horrors* adventure. Gary Gygax wrote a foreword for the product, lauding the new adventure as "demanding" and "thrilling."

Acererak and the Tomb of Horrors have reappeared many times in the years since. In the 3rd Edition of the D&D game, Acererak made a notable appearance as a vestige that could be contacted by members of a class known as binders. Statistics for Acererak in 4th Edition appear in *Open Grave*.

The ultimate 4th Edition expression of the Tomb of Horrors is the *Tomb of Horrors* book by Ari Marmell and Scott Fitzgerald Gray. This adventure takes its cue from *Return to the Tomb of Horrors*, building upon the his-

tory established by that adventure. Now Skull City is in ruins, and the tomb of Acererak awaits new victims to expose to its horrors, both known and unknown.

Continuing the Story

What can prepare you for the most deadly dungeon of them all? A healthy dose of caution. If something looks like a trap, it is—and it probably contains another trap you didn't anticipate. If you see some mystery and are tempted to reach out and grab it, don't.

Arm yourselves with magical means of exploration and interaction that function at a distance so you won't be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Simple powers such as *mage hand* can be helpful in exploring the dungeon, and the Hand of Fate ritual can help you choose between options—even if they're both bad. Of course, you shouldn't leave behind mundane means of safe exploration such as a ten-foot pole or a set of thieves' tools. You might want to stash several in a *bag of holding* or a *handy haversack*. Make sure to distribute useful items such as potions among the party members, and bring along multiple sources of healing; if the cleric is suddenly disintegrated while carrying all your supplies, it won't be long before everyone else ends up dead. Finally, take common-sense precautions against undead—a likely sort of foe, considering Skull City and Acererak's reputation. Items that grant you resistance to necrotic damage might well be helpful.



The Tomb of Horrors still awaits new prey

their caves. When the giants thundered down into the hills and laid waste to all before their avalanche rush, people in the area knew that Desatysso was dead. But some time passed before anyone learned the truth of how he died.

An embittered companion of Desatysso survived the disaster that befell the mage and kept his journal hidden for many years. When the accursed diary was at last freed from her age-gnarled grip, others discovered that Desatysso had gone into the Tomb of Horrors armed with special knowledge of its old master, the lich Acererak.

Who has not heard the legends of the Tomb of Horrors, crypt of a hundred heroes? Who does not know the name of its thrice-dead master, once half-demon and half-human, then a lich, then a demilich, and finally destroyed once and for all on the cusp of achieving mastery over undeath? Who has not feared Skull City, built by necromancers around the Tomb of Horrors, home to as many of the dead as the living? These are the tales everyone hears, but where does the truth lie?

Desatysso ventured into the tomb long after the lich was supposedly vanquished. Although he failed in his quest, others took up his notes and the clues he left behind. By then, Skull City had grown up around the Tomb of Horrors. Constructed by necromancers hungry for scraps of Acererak's knowledge, the city rose in secret. It grew steadily as it attracted first spellcasters, then mercenaries and disreputable merchants, and eventually all manner of people willing to walk the streets with the undead.

Those who followed Desatysso's clues succeeded in infiltrating Skull City and entered the Tomb of Horrors. Although some died, other heroes succeeded in discovering Acererak's plot to put himself in control of all undead. For the third time, Acererak perished. Affairs in Skull City spun out of control with the revelation of Acererak's plot and his failure, and the city broke apart in violent infighting. The Tomb of Horrors once again was an abandoned ruin.

These facts any bard can tell you, but they do not explain why lights once again flicker in the ruins of Skull City at night. Nor can they tell why copies of Desatysso's journal appear on the shelves of booksellers without anyone noticing who put them there. Black-cowled wizards huddle with strangers who seem to sit in their own shadows, and the name Acererak is heard to pass their lips. Has the thrice-dead wizard again risen from his grave? Will the Tomb of Horrors, long thought to have been looted, once again lure bold fools with untold treasures? And if so, what new devilry has Acererak dreamed up?

Backgrounds and Feats

Dragon 371 presents a wealth of material for connecting your character to the Tomb of Horrors, in an article called "Legacy of Acererak." In it you'll find backgrounds and feats that you can use to flesh out your character's history and his or her affiliation with the tomb, Skull City, or the strange cabal of Acererak worshipers known as the Bleak Academy.

TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL

Sometimes they thundered in like a storm, their horses churning roads into slurries of sword-spilt blood. Sometimes they crept among the people, their corruption undetected and as contagious as plague. When they came to a village seeking wealth or goods, none could resist, nor hope. When they called a name or pointed someone out, people had to choose: Surrender, and thereby gain a few more days' breath; or resist, which meant swift death for the lucky and days of torture before execution for the rest.

Unknown multitudes met their doom in the Temple of Elemental Evil. Children went to the fire. Men were drowned. Women were sacrificed to blackest evil. If you were chosen to be a slave, those fates hung over you for however long you pleased your masters, be they the ochre-robed priests or the thugs who served them.

The Cult of the Elder Elemental Eye spared no one. Nobles and peasants alike saw their homes burned, families murdered, and friends taken. The only defense was conversion—but mere words would not suffice. To protect yourself, you had to join in the villainy by robbing neighbors and enslaving friends. If you converted and your relatives did not, as a dreadful test of your faith you had to bring them forward for sacrifice.

Such evil could not long be tolerated by the neighbors of the temple, and so armies assembled to fight the cult and destroy its works. Yet the cultists had more than mortal forces: Elemental beings and demonic creatures fought alongside them.

Their losses were terrible, but the forces of good ultimately triumphed. With magic and might, the armies tore down the walls guarding the Temple of Elemental Evil and drove back its greatest defender, a demon of rot and ruin. This creature, unable to be slain, was bound in the dungeons below the temple and sealed in with magic. All the forces involved signed an accord never to open the place again—despite the wealth of a nation having been locked away with the demon. With the cult vanquished and its demonic leader imprisoned, the armies of good left to bind their wounds and bury their dead.

As the lands around the temple recovered from their enslavement and the war for their freedom, the defeat of the temple seemed to invigorate the realm. Crops grew more fruitful and animals fatter. Wells long thought putrid or dry filled with clear water. People did not forget the horrors, but they could reflect upon them as something from the past.

That was many years ago. Now, bandits roam the roads and mercenaries demand money to protect travelers and villages, but the difference between them is sometimes just a mask. People once again fear their neighbors. And the quiet sounds in the shadows could be ochre robes rustling.

Background: Cult Survivor

You were young when the Cult of the Elder Elemental Eye held sway over all the surrounding lands, but not too young to remember. How could you forget? Your parents were taken during the last days before the war.

When the armies of the surrounding lands rode through the streets of your village, pennants flying as they drove your oppressors before them, you were swept up in their wake and ready to spill blood. But your uncle held you back. He took the dagger from your hand and bade you stay still. You were not ready to fight, and he would not allow you to die so soon after you came into his care.

Your uncle was a simple man of the fields and market, and he would have stayed as well, but your bravery shamed him. Bearing your father's sword and your mother's shield, he joined the army to fight the cult. Word of victory returned, but your uncle did not. Nor did you ever see your parents again.

Your aunt raised you and sought to protect you from the world. She thought that if she could keep you away from violence and hide from you the truth about the cult and the temple, you might somehow avoid being hurt by such things. But her efforts only inflamed your desire to know more and to be ready for the next battle. You often slipped away to stand in the shadow of the temple, searching through the weeds and rubble of the battlefield for your parents' sword and shield. You wonder if your mother and father are still alive, slaves locked behind the temple's doors.

Now bandits again rove the roads, and the village elders whisper that the old sense of terror has returned. If the cult is back, the temple is the source—you're sure of that. And this time you're ready to fight.

Associated Skill: Arcana, Athletics, or Religion.

Background: Former Cult Sympathizer

You have done terrible things, acts that still have you waking in a cold sweat more than a decade later. You had killed before and you have killed since, but you remember everything about each person you were forced to execute or enslave for the cult: the color of frightened eyes, the trails traced by tears on upturned faces, brave last words, heart-wrenching pleas and screams, even the sudden warmth of spit on your face.

TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL, PAST AND PRESENT

In 1979, TSR Inc. published a slim adventure entitled *The Village of Hommlet*, which detailed a small farming village, its inhabitants, and a nearby moat house populated by evil creatures. This adventure was originally intended as the first part of a larger series culminating in the exploration of the newly repopulated Temple of Elemental Evil. The temple didn't see print for six long years, until it was presented as part of a 128-page "superadventure" named *The Temple of Elemental Evil*. This book included a chapter that updated and revised *The Village of Hommlet*, gathering the entire story line between two covers.

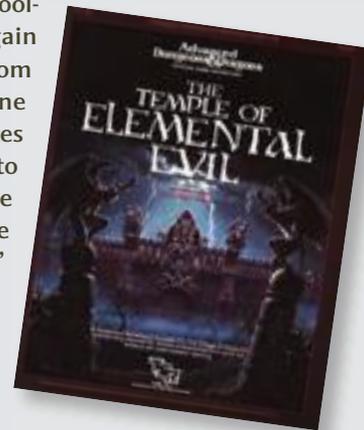


Over the years, Hommlet and the temple have reappeared in a novel, a computer game, and even another superadventure: *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* (published in 2001 and set years after the original). The 4th Edition of the D&D game refers to the Temple of

Elemental Evil many times, including two different adventures that take characters back to Hommlet and its moat house: one created for the Origins Game Fair in 2008 and the other as a DM reward for RPGA™ players. Zuggtmoy, the demonic ultimate villain of the Temple of Elemental Evil, appears with 4th Edition statistics in the *Demonomicon*™ supplement, and the Cult of the Elder Elemental Eye is discussed in *The Plane Below*™ and *Heroes of the Elemental Chaos*™.

Continuing the Story

Stories of the Temple of Elemental Evil that one can hear today describe all sorts of horrors working on behalf of the cultists: elementals, undead, demons, oozes, and more. Preparing for any one kind of foe would thus be foolish, but you can gain some advantage from this knowledge. One reason that the forces of good were able to defeat the Cult of the Elder Elemental Eye was that the cultists' forces were divided among the four basic elements, as well as another faction loyal to the demon. This division led to rivalry and suspicion among the groups, allowing subterfuge to set one element against another or against those loyal to the demon. Even if such divisions don't exist within the temple today, you might open up old wounds and thus inflame your enemies' latent hate for one another.



Whatever foes you might face, you can at least prepare for the environments in the dungeons. An area devoted to elemental fire will obviously be hot, so take along precautions such as *potions of fire resistance*. Similarly, the likely presence of water in an area suggests the efficacy of a *Water Breathing* ritual. The ability to fly or a *feather fall* effect could be useful in an airy dungeon. And the magical ability to dig quickly or meld into stone could be invaluable in a place that highlights elemental earth.

You wonder every day if you should have been as courageous as they were—if you should have rejected the Cult of the Elder Elemental Eye and died in the terrible dungeons beneath the temple. Is life worth living with so much blood on your hands? Can you even consider your desperate existence a life? When you encounter anyone new, you search your memory, frantically hoping that the face is not one you recognize. At the same time, something inside you burns to be called out for your crimes. At least then the torment might finally end.

Yet each time you consider giving in, you find the strength to stay alive and stay hidden. You're not really strong, though—you're just afraid. What else would you be willing to do to avoid death? If the time again comes when you must choose between what is right and what is safe, will you add more faces to the host that haunts you, or will you accept their judgment in the afterlife?

Associated Skill: Bluff, Insight, or Intimidate.

GATES OF FIRESTORM PEAK

The Firefestival might be canceled this year, and at the worst possible time. This month-long annual celebration, held in the village of Longbridge, has become famous over the years. During this festival, people try to outdo one another with their enthusiasm for firebrand battles, fireworks, and candle displays. Of course, no celebration can be complete without food and drink, and the Firefestival is when the locals break out their fire brandy, smoked ales, and spiciest foods. Even sweet treats set the mouth aflame, with candied hot peppers and cinnamon delights prepared specially for the occasion. All this activity occurs in the shadow of the famous Firestorm Peak, the mountain that the festival celebrates.

Firestorm Peak has two claims to fame. Once every twenty-seven years, flames burn across its highest reaches, called down from the sky by an unknown magic and raging afterward for a month regardless of the weather. The mountain also hides some secret behind huge, rune-encrusted doors of glass as hard as steel, and nothing can lever them open or break the mountain around them. They open by themselves when the fires burn, and close again as the flames die out twenty-eight days later.

Nearly twenty-seven years have passed since the last appearance of the firestorm. That means that this

year the comet called the Dragon's Tear will again appear in the sky, its red tail arcing over the mountaintop, and Firestorm Peak will explode anew with supernatural flames and send them roaring toward the stars. Anticipation and enthusiasm for this event began to build more than a decade ago, and this year should have seen the biggest and best Firefestival ever—but that won't happen.

People in nearby towns have decided not to go to Longbridge this year. They believe the village is cursed, and the people of Longbridge grudgingly agree. For some time now, cows' milk has been coming out sour. Chickens, when they lay at all, produce only soft-shelled eggs filled with blood. Deer have turned upon their hunters and gored them to death. Stories tell of long-domicile animals turned fiendish overnight, driving some townsfolk to drown their pets. Even people have been affected: Tension has led to short tempers and frequent fights, and manic violence erupts without any obvious cause. The gallows in Longbridge had to be expanded to keep up with the number of convicted criminals, but the purpling bodies swaying there have served as little deterrent. Things just seem to be getting worse.

As the time of the Firefestival draws nearer, people watch the skies for the first crimson hint of the Dragon's Tear. Will it bring weal or woe? Can the sight of fire on the mountain bring back some hope to Longbridge, or will the flames be the signal for some new villainy to begin?

GATES OF FIRESTORM PEAK, PAST AND PRESENT

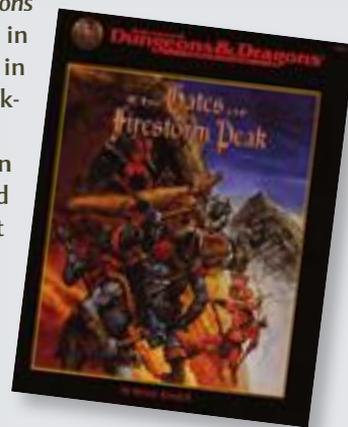
The Gates of Firestorm Peak, by Bruce R. Cordell, hasn't been revisited throughout the history of the game as have other infamous dungeons. It appeared just once, as a 2nd Edition AD&D® adventure. Yet that adventure had an enormous impact on the D&D game, for it was the birthplace of the Far Realm. Before that time, D&D had no concept of a plane of alien geometry and maddening entities, but today the Far Realm has been firmly established in the cosmology of the game.

Continuing the Story

What dangers lurk within the mountain today none can say, but the runes on the gates and their construction hint at eladrin origin. Eladrin do not typically build tunnel complexes, so the location must have been meant to contain a dark secret or imprison something foul. The link between the Dragon's Tear comet and the opening of the gates suggests star pact magic, an idea supported by the fact that the last person known to have entered Firestorm Peak was a warlock called Madreus (known as "the butcher of Havenburg" for dark deeds

done in that city). Perhaps the Dragon's Tear is an unrecognized member of the host of weird constellations named in the *Revelations of Melech* (described in "Wish upon a Star" in *Dragon* 366), thus linking it to the Far Realm.

Warlock magic can be difficult to defend against, but star pact magic tends to deal radiant, cold, or psychic damage. If beings of the Far Realm are involved, having protection against psychic damage would be prudent. Also, since the strange powers of warlocks and Far Realm beings often control the minds of their targets or otherwise affect their victims repeatedly, having ways to gain extra saving throws could be important.



Ice Iron

The glyph-covered gates of Firestorm Peak are made of nephelium, also known as “ice iron.” This unusual metal has the properties of iron when forged, but like gold it does not rust and, amazingly, it is as transparent as glass. For years people have collected small amounts of ice iron from streams around Firestorm Peak, particularly from the Quickstep River that flows through Longbridge. Indeed, most of the communities on the river arose from the presence of prospectors panning for flecks of the precious metal in the shallowest spots.

For many years, ice iron made this area rich. The metal was impossible to obtain by mining—no one could see any trace of it in the surrounding rock—and panning for it was far more difficult than panning for gold, since it is nearly invisible in water. These factors made ice iron fabulously rare, and it fetched twice the value of gold by weight. Those who purchased it were typically wealthy lords who used the metal for small windows in their fortresses. Today the Quickstep River has been panned out, and ice iron is almost never found in its bed. If any more of the stuff exists, it might lie beyond the gates of Firestorm Peak—and in fact, the gates themselves are made of it. So far, though, the gates have proven impervious to any attempt to break them or free them from the surrounding rock, and none who have passed beyond when they opened during the firestorm have ever returned.

Background: Longbridge Local

You grew up in Longbridge during the last days of the ice iron rush and can remember running back and forth across the river, pounding the boards of the Long Bridge with your tiny feet, rushing to bring grains of the clear metal to the assayer. One day, in your haste to “quick step across the Quickstep” (as your father used to say), you dropped the bag of hard-won metal and watched it plunge into the river through a gap in the bridge. No punishment from your parents could match the terror and guilt you felt as you saw your family’s fortune slip away.

Now the future of your family and many others in Longbridge is more uncertain than ever. The ice iron rush is over, and the curse that besets the village seems like it will never end. You’ve seen good people—even close friends you grew up with—become desperate, go bad, and finally swing from the gallows. The town was a happier place when the metal was here. But no amount of panning in the river or digging in the hills has turned up even a flake of ice iron for as long as the curse has been active.

Yet the gates of Firestorm Peak are made of the stuff. Clearly, that fact is significant, but in exactly what way remains to be determined. You’ve made a study of all the legends and history, so you know the gates are invulnerable when they’re shut. But what about when they’re open? Even if they are still invulnerable, there could be more ice iron inside the mountain. You know one sure way to find out.

Associated Skill: Arcana or History.



The path ahead is unmistakable . . . when the only other way to go is straight down

Dungeoneers' Tools

Adventurers who plumb the depths need to understand that, unlike an aboveground expedition, a dungeon delve promises little hope of replenishing or resupplying. Subterranean adventurers must rely only on what they bring with them, which makes planning—and packing—gear for the trip as important as keeping one's weapons in fighting shape.

In addition to the core rulebooks, the *Mordenkainen's Magnificent Emporium* supplement includes an extensive collection of adventuring gear and alchemical items, which is augmented by the entries here.

ADVENTURING GEAR

A piece of equipment doesn't need to be a magic item to be useful. The most mundane tool can be a lifesaver in the right situation.

ADVENTURING GEAR

Item	Price	Weight
Artisan's tools	5 gp	5 lb.
Delver's kit	40 gp	28 lb.
Crowbar	2 gp	4 lb.
Iron spikes (10)	1 gp	5 lb.
Manacles, iron	10 gp	2 lb.
Miner's helmet	10 gp	3 lb.
Sacks (2)	1 gp	1 lb.
Surveyor's gear	15 gp	5 lb.
Ten-foot pole	1 gp	8 lb.
Drill	10 gp	2 lb.
Flotation bladder	2 gp	1 lb.
Hacksaw	5 gp	1 lb.
Lantern, bull's-eye	12 gp	2 lb.
Listening cone	8 sp	1 lb.
Mirror	10 gp	1 lb.
Rubbing kit	5 gp	1 lb.
Ruby lenses	25 gp	3 lb.
Shovel	2 gp	8 lb.
Tongs	3 gp	2 lb.
Vial bandolier	6 gp	1 lb.

Artisan's Tools: This collection of simple hand tools, nails, and a measuring stick is often seen in the home of a city-dwelling crafter, but adventurers would do well to take a set of these tools along. With them you can perform minor repairs, fashion basic wooden or metal objects, or dismantle simple locks.

Delver's Kit: This kit includes a crowbar, ten iron spikes, iron manacles, a miner's helmet, two sacks, surveyor's gear, and a ten-foot pole.

Crowbar: Wielding this metal pry bar gives you a +2 bonus to Strength checks to break open locked doors or containers.

Miner's Helmet: You can attach a lantern, a sunrod, or some other light source to the forehead reflector of this headgear to provide hands-free illumination.

Iron Manacles: When you put these shackles on a helpless or otherwise incapacitated creature, that creature is restrained until it escapes or is freed. The Acrobatics check to escape from these restraints is against a hard DC of the creature's level.

The Strength check to break the manacles is against a DC that depends on the quality of the manacles, whether iron (DC 24) or adamantite (DC 31).

Iron Spikes: Hammering one of these blunt, wide metal wedges between a door and its frame requires a standard action and adds 5 to the DC of checks to open the door. If nothing but a spike is holding a door shut, the base DC to open it is 15. Spiking a door is noisy; each time you drive in a spike, creatures within 20 squares can make a Perception check with a +5 bonus to hear you.

Sack: This sturdy burlap sack holds up to 50 pounds and has a volume of 1½ cubic feet.

Surveyor's Gear: With this plumb line, measuring chain with pins, and slate for recording notes, you gain a +2 bonus to Perception checks to search for secret doors or hidden rooms, but using the gear takes at least 5 minutes.

Ten-Foot Pole: Prodding dangerous-looking things with a ten-foot pole lets you trigger many traps from the safety of 2 squares away.

Drill: This handheld tool comes with six tough metal bits. A drill can bore a hole through wood, stone, and even some metals with enough time and effort. A typical bit can drill through 6 inches of stone or 2 inches of iron (a process requiring up to 6 hours) before it breaks or its cutting power is exhausted. Each additional set of bits costs another 10 gp.

Flotation Bladder: The risk of drowning in a cold underground lake leads some adventurers to carry these containers of cured animal hide. A character can blow into a flotation bladder to inflate it and then hang onto it to keep his or her head above water. If you're using a flotation bladder, failing an Athletics check to swim by 5 or more leaves you treading water instead of sinking.

Hacksaw: This thin-bladed saw can cut through tough material, even metal, although doing so can be quite slow. Harder materials dull the blade quickly, so a hacksaw is best used to cut thin or small objects. A single hacksaw blade can cut through a 1-inch-thick piece of iron (or larger objects of softer materials, at the DM's discretion) in up to 2 hours, before it breaks or its cutting power is exhausted. Each additional blade costs another 5 gp.

USING EQUIPMENT EFFECTIVELY

Gear is good. If a piece of equipment wasn't important for some reason already, you wouldn't bother to bring it along. That said, you can get more out of your tools by being both creative and systematic in your thinking about them.

Innovate: Many kinds of gear are so specialized that they don't lend themselves to being used in new ways, but many others have versatility that's waiting to be put to use. Need a temporary container for a small amount of liquid? Close off one end of your listening cone and fill it up. Think about what's included in the surveyor's gear that comes with a delver's kit, not just in terms of the bonus to Perception checks but with an eye toward other uses for those chains and that piece of slate. Your DM might not give you a bonus or some other game benefit every time you try to use a tool in a nonstandard way, but there are other ways to reward this sort of creativity.

Organize: Being organized is more than a matter of lugging around as much gear as you can carry. The more different kinds of gear you have, the more you need to care about how you store each item on your person or transport it—in case you need something in a hurry. One tip: Hang your crowbar from your belt rather than stowing it in your pack. That way, when something relieves you of your weapon, you have an impromptu club close at hand.

Lantern, Bull's-Eye: A bull's-eye lantern is equipped with a lens that enables it to project a beam of bright light 2 squares wide out to 10 squares. This way, you can illuminate long hallways without lighting up the whole area.

Listening Cone: Put the mouth of this cone of pressed iron against a flat surface and place your ear against its flattened tip to amplify the sounds you might hear beyond. This item grants a +2 bonus to Perception checks to listen through doors and walls.

Mirror: The finest mirrors are made of silvered glass and are prohibitively costly, so most adventurers favor these less expensive handheld disks of polished metal. A mirror can let you safely look around corners without being seen, avoid the direct gaze of a medusa, or reflect light to signal distant allies (or to lure enemies).

Rubbing Kit: The materials in this scroll case enable you to transfer an image of ancient runes or carvings onto a different surface to be deciphered later. The case contains several thin sheets of parchment and a stick of soft charcoal. After placing a piece of parchment over the surface to be copied, rub



The right tools make dungeoneering quicker and safer

the charcoal against it while applying gentle pressure. With a standard action, you can make a rubbing covering 1 square foot. One kit contains enough material for ten such rubbings.

Ruby Lenses: These red glass inserts let you reduce a lantern's brightness without limiting the area it illuminates. The red glow is easier on the eyes, and it doesn't attract as much attention as the bright light of an unfiltered flame. The light that passes through a ruby lens is dim, but its radius is unchanged.

Shovel: With this sturdy tool you can dig through deep, dense, or unappetizing material to locate treasure (or bury your hard-won prizes for security), scoop up small objects that might be dangerous or unpleasant to handle, or clobber an enemy in a pinch.

Tongs: These foot-long metal pincers are similar to those used in smithies. With them, you can manipulate objects at times when using your hands is too risky, such as when you're reaching into a scalding brazier, an unknown liquid, or a dark hole.

Vial Bandolier: Stitched onto this well-crafted leather shoulder harness are ten padded holsters that can hold doses of potions, poisons, and elixirs, ensuring easy access while cushioning them against accidental breakage.

ALCHEMICAL ITEMS

Dungeoneers have developed many recipes for items to assist them in their expeditions. Traded around taverns or sold in outfitter's shops, these alchemical items give explorers unique advantages in tricky situations.

Reading the Table

The alchemical formulas used to create the items in this section have three common characteristics, all summarized on the table.

Key Skills: You must have training in at least one of the indicated skills to use a particular formula.

Market Price: What you pay to purchase the formula (which can also be thought of as the recipe).

Creation Time: How long it takes to produce one dose or application of the alchemical item.

ALCHEMICAL FORMULAS

Name	Key Skills	Market Price	Creation Time
Aboleth slime	Arcana, Dungeoneering, Nature	4,500 gp	1 hour
Longbreath	Healing, Nature	160 gp	30 minutes
Pacification dust	Dungeoneering, Nature	200 gp	30 minutes
Phantom ink	Arcana, Dungeoneering, Thievery	70 gp	30 minutes
Stone eater	Arcana, Dungeoneering, Thievery	700 gp	1 hour
Violet phosphor	Arcana, Nature	70 gp	30 minutes

Item Categories

Each alchemical item in this section has a category that defines how the item is used or its general effect.

Oil: Oils are applied to other objects (typically weapons), granting those objects temporary properties or powers.

Volatile: An item of this category explodes or expands when shattered or broken, often dealing damage by the creation of a specific type of energy, such as acid, cold, fire, or lightning.

Poison: A poison is a toxin that hampers or harms a creature.

Other: Some items create miscellaneous effects that don't fall into one of the above categories. These have no designation other than "Alchemical Item."

ITEM DESCRIPTIONS

For convenience, the formula cost of each of the alchemical items in this section is repeated in its statistics block. The other gold piece values represent the cost of the components (or ingredients) needed to create the substance for a single application.

Aboleth Slime

This revolting goo is an alchemical concentration of the aberrant poisons in aboleths' mucus, which must be harvested from the foul pools in which the creatures dwell. Splashing aboleth slime over a living creature brings it spasms of pain as its form twists uncontrollably. The process of collecting the disgusting stuff is exceedingly hazardous, making this formula both hard to find and very expensive.

Aboleth Slime Level 15+ Uncommon

This cloudy sludge racks your enemy's body with pain and unwelcome transformation.

Lvl 15	1,000 gp	Lvl 25	25,000 gp
Lvl 20	5,000 gp	Lvl 30	125,000 gp

Alchemical Item: Poison **Formula Cost:** 4,500 gp

Key Skill: Arcana, Dungeoneering, **Time:** 1 hour
or Nature

Master of the Dungeon

When *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* started, it used “referee” (a term originating with the war games that were the ancestors of roleplaying games) to refer to what we now call the Dungeon Master. Today, many roleplaying games use words such as “narrator,” “director,” or “storyteller” to indicate how the rules of narrative shape the flow of the game as opposed to the rules of a simulated world.

So, should you be a heartless referee enforcing the rules of a cruel world? Or are you a flexible storyteller, softening the game’s threat to let the heroes’ exploits reach a dramatically satisfying ending?

Either. Or both. Plenty of old-school dungeons reinforced the cold, hard facts of an adventurer’s life. But the game has always put fun at the table above adherence to the rules. Neither kind of play is right or wrong, as long as everybody’s on the same page.

Your group might gravitate toward either extreme, or fall somewhere in the middle. Have a discussion regarding what style of play everyone favors. It’s okay to run a no-holds-barred meat grinder if that’s what the players expect. The players won’t have much fun, though, if you give them no warning before your dungeon chews up characters into which they have poured significant time and effort. As always, you should adjust your DMing style to conform to your players’ expectations.

Nasty in Your Narrative: The most story-focused games of deep roleplaying, full of sessions when “we never rolled the dice once,” can still have a touch of ruthlessness. Think of when a character you loved in a movie, a book, or a TV series died abruptly. Done right, such a moment can be riveting and meaningful. Done wrong, it is an exercise in hair-pulling frustration. You should always feel free to let the chips fall where they may—death can be random and sudden—but avoid arbitrary affronts to the reality of the game. Falling in lava is unfortunate, but a goblin’s arrow mysteriously dealing four times its normal damage is just unfair.

Compassion on the Crawl: In like fashion, a hard-core dungeon crawl can be reshaped by an unexpected injection of old-fashioned drama. When a party accustomed to fighting ogres and spotting

killer traps comes upon a lost child in a dungeon, the players might expect ambush or deceit. But if the child really is a victim of circumstance, how will the adventurers handle it? Can a hardened, pragmatic crew feel sympathy for an innocent and decide to escort that individual to safety, even if they know that doing so might put them in danger?

Advice and Tools

This chapter examines a number of ways to craft an interesting dungeon—both in the construction and in the playing.

Involving the Characters: Delving through a dungeon’s dank tunnels needs to be meaningful and interesting. If a character has a stake in what’s happening, his or her player will be more immersed in what’s going on. This section shows how to connect the characters’ concerns to what’s happening underground, in the form of adventure seeds for each of the themes in Chapter 1. It continues with some broad-based advice on how to get the characters interacting with the environment through exploration and puzzle solving.

Creating an Underdark Adventure: The scope and variety of the Underdark distinguish this underground realm from other types of dungeons. The advice in this section is about capturing the feel of traveling in the Underdark, and fitting your plots and battles to this environment. You can use the “An Underdark Trek” skill challenge to play out the trials the heroes must face as they traverse its caverns.

Dungeon Makers: Dwarves and minotaurs don’t build their underground lairs the same way. You can add creature flavor to your dungeons based on who or what made them. This section explores the features typically found in the dungeons of various races and groups, with descriptions of specific features you can build on when you design your own work.

Special Rewards: This section describes scrolls of power, which enable characters to wield the magic of the gods with memorable spells such as *power word kill* and *wish*. It also includes a few special companions the adventurers might encounter in the dungeon.



Involving the Characters

When the adventurers take their first steps into the dungeon, you need ways to keep them moving forward. This section discusses how to customize your dungeon to draw both characters and players deeper into the story of your adventure.

THEMES AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

A player's choice of theme and background says a great deal about his or her character's goals and motivations—sometimes more so than race or class. A theme shouts at the DM, “This is what my character wants to care about in our adventures!”

A good adventure should feature multiple ways to engage the players on this level. For example, an adventure that starts by calling out a treasure hunter to find priceless, forbidden books in an abandoned Underdark library offers many options to involve other characters. An escaped thrall might learn that mind flayers have occupied the library and are close to deciphering the books. If the party prevents this event by destroying the books, the Underdark envoy can lead an effort to prevent feuding drow houses from going to war over the missing tomes.

Several examples of incorporating story hooks into adventures are presented here, using the themes and sample characters from chapter 1. Each of the adventure hooks is classified in one or two of the following categories, which you can consider when devising your own theme and background connections.

Announcement The simplest approach to incorporating adventure hooks is to plant monsters, locations, or plot devices that directly speak to one or more characters, and to be blatant about it. This method is an easy way to get the adventure moving.

Foreshadowing Take a plot that is important to the adventure as a whole and link clues regarding that plot to the backstory of one of the characters. When those clues come up in the adventure, only that player will know their significance.

Misdirection Place red herrings that appear to tie to a character's theme, but that eventually lead to dead ends or more complicated truths. Even if the players can see through your deception, they might enjoy playing out the consequences of this adventure hook as though their characters were none the wiser.

Newcomer Introduce a character, an organization, a monster, an ideology, or a plot element that has certain aspects in common with one of the adventurers, but opposes that character's goals in some way. A newcomer might serve as a guide, be in a rival group seeking the same goal as the party, or be revealed as a figure from an adventurer's past that he or she must reluctantly solicit to gain crucial information.

Tough Choice Put a character in a situation where following the behavior suggested by his or her theme creates tension with that character's moral code, or puts the party in a dangerous situation.



IMPROVISING THEME CONNECTIONS

It happens to every DM. A question comes up regarding something important and you haven't prepared an answer. “If this dwarf became king last month, what happened to the old king?” “Wait, didn't you say the soil's soft and muddy? Why didn't we find the killer's tracks?”

If you're put on the spot, you can look to the theme or background of the character for answers. The player asking the questions has demonstrated that he or she cares about the topic, so give that character a chance to pursue it.

- ◆ A bloodsworn might ask if the old king died or left under suspicious circumstances. Perhaps her quarry, has some sort of connection to the event.
- ◆ If a deep delver inquires about a lack of tracks, you might decide that the culprit is a creature that has *earth glide* (such as many earth elemental beings).
- ◆ On the other hand, if a trapsmith wants to know why there were no footprints, you could say that the killer used a trapped rune with a delay before its effect triggered, then left before the rain started.
- ◆ An escaped thrall who wants to know what happened to the old king might gain a weird insight or experience a vision that suggests he is now a prisoner of illithids.
- ◆ If the treasure hunter asked what happened to the king, you might instead decide that he abdicated to search for a fabled lost dwarven hoard.
- ◆ An Underdark envoy might care to parley with the new king. Perhaps he wants to learn of the former king's fate, and he suspects a nearby drow city is involved.
- ◆ An Underdark outcast might hope that the change in rulership will allow him to restore contact with his former life. Perhaps the new ruler requires him to pass a test that demonstrates his worthiness.



Bloodsworn

Hooking a bloodsworn into an adventure might seem easy—all you need to do is include his or her hated enemy. But you can't have a 3rd-level party face off against a drow outpost or a 12th-level pack of monsters. Instead, create some hooks that establish connections to the enemy without requiring the foe to appear.

Relics and secondary characters encountered during an adventure might reveal the secret plots of an adversary. Alternatively, a bloodsworn hero might run into other groups that share his or her enmity. Such groups might eventually become allies—or they could be rivals, fighting to see who is more worthy to take on their hated foe.

The tough choice technique can be used to great effect with a bloodsworn character. Putting one in a situation in which the party needs help from the enemy, or where the consequences of acting against the enemy could be dire, can push the character's beliefs to the limit. Use this device sparingly, however, so that the bloodsworn's player doesn't feel as though his or her theme is irrelevant.

Rook in the Corner (Announcement): In a series of towns they travel through, the adventurers see wanted posters showing different names but all bearing the likeness of a drow named Rook. The posters enumerate no crimes he has committed—being a drow is enough. Eventually, a group of well-armed guards informs them that Rook was last seen going into a deep cave—one they are forbidden to enter—that connects to the Underdark.

To Topple an Enclave (Tough Choice): Drow outcasts calling themselves the Scorpion Brigade plot to destroy their former enclave of Thes-Kesselav. The adventurers discover the brigade's base in caves near the city, where the drow have stockpiled dozens of maps, attack plans, and magic items. Will Meliera take this chance to cause havoc and destruction in the city, even at the risk of betrayal by these outcasts?

Behlo the Vengeance Seeker (Newcomer): Like Meliera, the halfling Behlo saw his loved ones die at the hands of the drow. He not only wants all dark elves dead, but longs also to kill any who harbor or serve them—even as slaves. He remains suspicious of elves and eladrin as well, believing that those of the same blood as the drow are not to be trusted.

Deep Delver

More so than other characters, the deep delver thrives when the environment is at its most challenging. An adventure shaped for a deep delver should contain extraordinary cavern complexes, great chasms, and other terrain that can exist only in the Underdark. Vast and unexplored areas of the map can hook a character who has this theme.

A deep delver also likes to demonstrate his or her skill at survival and navigation underground. Add secondary characters who need help traveling through the tunnels—or escaping them. Talk about arduous journeys and barely navigable terrain. You don't need to call for endless skill checks for simple journeys. Simply mention how the deep delver assists the adventurers and their companions as they travel.

The Mercenary Papers (Announcement): After defeating the leader of a group of monsters, Karl and his allies discover notes from a drow merchant house. These notes describe arrangements to purchase a large number of grimlock slaves for use as soldiers.

Deia Smallfeather (Newcomer): Karl encounters Deia, a former Deep Guide. She had suspicions that something was amiss in the organization and left shortly before Karl joined. Living aboveground now, she is reluctant to return beneath the surface and explore the caverns again.

Freedom for One (Tough Choice): The adventurers and a group of companions they are escorting through the Underdark are captured. A companion reveals a way that one of the party might escape—but only one. Karl's ability to navigate the Underdark is the best hope for getting a message out or finding help. Will he keep his promise to never desert his comrades, or will he risk leaving them alone to attempt a possible rescue?

Escaped Thrall

A former master casts a long shadow over an escaped thrall's life. Make that slaver a major enemy in your game, whether as the mastermind behind an ambitious plot or the lieutenant of an even greater evil. You can show the scope of the thrall master's scheme by having the adventurers come across other thralls not yet lucky enough to win their freedom, or by providing maddening visions to the escaped thrall suggesting the master's involvement in multiple devious plots.

Incorporate allies and enemies of the thrall master into your campaign. If the escaped thrall was in the sway of a mind flayer, look to aberrant enemies and potential allies such as githyanki. A vampire slaver might suggest encounters with vampire hunters allied with Pelor or the Raven Queen.

An escaped thrall's imprisonment leaves both mental and physical scars. Your job is to set up situations where the character's pain can resurface. The foreshadowing and tough choice categories of adventure hooks bring the escaped thrall's past to the forefront, where it provides a dark subtext to the character's heroic actions. Use this approach in moderation, however, or you risk making the thrall a liability to the rest of the party.

The Branded Agents (Foreshadowing/New-comer): Other former thralls of the aboleths appear in cities, where they unconsciously perform the dark tasks of their aberrant masters. When these sleeper agents are captured or attacked, an abolethic safeguard triggers. This causes them to go mad and melt into puddles of slime, creating a psychic backlash that only Mord can sense.

The Passage of Pain (Tough Choice): On the trail of a slaver, the adventurers encounter a locked stone door that can normally be opened only by an aboleth or one of its servitors. Mord can open it, but only by tapping into the repressed horror of his youth. If he does so, no one can be certain that he will return from his descent into madness.

The Drowned Temple (Announcement): A vision wakes Mord in the middle of the night—a dark dream of a temple of Ioun collapsing into a sinkhole. The tentacled bodies of aboleths rise from the sunken ground, surrounded by a cadre of child slaves. Father Michelson's bloodied body lies slumped against an altar. Is this a nightmare? Has this already happened? Or is Mord being warned of events not yet come to pass?

Trapsmith

A trapsmith can be drawn into an adventure by promises of danger and problems to solve. Because such characters spend their lives getting into tense situations, you need to keep escalating the level of risk. Each trap should be more dangerous than the last, each situation more precarious.

Part of what attracts a player to this theme is the idea of having skills unique to that character. So put the trapsmith in a position where he or she alone can overcome the defenses of the dungeon. Establishing a connection between the character and whoever is responsible for the dungeon's traps can make the trapsmith's job feel more personal.

This theme will have a bearing on how you design the mechanical components of your adventures. You should include a greater number of traps than usual in your dungeon, and have enemies sneak up on the party only to set off the trapsmith's own devices.

The Unbreakable (Announcement/Tough Choice): The enormous and complex trap known as the Unbreakable seals off an open shaft running straight down through solid granite. Numerous factions will pay good money to see it disarmed, and they want to hire Thorry for the task. The Unbreakable is several stories deep, with rooms of traps that can trigger crushing walls, planar imprisonment wards, and *disintegration* spells. Few know that an imprisoned primordial lies beneath the Unbreakable, and that the trap is designed not to keep intruders out, but to hold the ancient being within.



Ella grabs the treasure but sets off a nasty trap

BEN WOOTTEN

Seven-Pointed Star (Foreshadowing): The kobold traps that the adventurers have been coming across have been simple and easy to disable so far. One small detail stands out, though: a star with seven points carved somewhere on each device. Thorry remembers seeing this symbol on the trap that took his fingers. Could the kobold responsible for that injury still be alive?

Tegan Burrwood (Newcomer): Thorry's strange take on good fortune puts him at odds with worshippers of Avandra, the god of luck. Tegan, a devotee of the goddess, believes that Thorry is blessed, and she wants him and his companions to help guide her expedition. Can Thorry suffer through her exaltations of his greatness and blessed luck long enough to collect the huge payment she promises?

Treasure Hunter

Immense hoards and risky situations draw a treasure hunter like a moth to a flame. The classic dungeon crawl appeals to such characters, for whom no adventure is too dangerous as long as a good profit waits at the end.

The announcement approach can easily grab a treasure hunter's attention, as you describe the ancient idol or the opulent chambers waiting to be found in a dungeon. Such a character can readily be subjected to a tough choice as well. Anything that provides a motivation beyond getting rich is a potentially interesting deviation from the norm. As demonstrated in Ella's story, a treasure hunter can seek a specific item for reasons beyond profit. Also, take notice when the treasure hunter starts to care about allied characters or comes to hate a particular type of enemy. You can then ensure that protecting the allies conflicts with finding treasure, or you can put the hated enemies in the way of attaining a legendary hoard.

The Red King's Crown (Announcement): Ella finds an illuminated manuscript with pictures of a noble eladrin of the Feydark known as the Red King. The illustrations show him clad in finery, but the crown he wears is clearly the one that belongs to the Green Man.

The Unseen Cage (Foreshadowing): The adventurers find a series of large caverns in the Underdark that would make perfect living quarters, but they are uninhabited. Ella feels a strange sensation that she experienced before on the Green Man's hill—a feeling that something is imprisoned here.

The Green Man Will Burn (Misdirection): The rituals of the fey are foreign to the people of the world. When rumors arise that the Green Man will be burned on a pyre at the winter solstice, Ella has no way of knowing that the burning is merely symbolic, and that the "Green Man" is an unfortunate captive of firbolgs. The firbolgs do not let the adventurers

leave, however—and one carries the true Green Man's scepter as part of the rite.

Underdark Envoy

This theme is all about face-to-face contact. Negotiating with rival factions, talking circles around sentries, and setting enemies against each other are all part of the envoy's job. Bring secondary characters and political situations into the mix when engaging an Underdark envoy—particularly characters you know will fall quickly for an envoy's eloquent charm.

Be aware, however, that arriving at too many diplomatic resolutions to conflict runs the risk of annoying other party members itching for a fight. The envoy character doesn't need to be fully effective every time. Even when negotiations break down into battle, enemies might be swayed by the envoy's efforts. An enemy who can't be turned to the party's side might still give the adventurers good advice or agree to not sound the alarm.

An envoy is particularly vulnerable to the misdirection approach, since political maneuvering is more than it seems even at the best of times. Don't be afraid to drop major hints (or simply tell the player) what's going on behind the scenes so that the envoy character can cut through the noise. The tough choice approach also makes sense for an Underdark envoy, considering the ways in which diplomacy can lead to unexpected complications.

Trapped by Both Sides (Announcement): A gnome refugee camp sits on a fey crossing, pinned between fomorian lands in the Feydark and a svirfneblin city in the natural world. The svirfneblin are suspicious of the gnomes and refuse to share their land, leaving them at the fomorians' mercy. The gnomes need someone to negotiate with the svirfneblin and win the right to escape from the fey crossing before they are wiped out. To make matters worse, no one knows when the giants have planned their attack.

Bjorgand (Newcomer): Khiira met the brusque fire giant delegate Bjorgand years ago, and he has reappeared in one debate after another ever since. Khiira does not bat an eye at killing in secret, but Bjorgand and his allies make their thuggery blatant. The fire giant negotiates with threats and particularly enjoys browbeating whomever the sly drow bard represents in her negotiations.

Drow Turncoats (Misdirection): Hired killers from Khiira's home city track her down. Instead of assaulting her, they appear to be swayed by her words when they meet, seeming less interested in killing her than in discovering how she escaped and found a new life. These assassins are secretly under orders from Khiira's mother to falsely pledge themselves to the envoy's service. After they meet her allies and contacts, they will carry out the order to slaughter Khiira and anyone who helps her.

Underdark Outcast

You'll need to get a good read on a player's reasons for playing an outcast before you begin incorporating hooks related to this theme. Though it's likely the player wants to see the character's former life play a part in the campaign, some players prefer their outcast's backstory to stay in the past.

For a player who does want to explore his or her outcast's unfinished business, use the foreshadowing and announcement methods to connect that past to parts of the larger campaign narrative. Bring in secondary characters previously known to the outcast, and have clues leading back to his or her former society. Be careful with such plot elements, however, if the character doesn't want to physically return to his or her lost home. Instead, introduce secondary characters who are also outcasts, but from other races or civilizations.

A newcomer can work well to frame the loss that an outcast character has endured. Create secondary characters of a similar upbringing who were not cast out, or other outcasts who have taken a darker path or suffered in other ways.

The Ailing King (Announcement): Korag's father, Chief Beltag, lies dying. Enemies of Barduum have been kept at bay by old treaties that will end with the chief's death. Their forces are encircling the entrance to Barduum's tunnels, awaiting the chance to attack. Korag can never be chief, but can he defend his kin now as he should have years ago? And will he be reconciled with his father before the old dwarf passes away?

Krass (Newcomer): Krass is a young goblin kicked out of his tribe after his snooping brought a band of orc soldiers down on them. Though he failed his people the same way Korag did, the goblin believes he did nothing wrong, maintaining that the others in his tribe should know how to run and hide as well as he does. He tells Korag to take pride in being an outcast—even as he resists the dwarf's efforts to win back his gear that the goblin stole.

Not Again (Foreshadowing): The party has been assigned to protect a merchant expedition traveling to a svirfneblin outpost in the Underdark. When drow ambush the caravan, Korag realizes that the attack is meant as a diversion to keep the adventurers away from the outpost—the true target of the drow raid. Korag is faced with an echo of the situation that resulted in his exile. If he supports his comrades against the ambushers, the svirfneblin will fall. But saving the deep gnomes would require abandoning the party. Will Korag be able to choose, and if so, which group will he forsake?

EXPLORATION AND CHOICES

When two seemingly identical tunnels lead into the unexplored darkness, the adventurers' decision about which path to take is effectively random. To avoid leaving things up to chance at this juncture, you can present choices that provoke and intrigue your players by placing careful clues that suggest the dangers they might face.

One of the simplest ways to make exploration interesting is to add distinguishing characteristics that differentiate the characters' choices. What if one tunnel leads downward and smells of fetid water, while the other goes to the west and hums with echoing, ghostly whispers? The heroes still won't know which way to go, but the choice they make feels more meaningful if it is based on their reactions to what might lie ahead.

Repeat a Motif: Find a thematic element to emphasize in each section of a dungeon. Spider statues might suggest the presence of drow, while the same statues defaced with reptilian scales could be seen in a drow area that has been taken over by kuo-toas. Skulls with holes in them lying in the shadows of caverns, spirals carved into the walls, multiple idols with gemstone eyes in different colors, or objects appearing in groups of a specific number can reinforce the presence of the builder of your dungeon or the monsters that dwell there.

Note Environmental Changes: You can create the sense that the party's explorations are progressing by mentioning minor differences in temperature, humidity, and air pressure. That's only the start, though. The D&D game offers endless opportunities for otherworldly phenomena, such as ice that



IMPROVISING EXPLORATION

You don't need to know in advance what's behind every door or down every passage; instead, plant clues that you can expand on later. A door that radiates heat might lead to the lair of a fiery creature, a portal to the Elemental Chaos, or an incubation chamber. Determine whether your players have expectations for what lies ahead, then use those expectations for inspiration. If you can arrange for such discussions to come at the end of a session, or hash them out between sessions, you can better use your preparation time to flesh out the details in a way that your players will appreciate.





Solving a puzzle often requires a team effort

mysteriously coats a chamber or passage, walls covered with color-changing fungi, insects that swarm in strange patterns, or terrain that warps and shifts. Planar incursions can also alter the landscape, creating chambers and caverns that transition between the Underdark and the Feydark, the Elemental Chaos, or the Far Realm.

Appeal to the Senses: As the adventurers move through the darkness, vision might be their least useful sense. Think about the sounds that echo within a dark cavern, the scents of rotting flesh or burgeoning fungus, or the texture of a wall where the energy of the Far Realm warps the world. A seasoned Underdark explorer might even be able to taste a drop of blood along the heroes' path to see what kind of injured creature might be lurking ahead.

Use Obstructions Carefully: Blocking off a tunnel seems like an easy way to prevent adventurers from passing, while a locked door might make the players only more determined to get through it. You can use obstructions to create intrigue and generate curiosity about what lies beyond. Put a "mere" locked door in front of interesting clues, extra treasure, and other items you intend for the adventurers to find. If you want to seal off an area more securely, make it obvious what kind of key or tool is needed to pass a door, a magic ward, or a monstrous gatekeeper. Even

as the players realize they can't go in that direction yet, their characters have something to look for as they continue in another direction.

Leave Things Blank: The baseline motivation for any adventurer is a bold curiosity regarding the unknown. If you provide the adventurers with a map, leave large areas of it blank. If the characters see visions in a scrying pool, mention that certain parts of what they view are obscured by darkness. Create locations of which even the creatures of the Underdark do not speak. Those blank spaces might have never been explored, making your adventurers the pioneers who map them for the first time.

MYSTERIES AND PUZZLES

Some of the iconic elements of a dungeon adventure are the mysterious statue, the complex magical protective ward, and the inscrutable monster posing a riddle. Often created or placed underground by a long-forgotten builder, such a challenge provides a safeguard against the characters' intrusion even as it hints at the builder's overall purpose. Puzzles and

mysteries beg to be explored and investigated, just as do the caverns and chambers they are a part of.

A simple mystery can intrigue and entertain nearly any group of players. One easy way to spark an investigation is to plant information that's a little off-kilter, prompting the players to think, "What's wrong with this picture?" If three of four statues face the same direction, why is the fourth looking off to the side? Why are some of the tiles on the floor red and others gold? The answer might be fairly easy to arrive at: Discover that the head of the fourth statue can be pivoted, rotate it so that it matches the others, and suddenly a secret door opens. Alternatively, an initial investigation might reveal a more complex puzzle, a riddle, or a trap.

Because in-game puzzles work best when you test the players' ingenuity rather than the attributes of their characters, be mindful of how willing the players are to be tested in this way. Some groups will happily spend an entire game session trying to figure out a single riddle. Others might be better served with a simpler puzzle that can be solved by trial and error. The following suggestions can help you make puzzles an interesting and dynamic part of a dungeon adventure.

Begin with the Familiar: Start with forms of puzzles and riddles the players are familiar with, then twist the structure or the concept to make something new. You might base a puzzle on sudoku or chess, or borrow the design of a trap from a movie, a novel, or a comic book. You could start with the classic riddle of the sphinx, then adapt it so that the answer involves a D&D creature. You could create a rebus (a passage of text in which words are replaced with pictures that match the sounds when said aloud), substituting strange symbols from the game world whose meaning the players must deduce.

Drop Clues: When you create a puzzle, think about how the players and their characters will approach it. Some amount of trial and error is to be expected, so make up a list of clues that can be found if the heroes search the immediate area, or attempt skill checks, or recall facts from earlier areas in the dungeon. Introducing clues in a natural way is easier to do if you have a few in mind early, rather than having to think them up on the spot.

It Doesn't Work, But . . . : Even a wrong answer or a failed attempt can still contribute to the solution of a puzzle. When a character tries to pull the blue gem loose from the wall, he might receive a nasty shock. But the adventurers now know that the gem is probably associated with the engraving of a lightning-filled storm cloud on the far wall.

Show Why the Puzzle Is There: The nature of a puzzle should speak to why it has been placed in the dungeon and why it works the way it does. A door that opens only if it is dealt cold damage might have

been built by frost giants. A complex riddle might be child's play for the intellect of the mind flayer that placed it as a magical ward, keeping thralls and intruders out while allowing other illithids to pass.

Have Consistent Results: The pieces of a puzzle should follow logic to avoid confusing the players. A rune triggered by the presence of fire should be activated equally well by a *burning hands* spell, a *fire seeds* invocation, or a flaming torch. Likewise, identical puzzles in the same dungeon should all follow the same internal logic. If the rune mentioned above appeared in another location, the players should be able to expect it to function in the same way that the first one did.

Put in a Reset Button: This guideline can benefit you as well as your players. The more variables a puzzle contains, the harder it can be for the players to retrace their steps if they make a wrong move. To keep a complicated puzzle from slowing things down if the characters get off track, you can build in an easy way to reset the puzzle back to its starting condition, using the assumption that whoever created the puzzle would want it to return to its default state for the next creature that tries to solve it.

This "reset button" might be obvious to the characters, so that they can activate it whenever they want, or it could be an automatic feature that returns the puzzle to its original state if the players find themselves stumped (or whenever you decide to trigger it).

Call it Quits: If a puzzle or a riddle fails to engage the players, don't force it. If the players are struggling for a solution, drop hints couched as memories from a character's backstory. If they are truly stumped, present an alternative way to move along so you don't bog down the game. You can work it so that taking the easy way leads to tougher consequences. For example, nastier fights, lesser rewards, or unsavory characters needing to be bargained with might lie at the end of a route that bypasses a puzzle-locked door.





The Underdark is full of fabulous terrain

Creating an Underdark Adventure

A party of heroes could spend a lifetime in the Underdark and not come close to exhausting its mysteries or its dangers. The Underdark is one of the best locales in which to set a dungeon adventure. Its staggering size and range of monsters give you a great set of tools to create a challenging and memorable story.

DESCENDING INTO DARKNESS

As the name of the game says, underground adventures are an essential part of *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*. Dungeons are exciting places for adventurers to raid, loot, and explore. The heroes enter the dungeon, do their thing, and then usually leave the same way they came in. The Underdark, however, is much more.

The first point to understand is that the Underdark is not a mere dungeon—even one of unbelievable size.

A dungeon has walls and boundaries, whereas the Underdark extends helter-skelter in all directions. It is a world within the world, and it likely covers the same area as all the realms of the surface. The Underdark is endless caverns and vast oceans, lost cities and great citadels teeming with life. Capturing the unique features of this environment is instrumental to creating Underdark adventures that offer maximum fun.

INFINITE SCOPE

The vastness of the Underdark is one of its most alluring features, for DMs and players alike. This untamed wilderness is so large that it can never be fully explored. Add to this the bizarre creatures and magic that pervade its depths, and you can see how and why the conventions of traditional adventuring are left behind on the surface world. The Underdark offers great freedom to you as a DM, enabling you to create new wonders around every corner so that your players never know what to expect.

This freedom comes at a cost, though. The immensity of the Underdark can easily overwhelm even the most dedicated gaming group. Its passages have so many branches that choosing the right one by

chance seems impossible. Every false turn threatens to take a party off course and into danger. Tales tell of would-be adventurers who get no farther than wandering the caves of the Underdark looking for a way out. Getting a lost group back on track without obvious contrivance can be difficult, and if the players feel as if the thread of the adventure has gotten lost as well, the game loses its excitement and sense of wonder.

Keeping the Underdark under control requires direction on your part. Create a game plan for how you want your players to experience this unearthly realm. Then make that plan clear to them, so that they have an idea of what to expect when it comes time to plan their expedition.

An Underdark Overview

A vast expanse lies deep under the surface of the world. The Underdark's tunnels, caverns, lakes, and hidden cities make it in some ways the greatest dungeon of all. Adventure always awaits in the Night Below. The *Underdark*TM supplement describes these subterranean realms in much greater detail, but here's the short version.

The Shallows: Reaching 2 miles below the surface, this region provides a meeting ground between the deep-digging races of the surface (such as dwarves and goblins) and creatures native to the underworld realms (including duergar and troglodytes). The Shallows is a beachhead to the Deeps, a place where explorers have some measure of safety and knowledge of their surroundings. Still, the numberless caverns and vicious creatures haunting the dark places mean that no one is truly safe.

The Deeps: Far more alien and dangerous than the Shallows, the area known as the Deeps houses mad aberrations, the cruel cities of the drow, and innumerable dangers that would never be seen in the light. Vast lightless seas and places of chaotic elemental influence exist in the Deeps, and staying there for too long can warp one's mind.

The Feydark: Since the Feywild is an echo plane of the natural world, it too has an Underdark. The grotesque mad giants called fomorians rule the Feydark. Gnomes and a few other races have carved out small homes in its tunnels, but they must always beware cyclops patrols.

The Shadowdark: The other echo plane, the Shadowfell, is already dark and cold, but its Underdark goes a step beyond. Nothing can match the despair and hopelessness one feels when traveling its halls. Apart from the cryptic loremasters called incubula, few residents of the Shadowdark still draw breath. The undead roam the pitch-black expanse of the World Tomb.

THE SETTING'S ROLE

When you have an idea of how big you want your Underdark to be, consider what part you want it to play in the campaign. What do you and your players hope to get out of an Underdark adventure? The answer should be something unique to this realm—a goal or quest beyond anything that can be accomplished by a simple dungeon delve.

Make sure your game takes the characters to the Underdark for the right reasons, driven by the campaign narrative and with hooks that can appeal to the whole party. The Underdark can seriously challenge even the most hardened adventurers, particularly those whose race or backstory ties them strongly to the surface world. For elves, eladrin, halflings, and others, the Underdark can be an alien and terrifying place—and a wonderful opportunity to push those characters outside their traditional comfort zone.

On the other hand, a campaign built around characters at home in the Underdark can have a very different feel. To skilled delvers or those who have always lived below the surface, the Underdark is a wilderness waiting for great heroes to conquer it. The caverns and tunnels of this realm are no less wondrous or dangerous than they are for surface-born characters, but the heroes of the Underdark have the tools to take on those dangers.



KEEPING IT INTERESTING

Ask yourself this question before you begin your Underdark adventure: Do you want to create an elaborate spelunking simulation or a scenario that focuses less on realism and more on action? If the answer is the former, make sure that this kind of simulation is something your players are as interested in as you are. The constant grind of skill checks and provisioning necessary to accurately describe real-world caving will slow down your game, but can provide a satisfyingly gritty realism to your adventures.

Most DMs find that it is faster—and ultimately more useful—to provide only the gist of the delve before getting on with the action. The tone of the Underdark is important, as are the trials of underground exploration, but don't forget that everyone's fun should come first. Develop a feel for what level of realism your group appreciates, then help craft the narrative of how their characters overcome the challenges before them. These are heroes, after all, and it's more interesting for them to triumph over significant adversity than be broken down by endless small challenges.



CRAFTING THE FEEL

It doesn't matter how well conceived your Underdark adventure is if you don't invest time in describing the look, sound, and feel of its unique features. Without attention to the physical and visual, an Underdark adventure can too easily become a series of encounters set in bland, mostly empty caverns. Luckily for you, the Underdark is one of the most evocative environments in which to stage an adventure.

Legendary Infamy: When setting the stage for an expedition to the Underdark, introduce that realm long before the characters make it a specific destination. Tavern stories, menacing plots, mysterious artifacts, or missing persons can go a long way toward establishing the Underdark's fearsome reputation in your world.

Uncanny Terrain: The geography of the Underdark is unparalleled in scope. Near-bottomless chasms, mile-high vaults, fungal forests, freezing seas, caverns whose walls are the fossilized bones of long-dead primordials—you can use any idea from your imagination to punctuate the tunnels and caverns that wind their way to the bottom of the world. Work up a list of memorable sites for your players to experience and interact with during their delve, so that the journey never has to fall back on a boring series of passageways.

Effect on Characters: Life in the Underdark takes its toll on an adventurer. Clothing becomes crusted with mud and dust. Gear frays at the edges or is battered by one too many falls. Eyes that have adjust to the darkness find even the brightness of a torch painful to bear. Making use of cavern fungus for sustenance leaves the consumer malnourished over time. Most insidious of all, the stygian gloom and tomb-like stillness of this realm is enough to drive explorers mad.

The physical and emotional stress of exploring the Underdark can wear away at a character's resolve, making him or her think and do strange things. Though you shouldn't encumber characters with unnecessary penalties, a creative description of the mood and physical demands of the Underdark can inspire creative roleplaying and lend a stark realism to the atmosphere of your game.

Inhuman Cultures: The Underdark's scattered cities are dangerous points of shadow in an even more dangerous darkness. Few such settlements resemble the cities of the surface world. Tales of dwarven strongholds and drow enclaves are familiar to many adventurers, but inhuman monsters such as aboleths and beholders also create settlements and societies here.

Adventurers will rarely find succor in such cities. Even the most benign Underdark cultures are distrustful of strangers. At their worst, the races of the

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

You can introduce sensory prompts from time to time to bring the unique environment of the Underdark to life. Examples include the following.

- ◆ Pulses of light shine up mysteriously from a chasm whose bottom cannot be seen.
- ◆ Vermin swarm so thickly that they create an impassable wall across a broad cavern.
- ◆ Animals known to be extinct on the surface are found below ground, having adapted to a life in the Underdark.
- ◆ In a broad grotto, crystals bloom in flowerlike shapes.
- ◆ A strangely porous rock muffles all sound nearby it, creating hushed echoes.
- ◆ A fiery wind howls out of a twisting tunnel.
- ◆ A sinkhole cave holds the remains of a fortress or a city that collapsed into the Underdark from the surface.
- ◆ A long-dead explorer has left a cryptic message scrawled on a cavern wall.
- ◆ A strange maze is revealed to be the immense fossilized remains of an unknown monster.
- ◆ Hot, stinging clouds of smoke and vapor boil up from a volcanic vent.
- ◆ An eerie whistling, like a fey song, echoes through small channels in the rock.
- ◆ A section of tunnel, covered in strange growths, is actually the gullet of an enormous dungeoneer denizen.
- ◆ A dark pit seems to contain the night sky, complete with familiar constellations.
- ◆ Cavern walls of soft chalk display scratches like those of fingernails reaching from ceiling to floor.

Underdark enslave outsiders as a matter of course. Think about ways to portray such civilizations as exotic yet believable. Mind flayer cities still need resources to thrive, even if those resources are extracted by mindless thralls feeding on the corpses of the slaves who fell before them.

The Unknown: Never underestimate the attraction of a good mystery. The Underdark's landscape gives you ample room in which to place enigmatic ruins, inexplicable portals, and bizarre encounters. No surface dweller can ever understand what truly goes on in a beholder's lair, and neither should you. Unleash your inner weirdness by giving the players a taste of the Underdark's deepest mysteries, letting facts develop over time. Let the bare bones of intrigue inspire the players to chime in with their own theories, then build on those theories to create a satisfying conclusion.

DEVELOPING A PLOT

Once you've created the foundations of what the Underdark is in your campaign and how it should feel, you need to come up with a reason to go there. Developing a plot for an Underdark adventure is similar to crafting adventures in other settings, but you should keep a few important differences in mind.

An Underdark adventure will likely take the heroes far from their homes or usual stomping grounds, and it might keep them there for a lengthy amount of time. Their motivation for delving had better be a good one. Without the proper setup, the players will wonder what was the point of entering the Underdark in the first place—or will feel as if they're being dragged along by a cumbersome plot.

Creating a memorable campaign hook should be among your first concerns when designing an Underdark adventure. It's not enough that you want the adventurers to fight the drow—you need to present them with a compelling reason to do so.

Character Background

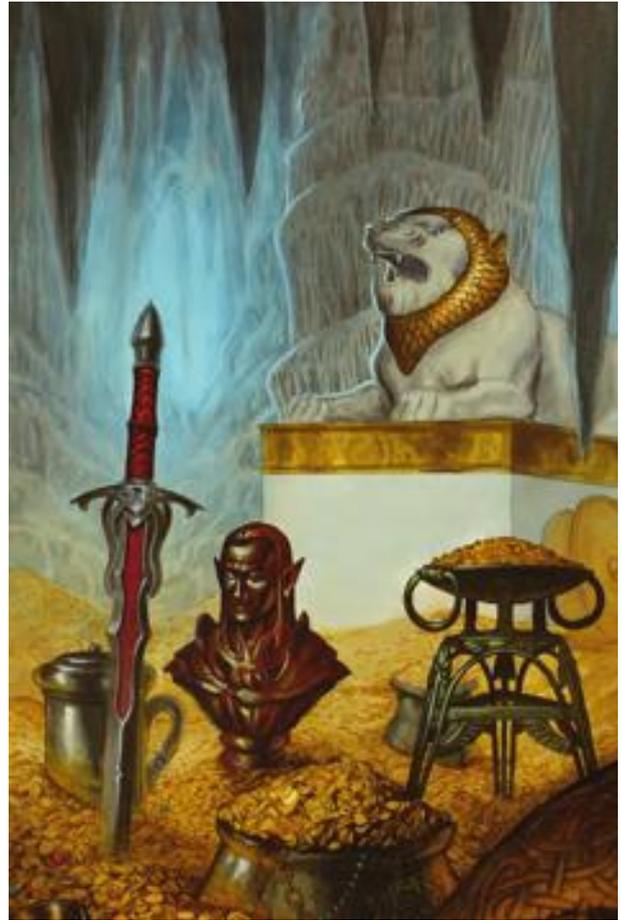
A character whose background involves the Underdark, even in a tangential way, can create a good opportunity to get a party underground. Adventurers who have any of the character themes presented in this book are perfect candidates for an Underdark adventure. By leveraging elements from a character's backstory, you create a personal stake in the adventure that can make it more exciting. Here are some examples.

- ◆ An Underdark native is called back to his or her homeland after being accused of a crime.
- ◆ Drow agents go to great lengths to pursue a character who was formerly a prized slave.
- ◆ The child of a famous explorer discovers his or her parent's journals and learns of unfinished underground adventures.

Monstrous Plots

The monsters that populate the D&D game offer plenty of excitement for characters braving the Underdark, but connecting those monsters to the heroes can take some work. By looking for opportunities to bring the peril of the Underdark to the surface world, you can inspire the adventurers to pursue that peril and destroy it.

- ◆ An important secondary character is suddenly revealed as being under the sway of mind flayers spying on the party.
- ◆ A tribe of Underdark goblins is building a scaffold to ascend a rift that has opened near a village.
- ◆ The child of a ruler has been kidnapped by an aboleth and must be rescued.



Wondrous valuables lie hidden in the Underdark

Dark Cultures

The workings of the Underdark's many civilizations are relevant to adventurers, particularly those hailing from the depths. An Underdark adventure can involve characters in political drama and intrigue among cultures wholly different from those of the surface world.

- ◆ Civil war in a beholder city overflows into surrounding regions when the leader of the eye tyrants is turned to stone by a medusa empress.
- ◆ Territorial disputes boil over between dwarves and svirfneblin, forcing the adventurers to choose a side.
- ◆ A duergar baron wishes to defect from his evil city and must be escorted safely to a dwarven stronghold.

Fabled Treasure

As the impetus for dungeon delves since the very beginning of the game, fabulous treasure and lost artifacts hold a strong allure for any self-respecting adventurer. The Underdark has no shortage of treasures lost or hidden in its labyrinthine depths.

- ◆ The hoard of a slain deep dragon spills into an open rift, attracting avaricious individuals of all races.
- ◆ Magnificent crystals rise from the footsteps of a forgotten primordial that wanders the Deeps.
- ◆ The vaults of Erelhei-Cinlu have been raided by a drow traitor, who was subsequently captured by the kuo-toas of the Dark Lake.

Dramatic Circumstances

Sometimes the campaign can unfold in a way that brings the characters to the Underdark without warning. Unexpected events can hurl the heroes into the depths, challenging their adaptability in new ways.

- ◆ Stepping through a portal in a wizard's tower takes the party to the Deeps, along the shore of the Spire Sea.
- ◆ A fleeing thief takes shelter in a cavern that leads to the Underdark, forcing the adventurers to pursue.
- ◆ Giant sinkholes open up during an explosive battle, swallowing up heroes and villains alike.

UNDERDARK EVOLUTION

My players' first exposure to the Underdark was something of an accident. The characters found themselves in a position to pursue a drow infiltrator who had stolen their treasure, then fled deep underground. I assumed the party would steer clear of this plot thread because I had always given the Underdark a creepy and dangerous reputation. They surprised me when they decided to risk going below. I quickly created a series of encounters and sights for them to experience during a two-week trek. Eventually the party found a drow outpost. After barely managing to overcome its defenders, they learned that despite their weeks of delving, they still had miles to go. Hard-pressed and short on supplies, the characters cut their losses and returned to the surface. I decided to make that return journey an adventure unto itself.

These adventures were a lot of fun because they allowed me to introduce a setting that lived up to its reputation. The players enjoyed being pushed to their limits, so much so that finding their way out again felt like a victory. The next time the characters entered its depths, they did so with experience and planning on their side. Four months later, they emerged as veteran dungeoneers (and a good deal wealthier).

—Jeff Morgenroth

UNDERDARK COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

Crafting combat encounters for an Underdark campaign lets you utilize every trick in your DM's toolkit. Any sort of terrain feature, hazard, or other challenge you can imagine can be a feature of your individually crafted Underdark setting. This section takes a closer look at some of the more distinctive aspects of the environment in the world beneath the world.

The Battlefield

The Underdark is a unique field of combat. On one hand, these dark realms feature the wide-open spaces typical of wilderness encounters. On the other, the caverns and vaults of the Underdark are filled with blocking terrain that provides the feel of a confined dungeon brawl. Unlike dungeons, whose walls and floors usually consist of flat, worked stone, Underdark terrain is rugged and dynamic. Exploiting this contrast can go a long way toward making an Underdark encounter feel unique. A battlefield's layout becomes as important as the monsters with which you choose to populate that battlefield.

Natural Caverns: Most of the passages and chambers of the Underdark have been created by natural forces and so follow no overall design. Lack of symmetry is the norm, but you should plan for more than an endless number of randomly branching tunnels and side rooms. Create unusual angles and shapes for the chambers of your Underdark dungeon. Have wide corridors suddenly narrow down, forcing the adventurers to squeeze through them. Create rough-edged masses of blocking terrain to simulate huge conglomerations of rock and crystal that must be climbed or bypassed. Encouraging tactical thinking from the players at all times is a big part of Underdark encounter design.

Terrain: In the real world, caves are extremely challenging to traverse. Even if realism is your goal, however, be wary of making every square of the Underdark difficult terrain. Such terrain can be more common in Underdark encounters than in a typical dungeon or wilderness encounter, but keep it within reason. Caves might feature a scattering of stalagmites or fallen debris. Certain areas can challenge characters by containing mostly difficult terrain, with clear squares becoming valuable assets in the fight.

Tight Squeezes: More so than in other dungeons, terrain that confines the combatants is prevalent in the Underdark. Characters seeking a protected alcove or a more advantageous position might be forced to squeeze through a crevice. Low ceilings can force larger combatants to stoop in combat, possibly fighting at a penalty. Try to keep such locations focused to specific areas, however, letting them add variety to the fight without wholly defining it.



TALKING THE TALK

Want to describe your Underdark locations as something more than “caves”? Use the terms below.

Bedrock: The solid rock that makes up the walls of a cave.

Chasm: A pit whose depth cannot be determined.

Cleft: A relatively small opening made by the splitting of rock.

Dormant Cave: A cave without running or dripping water.

Grotto: A cave with numerous stalagmites (floor) and stalactites (ceiling), typically containing a large amount of water as well.

Karst: A complex cavern created through the erosion of stone by running water.

Live Cave: A cave with flowing water.

Pillar: A freestanding column of bedrock reaching from floor to roof, remaining after the surrounding rock has eroded.

Ossuary: A cave filled with bones or fossils.

Rift: A cave that runs vertically, formed by tectonic upheaval.

Sea: A giant body of saltwater that fills vaults and covers great distances, usually connected to an aboveground ocean.

Shaft: A vertical tunnel that sometimes brings air from the surface.

Speleothem: Any rock formation created by mineral deposits, such as stalagmites and stalactites.

Spring: A natural upwelling of water, often laden with undrinkable minerals.

Tunnel: Any long and relatively narrow passage that connects caverns.

Vault: A cave of awesome size and height, the ceiling of which might be a mile or more above the floor.

Elevation: Cave floors almost never occupy a level plane; they slope up and down in rocky drifts or end in sheer barriers and ledge walls. Consider adding shifts in elevation to create a dynamic sense of positioning in caverns. Ledges, pits, and large rock formations can also provide ways to vary the height of different areas of the battlefield, making reach or ranged weapons particularly useful. Characters who have training in Athletics or Acrobatics have a chance to shine in such encounters.

Fantastic Terrain: The raw, chaotic force that created the Underdark remains prevalent throughout its depths. Use the presence of fantastic terrain to dress up your caverns and heighten the narrative elements of the dungeon. Seismic activity, the tainted presence of ancient monsters, or the legacy

of great magic lost underground at the time of the Dawn War can all suggest fantastic terrain for use in your encounters.

Light Sources

The need for artificial light is a constant challenge for Underdark explorers. In addition to carrying a supply of torches or oil if magical light is not readily available, players must keep track of which characters are responsible for the light. The group should choose one or two players who will track their light sources' duration and radius.

You and the players should be familiar with the effect of bright light, dim light, and darkness on combat, so that you can keep the action moving when the battlefield becomes obscured. Remember that solid objects block a light source, and that Underdark creatures will take advantage of the adventurers' dependence on light by targeting the individuals carrying it.

Though the threat of total darkness should always be on the adventurers' minds, you can provide ways to improvise if a primary source of light is lost. For example, luminescent fungus is common in the Underdark and can provide temporary dim light.

SKILL CHALLENGE: AN UNDERDARK TREK

Adventurers who dare the depths need more than weapons, wits, and magic to survive. The Underdark teems with dangers, and those who brave its caverns must make use of every bit of their skill and ingenuity. This section provides a sample skill challenge you can use to mark a party's progress through the Underdark. It is made up of two components, one using individual checks and one using group checks.

Individual Checks: Making Progress

Surface dwellers can quickly become overwhelmed by the scope of the Underdark's tunnels. Without the sun or other landmarks to reckon by, explorers can become helplessly lost without a master dungeoneer to lead the way. This skill challenge simulates a lengthy trek through the Underdark, the goal of which is to arrive at a particular location. The skill challenge represents activity during a day or two of travel, and can easily be broken up by combat and roleplaying encounters.

Level: In the Shallows, the level of the skill challenge is equal to the level of the party. In the Deeps, the level of the skill challenge is two levels higher than the level of the party.

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures). Increase the complexity to 4 or 5 to simulate longer treks, increasing the maximum number of successes for primary skills accordingly.

Primary Skills: Athletics, Dungeoneering, Endurance, Perception.

Athletics (moderate DC by level, 4 successes maximum): The character climbs through caverns, leaps over pits, or pushes aside barriers to help the party move through rugged terrain.

Dungeoneering (moderate DC by level, 4 successes maximum): The character's savvy and insight enables the party to find the best path, avoid hazards, identify sources of food and water, and move safely through the treacherous depths.

Endurance (moderate DC by level, 2 successes maximum): The character pushes through fatigue, endures areas of stale air, and toughs out the psychological effects of constant darkness.

Perception (moderate DC by level, 2 successes maximum): Ever watchful for new passageways, monsters, or hidden advantages, the character uses his or her sharp eyes to help the party avoid trouble.

Secondary Skills: Insight, Heal.

Insight (hard DC by level): By paying close attention to the condition of his or her allies, the character helps the party overcome an Underdark hazard. A successful check against a hard DC, in addition to counting as a success in the challenge, gives each character a +2 bonus to the first skill check made during the next Underdark hazard the group encounters (see below).

Heal (hard DC by level, when a character loses a healing surge from an Underdark hazard): The character treats the injuries of one character that resulted from a failed group check to avoid an Underdark hazard. The character does not lose a healing surge, though he or she still suffers any other penalties.

Success: If the characters earn enough successes before 3 failures, they arrive at their intended destination.

Failure: If the characters attain 3 failures, they become lost in the Underdark. They have a combat encounter of a level equal to that of the skill challenge. The characters must start the skill challenge again in an attempt to reach their destination or to return to their starting point.

Group Checks: Overcoming Hazards

The characters can encounter numerous setbacks during their trek. Choose a number of skill checks between two and four, with four suitable for an adventure in the Shallows and two representing the more challenging Deeps. Each time that number of skill checks has been attempted in this challenge,

choose one of the following hazards and have the characters make a group skill check against the given DC. If half the group succeeds, the party earns 1 success in the challenge, which does not count toward the maximum number of successes allowed for that skill. If the group check is failed, it does not count as a failure in the skill challenge, but the adventurers suffer the described setback.

These setbacks usually last until the next Underdark hazard is encountered. When a combat encounter occurs during the skill challenge, any ongoing setback applies to all the characters during that encounter. At your discretion, some setbacks (such as penalties for fighting in cramped tunnels) can be applied to enemies as well.

Cramped Tunnels: The characters must crawl through a series of narrow and claustrophobic tunnels by succeeding on a group Acrobatics check (easy DC by level). On a failed check, each character loses a healing surge. In addition, until the next hazard, the characters each take a -2 penalty to all skill checks, due to their disorientation.

Eerie Phenomena: The party is unsettled by patches of twisting shadows, veins of mysteriously glowing minerals, or the menacing sound of an unknown creature in the darkness. The characters must succeed on a group Insight check (easy DC by level). On a failed check, each character takes a -2 penalty to Perception checks and initiative checks until the next hazard.

Rugged Terrain: The characters must clamber over rubble, maneuver through stalagmites, or otherwise negotiate challenging terrain by succeeding on a group Athletics check (moderate DC by level). On a failed check, each character loses a healing surge. In addition, until the next hazard, each character takes a -2 penalty to Athletics checks and Endurance checks because of fatigue.

Foul Air: The characters must succeed on a group Endurance check (hard DC by level) to avoid succumbing to low oxygen levels or poisonous fumes. On a failed check, each character loses a healing surge.

Underdark Vermin: A swarm of cave-dwelling vermin or a patch of hazardous fungus represents a potential hazard. The characters must succeed on a group Nature check (easy DC by level). On a failed check, until the next hazard, the characters each take a -2 penalty to all skill checks.

Utter Silence: The caverns ahead are as still as death. The characters must succeed on a group Stealth check (moderate DC by level) or attract a hungry predator. On a failed check, the heroes have a combat encounter one or two levels lower than the level of the party. The characters are automatically surprised during this encounter.

Dungeon Makers

Every organization or race that braves the Underdark creates dungeons in a specific style. An adventurer who knows how to read the works of different dungeon makers can quickly identify what kinds of traps—and treasure—might lie ahead.

CULTISTS

Few worshipers create dungeon complexes by choice, and those that do are usually vile. Driven underground or into the wild, these iconoclasts create their sites of worship in the dark places of the world.

Such dungeons are typically dangerous places to those not of the cult's faith, which is dedicated to a forgotten god or otherworldly evil. A cult calls its dungeon a safe haven; the world at large sees it as a place of blasphemy.

Living the Faith

Cultists spend their time worshiping, praying, or indulging in the dark secrets of their faith. As a result, their living and eating quarters are drab and utilitarian, showing little concern for comfort.

Barracks: A cult sizable enough to build a dungeon has a large congregation of zealous followers. These individuals are housed in cramped barracks chambers, possessing only their robes and a religious symbol or some other token of faith.

Communal Living Spaces: Cultists work, worship, and take their meals in crowded common rooms. Such areas are designed to take away the identity of the individual, focusing on mass veneration and single-minded obedience.

Chosen Ones's Quarters: The only people in a cult who have private chambers are typically its leaders. Their rooms are locked and mysterious, separated from the rest of the supplicants by a veil of reverence and fanatical guards.

Chambers of Worship

Veneration of a higher power is the only reason a cult dungeon exists. When worshipers create an area in the dungeon, they do so with that purpose in mind. Images honoring the god, creature, or philosophy of the cult are common, taking the form of elaborate murals, tapestries, or carvings depicting its supposed greatness.

Altar: The dominant feature of any cult's dungeon is the altar, where cultists make foul offerings to their patron. Great numbers of cultists are found here at all times, making this the most dangerous place in the dungeon. The exact nature of the altar depends on the cult, but these chambers always contain unwholesome magic.

Meditation Chambers: These smaller rooms are quiet and isolated, smelling heavily of incense and bedecked with religious icons. Acolytes meditating on their cult's secrets can be found here at all times.

DROW

Elegant and refined, drow-built dungeons are an extension of that race's legendary decadence. More than just homes and fortresses, drow dungeons are crafted to indulge a fetish for pain and an appreciation of dark beauty. Just as elves draw the details of their civilization from the natural world, drow shape their cities and buildings to mimic the natural features of the Underdark.

Drow are masters of subterranean construction. Magic, an enslaved workforce, and boundless creativity combine to create structures that enthrall and terrify outsiders.

Decadent Domiciles

The residences of the noble houses of the drow shine like cruel beacons out of the shadows of their cities. Functional as well as beautiful, these great estates exemplify the dark elves' love of magic and depravity, and their self-declared superiority. The spires of these edifices are meant to inspire envy and fear in all who see them.

Fortress Estates: The drow ruling houses possess tremendous wealth, and their leaders are not shy about showing it. Their estates are fortresses featuring outer walls, towers, and well-defended chambers. Drow nobles ostentatiously one-up each other with



TEN TRAPPINGS OF A CULT'S DUNGEON

- 1 A mural depicting the cult's future rise to power.
 - 2 Sacred animals roaming the halls freely.
 - 3 The embalmed body of the cult's founder.
 - 4 Defiled holy symbols of other religions.
 - 5 A symbol of the cult worked into mundane objects.
 - 6 Reminders of punishment for disobeying the cult's leaders.
 - 7 Distant chanting.
 - 8 Incendiary bins to burn forbidden objects.
 - 9 A statue of the cult's otherworldly patron.
 - 10 Deceptively welcoming entrances to lure new members.
- 

new construction that shows off their family's affluence. They set towers apart from other buildings, ensuring that no one can approach those structures' entrances without being spotted by guards. The interior of a drow noble's home is lush with opulent excess, much of it plundered from other houses.

Chambers of Indulgence: In the high towers of a drow estate stand the halls where matrons and noble scions indulge in decadent excess. Filled with sumptuous couches, diaphanous fabrics, freely flowing wine, and depraved entertainment, these rooms overflow with comforts and diversions, giving the entitled drow nobility a place to carouse their days away.

Slave Pens: All drow houses boast impressive slave pens, kept out of sight in the lower chambers. Some families turn these spaces into vast mercantile enterprises, making their fortunes by selling slaves. Others create elaborate training yards to prepare thralls for combat in a city's gladiatorial arena. No matter what their decorative appearance, slave pens are dismal places of chains, filth, and death.

Frontier Outposts

Surrounding the metropolitan drow settlements are a variety of guard posts and garrisons that protect each city's borders. Architecturally, these fortresses display the same artistic grace found in the cities, making them resemble noble villas more than military strongholds. Those who doubt the strength of these outposts because of their appearance learn the lesson of their lives when the drow rise to defend them.

Impregnable Defenses: Drow outposts are built atop chasms, cliffs, and even huge stalagmites, making them difficult to attack. Most feature only a single entrance, fiendishly defended by magical wards, cramped labyrinths, or cultivated slimes. Drow take pleasure in tormenting invaders before they are slain, and so they sometimes create false gates and passages that lead far into their strongholds. The leaders of an attacking force think they have the element of surprise, but in reality they are being drawn into a trap.

Hall of Blades: All frontier outposts have an area where male drow practice the arts of combat and killing. These large chambers or courtyards are decorated with images of conquest that inspire drow warriors to hate any creatures not of their kind. Cruel weapons hang from racks along every wall, with dueling circles rising in tiers above the ground.

Secret Paths: Secret tunnels spin out from a drow outpost like the lines of a spider's web. Cleverly concealed, they are sometimes hidden even from the drow guarding a fortress. Such pathways provide clandestine access for spies or agents on important missions for the great houses or the priestesses of Lolth. Corrupt captains sometimes sell passage through these tunnels, though they offer no aid against any creatures or wards that might be guarding them.

Within the Web of Lolth

Rising in an unsettling swarm of barbed towers, the great temples of Lolth dominate the skyline of every drow city. Imperious and threatening, these structures are a constant reminder of the authority of Lolth's priestesses. An eldritch fire glows behind the spiderwebs that drape a temple of Lolth like a veil, as elaborate statues and carvings leer from the eaves.

Webbed Vault: The central area of a temple is a vast chamber large enough to hold hundreds of worshippers. A glass dome overhead sheds a cold and pale light. The high priestess evangelizes from a mighty dais at the head of the chamber, while spiders lurk in the dark tangle of webs that choke its upper reaches.

Torture Theatre: Drow take pleasure in the suffering of others, and their dungeons are public displays within Lolth's temple. Here prisoners are creatively restrained and ritually tormented for the amusement of the populace, who howl with delight as the priestesses perform their ceremonies.

Sacrificial Chamber: Deep within the mystic inner chambers of the temple stands the sacrificial altar where important victims are offered up to the Spider Queen. The sacrificial chamber is bedecked in grotesque artwork of gruesome detail and awful magnificence that reveals the dark elves' love of cruelty.

Handmaidens' Font: Tucked away in the topmost spire of a temple is a place that only the highest priestesses can enter. In this simple chamber stands a basin whose bottom reveals a portal to the Demonweb Pits. Priestesses use the font to commune with the yochlols, the handmaidens of Lolth.

DUERGAR

The settlements of the duergar rival those of their dwarf cousins in craft and construction. While a duergar fortress is every bit as magnificent and long-lasting as any dwarven redoubt, the dwarves build out of a sense of pride and community. In contrast, duergar architecture and construction reflects only that race's greed and cruelty.

The dungeons of the duergar are bastions of their campaign of evil, which imperiously claims ownership of all resources and treasure in their surroundings. The ancient tunnels and pathways of duergar mines are places where few subterranean travelers dare to tread.

Fortress Cities

The fortresses of the duergar are impenetrable ramparts. Highly defensible, a duergar citadel might be cut into a cliff face or built of stone blocks set into place by long-dead slaves. Behind the walls of a duergar fortress stands a city that reflects the evil of its dark masters.



Duergar fortresses are as grim and terrible as their builders

Outer Defenses: The walls of a duergar fortress rise abruptly from the floor of its cavern, usually surrounded by a moat. This might be a trench littered with cast-off chunks of jagged metal, a stream of flaming oil piped from a well discovered by duergar miners, or a searing pit of molten lava.

Monolithic Buildings: Duergar buildings are dour and utilitarian, rising up like stone slabs and devoid of ornamentation beyond the occasional runic label at the entrance. Would-be invaders of a duergar city are stymied by a lack of landmarks along its endlessly similar streets.



DUERGAR DESTINY

By Duke Thangaart of Balecrag

Our self-righteous cousins would have you believe that their cities are the strongest and most glorious in all the Underdark. Bah! What do they know of strength and glory? Their cities crumble while ours grow ever greater! This is because they slavishly honor the clan, while we duergar honor only the strong.

Hellfire burns in our veins, giving us the vitality to conquer, to thrive, to live! Let the dwarves bow their heads in their shabby caves. The duergar will make thrones of mountains.



Cavernous Halls

The interior of their buildings is where the duergar invest their greatest skills of craft and design. Not willing to waste time or wealth embellishing public spaces, the duergar create great vaults whose columns and walls are studded with intricate carvings and gems. They proudly display their mined or plundered treasures among images of their infernal kings.

Workshops: Duergar keep well-equipped workshops in their lairs, where raw gems and precious metals are transformed into more valuable jewelry and relics. The slaves who toil for them keep these workshops running day and night.

Foyers: Duergar dungeons open into a circular antechamber containing passages to other rooms beyond. Meant to honor their race's connection to the Nine Hells, the floor of this foyer is set with a great seal covered in grotesque carvings.

Trophy Room: Duergar nobles practically live in these great halls, which are packed with choice treasures accumulated over generations of greed and evil.

Throne Room: Just as the dwarves cling to the trappings of the ancients, so do the duergar. Unlike the dwarves, though, their regal chambers are designed to intimidate visitors more than to honor the race's ancestors.

Infernal Embassy: The duergar's close connection to the infernal realms sees a steady stream of fiendish emissaries within their settlements. Duergar dungeons contain chambers designed to cater to the needs of a devilish guest.

Slave Labor

Duergar are driven by a lust for conquest and ownership. To fuel that ambition, they ceaselessly delve into new areas in search of precious ore or gems. To be more precise, their slaves delve. No duergar will lift a finger to perform hard labor with a legion of thralls on hand.

Hazardous Tunnels: Duergar care little for the safety of their slave miners, coldly factoring in expected deaths from cave-ins, starvation, or monsters when they plan their excavations. Their tunnels spread in a chaotic web wherever the duergar seek the wealth of the Underdark.

Forge: Fueled by infernal fires or the burning of prisoners' corpses, duergar forges work an endless number of slaves to death as they produce the weapons and tools of their masters' reign.

DWARVES

Those who understand dwarves know the pride that members of that race take in smithing and stonework. Renowned for their attention to detail and their dedication to quality, dwarves build their fortresses and dungeons to last.

No other race matches the dwarves' ability to mix beauty and efficiency. Every room and structure in a dwarven dungeon has a purpose, and even the most utilitarian chambers show the painstaking care of master architects and artists. The dwarven style is rigidly geometric, severe, and meant to inspire awe. Complexes feature vaulted ceilings in underground halls, stairways that lead to hundreds of mine tunnels, and gigantic forges that continually churn out marvels. These structures serve more than a utilitarian function. They make the hearts of the dwarves who build and dwell within them swell with pride.

Mines and Metal

Dwarves love wealth in the form of precious metals and rare stones that hide deep within the earth. Their underground domains are a combination of mine and vault. When they tap into a rich vein of ore or a



deposit of geodes, dwarf miners slowly turn a mine into a home. Dwarves don't simply fill any suitably large chamber with treasure. They decorate their stone walls and pillars with gold, set gemstones into their tables, and weave mithral into fine tapestries. Their smiths craft excellent weapons and armor, and their nobles drink from gem-studded silver goblets.

Mine Shaft: Spreading out around a dwarven hall like fracture lines, multiple mine shafts lead ever deeper into the earth. Dwarven mines are narrow and dark, traversed with rails on which carts carry ore to the distant forges. A mine shaft carries the constant risk of collapse, either from earthquakes or the movement of burrowing monsters such as purple worms and xorns. Built to follow veins of ore and gems, dwarven mine shafts are not logically laid out like the rest of a settlement. Outsiders can easily become lost in the twisting tunnels.

Forge: Dwarves create huge workshops for their smiths, with dozens of stone worktables and anvils surrounding the forge. Some forges employ magic furnaces, while others tap into natural magma pools.

Built for Defense

After dwarves uncover their precious treasures, they fight to the death to keep them. Their fortifications are unparalleled at keeping out intruders while allowing the dwarves to endure even the longest sieges.

Gate: Every dwarven dungeon has an imposing front gate, ornately decorated and crafted of stone or metal. Dwarves sometimes conceal these gates with illusion magic, then reveal them at a time designed to impress visitors most effectively. Throughout a dwarven dungeon, smaller gates and portcullises create deeper lines of defense.

Murder Holes: Dwarves seldom shy away from a face-to-face fight, but that attitude changes when invaders hit them where they live. Dwarven

dungeons feature secret side passages with narrow openings that connect to the main corridors. Through these murder holes, dwarves attack their enemies with hot oil or crossbow bolts, breaking up their attacks and driving them into traps.

Choke Points: As much as dwarves appreciate towering ceilings and wide avenues, they make sure that all approaches to their inner citadel pass through choke points at strategic locations. These narrow defiles force attackers into close confines, where multiple defenders can shoot and strike at enemies approaching down a narrow tunnel.

Life Goes On

While it is occupied, a dwarven city bustles with activity. Only when abandoned does it come to feel like a true dungeon. When dwarves flee or retreat from a fortress, they take their belongings but leave their structures intact. Their pride tells them they'll be back to reclaim the glorious home they have lost.

Grand Hall: During their frequent communal meals, dwarves gather at long tables to partake of copious amounts of food and drink. A stage for performances and speeches, a huge kitchen, and racks of mugs speak to the raucous gatherings that once filled an empty grand hall with the din of celebrating dwarves.



ON TRAPS

By Tegget Bronzecrown

No dwarf should ever build anything like a worthless kobold's snare or pit. A trap is a work of art, as much so as a suit of armor or a great statue of a dead king. Design your traps as an integral part of the architecture in your halls. Lay down every passage with your traps in mind.

The possibility that you and your kin will need to abandon your halls is ever present. But by ensuring that your home remains defended, you make easier your clan's inevitable return. A real dwarven trap must resist being destroyed or disabled, and it must have a reset mechanism. A device sprung once and spent has no worth. Your traps must endure as long as the dwarf race draws breath.

Smash invaders with heavy stone slabs. Drop them into deep pits where they can starve like the vermin they are. Outsiders lust hungrily for the riches of the dwarves, so a trap that triggers when an intruder interferes with the jewels on a pillar or statue is one that will surely be sprung.



Distillery: In dwarven distilleries, veteran brewmasters craft ale, whiskey, and other potent spirits. Kegs might yet remain in their racks in an abandoned distillery, but be warned—only the truly brave or foolish risk drinking dwarven liquor that has aged an unknown number of years.

Animal Pens: Unlike many Underdark dwellers, dwarves have the same taste in food and drink as the races of the surface world. They prefer beef and mutton to spider and mushrooms, milk and honey over rusty water and lichens. Some dwarven citadels maintain aboveground settlements where food animals are raised. Underground pens are used to house overflow livestock that enables the dwarves to maintain a food supply while under siege.

Temple: Even though they pay small tributes to many gods, dwarves revere Moradin more than any other deity. Moradin is the only god certain to have a temple in a dwarven community, never far from the central forge. Along with more mundane offerings, master crafters place their finest works in the god's shrine, which is protected by traps.

Throne Room: Dwarves observe a strict political hierarchy, and the throne room symbolizes the authority of their lord. The walls of a throne room are lined with images and stories of rulers going back centuries.

HUMANS

As with all their endeavors, humans create dungeons in pursuit of a larger goal. Ambition drives them underground to conquer new territories, get rich, or discover unknown lore. A human-built dungeon can serve as a staging ground for the search for underground riches, the secret prison of a citadel, or a last foothold in enemy territory. Humans weren't made to live underground, however, and they have no formal tradition of subterranean settlements. Thus, each human dungeon is unique in design and purpose.

Quick and Dirty

Humans use whatever supplies they have at hand when they dig their dungeons, reinforce them, and build structures within them. Functionality comes first, and explorers in a human dungeon rarely see a consistent quality of work and materials. Since a dungeon made by humans is a means to an end, its builders feel no obligation to have it last for all time. Such dungeons are typically either full of toiling workers or long deserted.

Workers' Quarters: Bedrolls line the walls of these rough-hewn tunnels, filled with workers sleeping off a recent shift even as others use the space as a thoroughfare. Wooden struts hold up the ceiling, which sometimes sheds small chunks of earth and

DISPATCH TO KARL BRASLIN

Regarding progress on excavation #3

Received your message, understand your concerns. Project must move forward. Rewards will make all this worth it, I assure you.

Following strategies will ensure success in venture.

- ◆ Increasing budget to produce iron struts instead of wood.
- ◆ Sending twenty more prospective miners to you. Should arrive within three weeks. Will need training on site.
- ◆ Authorizing you to hire new wizard to replace the departed Zenteem.

Do not forget—four months until deadline, when we will default on major loans. Your stake is in jeopardy, as is mine.

Best of luck moving forward.

Regards,
Kaia Elding

stone. Workers hit by debris simply turn over and fall back asleep.

Water Wheel: An underground waterfall is the site of a wooden water wheel. Its rotation powers a nearby rock crusher, while workers fill buckets at the falls to carry water to the dig site.

Planning Office: The overseer of the operation works out of an old carriage-wagon that has been wheeled deeper into the dungeon as its main shaft is widened. The coach's interior is plastered with maps and plans.

Big Ropes: The dungeon makers found a chasm in their path. Rather than spend time building a bridge, they ran a heavy rope across the gap on an incline. Workers burdened with gear slide down the rope to the work area. Coming back requires climbing up a precarious set of steps built into the opposite cliff face, then sliding down another rope coming back in the other direction. A third rope system employs pulleys and metal buckets, allowing the transportation of ore and equipment back and forth.

Expanding the Frontier

Just as they have always pushed out to explore the unconquered lands of the surface world, humans constantly seek to expand their territories underground. Where a subterranean race such as dwarves might stop short of a drow-inhabited area, humans keep right on going.

Pitted Tunnel: The large cavities in this tunnel seemed like a blessing at first, since they made digging easier. Soon, however, human miners discovered

that they had dug through a bulette's hunting ground. The creature is far too formidable to be directly assaulted, so the miners have learned to hide during the forays that occur every week or so.

Contested Ground: A line of human soldiers sits on one side of a cavern as workers file past. On the other side, a few drow warriors stand guard. Neither side can afford to take troops away from this unofficial border, but neither can be certain of victory if a battle breaks out. The stalemate has continued for weeks, and the tension is rising.

Sun God's Chamber: A tunnel through solid stone takes a sideways turn to route around an uncovered artifact—a metal cylinder half excavated from a rocky wall. It bears the symbol of Pelor, and the crystals growing around it shine with the light of the sun. The miners who uncovered it could tell that part of the text on the cylinder was a warning, but their efforts to decipher the rest have so far been in vain.

KOBOLDS

Kobolds prefer to live in natural caverns and tunnels that offer the honeycombs of small passages they favor—and which they protect with effective traps.

Kobolds love sites with plenty of twists and turns, from city sewers to ancient limestone caverns. In some cases, they undertake excavations to increase the number of passages in their lair, even if only to throw off invaders. A kobold dungeon demonstrates that race's cleverness and adaptability through its twists, turns, and hazards.

Cramped Passages

Kobolds grow anxious in open areas, so they make a point of lairing in cramped chambers. Doing this also ensures that only creatures of their size can move through kobold tunnels at speed, forcing larger pursuers to stoop or crawl. Outsiders can become easily confused and disoriented in these restrictive passages, making them vulnerable to the traps that wait at every turn.

Collapsing Ceilings: Kobolds entice would-be intruders into their lairs by way of large, easily navigated passageways. These routes lead to dead ends, however, giving the intruders nowhere to turn when kobold sentries knock out the struts that hold up the ceiling. While the kobolds sneak to safety through concealed side tunnels, the resulting cave-in finishes off the intruders.

False Leads: Explorers think they've picked the right path to the heart of a kobold lair when the traps they encounter become more frequent. Savvy kobolds know about this assumption, and in a fiendish bit of reverse psychology, some kobold tribes lay their deadliest traps along false paths, leading overly confident invaders away from their lairs.



THE MESSY END OF VANCE THE DASHING

Recounted by Herc Muleback, loyal henchman

It had been four hours since my boss, Vance the Dashing, went down into the kobold warrens. I'd almost given up hope of his return. Then I jumped up when I heard footsteps from the mouth of the cave and saw the familiar brim of his swashbuckler's hat. My jaw dropped when I saw the golden glow of what he held in his hands. He'd found it—the jeweled Egg of Kurtulmak!

Yet the look on his face wasn't the grin I'd expected. Then I saw the bloodstains on his ripped tunic, the darts bristling up and down his back, and the wire trip-lines dangling from his limbs. Vance stared right through me, his eyes glassy as the egg dropped from his hands. He collapsed face first in the dirt, dead. From the look of it, he never even had a chance to draw his sword.



Intersections: Kobolds strategically excavate chambers where certain tunnels connect, creating larger intersections. These areas provide enough room to create complex traps and to set up full-scale ambushes when intruders get too close for comfort.

Home in the Tunnels

Beyond the twists and turns of a kobold tribe's outer defenses lies the group's home. The larger caverns in this area are packed with kobolds and interlinked by the same cramped passages that surround them.

Living Quarters: The most spacious areas of any kobold warren are the living quarters that house most of the tribe. Craggy and cluttered natural caverns are typically chosen for such areas, providing numerous nooks and crannies in which different family groups take up occupation.

Shrine: All large kobold clans carve a shrine to Tiamat out of the rock of their lair. This area is the only place in the dungeon where treasure is strewn openly, since no kobold would dare to steal an offering from its clan's patron deity.

Hatchery: These secure locations are where the females of a tribe lay their eggs and where hatchlings are raised. Kobolds keep these caverns hot and humid to ensure the health of their offspring.

Food and Supply Cache: These areas are filled with materials captured from the surrounding environs. A cache chamber is cluttered and filthy, with mold or mushrooms growing in piles of stolen gear.

Vermin Corral: Cave crickets, centipedes, spiders, and lizards skitter within these rickety paddocks. A corral is typically built around an area rich with the molds or algae on which the domestic creatures of a kobold clan graze.

KUO-TOAS

The stench of rotting fish. The reverent chanting to mad gods. The screams of sacrificial victims. These are the signs that a kuo-toa dungeon lies ahead. The underground lairs of kuo-toas are horrid places filled with equally horrid creatures, but the rewards they offer are great. Kuo-toas hoard their wealth near their dark shrines as offerings to the insane beings they worship.

Kuo-toas make their lairs in natural caverns that have been eroded by water seeping through the Underdark. Walking into their dank, twisting caves is like entering another world where the ocean has consumed the land and fish rule over all. Rippling black pools reflect light from phosphorescent fungi along the walls, creating the feeling of being trapped underwater.

Sacred Pools

The amphibious kuo-toas are most comfortable in water, so they build colonies around the deep, murky pools that dot the Underdark. They treat their pools as holy places, connected to the deepest underground seas where dwell the gods of the deep.

Kuo-toas believe that aboleths have a connection to their deep gods, and some kuo-toa colonies lie directly atop aboleth lairs. Any passage leading downward into darkness from a kuo-toa lair is a route that all explorers should think twice about following.

Breeding Pool: Kuo-toas lay their eggs in shallow pools of clear water, a stark contrast to the murky sumps found elsewhere in their lairs. Not far away, other pools hold kuo-toa fingerlings, not yet a year old and unable to breathe air. Vicious guards protect these pools and look after the young. The leaders of the kuo-toas keep separate royal spawning pools near their quarters.

Offering Pool: The wealth that kuo-toas pillage from other creatures is cast into the depths of this diamond-shaped black pool as an offering to the deep gods. The pool's chamber is usually deserted, though ranking kuo-toas sometimes come here to retrieve valuable treasures for their personal quarters.

A Wealth of Slaves

Above their brackish pools, the kuo-toas build the cells and pens in which dwell slaves drawn from other races. Kuo-toa lairs bustle with activity, but slaves do all the real work. Overseers keep watch as slaves catch



Kuo-toas guard their precious young ferociously

fish, clean, dig new tunnels, and craft the kuo-toas' signature hunting weapons. Other kuo-toas use their time to worship at their weird altars, or undertake excursions into the Underdark seeking enemies or more slaves.

Slave Pens: At the rare times when slaves are allowed to sleep or eat, they are stuffed into closely guarded, cramped pens built of thick wooden bars. Each pen offers little more than a shallow pool of filthy water to drink, a rocky floor to sleep on, and a reeking pit for waste. Slaves are fed rats, fungus, and insects. The kuo-toas save their precious fish for themselves.

Workshop: Kuo-toas set their slaves to work crafting specialized weapons for hunting, along with trinkets to offer to their gods. Their workshops are flat-floored chambers strewn with simple tools.

Purging Chamber: Kuo-toas have a racial tendency to descend into madness. In a futile attempt to prevent the insanity from infecting others, an individual affected by this condition is either exiled or sent to the lair's purging chamber. Sane kuo-toas will not come near a mad one, so they order their slaves to force those so afflicted through the single entrance to this small room. Slaves attack the mad

kuo-toa with spears until they slay it, then leave its body to rot.

Worship and Rule

The deep gods influence every aspect of kuo-toa society. When kuo-toas create their dungeons, they lay them out based on ancient patterns that they believe have been passed down by their gods. They do not craft many adornments, and the statues and wall art they do create are displayed near their deepest pools and holiest sites.

Meditation Cell: Kuo-toa monitors use these small, secluded areas to go through the mental exercises that stave off their racial madness. These areas are left dark and unadorned so that meditating monitors can turn their focus inward.

Sacrificial Shrine: In a smaller kuo-toa community, the shrine is no more than a simple stone slab caked with dried blood. In the largest and oldest settlements, kuo-toas have created tall, tiered ziggurats on which their victims are ritually murdered.

Whip Chambers: The whips are the leaders and religious scholars of the kuo-toa race. They maintain austere chambers in which they keep their spellbooks and religious artifacts.

MIND FLAYERS

If anyone knows how to keep a secret, it's an illithid. An explorer on the trail of a mind flayer might enter a dungeon, explore it thoroughly, and find no trace of any creature within. In fact, the seemingly ancient ruins are a decoy, designed to keep anyone from finding the otherworldly structures hidden below.

A true mind flayer dungeon is a sprawling mass of chambers, planned and built according to intentions that make sense only to creatures of the Far Realm. It takes on a geometrically rigid spiral configuration, from which rise domes, bulbous towers, and twisting tubes.

Living Architecture

Mind flayers craft their structures to display features of living tissue. The walls of a mind flayer dungeon might have eyes, mouths, or even beating hearts. Illithids favor vertical architecture, with spires and domes looming high above the streets of their cities.

Slaver's Tower: Bone struts and thick tendons support this high tower. Inside, prisoners are lashed to the walls while they await the dark ritual that will make them into thralls.

Domed Arena: Mind flayers pit thralls against one another in mortal combat, but not as sport. Rather, the illithids treat such contests as experiments, carefully noting the strengths and weaknesses of the different races. The dome above is made of bone struts covered with stretched, translucent skin.

Rippling Tunnel: This tunnel's pulsating walls drip with slime, and explorers must move along it as if they were traversing the inside of a living creature.

Pervasive Psionics

A mind flayer dungeon thrums with psionic energy. Sneaking into such a site can be difficult when the very walls can sense the thoughts of intruders. Illithids imprint specific psychic patterns on their thralls, then set up psionic wards to alert them when anyone not imprinted enters certain areas.

Elder Brain Pool: In a mind flayer city, a singular creature known as an elder brain leads the illithids in their dark plans of conquest. Formed from the combined minds of deceased illithids, an elder brain dwells in a secure chamber at the center of a city. Soaking in a briny pool, it issues orders as it flares with tangible manifestations of psionic power.

Psionic Gatehouse: When a creature steps onto the spongy floor of this wedge-shaped chamber, the doors seal shut. In Deep Speech, a solemn voice declares that the way of the mind opens the path beyond. Only by demonstrating psionic ability or tricking the sensor can an intruder open the doors.

Crystal Library: In addition to a collection of standard books and tomes, a mind flayer library contains a small chamber in which rainbow-hued crystals line the walls. These contain psychic impressions implanted by telepathy, which can be unlocked through concentration. But, since those memories were peeled from creatures as their brains were eaten, the experience can be unpleasant.

Alien Experiments

Mind flayers dissect and reassemble sentient creatures so they can learn how to pervert their minds and bodies.

Laboratory: Several wide tables of green-gray metal line the center of this chamber. Partially vivisectioned creatures are held there, terror-stricken and wracked with pain. Tools extend from the ceiling—articulated arms of metal, bone, and muscle that bristle with implements of dissection and torture. Racks lining the walls are stacked high with organs in jars, writhing worms, and the body parts of Far Realm monstrosities.

Monster Cages: The creatures that survive the illithids' experiments live in small cages hanging from the ceiling of this large chamber. Normal creatures exposed to portals to the Far Realm, hybrids stitched together from mismatched parts, and deformed humanoids created during failed experiments can all be found here, living in constant agony. The stench is overwhelming, and these pitiful creatures beg for release—or death—if discovered.



THE LAIR OF THE MIND EATERS

Excerpt from the novella by Erin Gale Soulforge

Ever closer to the center of the spiral did I travel, heart racing and mind muddled. Never did I see such grotesqueries as those that formed the very bedrock of this city.

Darkened towers heavy with sinew and quietly groaning as if in pain reached up into the blackness of the cavern, one I could not see the height of but could sense was of unfathomable scale. Laughter rang out, and I soon realized it was my own.

I felt the seams of my mind pulling loose as my dread twisted in the grip of some fell power, bringing upon me a new emotion I could not fathom. Forging onward still, I came upon one last door, imperious and inlaid with scenes of death and dominion.

Ecstasy gripped me when dread should have, as I realized my path had for some time been leading me back to where I entered . . . I now stood at the place of my arrival, and could finally escape this hell beneath the earth.



MINOTAURS

In the Underdark, the mazes of minotaurs spread out as webs of twisting passageways nearly impossible to escape. Some labyrinths are built by peaceable minotaurs bearing no ill will toward other humanoid. Others are crafted by great brutes that view the lesser races only as sacrifices for Baphomet, and whose complex passageways are the stuff of legend.

Twists without End

A minotaur labyrinth can drive intruders mad as they try to navigate its multitude of turns and corners—assuming they don't die of thirst or starvation first. A labyrinth on the surface might allow crafty adventurers to climb or fly to safety, but an underground maze offers no such option. Explorers here must trust to their mapmaking skills.

Stranded Monsters: Many creatures wander into a labyrinth and never emerge again, though not all such creatures perish. Sometimes monsters are able to find food and a place to lair, turning a labyrinth into an unlikely home.

Barriers: Rare is the minotaur labyrinth that consists of nothing except halls and turns. Most feature rivers, gorges, cliff faces, and vast chasms that explorers must negotiate.

Titanic Construction: The strength and ingenuity of minotaurs is demonstrated by the scope of their mazes. Huge bridges, towering staircases, and high walls abound to challenge intruders.

Center of the Maze

At the heart of most sizable labyrinths stands a minotaur city. Although not as densely populated as other humanoid settlements, a minotaur city is as strong as the stone from which it is carved.

Confusing Architecture: The center of a labyrinth can sometimes be as confusing as the maze that leads to it. Major roads suddenly become dead ends, buildings are chopped off in mid-rise, and passages can give onto pits or secret stairways without reason.

Plaza: This area at the center of all the paths of a labyrinth serves as a meeting place where minotaurs gather in times of war or celebration. Outsiders who end up in the plaza can become quickly confused as to which of its numerous entrances is the one they just passed through.

Shrine to Baphomet: To the regret of many visitors, an altar dedicated to the Horned King stands near the heart of most minotaur mazes. These barbaric shrines are caked with the blood of sacrificial victims and the leavings of dreadful feasts.

WIZARDS

All adventurers know that wizards are the masterminds behind some of the world's most unforgiving dungeons. Whether designed to house a trove of arcane lore or to keep the mundane world and its occupants at a distance, a wizard's dungeon is a place of bizarre wonders.

Such a dungeon is created in a place of power, whether in a mountainside holding an ancient arcane relic or on the perimeter of the abandoned temple of a long-dead god. No matter what its location or how dire the rumors of its magical defenses, a wizard's dungeon always attracts ambitious adventurers seeking to claim its treasures.

An Artist's Masterpiece

Wizards are not content to carve their dungeons from mundane caverns. They go out of their way to create or transform the dungeon environment with magic. A wizard considers himself or herself an artist, so that a dungeon becomes a medium for the individual's expression of arcane prowess.

Challenges Galore: Nearly every room and corridor in a wizard's dungeon holds potential danger to vex intruders or to test the worthiness of would-be allies. Flaming jets could suddenly shoot from the walls, or furniture might animate when someone touches it. The true nature of a wizard's dungeon is never what it appears.

Mystic Design: The floor plans of some wizards' dungeons are designed to reflect or harness arcane energy. These chambers and passages create mystic symbols when properly mapped, offering clues to uncovering a wizard's secrets.

Magical Locomotion: Many wizards create dungeons that require fantastic means of movement to traverse, from vertical shafts with no handholds to floating platforms that shuttle travelers over hazardous terrain.

Arcane Secrets Abound

Wizards create dungeons as a focus for magical research. For some, a dungeon is a testing ground for experimenting with new spells and magic items. Other wizards create dungeons to house the disastrous results of such experiments.

Laboratories: Wizards can't resist the opportunity to study their magic and find new ways to use it. Their dungeons frequently feature well-stocked laboratories where experiments are conducted. Vast piles of scrolls and racks of alchemical compounds abound in these workshops.

Summoning Chamber: This foreboding room is present in many an archmage's dungeon and is always bad news for adventurers. Within, the wizard communes with otherworldly entities that are able



TWENTY WEIRD THINGS IN A WIZARD'S DUNGEON

- 1 Signs or symbols that warn intruders to beware.
 - 2 A ceiling that appears as a starry night sky.
 - 3 A fountain that flows backward.
 - 4 Animated shadows that move across floors or walls.
 - 5 The stuffed body of a never-before-seen creature.
 - 6 Piles of books being sorted by faeries or imps.
 - 7 A well that draws water from the deep ocean.
 - 8 Rats skittering along the ceiling.
 - 9 Candles or torches burning with green flame.
 - 10 Portraits with moving features or backgrounds.
 - 11 Self-building bridges or passages.
 - 12 A globe showing the geography of another world.
 - 13 A mirror that shows the viewer's aged reflection.
 - 14 Jars filled with obscure creatures, living or dead.
 - 15 Doors that change location when not observed.
 - 16 Glowing crystals singing the history of the listener.
 - 17 The head or other body part of a historical figure.
 - 18 Flagstones that illuminate when walked on.
 - 19 A tunnel that seems to extend forever.
 - 20 A chamber where time moves slowly or quickly.
- 

to cross into the world through magic circles or other kinds of dimensional portals. These creatures are often bound to a wizard's command and thus eager to attack intruders.

Treasure Vault: The wealth of wizards is the stuff of legend. Every wizardly dungeon has a treasure vault, hidden in a warded cache or sealed behind mighty doors. Protected by passwords, riddles, or cunning magical seals, a wizard's vault can make those who survive entering it rich beyond their wildest dreams.

Sanctum: This carefully placed and secure chamber is where a wizard rests, studies, and ponders the mysteries of the cosmos. Some sanctums rest atop the rest of a wizard's dungeon in a secret apex level, while others are hidden in the dungeon's uttermost depths.

YUAN-TI

Filled with shadows, poison, and slithering menace, the dungeons of the yuan-ti are places of sanctity to their cold-blooded race. Hidden from the eyes of the world, nearby yet ever elusive, yuan-ti dungeons shelter the servants of Zehir as they hatch their insidious plots and dream of a time when their coils will encircle the world.

The scope of a yuan-ti dungeon varies depending on its role in the schemes of that race. Some are newly built extensions of a cult's secret lair within a city. Others are many-tunneled complexes built in a time before recorded history. All evoke a primal dread in intruders.

Places of Refuge

The yuan-ti's plan for domination begins with infiltrating the population centers of the world. The creatures establish safe houses in abandoned buildings or the homes of mesmerized citizens. From there, they work tirelessly to subvert the authority of a settlement, coming and going in secret.

Benevolent Fronts: A yuan-ti dungeon in the cities lurks behind the false front of a charitable organization or other benevolent group. The yuan-ti take great care to ensure that this deception is meticulously detailed, throwing off suspicion of what lies beneath.

Hidden Caches: Cultists operating safe houses keep supplies on hand for use by yuan-ti spies, including magic items, poisons, ritual scrolls, and bribe money. Their hiding places are sometimes no more secretive than a cellar or a space beneath the floorboards of a building, with a venomous snake left among the goods to protect them from thieves.

Escape Route: A yuan-ti cult maintains secret passages that its members can use to escape if their true nature is discovered. Such a route might lead deeper into an adjoining yuan-ti dungeon, or to an inconspicuous exit in the city above.

Lair of the Snakes

Yuan-ti dungeons are terrifying places, possessing an ancient and exotic wonder. Winding passages connect a dungeon's chambers, which are sculpted into serpentine curves.

The yuan-ti are perfectionists in their architecture, creating magnificent structures with impeccable detail. These works are cold and passionless, however, as befits a reptilian race. Fanged jaws, sinuous bodies, and scaled surfaces are a constant motif, rippling subtly in the shadows to rattle the nerves of intruders.

Cunning Construction: Yuan-ti dungeons have numerous secret passages that crisscross between chambers. In many cases, these passages also lead to the surface, providing easy ways in and out for yuan-ti spies.

Temple to Zehir: All yuan-ti revere Zehir, god of darkness, and they create grand temples to honor him. These sites feature stepped pyramids, giant statues, sacrificial pits, and images of snakes throughout.

Transformation Chamber: The most fearsome site in any yuan-ti dungeon is the chamber where the dark curses of that race are worked on victims and thralls. These places reek of sorcery and poison, and they echo with the screams of the unwitting creatures that enter and are forever changed.

Special Rewards

The deepest and most heavily fortified dungeons could well contain magical treasures that surpass anything known in the surface world. This section presents scrolls of power, magic items that provide godlike power to those who wield them.

It also contains stories and statistics for a quartet of dungeon companions—secondary characters that can enhance an adventure story and fill useful roles in a party at the same time.

SCROLLS OF POWER

A scroll of power is a specially prepared magic item that contains an unusually rare spell, prayer, evocation, discipline, or hex. Created by gods, exarchs, and archwizards, these scrolls are among the mightiest and rarest of all magic items.

A scroll of power can be used by any character as a standard action. Once it is used, the magic of the scroll dissipates and cannot be brought forth again.

Item Descriptions

Each scroll of power description has three elements.

Tier: Like artifacts, scrolls of power are designed for a given tier of play.

Benefit: The effect created by the activation of the scroll.

Award: The sort of adventure or campaign style the scroll might benefit.

Mass Heal

Lady Dusk, the compassionate leader of a prominent healers' guild, spent her life traveling the world. Selfless and courageous, she sought always to mend the wounds of the suffering.

One day, Lady Dusk received a message from an old half-elf friend. Trinadel was an adventurous sort, forever looking to unravel ancient lore and uncover rare artifacts. The letter spoke of his stay in the village of Barovia, below the grim walls of Castle Ravenloft. Many in the village were ill, he wrote, and Dusk's services might help ease their affliction. He also mentioned the eerie nature of the place, and how he could not help but feel that he was being watched.

The urgency of the letter inspired Dusk to make the journey. Before long, she and her party entered the strange mists that surrounded Barovia. Disoriented and confused, the group quickly lost its way despite the best efforts of the ranger Rindasu. As the fog thickened, the howling of evil beasts began to rise. The group raced on, hoping to escape the abyssal wolves that shadowed their movement. But with each wolf slain, two more seemingly appeared from the shadows.

Finally surrounded, the party was forced to stop. The stalwart paladin Bryce stepped forward to protect his companions, who were exhausted and on the cusp of defeat. Lady Dusk knew that if she did not act quickly, she and her companions would perish.

Whispering a quick prayer to Sune, Dusk quickly drew forth a sacred scroll that was their only hope for survival. As she uttered its incantation, a divine light flared across the battlefield, and the mortal wounds that had ravaged the party were no more. Revitalized and ready for battle again, the adventurers drove off the wolves and raced through the woods to reach Barovia at last. No one spoke, but Dusk offered silent thanks to Sune for the prayer that had saved them.

This scroll was created during the Dawn War—a gift granted to mortal warriors fearless enough to stand at the gods' side against the forces of chaos. The power of *Mass Heal* was dispersed throughout the ravaged lands of the world and actively hunted by the primordials and their servants. No one knows how many of these relics survived those chaotic early days, but legends tell of worthy adventurers who receive visions regarding a scroll's location.

Tier: Paragon.

Benefit: Each ally within 10 squares of the user is restored to full hit points and maximum healing surges, and is cured of all diseases currently affecting him or her. In addition, each ally is immune to fear until the end of the encounter and gains temporary hit points equal to his or her bloodied value.

Award: *Mass Heal* is an excellent reward for a party that completes a difficult quest for a deity or a religious organization. The scroll might be hidden deep within the crypt of a long-dead hero, protected by guardian spirits or constructs. In the game, it can reverse the outcome of a climactic encounter or enable a party low on resources to continue an adventure as if starting fresh.

Polymorph

Bah'Li, battle mage of the high elves, had been fighting for weeks. The Tyrantclaw orcs' onslaught was more difficult to quell than he had originally anticipated. With his forces depleted and failure becoming a clear possibility, Bah'Li returned to his camp on the sandy beaches of the island. There, in secret, he opened an ornate rune-etched scroll case—the one his father had bestowed on him prior to his departure. He was told that the power of the scroll could never be spoken of, and that when he found himself in a battle from which there was no escape, its use would turn the tide.

A long-forgotten god was the inspiration for the dark mages who developed this fearsome spell—and who paid the price for twisting the laws of nature with

their magic. Legends say that this unnamed god would steal the souls of the innocent and maliciously reshape them into creatures of horror.

Knowing that his acolytes yearned to share this dark magic of transformation, the god gifted them with a small portion of his power. The mages worked endlessly to craft the incantations that would grant them access to their god's designs. In the end, however, those designs were their undoing, as their vengeful god's magic transformed them into the creatures they sought to shape.

Today, precious few *Polymorph* scrolls of power exist, and all carry a hint of the evil that crafted them. Though *Polymorph* can be used safely, its benefit comes at a price.

Tier: Heroic.

Benefit: The scroll's user assumes the form of an elite monster of his or her level + 2 or lower. Until the end of the encounter, the user has the hit points, defenses, traits, powers, and special abilities of the monster, instead of his or her own. At the end of the encounter, the user resumes his or her normal form and takes damage equal to the bloodied value of the monster.

Award: The copies of *Polymorph* that still exist are protected by mighty wizards and other guardians. Adventurers might be given this scroll to use as a last resort when performing a task of grave importance.

Power Word Kill

For six days, Emirikol the Chaotic had battled the storm titan Volturnus. The renegade wizard used every spell he knew, calling down elemental fury against the monstrous foe. He summoned demons to rend the titan's flesh and blasted its mind with raw arcane power. Though battered and bloodied, Volturnus yet came on. With the titan's fury raining down on him, Emirikol climbed a rocky spur where the battle would conclude face to face. Volturnus thundered out a booming laugh, thinking the wizard would soon be dead. Yet there on the storm-swept rocks, Emirikol shouted out the word of undoing. Volturnus shrieked. The winds howled. Lightning raked the clouds. Then the titan fell dead, a threat no more.



For the first wizards, all the world's languages were insufficient for commanding arcane energy. Lacking the ability and vocabulary to voice the esoteric concepts behind their spellcraft, they created an arcane lexicon—a language of magic—from which the first *power words* were created.

Every wizard spell contains words of power, without which its magic would not take effect. Most are harmless on their own, manifesting magic only when shaped by a caster. A few, however, embody enough potential that merely speaking the words aloud is enough to draw that magic forth.

These most potent arcane effects—*Power Word Stun*, *Power Word Blind*, and the dreadful *Power Word Kill*—proved exceedingly dangerous when loosed on the world. Many archmages took it upon themselves to purge these words of power from the arcane lexicon, destroying spellbooks and revising history. The *power words* were lost, or so they hoped. As it happened, not every wizard was willing to part with such awesome arcane might.

Tier: Paragon.

Benefit: One mortal creature that the user can see dies. The creature must be of the same level as the user or lower. The user then drops to 0 hit points.

Award: The few copies of *Power Word Kill* that were preserved by the ancient wizards have been lost or hidden for centuries. Adventurers might uncover one of these scrolls in an ancient arcane laboratory, buried in a vault deep in the Underdark, or in a forgotten library of some dead civilization such as the tiefling empire Bael Turath or the serpent kingdom of Zannad. Wizards who hold copies of *Power Word Kill* guard them closely, fearing that the scrolls will be used against them.

Wish

The dying god sat on the throne of his crumbling fortress, contemplating the end of all that was. His children had bested him, and now the magic that was his lifeblood was failing. Time and the world would change as they always did, but he would no longer be a part of that.

*With the last of his immortal might, he began the process of scribing a set of scrolls of power as an eternal testament to his strength and will. The scroll of *Wish* would be a final gift to his lost followers—the power of the gods themselves bestowed on mortal hands.*

While casting the scrolls down into the world, he knew that mortals would one day find them buried deep in the tombs and dungeons of the past. He would not live to see the day that they were discovered. But as his life faded, he was content to know that his prowess would once more reshape the world.

When the world was young and the Dawn War raged across all lands, gods and primordials alike coveted the loyalty and assistance of the mortals who



A wish is as great as its caster can imagine

would heed their call. Each side did what they could to entice followers to their cause. Some gave gifts of arms, armor, and artifacts. Others offered access to forbidden lore—the most potent of which was the ability to reshape the nature of time and reality.

In time, the use of the *wish* spell grew out of control. The mortals who had knowledge of it began to dream about challenging the masters of the Astral Sea and the Elemental Chaos. During the last days of the Dawn War, the gods and the primordials fought to erase all knowledge of it from mortal memory.



FOR THE DM: BE CAREFUL WHAT THEY WISH FOR

Wish has been the most powerful spell in every version of the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game. Use this scroll with care. Ensure that your players know that the request of the entity that grants the wish is likely to be very challenging to fulfill. Unlike what is suggested in older editions of the game, you should respect the intent of the player who activates the scroll, not try to reverse or undo the wish by twisting the player's wording.



This most potent magic still lingers in the world, however, trapped in scrolls of power whose creation has been lost to time. Those who have heard the rumors of the *Wish* scrolls constantly seek out their resting places. Agents of the gods and the primordials are likewise keen to discover these lost scrolls, knowing that one employed by the wrong hands might enable the servants of imprisoned primordials to break their masters' chains.

Tier: Epic.

Benefit: The user of this scroll can make one request of a powerful entity. Some examples of valid wishes include: personal improvement (+4 to one ability score of the user's choice), a single uncommon or rare magic item, a clue to the secret name of a primordial, or the last known whereabouts of an artifact. The user must perform a service for the entity in recompense. Failure to complete the service has dire consequences.

Award: A *Wish* scroll might be granted as a reward for performing a service for an exarch, or might be uncovered in the tomb of a legendary hero. Rumors exist that some demon lords protect copies of this scroll, as do the scribes of the world's most prestigious library. No one can confirm these rumors, however, since revealing that one possesses such a scroll would likely cause mass hysteria and draw the attention of those who covet it.

DUNGEON COMPANIONS

Adventurers can come across intangible rewards during a dungeon delve, such as assistance from an unusual and unexpected source. The following characters can be used as companions to supplement the heroes' abilities during their underground adventures. Each presents a unique personality, background, and strengths that can be integrated into an adventure's plot. For more information on companion characters, see *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*.

Akaana Vir'tlar

"Fine, we'll do it your way . . . for now."

Entitled and petulant in attitude, this adolescent drow heiress doesn't know how alone she truly is. Her home, the drow city Aoroon, lies entombed in the venomous webs of the demon-spider Yorgrix—along with the shriveled husks of her formerly influential family. As a child hostage under the cruel eyes of a rival house's matriarch in a neighboring city, Akaana was spared the destruction of Aoroon. She was determined to be reunited with the survivors of her family, though, and used her magical talents to escape her captors. She now slips through the shadows of the Underdark, unaware of the danger ahead or the matriarch's assassins in hot pursuit.

Gaining Akaana Akaana is young and sheltered, and not yet fully corrupted by the ways of her kind. At the same time, she is firmly indoctrinated in drow superiority, carrying herself as if she were a queen. The source of her arcane gifts is shrouded in mystery. She needs direction to fully develop them without hurting herself or others.

The adventurers might encounter Akaana as she wanders through the Underdark, or perhaps as she sneaks into their camp to steal food. She is quick to bargain for an alliance, but she refuses to plead for one. Accustomed to male slaves waiting on her in a sumptuous fashion, Akaana is dismissive toward males in the party. A strong female character, on the other hand, might find herself becoming a role model for this arrogant but vulnerable "princess."

Akaana Vir'tlar		Level 13 Controller
Medium fey humanoid, drow		
HP 68; Bloodied 34; Healing Surges 6		Initiative +9
AC 26, Fortitude 24, Reflex 27, Will 27		Perception +7
Speed 6		Darkvision
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⊕ Dagger (weapon) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d4 + 9 damage.		
⚡ Scare (fear, psychic) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +17 vs. Will		
Hit: 1d8 + 9 psychic damage, and the target cannot make opportunity attacks against Akaana until the end of her next turn.		
✱ Dark Gathering (psychic, zone) ♦ Encounter		
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +17 vs. Will		
Hit: 1d10 + 9 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of Akaana's next turn. If the target is in the origin square of the burst, the target is also blinded until the end of Akaana's next turn.		
Effect: The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of Akaana's next turn and is heavily obscured to enemies.		
MOVE ACTIONS		
🕸 Spider Climb ♦ Encounter		
Effect: Akaana climbs up to her speed.		
MINOR ACTIONS		
☁ Cloud of Darkness (zone) ♦ Encounter		
Effect: Close burst 1. The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of Akaana's next turn. The cloud blocks line of sight for all creatures except Akaana. Any creature other than Akaana is blinded while entirely within the cloud.		
🌑 Umbral Leap (teleportation) ♦ Encounter		
Requirement: Akaana must be in a square of dim light or darkness.		
Effect: Akaana teleports up to 10 squares to a square of dim light or darkness. Akaana need not see her destination, but if she cannot occupy that square, the teleportation is negated.		
TRIGGERED ACTIONS		
🕸 Lingering Magic ♦ Encounter		
Trigger: An effect caused by one of Akaana's powers would end on her current turn.		
Effect (Free Action): The triggering effect instead ends at the end of Akaana's next turn.		
Skills Arcana +14, Intimidate +14, Stealth +14		
Str 8 (+5)	Dex 16 (+9)	Wis 12 (+7)
Con 10 (+6)	Int 17 (+9)	Cha 17 (+9)
Alignment unaligned		Languages Common, Elven
Equipment robes, dagger, jewelry		

Meepo

“Meepo is just a pawn in big game of life.”

The morose kobold named Meepo has always been something of an outsider in his tribe. A runt even by kobold standards, he was assigned to the dangerous task of caring for a white dragon wyrmling hatched from a stolen egg. Ordinarily, such a job would be a great honor. In Meepo's case, though, the tribe's leader secretly hoped that the dragon would kill the wretched kobold. Fortunately for Meepo, he has consistently proven quick enough to avoid becoming the wyrmling's next meal, and he has become enamored of the creature despite its efforts to kill him.

Meepo		Level 1 Striker
Small natural humanoid (reptile), kobold		
HP 26; Bloodied 13; Healing Surges 8	Initiative +4	
AC 16, Fortitude 13, Reflex 16, Will 13	Perception +7	
Speed 6	Darkvision	
TRAITS		
Combat Advantage		
Meepo deals 1d6 extra damage against any target granting combat advantage to him.		
Trap Sense		
Meepo gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against attacks made by traps.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔ Spear (weapon) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC		
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage.		
🏹 Sling (weapon) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +7 vs. AC		
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage.		
MINOR ACTIONS		
👉 Shifty Maneuver ♦ Encounter		
Effect: Close burst 2 (Meepo and allies in the burst); the target can shift 1 square as a free action.		
TRIGGERED ACTIONS		
⚔ Opportunistic Jab (weapon) ♦ Encounter		
Trigger: An enemy misses Meepo with an attack.		
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Meepo uses <i>spear</i> against the triggering enemy, and that creature grants combat advantage to Meepo for this attack.		
Skills Stealth +9, Thievery +9		
Str 8 (-1)	Dex 18 (+4)	Wis 14 (+2)
Con 14 (+2)	Int 12 (+1)	Cha 10 (+0)
Alignment unaligned		Languages Common, Draconic
Equipment leather armor, spear, sling, 20 bullets		

Gaining Meepo Meepo lacks the cruelty found in many kobolds; he is a sensitive fellow. Any injury to his beloved dragon causes him to break down in fear for the dragon and of the punishment he might face for failure to keep the dragon safe.



Characters are most likely to encounter Meepo after a rival kobold tribe, a pack of goblins, or some other group has kidnapped the dragon. If the adventurers help Meepo recover his friend, he gladly helps them. Any character who treats him well could gain Meepo as a long-term ally and companion.

Thresher

"Master save Thresher. Thresher help master."

None of the svirfneblin of Glimmerhollow would have guessed that when the feral troglodyte they nicknamed "Thresher" disappeared, the tunnels surrounding their town would grow more dangerous. A few gnome deaths were ascribed to Thresher, but the svirfneblin didn't realize that the troglodyte kept the tunnels leading to their city safer. Preferring aggressive prey, Thresher took down wandering monsters, bold svirfneblin, and potential invaders alike.

Gaining Thresher Adventurers might encounter Thresher as a prisoner. If the characters free her, they find that Thresher speaks haltingly, although she is uncommonly intelligent for her kind. She might express her gratitude by leaving dead prey as gifts for those who freed her. If treated well, Thresher could show up when least expected, joining a battle on the side of her new friends.

Thresher		Level 6 Striker
Medium natural humanoid (reptile), troglodyte		
HP 53; Bloodied 26; Healing Surges 9		Initiative +5
AC 21, Fortitude 20, Reflex 18, Will 19		Perception +6
Speed 5		Darkvision
TRAITS		
Combat Advantage		
Thresher deals 1d6 extra damage against any target granting combat advantage to her.		
Troglodyte Stench ◆ Aura 1		
Living enemies take a -2 penalty to attack rolls while in the aura.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⊕ Claw ◆ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC		
Hit: 1d6 + 7 damage.		
↓ Tooth and Claw ◆ Encounter		
Attack: Melee 1 (one or two creatures); +12 vs. AC. If Thresher targets only one creature, she can make this attack twice against that creature.		
Hit: 1d6 + 7 damage. If the attack bloodies the target, Thresher can use <i>claw</i> against it as a free action.		
↓ Feral Pounce ◆ Encounter		
Effect: Thresher shifts up to 2 squares before the attack.		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC		
Hit: 3d6 + 7 damage, and Thresher shifts up to 2 squares. If Thresher has cover or concealment after shifting, she can make a Stealth check to hide as a free action.		
MINOR ACTIONS		
Blind Spot Advantage ◆ Encounter		
Effect: Thresher gains concealment against one enemy she can see until the end of her next turn.		
Skills Athletics +12, Stealth +10		
Str 18 (+7)	Dex 14 (+5)	Wis 16 (+6)
Con 16 (+6)	Int 10 (+3)	Cha 8 (+2)
Alignment unaligned Languages Common, Draconic		

Ultok

Although a young specimen, this umber hulk stands half again as high as a tall dwarf. It responds to Dwarven commands as attentively as a trained hound.

The juvenile umber hulk named Ultok wastes away from loneliness and hunger in the chambers of Z'kar, a dwarven mining outpost turned graveyard. Dwarves trained him to be a loyal mine laborer and a beast of burden. The tame umber hulk routed a group of orc raiders before they could raze Z'kar, but not before the orcs slaughtered the rest of the outpost's inhabitants. Now the carcasses of orcs mingle with the dwarven dead. Trained to await orders, Ultok waits stoically for a command that might never come.

Gaining Ultok Ultok is a docile creature. The dwarves who employed him to excavate tunnels treated him well. Ultok assumes that adventurers are enemies when they first find him, and he loyally defends his master's body. His name is inscribed in Davek runes across his brass collar, which should tip off characters that Ultok is not the monster he appears to be. Obedient and eager to please, the umber hulk understands commands given in the Dwarven language, the sounds of which are comforting to him. With a little work, the characters can make Ultok a useful ally in their Underdark explorations, as long as they can keep him fed.

Ultok		Level 10 Defender
Medium natural magical beast, umber hulk		
HP 85; Bloodied 42; Healing Surges 12		Initiative +7
AC 27, Fortitude 25, Reflex 22, Will 22		Perception +12
Speed 5, burrow 1 (tunneling)		Darkvision, tremorsense 3
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⊕ Claw ◆ At-Will		
Requirement: Ultok must not have a creature grabbed.		
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +16 vs. AC		
Hit: 1d10 + 10 damage, and the target falls prone.		
↓ Sweeping Claws ◆ Encounter		
Effect: Ultok uses <i>claw</i> twice. If both attacks hit the same target, Ultok grabs the target (escape DC 18).		
↔ Daunting Gaze (psychic) ◆ Encounter		
Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +14 vs. Will		
Hit: 1d8 + 8 psychic damage, and Ultok marks the target (save ends) and pulls it up to 3 squares.		
Skills Athletics +15, Endurance +13		
Str 20 (+10)	Dex 14 (+7)	Wis 14 (+7)
Con 16 (+8)	Int 5 (+2)	Cha 10 (+5)
Alignment unaligned		Languages understands Dwarven

Appendix 1: Build Your Own Dungeon

Dungeon building can be one of the most enjoyable aspects of running a Dungeons & Dragons game. It can also be one of the most overlooked skills involved in being a great DM. They don't call you a *Dungeon Master* for nothing! You should be the consummate expert when it comes to creating fun and enjoyable dungeon adventures.

Creating an entertaining and challenging dungeon is as much an art as it is a science, and the process can be as simple or complex as you want it to be. Check out this section for important concepts designed to expand your understanding of how to approach the construction of your one-of-a-kind creation.

LINEAR VS. DYNAMIC

Before you start to draw anything up or even think too much about other basic decisions you'll need to make, decide whether you want to create a linear dungeon or a dynamic one.

The linear approach is the simplest way to create, manage, and run a dungeon adventure and its encounters. A linear dungeon involves fixed connections with limited choices and typically forces a group of players through a series of encounters from start to finish. Imagine a flowchart in which a series of linked events runs from one side of the page to the other. Limited options for variation might emerge as the group progresses through the dungeon, but you have most likely already decided what will occur and when.

As you create more dungeons, you will discover what works best for you and your players. A linear dungeon design is great for DMs who want to stick to a predefined story line, and for players who prefer a straightforward buildup leading to a climactic final encounter.

A dynamic dungeon is more complex than a linear one. An adventure in such a setting involves multiple plot paths in addition to incorporating a variety of decisions the players can make. Think of a dynamic dungeon as a decision-making engine. The players are challenged not only by the monsters, hazards, and traps they encounter, but also by the outcome of their choices as they face those challenges. A dynamic dungeon can provide a rewarding experience for your players, but it also involves more preparation on your part.

A dynamic dungeon is built around a series of decisions the players can make and the resulting



No matter where you go . . .

outcomes of each decision. With each new outcome that occurs as the story unfolds, the path to the conclusion of the adventure can change. This means that if you were to run a different group through the same dungeon under the same initial circumstances, the experience that results might be completely different. The benefit of running a dynamic dungeon is that the players feel they have more control over the events that unfold.

ROUGH IT OUT

Now it's time to get out the basic building blocks of dungeon design—in other words, all the topics that are covered earlier in this book. Decide on an overall purpose or theme for the place and a location, then think about the kinds of creatures and environmental effects that might be part of the dungeon.

You might have started to think about these issues already—for instance, maybe you've always intended to build an underwater dungeon with natural, snaking passageways, or a “true” dungeon complex made up of traditional-style rooms and corridors. The point is that you should make a few basic decisions about your dungeon—rough it out in your mind—before you do any “actual” design.

Use the material in this book, or any other sources you have, to inspire you and help organize your thinking. Do you want to build one of the types of dungeons described in Chapter 2 (perhaps your players have a special interest in exploring a floating castle), or do you want to try creating a hybrid or a combination of more than one type? For an added dose of realism in a dungeon made up of natural caves, you can use images and details from actual locations to enhance both your design decisions and the playing experience.

DRAW IT UP

Next, using whatever materials you prefer, start to draft or sketch out what the map of your dungeon will look like. DMs have been getting great results for a long time by using a pencil and a pad of graph paper (and nowadays both of those implements might be electronic in nature).

With all of your basic decisions in mind, start to consider how you want the dungeon to unfold as the characters traverse it. Label each area with a name or a number that you can use as a reference. Once you have the dungeon (or at least a good-sized section of it) mapped out and labeled, you can begin the work of bringing it to life.

Create a description for each area you labeled. These descriptions can be as brief or as elaborate as you like. Some DMs are comfortable with brief

descriptions that serve as memory joggers (“sleeping quarters”). Others like to note more detail (“sleeping quarters: mounds of animal hides”). If you include important sensory information such as smells and sounds in addition to what the characters can see, you can better describe the area to your players.

When your area descriptions are completed, you can start to populate your dungeon with monsters, hazards, and traps that fit your theme and are appropriate for the level of the party. For more information on constructing challenges based on level, see page 285 of the *Rules Compendium*.

For an extended adventure, you don't have to detail everything at once, even though you should have a good idea of what the dungeon will contain overall in terms of challenges. Leave yourself some “design room” by concentrating first on the details of the areas the characters will pass through early on, and fill in the trappings of other areas as the heroes get closer to them. This approach also enables you to adjust your final design as the plot of the adventure unfolds, which can do nothing but enhance the story.

Form and Function

It's important to note here that the design of your map isn't necessarily dictated by whether you're making a linear dungeon or a dynamic one. The difference between those kinds of dungeons is more story-based than structural. Although the layout of a linear dungeon is usually relatively straightforward and, well, linear, the same framework can work for a dynamic dungeon.

Conversely, you can draw up a dungeon that's a maze-like mix of chambers and the passages that connect them. The path the characters take to get through it might be convoluted but nonetheless still take them on a linear story . . . or the setting's complexity could lead you easily into designing a dynamic dungeon full of plot threads and story options.

Dynamic Decision-Making

In a linear dungeon, the question “What do we do next?” often has just one obvious answer. A dynamic dungeon, in contrast, requires you to create options in reaction to which the players will make decisions. These options can be as simple as a room with a choice of two exit doors, or as complex as a magical puzzle that whisks the adventurers to a dozen possible destinations based on the answers to a series of riddles.

If you want to challenge players with options that are large in number or complex in their ramifications, you could find that your dungeon has already outgrown the need for you to make a physical map of all the possibilities. You might find it easier to keep your thinking organized if you treat your

complicated, dynamic dungeon as a series of events in a flowchart.

As you create the layout of your dungeon (in other words, draw the map), consider how the events of the story help to dictate the structure of the environment. For instance, you could create a branch in your story that sends the characters along one of two routes depending on their choice or on the outcome of a prior encounter. One route leads to a straight-up combat encounter, and the other path takes the heroes into a puzzle that they must solve in consecutive steps. The location of the combat encounter might be a large single chamber, while the puzzle lends itself to being laid out in a network of narrow corridors. If you don't know what kinds of story choices you're going to give the players ahead of time, you can't take these facts into account on your map.

As you flesh out your dynamic dungeon, you open up more and more branches representing players' choices and possible outcomes. In some cases, different outcomes might lead to the same ultimate result. In many cases, the climactic encounter in a dynamic dungeon is the same regardless of how the adventurers arrive there. The choices that the players have made along the way, however, create a unique context for that climax, making them feel that they are the driving force behind the adventure.

DUNGEON SYNERGY

Many dungeons, particularly those that have survived relatively unassailed by creatures from outside, have had decades or longer in which to establish interrelationships and synergy between the various inhabitants. Before you start to populate your dungeon with particular monsters, think about how much interaction the denizens of the place have with each other.

In certain kinds of dungeons, “synergy” (however you define the term) is a minor or nonexistent issue. Some of the most challenging dungeons are those made up almost entirely of encounters with traps, hazards, automatons, and nonliving monsters. In such a place, interdependence between the parts really matters only if you want it to.

On the other hand, a dungeon adventure that's driven by story elements and an over-arching plot is more likely to need this sort of attention. You can create a setting that plays off the rivalries and conflict between the creatures that live there. Doing this helps to make a dungeon a vital and diverse system, creating the impression that it is a living part of the world, not simply a passive environment for exploration.

A relationship between monsters could be as straightforward and one-directional as that between predator and prey, or master and slave. Or it can be as

complex as the tensions that arise between opposing power groups or factions of equal strength. In such a situation, the characters could shift the balance of power depending on which side they support.

To flesh out these factions, ask yourself a few questions as a starting point. What creatures make up the faction? Is it a group dominated by a single kind of creature, or one that connects loose bands of different creatures? From what conflict or event did the faction originally arise? How long has the faction existed, and how has its influence grown or waned? Who runs the group? What kind of leadership structure is in place? Who are the faction's other important figures, and what resources do they have available?

Try to come up with as many details of this sort as possible, so that the players can immerse themselves in the roleplaying opportunities that arise as the adventurers cross paths with a faction's forces.

UNIQUE CHALLENGES

One of the greatest strengths of the D&D game, when it comes to adventure design, is the number and variety of monsters you have to choose from. After you decide what races and other kinds of creatures to feature in your dungeon, consider modifying some of them to suit the story of your adventure and help give players a distinctive experience.

We're not necessarily talking about mechanical changes here. Sure, you can differentiate monsters by adding to or altering their traits and powers—but sometimes you can make an even bigger difference, in the framework of your story, by changing the way monsters look or the way they act.

Behavior

A great way to make a monster unforgettable is to differentiate it from others of its kind by how it behaves during an encounter. Monsters that share the same statistics block can be nuanced in this way, giving the players a chance to think of their foes as more than just collections of abilities.

For example, the goblin is an iconic creature and a mainstay of low-level dungeons. Even so, the similarity between the attacks and powers that these “out of the book” creatures possess can quickly make repeated combat encounters with them feel stale. You can address this problem before it occurs by adding some individuality to one or more of those goblins.

Consider three goblin combatants that have identical statistics blocks. You could decide that goblin one is afraid of water, refusing to approach a magic pool at the center of the encounter area. Goblin two does a ridiculous-looking victory dance whenever it deals any damage to a foe. Goblin three is discovered cowering in a corner, begging for its life.

Without changing any combat statistics, you have created individuals among these commonly encountered creatures—individuals that stand out from the crowd. In all three of these cases, the characters might be faced with the question of whether to show mercy to such an unusual goblin—or they might wonder if the goblin’s behavior is a ruse designed to throw them off guard. No matter what, you’ve given the players something unexpected to think about.

Appearance

It’s commonly understood that, for all practical purposes, creatures of the same kind look and sound the same way. You and the players use this familiarity to your advantage all the time—when the characters burst into a room that holds a group of orcs, everyone at the table understands what they’re looking at.

In your dungeon design, you could make one of those orcs stand out by having him wear a bright red helm. When the action begins, the other orcs form a protective circle around the special one. Are they protecting him because he truly is special, or is it the helmet they care about? What you or the players make of this situation and how it resolves might dictate how later events in the adventure unfold.

Imagine that the characters come across a band of human cultists deep inside your dungeon. You reveal that, unlike their pasty-faced compatriots, these enemies have skin seemingly bronzed by exposure to the sun. Is this evidence, perhaps, that a passage to the surface lies somewhere beyond? A simple change in the appearance of these cultists opens up a host of story possibilities for you to explore.

Mechanical Tools

Changing the game statistics of a monster is certainly a direct way to make your version of that creature stand out from the run-of-the-mill variety. If you’re the sort of DM who enjoys tinkering with mechanics, the game offers tools and features to get you started. In particular, monster themes (from *Dungeon Master’s Guide 2*, *The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea*, *The Book of Vile Darkness*, and other sources) and monster templates (in the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*, *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead*, and other sources) can be a big part of your DM’s toolbox, enabling you to create distinctive variants of creatures that might otherwise become too familiar to players and characters alike.

Another way to alter monsters is by “reskinning.” When you reskin a monster, you take away traits, usually having to do with the monster’s race, and place another set of abilities on the monster, keeping most of its existing powers intact. For instance, you might have a special need for a drow spider master, which you could model on the hobgoblin beast master

(*Monster Vault*, page 156). Remove its hobgoblin traits (natural origin, low-light vision) and add drow traits (fey origin, darkvision), then use “spider” in places where the hobgoblin’s trait powers refer to “beast” or “magical beast.” In similar fashion, you might add ice walk, cold resistance, vulnerability to fire, and the ability to burrow through ice to a bulette to create a glacial bulette. Just as with every other aspect of your dungeon creations, your imagination is the only limit to what you can do with reskinning.



WORDS FROM THE MASTER

Assume that you have assembled a group of players. Each has created a character, determined his or her race and profession, and spent some time carefully equipping these neophyte adventurers with everything that the limited funds available could purchase. Your participants are now eagerly awaiting instructions from you as to how to find the place they are to seek their fortunes in. You inform them that there is a rumor in the village that something strange and terrible lurks in the abandoned monastery not far from the place. In fact, one of the braver villagers will serve as guide if they wish to explore the ruins! (This seemingly innocent guide might be nothing more than he seems, or possibly an agent of some good or evil power, or a thief in disguise, or just about anything else. . . .) The party readily agrees, and so the adventure begins.

You inform them that after about a two mile trek along a seldom-used road, they come to the edge of a fen. A narrow causeway leads out to a low mound upon which stand the walls and buildings of the deserted monastery. One of the players inquires if the mound appears to be travelled, and you inform the party that only a very faint path is discernible—as if any traffic is light and infrequent. Somewhat reassured, another player asks if anything else is apparent. You describe the general bleakness of the bog, with little to relieve the view save a few clumps of brush and tamarack sprouting here and there (probably on bits of higher ground) and a fairly dense cluster of the same type of growth approximately a half mile beyond the abandoned place. Thus, the party has only one place to go—along the causeway—if they wish to adventure. The leading member of the group (whether appointed or self-elected, it makes no difference) orders that the party should proceed along the raised pathway to the monastery, and the real adventure begins.

—Gary Gygax, “The First Dungeon Adventure,”
AD&D Dungeon Masters Guide, 1979



Appendix 2: Random Dungeons

Random generation tables have been a feature of the D&D game since its earliest days. Roll the dice, let the results dictate (or at least suggest) what happens next, and see what you get!

This appendix gives you a set of tables for creating a random dungeon and filling it with details. The tables don't replace the need for you to decide how your dungeon is configured—you still get to draw a map and determine how the rooms and chambers are connected to one another. And you're still in control of the big story behind your dungeon adventure (in other words, there's no table for "Campaign Plotline"). Beyond that, you can let these tables do the work of fleshing out the environment and the story you're crafting. As you'll see from the example at the end of the appendix, the results of your rolls can send your imagination in directions you might not have anticipated.

When these tables are used in the order presented here, some of them come into play at each stage of your dungeon-building process. Many of them draw on or refer to information elsewhere in this book.



HOW TO USE THE TABLES

Short answer: Any way you want.

Slightly longer answer: Treat the results of your die rolls as either inflexible facts, sources of inspiration, or a combination of both.

If you let the tables dictate everything to you, it's possible that you'll find yourself facing a dilemma at some point when two die results don't play nice together (a kobold dungeon beneath a desert region?). You can resolve this sort of problem with a creative solution (the area wasn't a desert until after the kobolds moved in), or you can pretend the "kobolds" result or the "desert" result never happened and roll for something that seems more realistic.

By thinking of these tables as lists of options rather than exhaustive and clear-cut choices, you give yourself the freedom to pick and choose from the information and ideas the tables present. Scan through the possibilities of a list before you pick up a d20—something might jump out at you that's perfect for your needs, or you might be inspired to put your own spin on one of the choices we've provided.



Involving the Characters

To start the process, you need to make some basic decisions about how the characters will interact with your adventure story, and vice versa. If your players use the character themes presented in Chapter 1 for their adventurers, you can draw on the first section of Chapter 3 (pages 120–124) for adventure hooks that are appropriate for each of those themes. If you find that you can use one of those ideas in its entirety, great. More likely, you'll need to come up with specific plot points based on the characters' backgrounds and the existing threads of your campaign.

Revelations and twists are meant to shake up a dungeon crawl. Think of them as goodies that you can keep in your pocket until you see a way to use them to best advantage. Most are deliberately vague and can be applied to either the adventurers or the villains. If you enjoy thinking on your feet, you could wait and roll on this table while the adventure is under way, either dropping it into the game immediately or waiting till the story hits a lull before you reveal the surprise.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Make 1 roll per player, discard one or two results. See page 120 for definitions.

d20	Adventure Hook
1-7	Announcement
8-10	Foreshadowing
11-12	Misdirection
13-16	Newcomer
17-20	Tough Choice

REVELATIONS AND TWISTS

Make 1 to 3 rolls, combine as appropriate

d20	Revelation or Twist
1	Ambush is sprung
2	Connection between adventurers is revealed
3	Become stuck at the worst time
4	Innocent individual is put in danger
5	Old enemy reappears
6	Portal opens, chaos ensues
7	Preparation pays off
8	Previous adventure is cast in a new light
9	Rival faction arises
10	Seemingly useless talent comes in handy
11	Solved problem becomes unsolved
12	Someone dies suddenly
13	Someone returns from the dead
14	Someone seeks revenge
15	Something nasty is summoned
16	Sudden silence
17	Tool or creature turns against its master
18	Villain disappears (perhaps temporarily)
19	Villain's plan has a bigger scope
20	What everyone feared comes to pass

Who, What, Where?

You can quickly create the building blocks of your dungeon by rolling for a dungeon maker, a dungeon type, and a general location on the following tables. See “Dungeon Makers,” page 134, and “Dungeon Types,” page 80, for more information.

MAKER

Make 2 rolls, choose one result

d20	Dungeon Maker	Page
1	Cultists	134
2	Drow	134
3	Duergar	135
4	Dwarves	137
5	Humans	138
6	Kobolds	139
7	Kuo-toas	140
8	Mind flayers	142
9	Minotaurs	143
10	Wizard	143
11	Yuan-ti	144
12	Other (or choose one)	

TYPE

Make 2 rolls, choose one result

d20	Type	Page
1-2	Cave	80
3-4	Crypt	80
5-6	Death trap	82
7	Floating castle	82
8	Ice palace	84
9	Magic laboratory	85
10	Maze	86
11-12	Mine	86
13-14	Prison	87
15-16	Sewer	88
17-18	Volcano	89
19-20	Warren	90

LOCATION

Make 1 roll or choose one result

d20	Location
1-2	Aquatic, or near a body of water
3-4	City
5	Desert
6	Floating earthberg
7-8	Forest
9-10	Mountain
11	Plains, hills, or valley
12	Tower
13-15	Underdark
16	Feywild
17	Shadowfell
18	Elemental Chaos
19	Astral Sea
20	Choose two compatible locations

Why and How?

Once you know the fundamental facts about your dungeon's origin and where it is, you can use the tables in this section to dress it up.

The first table in this section speaks to the basic reason why the dungeon was built or what its predominant theme or purpose is at the present time. Knowing your dungeon's purpose allows you to give the place an over-arching theme, from the kinds of creatures that dwell there to the plot threads that play out during the adventure. From here, you can add in defenses, weaknesses, motifs, and strange effects to complete the package.

Defenses are meant to be used in addition to (not in place of) traps and monsters. Defenses such as protective wards could be incorporated during construction, though hazards such as an infestation of slime more likely appeared after the place was built.

Weaknesses are rarely created by a builder deliberately. Most either serve some purpose (such as a secret entrance), were caused by the builder's enemies (a competing faction living inside the dungeon), or came about as a result of the passage of time.

Motifs and strange effects go farther afield and add more detail. Motifs provide specific sights, smells, sounds, and so on to set the scene in your dungeon. Strange dungeons include a number of highly magical—and bizarre—features. These can be fun if you want to go outside the norm, but use these options with caution. (Of all these tables, it's probably best to use these two lists as possible choices rather than letting the dice dictate your results.)

PURPOSE

Make 2 rolls, choose one result

d20	Purpose
1	Battle
2	Courage
3	Death
4	Desperation
5	Dreams
6	Enslavement
7	Exploration
8	Fate
9	Grief
10	Honor or oaths
11	Horror
12	Illusion
13	Knowledge
14	Pain
15	Rebirth
16	Risk
17	Society
18	Talent with a specific power source
19	Transformation
20	Worship

DEFENSES

Make 3 rolls, combine as appropriate

d20	Defense
1	Abnormal construction material
2	Animated statues
3	Creature infestation
4	Deadly environment (extreme temperature, poison gas, and so on)
5	Death traps
6	Emotion-altering aura
7	False entrances and tunnels
8	Guard posts
9	Hard-to-reach entrance
10	Illusions
11	Bound creature
12	Mazelike corridors
13	Mind-controlling traps
14	Overgrown vegetation or fungi
15	Password-locked doors
16	Scrying by villain or powerful monster
17	Sealed by authority or magic
18	Spirits of the dead
19	Underwater passages
20	Wards

WEAKNESSES

Make 2 rolls, combine as appropriate

d20	Weakness
1-2	Aged and crumbling
3	Competing factions
4	Festival or ceremony distracts residents
5	Frequent visitors
6-7	Item or magical effect allows safe passage
8	Overconfident villain
9	Earlier intruders triggered traps/killed monsters
10-11	Secret entrance
12-13	Secret tunnels
14-15	Shoddy or hasty construction
16	Simple to navigate
17	Some areas off-limits (sacred, cursed, and so on)
18	Sprawling and difficult to defend
19	Teleportation circle with known key
20	Traitors in the villain's ranks

MOTIFS

Roll as desired, or choose one or more

d20	Motif
1	Ancient writing appears on visitors like tattoos
2	Anything eaten tastes like a specific food
3	Black handprints
4	Diagrams of constellations
5	Doors speak in strange language when opened
6	Echoing screams of slain adventurers
7	Eyelike glowing gemstones set in walls
8	Footsteps echo too many times
9	Light sources change color in different areas
10	Metal fixtures are surprisingly cold or hot
11	Mirrors show past self

12	Persistent fragments of spells cast long ago
13	Fine art, tapestries, or mosaics
14	Scent of burning incense
15	Wall lamps light if creatures come near
16	Shrines containing coins and trinkets
17	Skulls inscribed with names hang from ceiling
18	Spectral blood dripping
19	Thin slime coats all, shrinks away from flames
20	Shroudlike sheets of fog

STRANGE EFFECTS

Roll as desired, or choose one or more

d20	Effect
1	Creatures that enter swap race or gender
2	Constructed of dreams or ideas
3	Dead rise immediately as undead
4	Exists in a space between planes
5	Falling apart, pieces dropping into thin air
6	Flesh and bone warp and distort over time
7	Flowing energy randomly recharges one encounter power during one encounter per day
8	Gravity pulls in different directions
9	Instincts are amplified, reason diminished
10	Some or all of the dungeon is living creature
11	Built on rope bridges between titanic trees
12	Magnetic walls
13	Paths loop back on themselves
14	Reshapes to match master's emotions
15	Rooms built into sides of a single vertical shaft
16	Rooms rearrange constantly
17	Surfaces are plants or fungi
18	All text perused appears blurry, can't be read
19	Time passes strangely or subjectively
20	Ward prevents all battle and bloodshed

Populating a Dungeon

In a dungeon, the heroes don't often run into helpful or allied characters. Instead, the adversaries and monsters set the tone of the adventure. The tables in this section include the major groups of underground dwellers, separated into three categories. A lord controls a dungeon, servants work for the lord, and monsters either prowl on their own or work for those that have enslaved them.

To add more narrative possibilities, roll on the quirks tables to put a different spin on each adversary the adventurers face.

LORD

Make 2 rolls, choose one result; go to Lord Quirks

d20	Master
1-2	Aboleth
3-4	Beholder
5-6	Mind flayer
7-8	Duergar
9	Roper
10-11	Dragon

12-13	Rakshasa
14-15	Archmage
16-17	Lich, vampire, or mummy
18-19	Giant or titan
20	Ascended servant (roll on Servants)

LORD QUIRKS

Make 1 roll or choose one

d20	Quirk
1-2	Arrogant
3-4	Ascetic
5-6	Devout
7-8	Duplicitous
9-10	Greedy
11-12	Insane
13-14	Megalomaniacal
15-16	Militaristic
17-18	Obsessed
19-20	Possessed

SERVANTS

Make 3 rolls, choose two results; go to Servant Quirks

d20	Servants
1	Constructs
2	Cultists
3	Demons or devils
4	Derro
5	Drow
6	Duergar
7	Giants
8	Gnolls
9	Goblins
10	Grimlocks
11	Kobolds
12	Kuo-toas
13	Lycanthropes
14	Minotaurs
15	Myconids
16	Orcs
17	Svirfneblin or gnomes
18	Troglodytes
19	Wizards
20	Yuan-ti

SERVANT QUIRKS

Make 1 roll for each servant result, or choose one

d20	Quirk
1	Crafty
2	Devout
3	Diseased
4	Factionalized
5	Feral
6	Insane
7	Mutant
8	Playful
9	Rebellious
10	Makes traps

11	Undead
12	Uses magic
13	Ghostly
14	Cannibalistic
15	Psionic
16	Heretical
17	Honor-bound
18	Fascistic
19	Mind-controlled
20	Diplomatic

MONSTERS

Make up to 3 rolls, or choose as desired

d20	Monster
1-2	Ankhegs
3-4	Carrion crawlers
5	Cave fishers
6-7	Elementals
8	Hook horrors
9	Mimics
10-11	Otyughs
12-14	Oozes or slimes
15	Purple worms
16	Rust monsters
17-18	Stirges
19-20	Umber hulks

Random Dungeon Example

Let's say your group contains five players. You roll five times on the Adventure Hooks table and get 6, 9, 10, 14, and 19. One of the characters has the escaped thrall theme, and you think that a tough choice hook would work well. The group also contains a treasure hunter and a deep delver, who probably are more interested in just being told where the payoff is. With these ideas in mind, you decide to keep the 19 (tough choice), the 6 (announcement), and also decide on a foreshadowing hook since two of your rolls (9 and 10) gave that result.

Now that you have an idea of what sorts of hooks can draw in the characters, you decide to roll three times on the Revelations and Twists table for some inspiration, keeping any results that seem promising. You get 5 (old enemy), 2 (hidden connection), and 15 (something nasty). These can work pretty well together. For example, the summoning of an elder evil is prophesied but can be thwarted by recovering an ancient holy item, which the treasure hunter seeks. The escaped thrall turns out to have been imprisoned by servitors of that evil being, and might have experienced glimpses of where the item lies. You can use these ideas to form a general story arc.

Now that you have an idea of the adventure's main thrust, you roll to create the basics of the dungeon. You start with the Makers table, rolling 7 (kuo-toas) and 3 (duergar). The idea of raising an ancient evil works better with kuo-toas, so you go with that.

Next, you roll on the Type table, getting 7 (floating castle) and 11 (mine). A floating castle isn't right for this idea, but you could work with an abandoned mine that has delved far into the earth.

Finally, you roll on the Location table, getting 9 (mountain). Sure, that can work. Maybe some duergar dug down in search of abysally infused ores and broke into a subterranean sea under a mountain, awakening something that drove the original miners out but attracted the mad kuo-toas.

To start the next section, you get rolls of 8 (fate) and 11 (horror) on the Purpose table. The second of those results resonates, because of its obvious connection to the idea of an unknown evil deep below.

With a story line and a basic dungeon theme, you're ready to add some details. Rolling three times on the Defenses table gives results of 20 (wards), 7 (false passages), and 12 (mazes). The haphazard tunnels of a duergar mine are well suited to mazes, dead ends, and twisty passages. Perhaps a ward was laid over the area in an attempt to keep the awakening evil from leaving its lake.

What about weaknesses? You roll twice on that table, getting 6 (item allows safe passage) and 4 (festival or ceremony). Both of these are great. The kuo-toas might be performing a ritual in preparation for breaking the wards that hold in the ancient evil. If the adventurers can find the holy relic before

the ceremony is done, they might be able to travel unnoticed, perhaps through the lake itself, while the fish creatures are focused on their rite.

At this point, you've got enough to go on to start outlining your dungeon. If you want, you can randomly roll or choose motifs or strange effects for additional flavor.

Finally, it's time to establish who's in charge of this place. What is that ancient evil? You roll twice on the Lord table and get 1 (aboeth) and 7 (duergar). As it happens, both of these could work well, though you need to keep only one. An aboeth overlord might be what the duergar miners encountered—and in fact duergar might still occupy the upper reaches of the mountain's interior. You can give the lord a random quirk, choose one from the table, or give it some other characteristic of your invention.

For servants, you could keep the duergar result. Your dungeon is sure to contain kuo-toas as well. So you can round things off with three rolls on the Monsters table. You get 3 (carrion crawlers), 14 (oozes), and 17 (stirges). Both oozes and carrion crawlers make sense in the damp caverns of the kuo-toas and their aboethic master.

Is the aboeth the unknown evil that the characters must overcome—or is it just the lieutenant of something far more terrifying? That's up to you.



This troglodyte makes drawings of creatures it sees outside its cave. Recognize anything . . . or anyone?



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