

Diceless Dungeons

Rules for Old-School Excursions Into the Dark

by

James & Kobyn George



The
House
Rules

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by James & Robyn George

Electronic Edition

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For the lovely Robyn,
who left a convention asking the
question: "why do we need
dice?" and started a conversation
that ended here...

Cover art by the incredible
Martin Schongauer
and all others in the public domain,
but no less great for the fact

Dedicated to gamers
everywhere, because they know
our hobby really began
with a passion for the childhood play
none of us could give up...

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INTRODUCTION

This is a role-playing game. A system of imaginative play in a world of magic, monsters, and hoarded treasure awaiting heroes brave enough to seek it. But unlike other games of its kind, this one does not use dice, but only the creativity of its players, bringing it closer to the imaginary stuff of childhood.

One player is the REFEREE. They create an adventure, usually, a dungeon or similar area to be explored by the PLAYERS, who become heroic figures in an imaginary world of fighting men and sorcerer's apprentices seeking riches and glory in battle. These work together as a party, fighting as a team to survive...

During a game, the referee describes what is happening, including important events and/or enemy monsters, and the players decide what their characters do in response, whether fleeing or fighting, etc. Of course, some of these will perish, for the dungeons are cruel. Fortunately, it is easy enough to make a new character and return to the underworld ready for more!





However, this is also an old-school system, emphasizing the decisions of the players over complex rules that end up doing everyone's thinking (and imagining) for them, much to the detriment of play. And old-school is a good match for diceless gaming, because both are open to whatever creative ideas the players and the referee think up and want to try out.

Build a ballista to storm a dragon's lair and even the odds? Dress as goblins to deceive their king and steal their gold? Nothing should be off the table here if the players can reasonably defend their actions, and a central feature of old-school is the ability to add and/or change anything at all. To this end, the referee should treat these rules as just a guide.

Finally, a single dungeon may take several sessions to complete and, even then, the action need not end there. Rather, players can take part in an ongoing campaign SETTING, growing in power and prestige as they explore their world and triumph over it. The dungeons, with their deadly monsters and killing traps, are waiting for heroes brave enough to enter them...

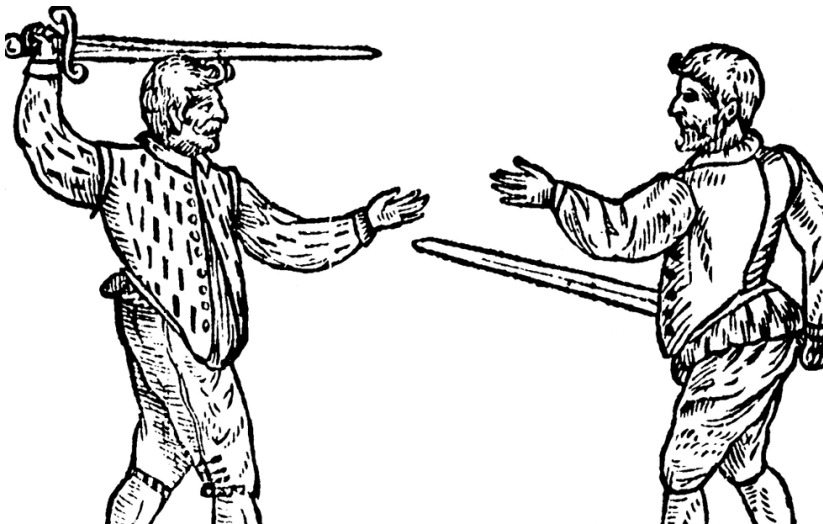
ONE: AGAINST THE DARK

While the referee gets to work preparing an adventure, everyone else must each create their own characters. These are ordinary men and women who did not want to be the blacksmith's apprentice and heard rumors of riches to be won in dark dungeons and faraway lands.

This underscores the difference between the sunlit mortal realm and the subterranean world of soulless evil and highlights the very real terror monsters represent. Fantasy is a fabulous genre for sure, but when magic is commonplace and monsters an everyday occurrence, something is lost to the detriment of both.

ADVENTURERS

Characters are best described as traditional adventurers, and this usually means some sort of fighting man or woman, because without magic, the only way to survive the dungeons is to take up arms or employ stealth. But the deadliest weapon is undeniably the decision-making and problem solving of the participants themselves!



TALENTS

As adventurers, characters can fight with weaponry and perform any actions available to an average person (common sense is the best strategy), although more complex or specialized actions require specific TALENTS that may be unique to the individual person.

To this end, each character gets THREE talents chosen from the following:

TALENT	DESCRIPTION
Acrobatic	climb and fall 50' for half wounds*
Bookish	recall facts about the setting
Cunning	detect some vital clue once per day
Dowsr	locate fresh water underground
Empathetic	identify simple (surface) feelings
Frugal	buy equipment at a 25% discount
Gregarious	charismatic, good first impression
Healthy	heal double wounds when resting
Inspired	detect supernatural evil within 30'
Jailer	pick locks and/or disable traps*
Linguist	speak the languages of a setting
Mighty	perform feats of great strength
Nocturnal	operate in total darkness out to 15'
Oracle	speak one prophesy per game day
Pickpocket	pilfer coins and other small items*
Resistant	receive half wounds from poison
Stealthy	hide from (and sneak past) enemies*
Trailblazer	follow a trail and live off the land

*Stealth not possible in armor or shield

Most talents are self-explanatory, although some require additional notes and probably some interpretation from the referee as shown:

In general, acrobatics and stealth (including thievery and most lock picking) cannot be attempted while armored, noting that characters can switch between armor or stealth as needed.





BOOKISH characters are well read and possess knowledge of the setting such that they will be able to recall important facts, although only when the player asks or the referee thinks this is a good way to advance a scenario.

CUNNING adventurers receive clues from the referee, who decides what gets uncovered, noting that players must still investigate revealed information and do the leg work.

DOWSERS know the direction of water, but may have to travel through enemy territory with no warning as to what may be waiting there!

EMPATHETIC characters cannot read undead or otherwise non-living targets (i.e., automations and the like), and only get a general idea from the rest. Of course, anyone can ask, so the referee should reserve some things for the empathetic exclusively to better ensure its value.

GREGARIOUS persons usually get better results dealing with others, although bad behavior will obviously negate the advantage. Players must always act out their exchanges with the referee.

INSPIRED individuals are either naturally attuned or favored by the gods, noting here that while magic is seldom in the hands of players, supernatural evil lurks in the dark.

LINGUISTS have a broad understanding of many spoken languages enough to make communication possible when it really matters.

MIGHTY heroes are powerful, but still bound by human limitations. The referee may declare certain actions impossible for all but those with this talent to acknowledge their ability.

NOCTURNAL characters move as if in low light conditions out to 15', noting that everyone else, excepting local monsters, cannot function or otherwise engage with enemies, making torches essential despite the associated risk.

ORACLES receive visions from the referee that must still be interpreted. Characters have little control over these, and the player submits to whatever the referee decides, noting that visions relate to some potential future happening.

Once again, difficult acts should be held in reserve for those characters who have the proper abilities. Short of this, talented characters should perform better when attempting identical actions to reflect their superior skills.

THE OPTIONAL APPRENTICE

While magic is rare, the referee might allow a SORCERER'S APPRENTICE-type character to bolster the game's fantasy aspect. If permitted, these cannot wear armor or shield and may only fight with daggers, staves, or (optionally) swords as befits a relative non-combatant. Otherwise, they can only take the Bookish talent, but make up for this with access to a variety of magic spells.

Casting a spell delivers one wound to the apprentice (being quite draining) and allows them to duplicate any one of the following personal talents. Where applicable, all effects last for one turn before fading:

Dowser, Empathetic,
Inspired, Nocturnal, Oracle

In addition, the apprentice can produce any of the following HIGH SORCERY:

ILLUSION spells create audiovisual illusions within a 30' radius (10' high) of a caster that are taken as real unless the viewer is either alert enough to detect them or able to save.

LEVITATION magic allows the caster to rise horizontally or vertically at 10' per round for the duration, then falling gently.

LIGHTNING BOLTS function as bows, but without the minimum range. They can also be used to splinter wooden doors and shatter hinges, with a maximum possible range of 60', noting that the effect is instantaneous and over quickly.



Once again, spell effects (except lighting) last for one turn before dispelling.

EQUIPMENT

New characters are a ragged lot, starting with only simple provisions as follows, perhaps parting gifts from home, although they can buy or find more later as needed:

Backpack
Bedroll
Rations, one week
Rope, 50'
Torch/tinder

In addition, they can choose TWO items from the following to customize their kit:

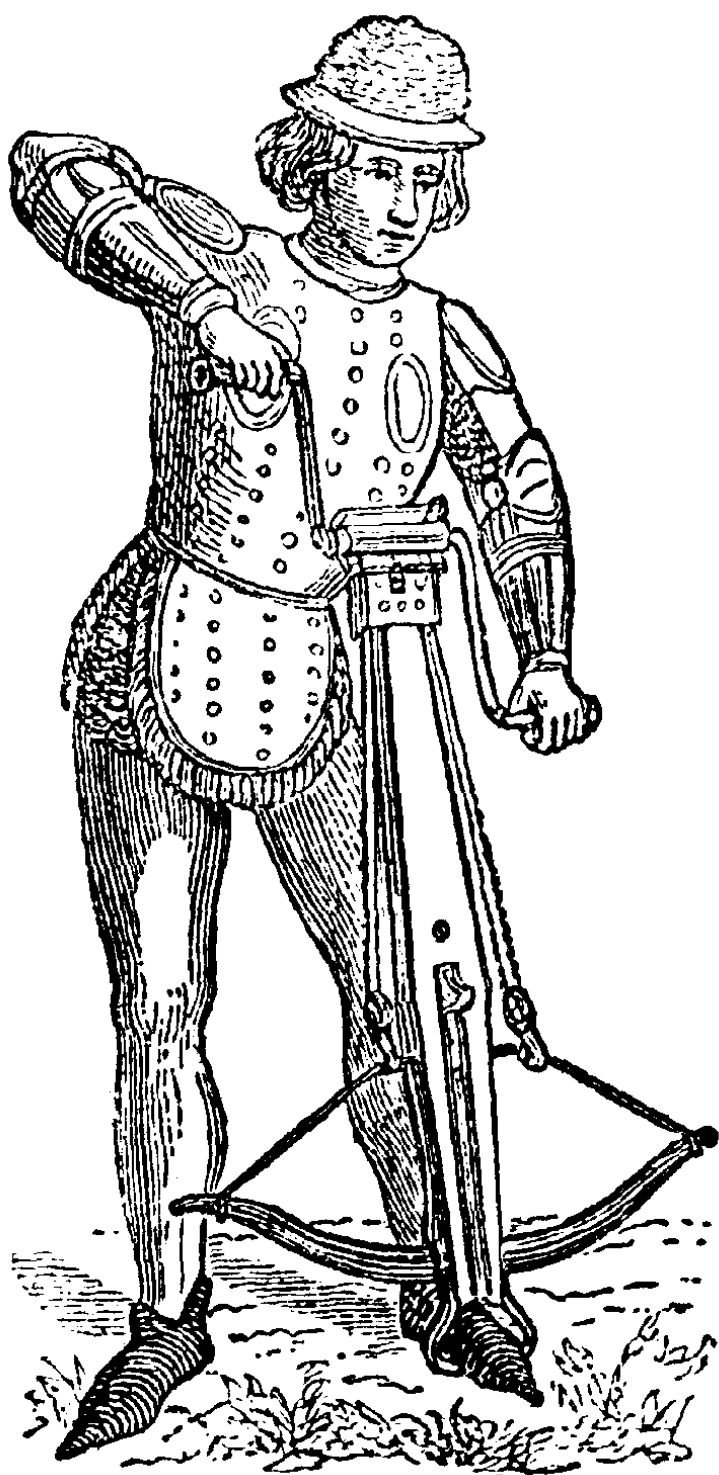
Armor	Dagger	Shield
Axe	Lock pick	Spear
Blowgun	Mace	Staff (quarter)
Bow	Mirror	Sword

Note that axes and swords can be either one or two-handed and bows crossbows. Likewise, shields and torches require a free hand to use.

ARMOR (and/or shields) protect the wearer from certain death. If the wearer takes enough wounds to die, they can sacrifice the armor instead to remain alive, although the item is damaged and must be repaired at 25% total value.

BOWS (and crossbows) can be fired at range to weaken oncoming enemies (per the Acts and Actors rules that follow) out to a range of 200'.

RATIONS (food and water) is hard tack and/or salted pork or something similar. This assumes a wine/waterskin that must be refilled regularly.





Characters begin having the clothes on their backs, secondary gear, and 20 of any chosen ammunition, i.e., arrows, etc. Furthermore, while they always have a few coins on hand for basic needs, big purchases require loot.

Silver pieces (SP) are the principal coin of the realm, with prices varying greatly based on geography and access, subject to the following and the dictates of the referee:

ITEM IS...	COST (SP)
Common, small	1-10
Craftwork*	11-49
Exotic, unusual#	50-99
Luxury items@	100 or more

*Basic gear and/or weaponry

#Larger items and armor

@Mounts and/or boats, wagons, etc.

Silver is not a condition of advancement, or, rather, allows advancement by making equipment available for purchase. Thus, referees assign treasure as they wish and price gear in harmony with what quantities they make available.

ENCUMBRANCE

A maximum load is 18 personal items, whether worn, carried, and/or stored in a backpack (which counts towards this) plus up to 5,000 coins and unlimited gems and jewelry.

TOTAL WOUNDS

Characters can suffer up to 10 wounds before dying, with the sorcerer's apprentice losing 10% of total power casting a spell! Fortunately, wounds are healed through rest or from curative potions found or won on adventures.

LANGUAGES

For simplicity, everyone speaks the COMMON TONGUE of the Realm, although other languages obviously exist. Linguist characters know enough of these to be useful in most situations, making this a valuable choice.

NAME AND GENDER

Finally, players name their character and assign gender and other details. A back-story helps to flesh things out, although this is optional because the character will absolutely develop through play as things unfold.

A character might look like this:

NAME: Bjorn GENDER: Male
TALENTS: Frugal, Healthy, Mighty
EQUIPMENT: Armor, axe, (battle),
backpack, bedroll, rations, rope (50'),
spear, torch, and tinderbox

If the character makes it, they will acquire valuable SKILL POINTS that promote survival and even the accumulation of additional talents!

TWO: ACTS AND ACTORS

In the absence of dice and similar random mechanics, much of the challenge stems from a sort of strategic resource management, where players must first think to use their talents in critical situations and/or imagine creative solutions to the problems before them. This may require accepting consequences to get things done and suffering losses to win.

MAPPING AND MOVEMENT

Traversing the underworld takes time and is undeniably fun. Many games, with their emphasis on dice and showy combat, forget this fact to the detriment of play...

First, someone has to map the underworld on graph paper, listening and asking questions of the referee while putting their descriptions down as accurately as possible. This assumes the character is actually doing so in the dungeon and requires two free hands, doubtless at some personal risk, to jot down each detail because it might be their only way back out again!



Routine dungeon exploration is divided into five-minute (in game time) TURNS during which a party moves 120'. This assumes wary movement mapping their path, looking out for enemies, and resting, where necessary. Under these watchful conditions, adventures proceed.

If enemies give chase, however, the party can move at QUICK TIME (240'). This leaves no time to rest, so for every five turns evading pursuit, one turn of rest is needed to recover, giving foes time to catch up! Of course, no mapping of any kind happens under these conditions.

EVASION AND PURSUIT

Unarmored characters with the appropriate talents can avoid certain enemies unless they are alert as explained later. Obviously, not everyone can do this, making some diversionary tactic, like splitting the party, a must when fighting is not an option or the party is weak and cannot hope to win the battle.

Note that enemies have variable movement rates, and this is often their greatest danger!

NEGOTIATION

Intelligent (speaking) enemies can often be reasoned with if communication is possible and some offering made. This can be food or, more likely, treasure or a non-aggression pact when travelling through enemy territory, noting here that Linguists are usually necessary, with the Gregarious securing better terms.

As a rule, any required offering scales to the power of the enemy (some can demand more) and/or the specifics of the trade. This is one of many strategic bargains the players will need to make, with the consequences of deceit dire indeed...





Animals (or those of animal intelligence) are uninterested in money, but will stop for a turn to eat discarded foodstuffs, usually, one day's worth for a single character and more for very large creatures as befits them.

Obviously, automatons and the undead never negotiate unless compelled by an outside force, perhaps an evil sorcerer or demon lord.

COMBAT WITH ENEMIES

For greater simplicity, combat does not begin until both sides are close enough to engage hand-to-hand. There are special rules for bows and similar missiles fired at range, although these can be used for close combat effects if the referee (and the narrative) permits...

This is not a traditional game, so combat is a narrative where both sides describe their moves and tell a story. Even so, there is still some element of risk and uncertainty, and death can happen despite the game's lack of dice and other random mechanics (indeed, not knowing what happens next is enough to keep things deadly).

Furthermore, the enemy can be either a single opponent or multiple foes working together as a gang. These details become part of the combat narrative, although large groups are measurably more powerful and dangerous to fight...

THE COMBAT ROUND

Combat is divided into one-minute ROUNDS depending on the size, strength, and/or number of enemies present as shown:

STRENGTH	ROUNDS
Weak	1-2
Average	3-5
Strong	6 or more

Thus, victory in battle becomes a matter of surviving to the end of a fight. But this is not without risk, because for every round spent in combat, the party takes one wound to be assigned to whatever character the players choose.

Some enemies receive a DAMAGE BONUS as well, basically, additional wounds on top of standard injury that can be divided between the rounds of combat as the referee sees fit. These represent ferocity and power and help to preserve some element of risk and uncertainty where it would otherwise not be present in the game.

Combat rounds are provided as a range so that players will never know exactly how dangerous the enemy is, although the referee should drop hints to reward especially clever inquiry.

A SAMPLE COMBAT

Bjorn and Eld are exploring a newly cleared passageway when they come under attack by evil goblins from a secret door. Because they were caught unaware, hostilities are the only option.

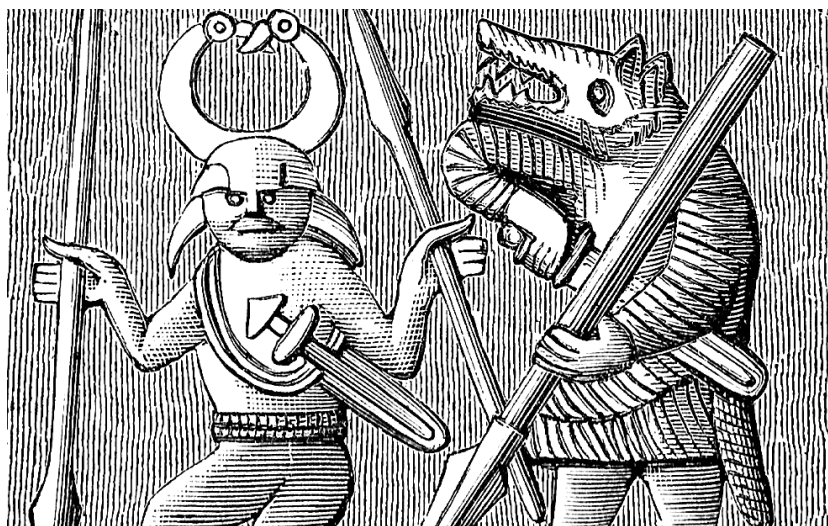
The referee makes the goblins average and overcome in three rounds, but assigns a damage bonus (+2) for a total of five wounds:

ROUND #1: Bjorn swings his axe and plows headlong into a wall of scaly flesh while Eld fires her bow. The referee delivers just one wound (holding the bonus in reserve) and Bjorn agrees to take this on himself.

ROUND #2: The monsters close to engage the archer, who discards her bow and draws daggers, slashing at her foes while Bjorn swears some bloody oath to his gods. The referee deals two wounds (standard injuries +1 from the damage bonus added), and the players split these evenly, given the situation, and keep fighting.

ROUND #3: Bjorn and Eld manage to defeat the enemy, but suffer two wounds in the fight, taking injuries as above. The players agree to divide these evenly and set about plundering what riches the slain monsters held...

Wounds are suffered, but the heroes prevail!



Once again, wounds are a matter of strategic resource management, with the players choosing how to assign injuries received.

COMBAT MANEUVERS

The choice of armor and/or weaponry is very important as an overall strategy. Armor can be sacrificed in place of a lethal wound, noting that heavily armored characters (those with both armor and shield) can do this twice...

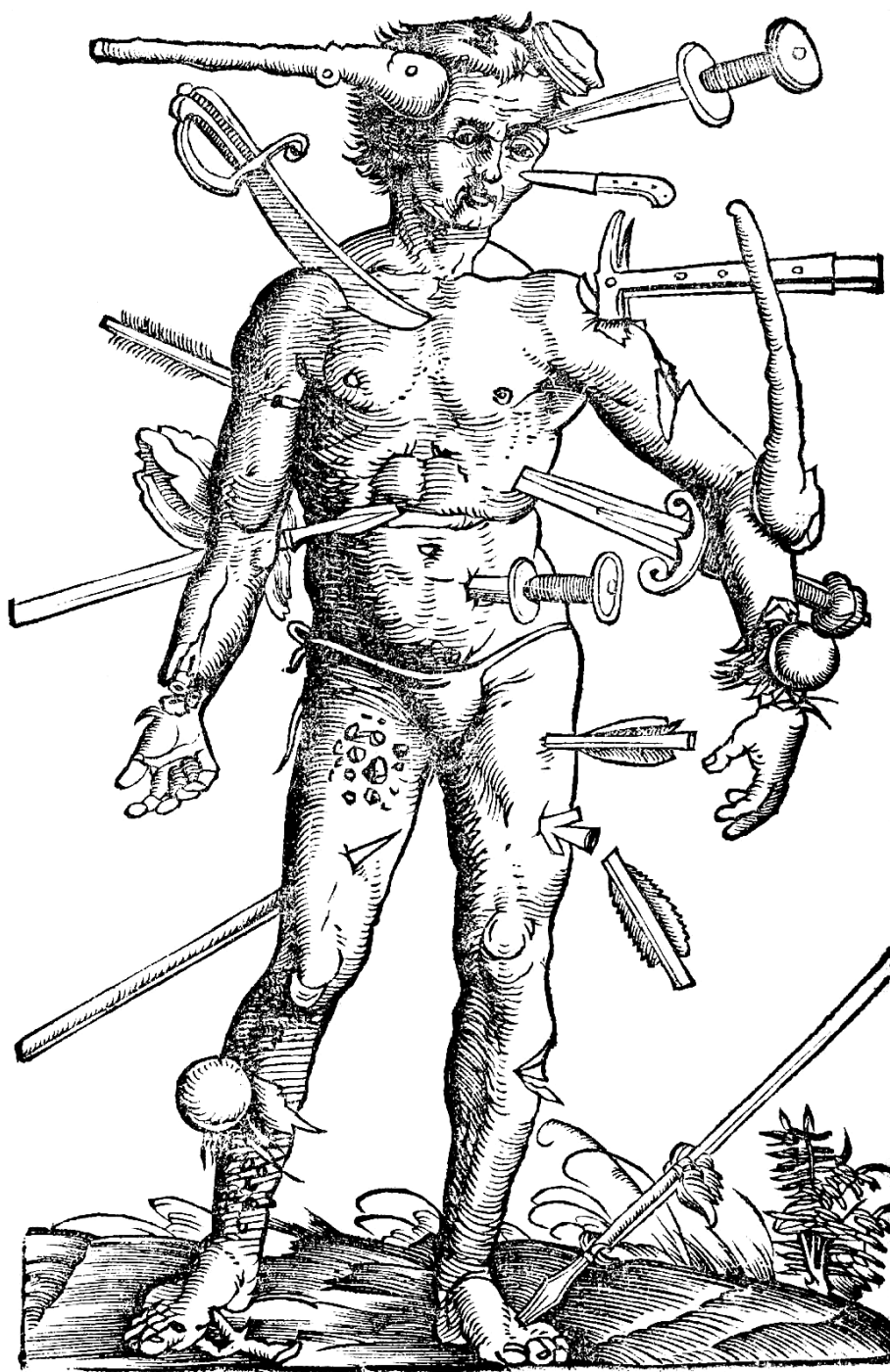
Archers can fire a volley of arrows into an oncoming enemy and reduce their strength by a single rank, so the strong become average and average weak, etc. Those who are already weak are slain outright unless part of a gang, wherein combat rounds are reduced instead.

Note that this requires a minimum range of 50' and a clear line of sight. Crossbows take longer to reload, but are given the same benefits as an abstraction. Lightning has no such limitations, with only one spell possible per round.

Of course, enemy archers will do the same, and vulnerable parties suffer a full round of wounds and must take cover or close to engage, noting that if no cover is available, the referee can deal another round of injury! Enemy sorcerers also inflict wounds using special rules.

HEROIC DEATHS

Finally, players can choose to make a HEROIC SACRIFICE and fall in battle. When this happens, the fight is immediately over and the willing martyr slain, although they go in style and can narrate their final dramatic blows. Note that smaller parties take more individual damage and that replacement characters cannot be brought in for at least one session to stem abuse of this...





INFIGHTING

Characters sometimes fight among themselves, subject to the above rules, delivering one wound per round until one side is beaten or begs for their life. This favors the heavily armored and should be avoided in most instances.

DEATH AND HEALING

Should a character suffer more than 10 wounds and do not expend armor to stay alive, death results. Luckily, wounds can be healed at a rate of one per day of rest, during which no other activity will be possible. In the dungeon, this requires clearing an area and posting a watch against intruders while the injured convalesce, noting that curatives also work.

OUT OF COMBAT

While some actions require specific talents to execute, others are available to anyone thinking to try them out. These are usually successful, although not without consequences, and players must be ready to weigh the risks involved.

THIEVERY

Stealthy characters can hide or steal from nearby enemies, with the important caveat that one third of these are ALERT and detect such attempts immediately. The would-be thief will never know this in advance, however, making this a risky proposition indeed.

Characters can also steal from one another, although this carries risk because players can check their inventories at any time and will probably know who to blame...

PITS AND PERILS

Traps and natural hazards can deal up to 25 wounds, and unlike enemies, may affect a single character or the entire party at the referee's discretion. Players must be alert for these and take clear steps to mitigate the threat.

ADVANCEMENT

When a character survives an adventure, they acquire SKILL POINTS as follows:

ACCOMPLISHMENT	AWARD
Going on an adventure	1 (base)
Making a personal sacrifice	+1
Superior role-playing	+1

Skills can be "spent" as shown below:

SPEND POINTS TO...	SKILL COST
Avoid special attack (save)	1
Develop another talent	7
Survive fatal blow (as armor)	3

Of course, the apprentice cannot acquire new talents, but may spend (7) skill points to extend all spell and scroll durations by one turn...

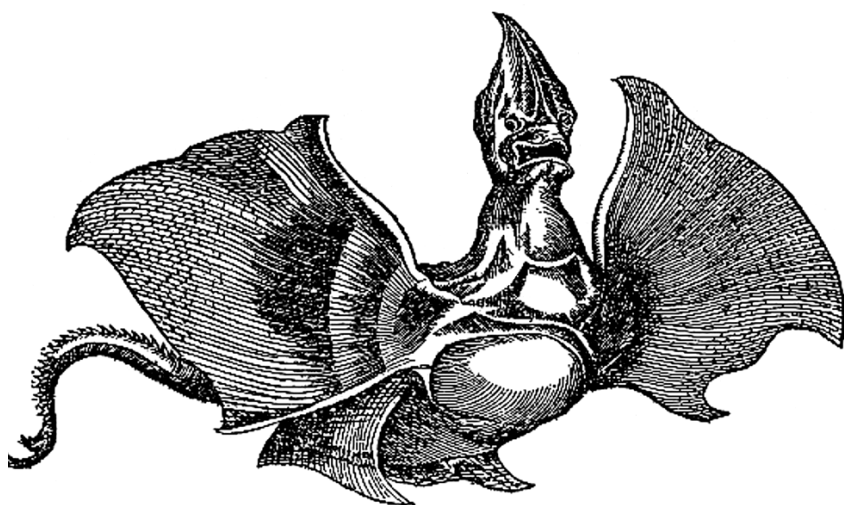
THREE: RISKS AND REWARDS

Monsters abound in the underworld, and vast riches await those with the courage to take them on and win. Because this is a narrative game, enemies are described in terms of their behavior and/or abilities, which counts for everything when an oozing jelly falls from above or ghosts materialize through a dungeon wall!

In addition to a narrative description, each enemy listed here gets a maximum DAMAGE BONUS and MOVEMENT RATE (in turns), although the referee can adjust these as their game requires or for unique variants, etc. For quick reference, these are listed as shown below:

NAME (DAMAGE BONUS/MOVEMENT)

Note that enemy STRENGTH is assigned by the referee, although this should roughly align to size and/or numbers. Likewise, their maximum damage bonus is the highest possible value and can be less for smaller (or juvenile) specimens encountered in the underworld. Mystery, alone, is enough to make even small foes terrifying!



Note that the information given applies to individual enemies met. Rival GANGS, whenever encountered, should be stronger and/or get a better damage bonus (but never more than twice what is shown) as befits the safety and power superior numbers represent...

SAVING MOVES

Certain enemies possess special attacks, like turning characters to stone, that are suffered by anyone taking wounds. Luckily, these can be resisted by SAVING (spending one skill point at the expense of other advancements).

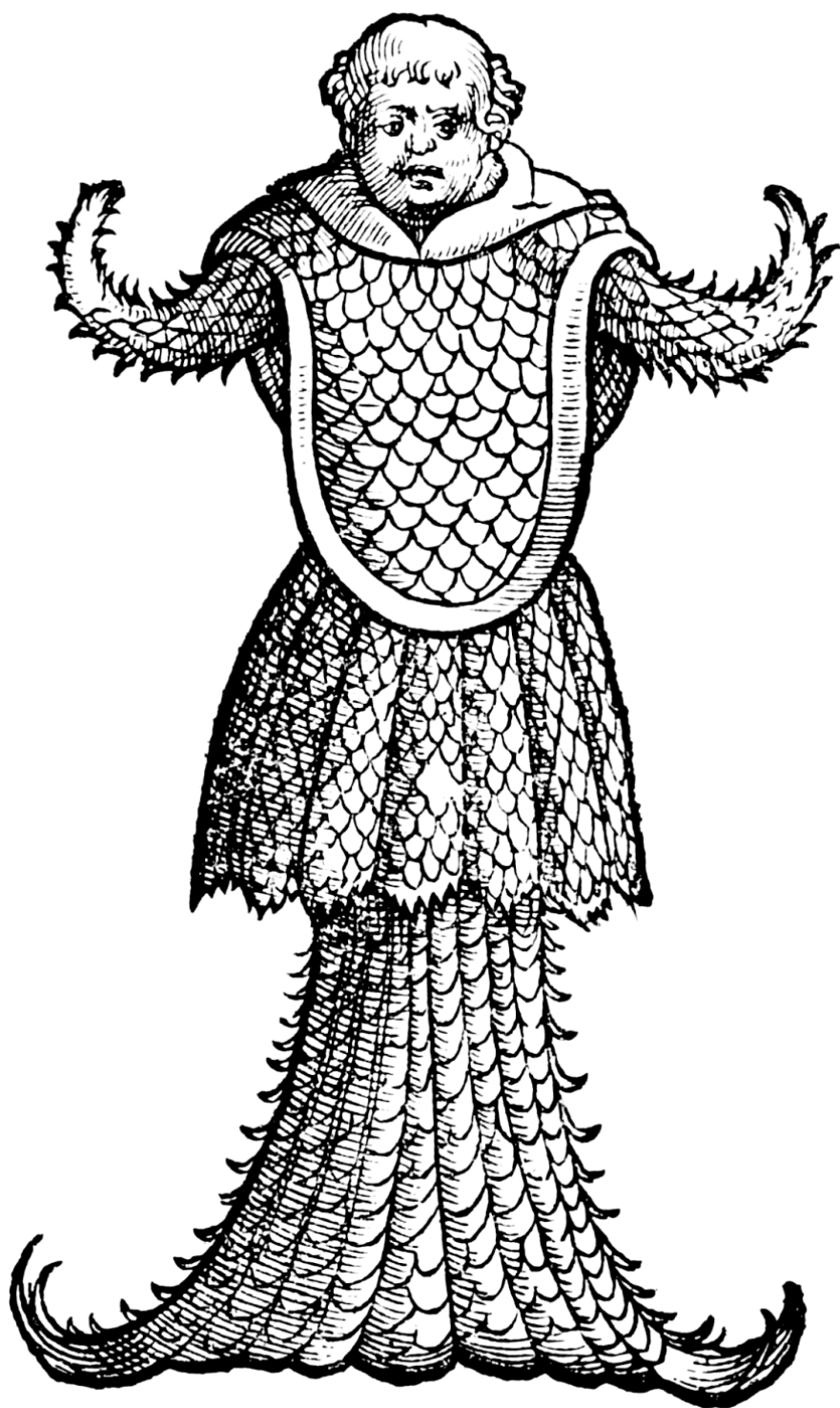
ENEMY MONSTERS

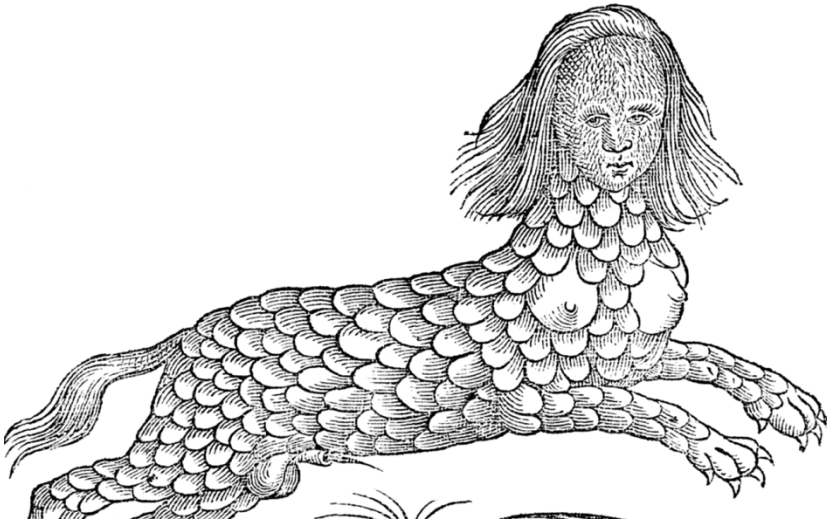
The following enemies represent very broad categories and can be tailored by the referee as their game requires, perhaps inspiring novel creations great and terrible:

APES (5/120') move in groups, but can also be solitary pets. Excellent climbers, they easily break from combat and get the Mighty talent, sometimes throwing rocks from above and fleeing to higher ground thereafter. Apes are seldom evil, but fight to protect their territory.

BASILISKS (7/90') include any number of small reptilian creatures. Anyone suffering a wound must save or be petrified (turned to stone) for the next 24 hours, during which the party must find some way to move them! Basilisks prefer ambushing prey over balanced fights.

BATS (3/240') may include the smaller variety found in swarms or a larger type that hunts the underworld in search of prey. Swift flyers, it can be hard to avoid them, with roughly a third of these requiring a wounded victim to save or catch a disease (explained later) needing a cure.





BLOBS (6/30') trickle from ceilings or bubble up from underground pools. Anyone suffering a wound must save or endure twice as much in the following round unless they can sacrifice an article of equipment in its place, perhaps armor, weaponry, or even hard-won treasure!

CHIMERAS (-/-) represent an evil mixing of several creatures and have at least two special attacks as a result. This might be anything from fire-breathing bats to blobs that can turn their victims into stone, etc...

DRAGONS (12/120') come in all sizes and occupy remote places. Their fiery breath has the range of a bow, but can be used at any time, dealing their maximum bonus, after which they continue fighting normally, but with another bonus to reflect their terrible ferocity! All dragons are intelligent and capable of fast flight.

FUNGI (8/0') are inhaled spores and famously difficult to see in low light such that players must make a show of checking. Once disturbed, all within 5' of the fungi share its full damage bonus, but with no actual combat occurring.

GHOSTS (3/150') include any number of departed souls and undead spirits. They move easily through solid walls and attack with a chilling ectoplasm, although they can only be harmed using sorcery. Fortunately, most will appear as apparitions to advance the plot.

GOBLINS (2/120') come in many forms, all of them wicked humanoid races, like kobolds, orcs, and hobgoblins, etc. Their greatest strength lies in their intelligence and ability to coordinate actions and use missiles, etc. This, alone, makes them among the deadliest foes around!

GOLEMS (5/90') are magically animated statues brought to life using a strange tome and tasked with guarding some location. They cannot be reasoned with and are impossible to hide from or sneak around, being supernaturally aware and acting as Mighty, perhaps better.

MANTICORES (9/180') are lions having a human head and a tail adorned with spikes. If the monster has at least 60' free, these can be hurled for the maximum bonus like a dragon, getting another bonus in close combat. Manticores love human flesh above all and are ill tempered.

OCTOPI (6/90') can be the standard variety or something like it, including terrestrial vines or similar creatures. Any character taking a wound must save or become immobilized such that they cannot fight or take additional injury, reducing a party's effectiveness until one side wins (victims are eaten unless rescued).

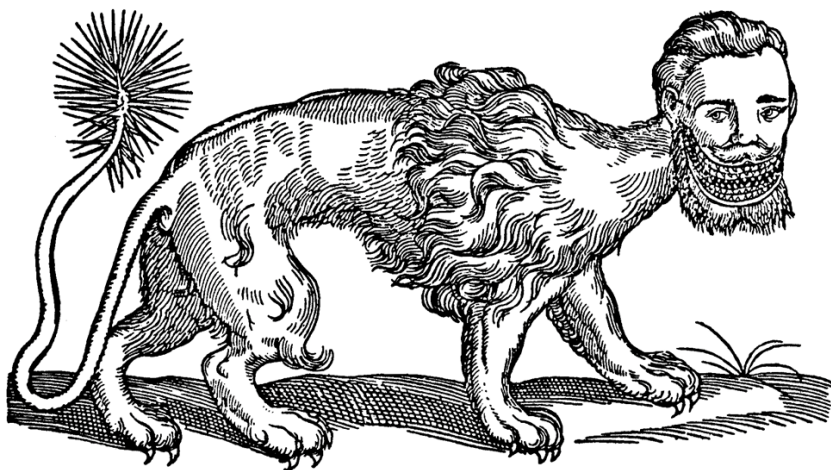
OGRES (4/120') are giants and trolls. They are inhumanly strong, inflicting twice the normal wounds (two) in addition to whatever bonus the referee decides. Although dim-witted, giants can generally be reasoned with, hoarding treasure and accepting food (and drink) in large amounts.

RATS (3/210') go in filthy packs through the underworld and are best described as wingless bats, even spreading disease in the same way, although a larger (non-communicable) relative is said to thrive in old sewers.

RIVAL PARTIES (9/120') seek riches and are not willing to share! These are treated as any other enemy gang, but may have full sorcerers who throw lightning out to 60' and cast illusions to confound and/or distract. Each member should have a distinct persona per the referee.

SERPENTS (7/90') are constrictors or a smaller, venomous kind. The latter lies in hidden places and bites probing hands for their full damage bonus, making them lethal. Constrictor serpents attack like an octopi, although only against a single target (the first wounded).

SKELETONS (3/150') guard cemeteries and old temples, usually at the behest of a necromancer and behaving like golems. They fight using weapons and enjoy immunity to bows and magical missiles (i.e., lightning bolts) owing to their supernatural origin and/or mindless obedience.



SORCERERS (7/120') display great power, having completed their training. They can cast one spell per round without penalties and attack at range (60') with lightning bolts, but prefer to create illusions. Some of these are necromancers able to call and command undead...

SPIDERS (5/90') can be tiny things that attack as serpents or a massive, carnivorous type that spins webs capable of immobilizing foes, much like a constrictor. These have a range of 30', but can be hung across entire corridors to ensnare anyone not paying attention.

VAMPIRES (9/180') prefer the underground, crumbling to ash in daylight. All are Mighty and can transform into a small bat or take a gaseous form capable of passing through narrow fissures, etc. Characters bitten by a vampire must save or become one within the week.

WARGS (4/150') are dire wolves common on the surface, but frequently kept as pets by goblins, who share a bond. They typically travel in packs, but are intelligent enough to anticipate character strategy and may communicate with their goblin keepers using gestures.

WEREWOLVES (8/120') show themselves as fully human, but can transform at will into an animal form equal to a warg, but resistant to all but sorcery and silver weapons. Anyone bitten by a werewolf must save or become one after a month, violently attacking their former friends.

WIGHTS (3/90') are a horrible form of undead, intelligent like vampires and able to generate convincing illusions like a full sorcerer to guard their remains. Furthermore, just looking at one requires a character to save or flee in terror, for they reek of death. Often the remains of nobility, wights guard impressive wealth.





ZOMBIES (2/90') can be encountered alone or in shambling mobs, biting and/or clawing at their luckless prey. These are magically animated corpses that sometimes carry a fatal disease such that anyone taking wounds dies unless cured, only to rise once more as a zombie.

Of course, the referee can add other monsters by comparing to the above list...

DISEASE

Some enemies transmit a DISEASE that renders normal healing impossible until cured at a cost of 100 SP. Alternately, a FATAL variety exists that not only limits healing, but also deals one wound per day and costs 500 SP to heal.

ENEMY GANGS

This is a narrative game, so enemy monsters require no mechanical justification for special abilities and movement, like swimming or the power of flight, etc. Even so, the referee should know the composition and number of any gang introduced to assist in narrating their battles.

Sometimes, clever players will try to target important leadership figures to improve their situation. This is easily inserted into the combat narrative, however, willing referees can allow players to save or take any number of wounds to shorten (and sometimes end) the fight in a suitably heroic fashion.

DEMONS AND DIVINES

Infernal DEMONS sometimes appear when their names are spoken or read aloud, and devious referees can leave scrolls and musty tomes to be found for this purpose. Demons enjoy 12/240', possess all talents, and otherwise operate as a sorcerer, although shrewd powers prefer to offer tempting (and one-sided) bargains...

Divine figures (THE GODS) rarely manifest, but when they do, it is usually to deliver some important revelation. For while deities possess unlimited power, they prefer to work through their priests and mortal agents.

TREASURES

While riches are the ultimate goal, monetary treasure has little impact on a character's advancement. Accordingly, the referee can place loot as they see fit, taking care to scale this to the danger involved in getting it. Of course, some of this may include magical objects.

MAKING MONSTERS

The enemies listed here are a cross-section of popular concepts, and the referee is highly encouraged to add others. Ultimately, each is a narrative possessing special abilities and/or tactical behaviors to challenge the players, who should be ready for anything. These rules are meant to be played in true, old-school fashion!

FOUR: BUILDING THE DARK

The dungeons are central to the game, perhaps every bit as much as the characters who go bravely into them. Each represents a landscape teeming with monsters, traps, and treacherous obstacles to overcome through courage, strategy, and a willingness to sacrifice...

PREPARING THE PITS

Dungeons should be mapped on regular graph paper, where one square equals 10', and this should apply to anyone charting them, subject to the referee. This is a game of exploration, more than anything else, and players should be greeted by an exotic world.

Chambers, passageways, and doors should be identified and numbered when correlating to some important event or encounter, with the details provided separately. Of course, this map, and the so-called "dungeon matrix", should be hidden from the players, who must accept risk as the price of gaining knowledge. Half the fun lies in not knowing what happens next!



INTO THE DARK

Dungeons are dark, although inhabited areas probably have a light source, noting that monsters (but not rival parties) can see in total darkness out to 240'. Everyone else requires torches that illuminate a 30' radius and might attract monsters or hungry beasts.

About half of any given dungeon should be uninhabited. However, empty does not have to mean uninteresting, and the referee can add ancient altars and scattered bones to create an exotic atmosphere. Indeed, the possibility of combat, alone, can be enough to create a feeling of dread in the player's minds.

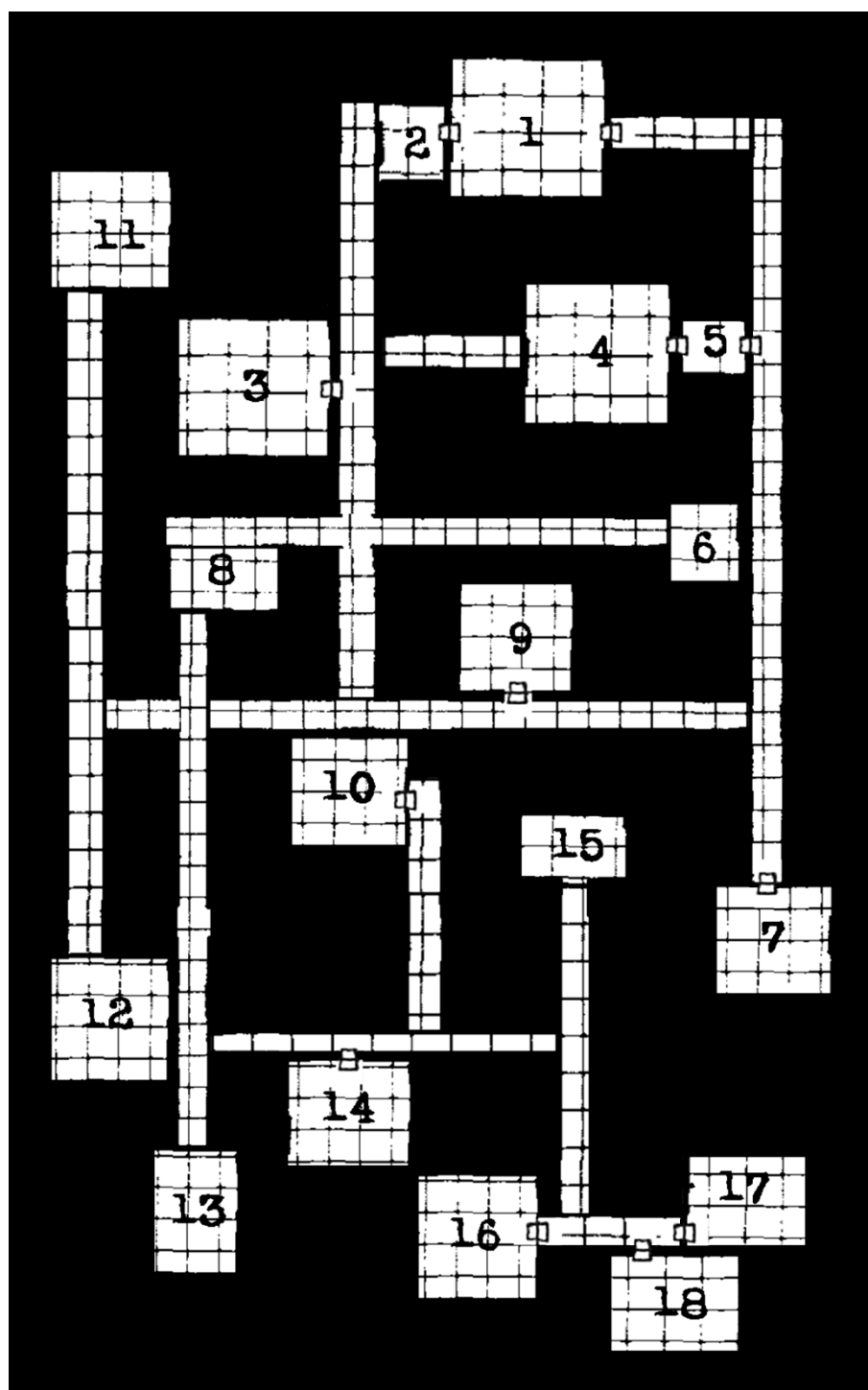
Furthermore, empty spaces often present challenging obstacles, whether locked doors or raging underground streams, to be navigated successfully by the party. Ideally, the referee will offer several ways to proceed, each with their own challenges and consequences.

OBSTACLES

Realistically, not every area should involve obstacles, indeed, most will not...

As a rule, obstacles, and similar non-combat challenges, should require that players weigh the consequences of any proposed action and decide how best to proceed, often, without a full understanding. This mirrors real-life action and compensates for not having dice.

Realistic consequences include having to discard heavy (but vital) equipment to cross a rough current or smashing open a door and alerting nearby enemies, etc. At the same time, not every situation calls for this, lest play become tedious and start to smack of injustice!





DOORS AND SECRETS

Characters will encounter many doors, some obvious and others hidden. The latter can only be found after thoroughly looking, and the players must describe their efforts in careful detail first. That said, listening at shut doors and/or picking locks takes a turn.

LOCAL MONSTERS

Not all monsters are meant to be fought and, indeed, some are obviously too powerful to realistically overcome, and the challenge here becomes avoidance. Furthermore, while many guard and/or carry treasure, hoards can also be buried in hidden places, with enemies just an obstacle on the way to riches.

Depending on the nature of the referee's game, the underworld can be a funhouse setting or realistically structured, with an actual reason for being. In the latter case, monsters will be logically placed, perhaps ancient crypts filled with the undead or an extensive goblin lair eternally at war with a nearby human village.

TRAPS AND HAZARDS

When setting any trap, including natural threats, the referee should understand exactly how it operates and what actions trigger it, whether pressure plates or tripwires stumbled upon by the unwary. This places responsibility where it belongs, on the players, who must be ready to describe their actions and take steps to minimize the danger if they fail.

Traps may include, but are not limited to, any variation of the following:

Cave-ins	Pit traps
Flooded rooms	Poisoned gas
Landslides	Spear traps

Note that unlike combat, referees can assign wounds to specific characters based on the particulars of the event, and that armor is no use against drowning or inhaled gas.

THE WILDERNESS

Of course, the wilderness between the dungeons and civilization can be mapped in similar fashion, being a lawless, uncharted place home to brigands and wild animals. The referee must decide how much they wish to emphasize surface adventures and fill in the blanks.

CIVILIZATION

Every dungeon has a nearby town or village where characters can rest (usually at an inn or hostel), buy and/or sell equipment, and obtain repairs as needed. These will also be home to any NON-PLAYER characters, perhaps an innkeeper with a tortured past, etc. The referee must decide how much to emphasize this aspect, although inquisitive players may force their hand here...

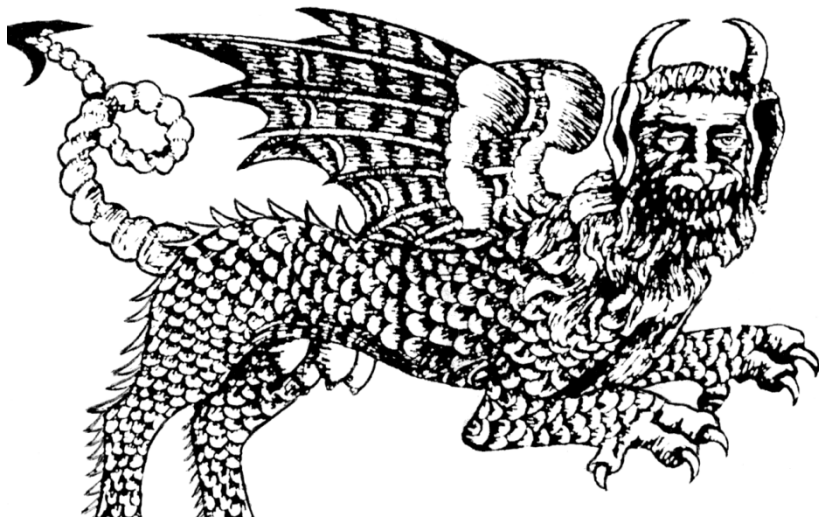
MAGICAL OBJECTS

While this game imagines a low-magic world, magic does exist (with the sorcerer's apprentice being one prominent example), and characters may find MAGICAL OBJECTS in the treasures they acquire, with value as shown:

AMULETS (750 SP) are usually worn around the wearer's neck and perform like armor, although effective against all injury, including that from poison gas, etc. Once used, the object loses all power, being drained of energy.

ARMOR (---) magically raises a wearer's total wounds by a factor related to its weight as follows: light (+1), medium (+2), or heavy (+3), but still useable against lethal injuries (repairs cost 500 SP per additional point).

Note that armor of any kind is extremely valuable, such that even the normal sort found or won on adventures will be unusable until repairs are made. Magical armor, on the other hand, is normally usable unless taken from some defeated foe or a long-forgotten hoard.



POTIONS (2-300 SP) must usually be imbibed and come with enough for a single use:

POTION	EFFECT
Draught	shrink to 1/10th full height*
Elixir	cure common/lethal disease
Holy water	weaken undead foes by one rank#
Libation	become completely invisible*
Poison	weaken living foes by one rank#
Remedy	eliminate up to three wounds
Stimulant	move at double time with no rest*
Tincture	enlarge to twice normal size*

*Assume effects last ten game turns

#Must be thrown/coated on weaponry, etc.

RINGS (500 SP) duplicate the effect of any one talent for a turn, but only if the wearer takes a wound first, noting that while death is never possible, anyone taking maximum wounds cannot heal again until somehow cured.

SCROLLS (250 SP) can only be used by those with the Bookish talent. Each contains a single spell, including high sorcery, that takes effect once read, after which the words fade.

STAVES (--) can only be used by the sorcerer's apprentice. Each one holds the equivalent of up to five "wounds" useable towards spell casting, after which the item must be recharged at a cost of 250 SP per spell for ingredients.

SHIELDS (--) operate much like armor, with maximum wounds by size: small (+1) or large (+2), with a repair cost of 500 SP per bonus...

WEAPONRY (1,500 SP) is legendary in battle, for each one holds a unique skill point that can be spent saving against a single special attack during combat, after which the weapon is drained and must be repaired for 750 SP (or half value).





All such items should be very rare and found only in the richest hoards. That said, everyone should be able to win something useful, with disposable items, like potions or magic scrolls, being the most commonly found.

ALCHEMISTS

While the most powerful artifacts can only be fashioned by non-players, the referee may allow ALCHEMISTS to set up shop in the larger cities, selling potions for twice their stated value that probably have unexpected side-effects.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Of course, fairness is vital, and the referee should oversee reasonable adventures that can be survived with the right effort:

EXPLORATION is normally a simple matter of tracking turns and describing the environment, with time for the players to respond and make important decisions. When faced with unexpected events, the referee should go with what creates the most exciting narrative for everyone.

COMBAT should be narrated by both sides as the blow-by-blow affair it truly is.

Finally, good ROLE-PLAYING is everyone's responsibility. Players should act out their character's personal interactions and the referee important non-players, taking care to give each a unique persona and motivation within their game setting.

DUNGEONS WITH DICE

Of course, some players will always prefer rolling dice, and these rules can be tailored to that purpose with very little effort...

First, combat proceeds as normal except that wounds are not automatic. Instead, during each combat round, one player rolls a regular die against enemy strength on the following, with failure meaning injuries suffered:

DIFFICULTY	ROLL*	STRENGTH
Easy	4	Weak
Moderate	5	Average
Hard	6	Strong

*Roll indicated result or better

Of course, players should take turns so that everyone gets a chance to decide their party's fate in battle. Otherwise, any out-of-combat actions are rolled against DIFFICULTY as befits conditions and/or the task at hand.

More than anything else, this is a game of imaginative play. There is enough freedom to make anything possible balanced with just enough structure to hold it all together, and a willingness to negotiate and improvise will unlock everything it has to offer. Thrilling adventure awaits, with or without dice...