

Diceless Dungeons 2

# The Diceless Wilds

Rules for Continuing Excursions Into the Dark

by

James & Robyn George





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by James & Robyn George

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To my wife Robyn,  
who taught me everything  
about love and could  
teach a master class on the value  
of imaginative play...

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Martin Schongauer,  
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to Brett Bernstein, Abraham  
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Obert, Talon Waite, and everyone  
else who believed...

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a supplement to the Diceless Dungeons game and as such, requires the original rules to play. Diceless. The word seems at odds with an activity known for them, a milieu where risk and uncertainty are sought-after things. But how is there risk without dice? Or uncertainty with no rolls to miss? Ask children, for their play has always been diceless. It is something adults forget and maybe need to learn again.

Whether cops and robbers or superheroes, kids understand diceless play. They negotiate, agree on the details, and let things happen. This is fantasy play in its purest form...

It was in this creative spirit that Diceless Dungeons was born. War-gaming, with its dense rules and technical heft, offered up an adult alternative to childhood play, and one with lots to offer. But then, not all rules require dice, especially not old-school games, where personal choice is the lifeblood of victory. That said, this book expands the first, adding new content for the best in adult (and childhood) fun!





Childhood play is the social contract in action, and to this end, Diceless Dungeons was always more of a framework around which players could negotiate. This book keeps it up with...

(1) Non-human characters, including dwarves, elves, and halflings. This adds a high-fantasy atmosphere with tactical options.

(2) Additional talents, most emphasizing new rules for hirelings and wilderness adventures, along with more spells for greater power.

(3) New monsters, many also indigenous to the wilderness above, with new magical items ready to win from ancient, gleaming hoards.

Of course, this changes the trajectory of the basic game, with consequences for existing campaigns everywhere. Not to worry, all of this is optional, and the referee is free to include what they want and discard the rest, for this is still an old-school system. Nonetheless, all games benefit from new content, for evil things haunt the woods even in the ordinary world, wicked things to be put down by heroic hands...



## ONE: SWELLING THE RANKS

The basic game imagined a so-called ordinary world of medieval men and women, fortune seekers all of them, leaving their quaint villages for lives of adventure. Aside from wolves and greedy brigands, the surface was safe. Foul monsters crawled from their darkened lairs at night, but mostly occupied the underworld, which was a place of chaos and evil. Magic was equally rare, being the domain of mysterious sorcerers who resided in dark towers far from home.

No more, for The Diceless Wilds adds new content, starting with NON-HUMAN races...

### THE FEY FOLK

Dwarves live in the far-away mountains, and elves, those immortal forest folk, dwell in their primeval woods. Even if the referee prefers a low-magic setting, the rarity and isolation of these people means that most will have never encountered them. On the other hand, the referee might shift to a higher-fantasy milieu.

NOTE: Non-humans are ancient and powerful, making game balance an issue. To this end, these begin having but a single talent, bolstered by their racial abilities. Humans are younger and less powerful, but already renowned for their cleverness, which means more talents.

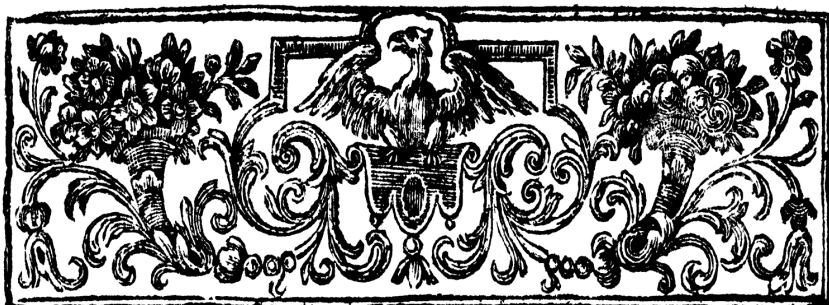
DWARVES are a type of so-called little people, similar to gnomes (covered later), although considerably more robust as befits a race given to mining the earth. They stand 4' tall and prefer the mountains and their mines, where they harvest precious metals and craft artifacts of exquisite beauty. If they have any weakness, it lies in a greed for mineral wealth, which they crave almost as much as glory on the battlefield.

Fearless warriors, dwarves can wear armor and shield and fight with any weapon, choosing axes, crossbows, and hammers first. Legends say they are made of stone. This is a myth, but dwarves are STONE TOUGH fighters. Once per game day, they can take up to 5 wounds in a single combat round and subsequently ignore it as though it never happened. They are otherwise immune to disease and never affected when so exposed.

Dwarves speak (and write) their own language and the common tongue of the human lands.

ELVES are first among the faerie folk, being tall, beautiful, and wise. It is left to the referee to decide if they have pointed ears, for such are not required, but all should bear the unmistakable mark of their fey blood. Human-sized, they are a graceful people and immortal, barring violence or misadventure of the sort known to adventurers everywhere. If they seem detached from mortal concerns, blame their ageless lives.

Fast, agile hunters, elves can wear armor and shield and fight with any weapon, choosing bows (long or short) and swords first. Born of magic, they possess a natural SPELLCRAFT exceeded only by human sorcerers. Once per game day, an elf may cast a single spell, including high sorcery, at regular wound cost, even fully armored, for their heritage dominates. Moreover, they are not subject to the terror induced by wights, etc.





Like dwarves, elves can speak and write their own racial language and the common tongue.

HALFLINGS are closest to humanity, although smaller as their name suggests. Standing 3' tall, they tend to be plump, for they lead carefree lives of food, drink, and creature comforts. Their origins are uncertain, but they prefer rolling hills (often near human settlement), dwelling in the cozy, well-furnished holes their kind are famous for. Agreeable folk, they can still show extraordinary courage on adventures.

Reluctant combatants at best, halflings can nonetheless employ armor and shield and fight with any weapon provided these are built for their smaller size. The latter is their greatest advantage, for halflings are LIGHT FOOTED and capable of movement at quick time (240' per turn) without requiring rest, remaining alert while doing so. Likewise, their nimbleness means they never accidentally set off hidden traps.

Living as they do among men, halflings read and write the common tongue of humanity.

Introducing non-human characters need not change the game, for these rarely interact with humanity and are viewed as exotic foreigners when they do. Otherwise, the referee can opt for a higher-fantasy setting if they wish it...

#### ADVANCED TALENTS

Expanding the game to include wilderness adventures opens the door to new skills suitable for any style of play. There is a whole other world beyond the dungeons, including bustling cities filled with their own dangers, and the referee can make these available immediately or held in reserve for when players have proven themselves by surviving multiple expeditions.

Once again, humans start with three talents and non-humans one plus racial abilities:

| TALENT    | DESCRIPTION                         |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| Ascetic   | go seven days without food/water    |
| Commander | recruit up to three hirelings       |
| Gambler   | win 7 SP per day staying at an inn  |
| Hardened  | survive three rounds after death    |
| Mender    | craft a (one-wound) remedy per day* |
| Smithy    | fix armor/shields at 15% of value#  |
| Traveler  | carry 24 items per the basic rules@ |
| Unbowed   | easily navigate rough terrain       |
| Weathered | predict the coming day's weather    |

\*All must be consumed within a day of creation

#Requires a stocked forge and one week's time

@Treasure (coinage) capacity remains unchanged

Good referees will provide ample opportunities for players to use these. That said, superior players are always thinking of how to leverage their abilities. If anything, these new rules enable the old-school experience.

ASCETICS can go a week without food and drink, helping stave off the effects of hunger and thirst as well as cold and heat exposure in the wilderness. Beyond this, the usual penalties apply, for their discipline cannot hold.

COMMANDERS exude just enough confidence to exploit the new hireling rules. This is not the same as being gregarious, for the player must demonstrate sound judgement lest their charges have enough and revolt and/or desert.

GAMBLERS must be somewhere this activity is possible, typically, an inn, but also a military camp or other place where non-players gather hoping to win some coin. Characters who gamble against each other will only ever break even.



**HARDENED** characters survive up to three rounds after dying, in or out of combat, whether from endurance or stubbornness. If administered aid before expiring (binding wounds and the like), they can survive, but at a permanent reduction of one total wound from lasting injury.

**MENDERS** concoct simple (one-wound) remedies, which might amount to little more than boiling medicinal herbs. Only one such remedy may be crafted daily, noting that these are weak, losing all potency after a day if unused. This is not likely however, for adventures are deadly.

**SMITHIES** can fix their own armor, shields, and weaponry provided a forge is available, doing so at just 15% of the item's total value. Each piece requires one week, noting that magical armor and weaponry can be repaired at half cost.

**TRAVELERS** are accustomed to life on the go and pack accordingly, carrying up to six additional items provided these can fit in a (human-sized) backpack or hang from a belt. Given the price of hirelings, this can be useful indeed, although excess coin still calls for horses and/or porters.

UNBOWED travelers know their way such that they are never slowed in rough terrain (covered later in this book) unless conditions are too extreme to reasonably ignore. Where applicable, terrain-adapted enemies remain a threat.

WEATHERED characters are alert to the signs of impending storms, predicting these with enough accuracy to a plan accordingly. If caught in squalls despite this, they have only themselves to blame for not showing due caution.

The referee can add more as befits an old-school game, fleshing out their campaign setting.

#### A DICELESS GRIMOIRE

To make things easier, those spells which duplicate regular talents are called CANTRIPS, and all others (high) sorcery. Moreover, the sorcerer's apprentice may now cast their first magic spell of the day at zero wound cost, after which the normal penalty applies. Of course, this includes high sorcery, for the character is finally starting to master their craft.

The list of available cantrips is expanded to include the following effects, all of which last one turn unless extended with experience:

Dowser, Empathetic,  
Inspired,  
Mender, Nocturnal, Oracle,  
Unbowed, Weathered

Cantrips are minor magic, so all spell casters (including elves) should have access to the entire list. High sorcery is more powerful, and the referee might limit novice characters to knowledge of but a single such spell, with more effects learned through experience. This is optional and covered in the following chapter.





## HIGHER SORCERY

The list of available high sorcery effects has been expanded to include the following:

Charm, Illusion,  
Levitation, Lightning Bolt,  
Polymorph,  
Servitor Spirit

CHARM spells only affect humanoid (meaning man-sized/shaped) enemies. The apprentice must come within 10' and speak their glamour, after which a single target comes under their control for one turn. Note however, that charmed foes cannot be made to harm themselves, and that one in three are WILLFULL and resist.

POLYMORPH magic allows the caster to assume the shape of any ordinary creature as small as a mouse to as big as a bear, gaining the locomotion and survival abilities to match, meaning birds can fly and fish can swim. The effect lasts but a single turn, but may be reinstated. Any items carried are absorbed into this new form, becoming unavailable for the duration of the spell.



SERVITOR SPIRIT calls the summoner's familiar, an invisible, invulnerable being that waits upon their master for a full game day, bearing light (three pound) burdens or performing simple tasks such as snuffing out candles or opening (unlocked) doors, etc. The servitor cannot attack or be engaged, even by other spirits, and never strays more than 30' from the caster's side.

Optionally, such spirits may be commanded to appear in a BODILY FORM chosen by the player at character creation per the following:

| TYPE   | MOVE | WOUNDS | NOTES            |
|--------|------|--------|------------------|
| Animal | 90'  | --     | bat, owl, raven* |
| Imp    | 60'  | 2      | miniature devil# |
| Sprite | 120' | 1      | winged faerie@   |

\*Cannot fight (take wounds) or die

#Flightless, will fight upon command

@Radiates faint light in a 5' radius

Taking material form allows the newly visible spirit to travel any distance and maintain telepathic communication out to 30', but only for one turn, after which the clairvoyance wanes until the familiar rejoins the apprentice. These are vulnerable in physical form, so the caster must take care, as slain servitors walk the astral plane, returning only after a week of rest.

## ADVANCED GEAR

TWO-HANDED melee weapons, like the battle axe and great sword, require 20' of free space to wield properly. On the other hand, their impressive size allows the user to suffer one wound and then ignore it once per combat, normally within the first round of injury. This is a heroic move, and one which demonstrates the might of ordinary people against all the combined powers of magic.

## TWO: EXPEDITIONS

This booklet takes the game beyond just the dungeons to a wilderness and city setting; and while much of the original rules still apply here, outdoor adventures present unique dangers for an adventuring party. Rough terrain and inclement weather can both impede progress, with dire consequences for survival...

ROUGH TERRAIN, including rocks or wet ground, slows movement and may preclude quick-time travel, which might be essential to evasion in open areas. The following rules apply:

| GROUND        | SPEED   | QUICK TIME |
|---------------|---------|------------|
| Level/plateau | 120'    | yes        |
| Overgrown     | 90'     | no         |
| Rocky/swamp   | 60'-90' | rarely     |

Note that while those with the Unbowed talent are not slowed, other perils remain.

WEATHER, including high winds and driving rain, can slow movement and obstruct visibility, both of which impede mapping and place the party in greater danger. Lightning and similar events (covered later) add to their woes:

| EVENT    | SPEED | QUICK TIME | VISIBILITY |
|----------|-------|------------|------------|
| Fog/mist | 60'   | no         | <1 mile    |
| Rain     | 90'   | yes        | 1-2 miles  |
| Snow/ice | 60'   | no         | 1 mile     |

Those with the Weathered talent can anticipate such events a day in advance, although they might not heed the advice. Snow and ice produce their own treacherous ground, making evasion difficult against enemies more accustomed to the local environment, and lightning is a present threat, which speaks to the need for preparation.



## MINIATURES

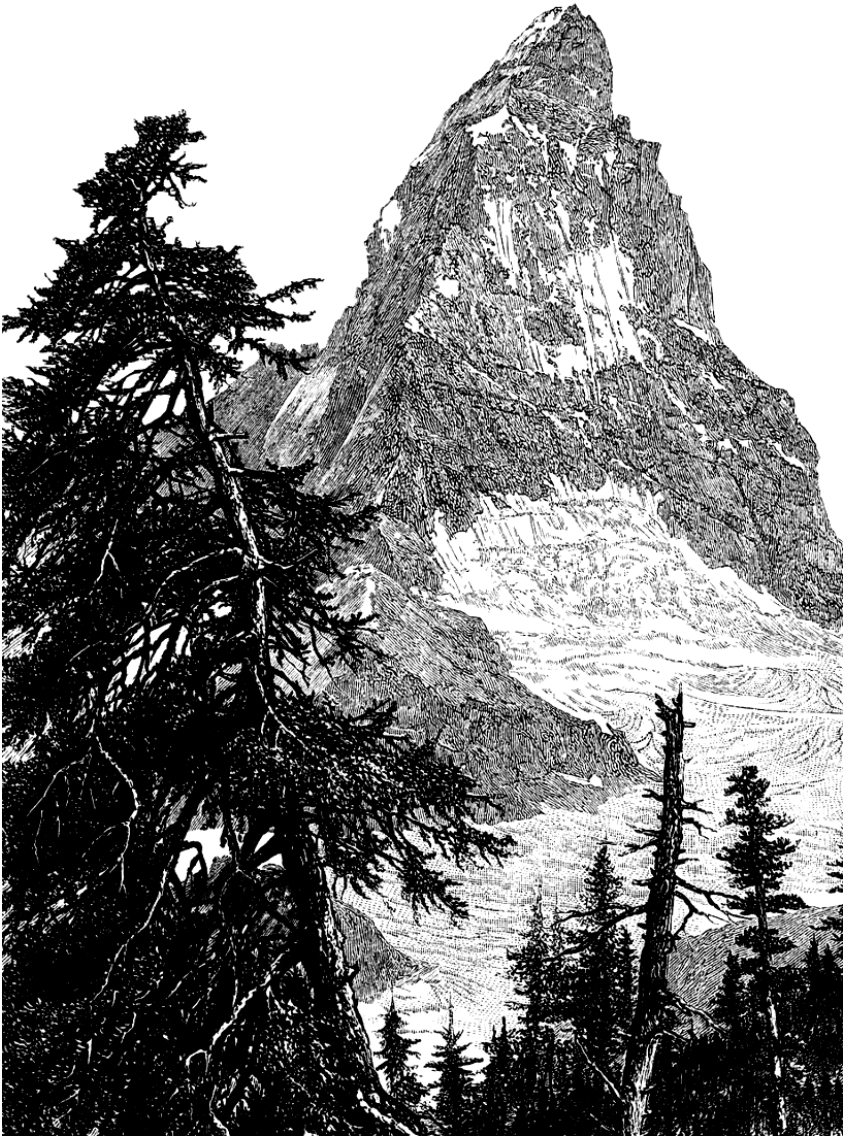
While not required, miniature figures add a certain spectacle to play, especially in combat, which benefits from the following:

- (1) Assume one inch on the tabletop equals 10' in the game (eyes and rulers help).
- (2) During a round, each combatant moves and/or acts, attacking or casting spells, etc.
- (3) Movement speeds are as follows:

| FIGURE IS...  | SPEED              |
|---------------|--------------------|
| Armored       | 40'                |
| Enemy monster | half listed value* |
| Unarmored     | 60'                |

\*Rounding up in all instances

- (4) Where applicable, enemies move and act first each round unless the players stage a clever ambush, noting that miniatures can be useful in non-combat scenarios as well, especially traps or natural hazards, where distance can be deadly.



Miniatures help to visualize when combat is unavoidable, and in group melee, the referee can denote enemy deaths by removing figures from the tabletop, allowing tactical players to better anticipate the end of hostilities. All of this promotes strategy and teamwork, not to mention fairness, which can only improve play.

## MAGIC IN COMBAT

Cantrips are immediate, taking effect within the same round they are cast. High sorcery varies depending on the spell and its purpose. For all their power, apprentices make poor combatants, specializing in other areas and wielding normal weaponry when forced to fight...

Charm spells are powerful, but require a full (uninterrupted) round wherein the caster looks into the target's eyes or some similar act, and even then, a third of these are willful enough to resist. Should the attempt fail, no wound cost will be incurred. Where applicable, ensorcelled humanoids are treated as hirelings in battle, taking wounds per armor and/or ability.

Lightning bolts are fast, powerful, and weaken even the mightiest foes at long range. They are also quite draining, especially when bows can deliver the same effect. Even so, their real power is that lightning can be thrown during melee, striking targets at close quarters.

Imp familiars can be made to fight, which means taking wounds for their master (and narrated appropriately). Of course, rival sorcerers will have these as well, although they are little more than a plot device. Animal spirits flee combat, which might be why they never die, while sprites avoid it. The latter might die for their master, but may resent the fact and take longer to depart their astral plane. This is up to the referee.

## LEARNING SPELLS

The sorcerer's apprentice knows every cantrip, for these are the stock and trade of their magical profession. High sorcery is different, and the referee might limit new characters to possession of but a single spell to curb their power, with more learned from grimoires (bound demons) or by spending skill points. If this is the case, the player can choose their first spell.

## HIRELINGS

Characters having the Commander talent can take up to three hirelings. This is expensive, but affords the leader one or more henchmen who can fight and provide loyal service:

New characters may be allowed to have one hireling to start. Otherwise, they will need to visit taverns and similar places where hired blades tend to gather. A prospective henchman will demand a **HIRING FEE** plus a weekly wage commensurate with their skills, although a few will accept a **SHARE** of treasure won. This is left to the referee, who acts out the negotiation...





The various hirelings, and their price, are listed below. Most, but not all, are men-at-arms equipped at their employer's expense. These command good pay, which they earn by fighting alongside their captains, taking wounds when the player chooses and reducing pressure on the party by spreading out the injury:

| HIRELING     | FEE*   | PAY        | WOUNDS |
|--------------|--------|------------|--------|
| Archer       | 150 SP | 15 SP/week | 1#     |
| Footman      | 120 SP | 12 SP/week | 3#     |
| Porter       | 50 SP  | 5 SP/week  | --     |
| Torch Bearer | 25 SP  | 3 SP/week  | --     |

\*Bonus to secure initial contract

#Unarmored, may be further equipped

Hired ARCHERS weaken enemy targets at range, per the applicable rules, which makes them worth every silver, switching to smaller, one-handed weapons when needed. Of course, these cannot use shields, although they can still be armored by their employer for added protection. Skilled and versatile, expert archers earn their pay.

FOOTMEN can also take wounds, indeed, this is their primary purpose. These can be positioned strategically, acting as extensions of their commander. As they can employ both armor and shield, heavy footmen are an excellent addition to any adventuring party, and smart captains always take the time to equip them.

Equipment PORTERS cannot employ armor, shields, or anything larger than a dagger. Their sole purpose is to bear burdens (equipment and booty), carrying 24 small items in their packs and an additional 5,000 coins, making them essential for long adventures and/or large hoards. Lacking combat skill, porters cannot take wounds and may die should they become isolated in battle.



TORCH BEARERS are often, but not always, small children hired to provide light and perform other menial tasks. Their small packs hold only a few personal effects, and they have limited competence owing mainly to their youth. Like porters, torch bearers never survive contact with the enemy and must be guarded. Light is scarce, and someone has to brighten the way!

Note: Armor and shields work differently for hirelings, each adding +1 to their total wounds when equipped. Upon receiving the maximum, death results, noting that magical armor and/or shields further improve their lot.

## LOYALTY AND TRUST

Henchmen are loyal (even against financial setbacks) if treated well and otherwise provided for, while abusive or careless leadership will have the opposite effect. The first two breaches require payment of the original hiring fee in compensation. Thereafter, disgruntled hirelings may simply desert, taking valuables with them or abandoning the party in dire straits.

## SPECIALISTS

In-demand SPECIALISTS are non-combatants who possess one of the following talents:

Dowser, Jailer,  
Trailblazer, Weathered

Unlike hirelings, anyone can hire a specialist, although only for a single adventure. These demand a fee of 120 SP plus expenses, noting that if they die, this amount must be paid to their surviving kin in compensation. Failure to do so is not looked kindly upon, for it violates the laws of the land. Indeed, the nobler houses stop at nothing to defend their family honor...





There is no standard for how much monetary wealth should be available in a setting, and the referee may need to adjust fees and weekly pay accordingly. If they prefer vast hoards, prices will need to be raised. But should their game steer a conservative course, the current values might be enough. This is left to the referee, who is in the best position to work it out.

### SAGES AND SCHOLARS

Sometimes, characters will need to consult an EXPERT, who charges by the query:

| QUESTION IS... | COST     | NOTES             |
|----------------|----------|-------------------|
| Routine        | 150 SP   | basic inquiry     |
| Specialized    | 2-300 SP | requires research |

Most experts are scholars attached to a church or some university in a larger city. These will answer routine questions immediately, assuming they have the proper expertise. Specialized inquiries, on the other hand, involve research, which can take both time (up to two weeks in some cases) and money, noting that academics never leave the safety of home for dangerous exploits.

## LANGUAGES

The introduction of playable non-human races, plus an assortment of intelligent woodland creatures, makes language more important than ever. Indeed, knowledge of their racial tongue is one of the biggest advantages of playing such characters. That said, the referee might include the following spoken tongues:

| LANGUAGE  | WRITTEN  | SPOKEN BY          |
|-----------|----------|--------------------|
| Dwarven   | yes      | dwarves, gnomes    |
| Elven     | yes      | elves, faerie folk |
| Forgotten | yes      | lost languages*    |
| Goblin    | no       | goblins, giantkind |
| Regional  | variable | human, national#   |

\*Ancient, preserved by scholarship

#Denotes language of a nation or state

## ADVANCEMENT

The referee might wish to increase earned skill points to promote their use as follows:

| ACCOMPLISHMENT              | AWARD |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Going on an adventure       | 1     |
| Making a personal sacrifice | 1-2   |
| Superior role-playing       | 1     |
| Victory against all odds    | 1-2   |

These can be spent as shown below:

| SPEND POINTS TO...             | SKILL COST |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| Avoid special attack (save)    | 1          |
| Extend spell duration one turn | 7          |
| Learn talent/high sorcery      | 7          |
| Survive fatal blow (as armor)  | 3          |

Note that extending spell/scroll durations is permanent and reflects growing skill. New high sorcery is much like learning a new talent.

### THREE: PERILS OF THE OVERLAND

Expanding the game to surface adventures means the wilderness is no longer safe and dull, for perils enough to rival the underworld await, and these are not confined to cramped chambers or constricted passages. Flying foes can dive from above, and all that open space allows enormous things (maybe prehistoric) to grow...

Once again, statistics are given as follows:

#### NAME (DAMAGE BONUS/MOVEMENT)

BEARS (5/120°) include the common (but deadly) variety, larger and more aggressive CAVE BEARS in prehistoric settings, and the ill-tempered GRIZZLY. All are solitary, but protective of any young in their care, the latter fighting as a gang for double their damage bonus.

BRONTOSAURS (12/150°) refer to any number of long-necked dinosaurs. Dull-witted herbivores, they are easily startled and heedless of those caught underfoot. Worse yet, these giants travel in large herds, stampeding for double wounds (per round plus the bonus) in their panic.

BUGBEARS (2/120°) are a variant form of goblin known for skulking in the woods. Stealthy foes, they cannot be detected in natural cover until within melee range, which allows them to ambush for +3 wounds in their first combat round plus their regular bonus for the remainder.

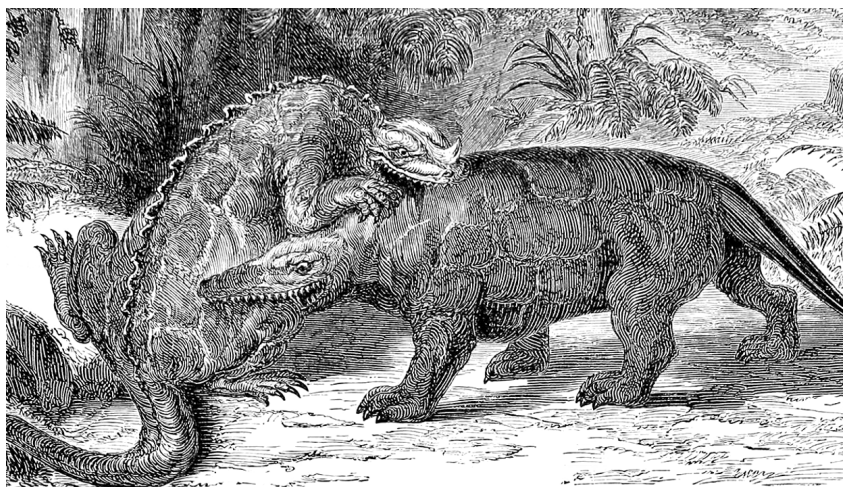
CENTAURS (4/150°) have the upper torso of a human with the body of a horse. Secretive folk, they shun most others, using bows and spears against intruders. Their powerful legs allow them to gallop at double speed, using this to lure foes onto open ground and loosing arrows on the fly.

DWARVES (3/120<sup>0</sup>) often travel through human lands as traders of precious metals. Given their natural hardiness, individuals are always of average or greater strength (for at least 5 rounds of combat), while gangs are strong, noting that all have a racial immunity to disease.

ELEPHANTS (6/150<sup>0</sup>) include prehistoric MAMMOTHS, those shaggy ice age giants. Most are docile unless attacked or their young threatened, after which they rush for double wounds per combat round as a brontosaur. Most, except for solitary bulls, move in herds for protection.

ELVES (2/120<sup>0</sup>) are sometimes encountered when visiting their forests, being treated as armored sorcerers with but a single spell (illusion is common for its variety). Most travel in hunting parties, with one spell per member, armed with longbows (a racial favorite) and swords.

FAERIES (3/90<sup>0</sup>) appear like tiny flying elves given to mischief. These can become invisible at will, appearing only long enough to attack, casting cantrips (but never high sorcery) with no limits. This makes them at least average when alone and strong (at least 6 rounds) in gangs.





**GHOULS** (4/120°) were human once, but driven by inhuman cravings became flesh-eating monsters known to haunt burials, tunneling 90° through packed earth to get at the dead. Anyone attacked from below must save or be immobilized, like an octopus, and eaten unless rescued.

**GNOMES** (3/90°) are much like dwarves, but smaller and with the ability to use cantrips or high sorcery once per game day. **REDCAPS** are a wicked, psychopathic variety who fight with hatchets and dip their caps in the blood. The latter have no magic, but can ambush like bugbears.

**GRIFFINS** (7/180°) have the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion, although a few varieties also sport talons. Airborne predators, they drop from the sky, inflict their maximum damage bonus in a lightning strike, then flee to the safety of their distant aeries.

**HALFLINGS** (1/240°) seldom leave their burrows, but when they do, they exploit their smaller size and natural stealth to remain hidden until they wish otherwise. If attacked, they wield knives and slings, firing with great accuracy for such friendly (and famously non-violent) folk.

**HORSES** (3/150°) are commonly employed by parties as transportation per the following:

| MOUNT  | COST   | LOAD#    | WOUNDS |
|--------|--------|----------|--------|
| Pack*  | 150 SP | 10 items | 7      |
| Riding | 75 SP  | 5 items  | 5      |
| War    | 250 SP | --       | 9      |

\*Includes pack mules and ponies

#Must be able to fit in a saddle bag

Warhorses alone enter combat, noting that these can be armored (**BARDING**, 75 SP) for +1 wound...



INSECT SWARMS (7/180°) can be anything from army ants to migratory killer bees. They are not so much slain as dispersed (fire helps), noting that anyone exceeding half their maximum wounds breaks out in painful boils that slow movement (no quick time) for one game day.

LIONS (5/120°) include any big cat, from fearsome tigers to ice age SABRE TOOTHES. Some move in small groups while others are solitary hunters, leaping from cover like a bugbear and dealing death to the unwary. True lions hunt in prides, surrounding prey to prevent escape.

LICHES (9/150°) are skeletal sorcerers who have prolonged their earthly existence through dark magic such that they may only be slain using sorcery or magical weapons. Moreover, their evil pacts may have granted them additional powers, making them terrible foes indeed:

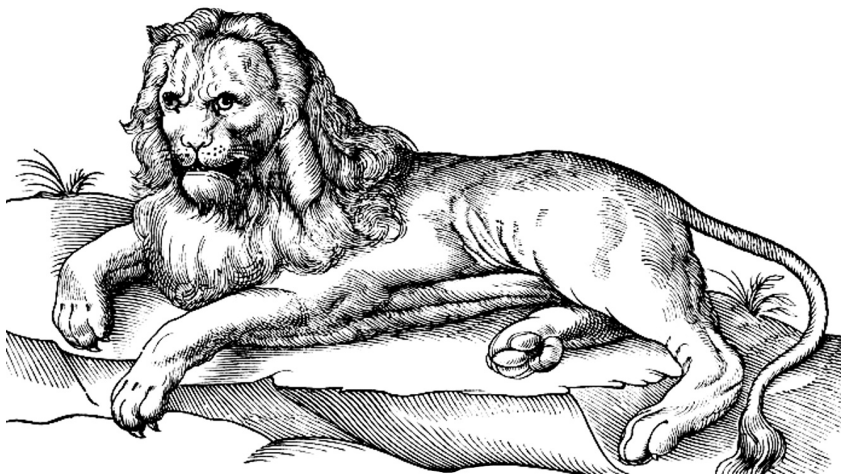
(1) So fearsome is their visage that any looking upon them must save or flee in terror.

(2) They are immune to charm and see through illusions, being above such things.

(3) Necromantic, they command many skeletons or zombies plus numerous charmed creatures.

Liches are mysterious and powerful figures, preferring to pull the strings remotely through servants and ruling vast domains. Their ways are inscrutable, but dependably wicked.

NEANDERTHALS (3/120°) inhabit prehistoric (ice age) settings and appear as brutish, physically powerful humans. Even so, they are excellent hunters and trackers and naturally adapted to a frozen environment. Appearances lie, for they are wise enough to never engage an enemy alone.



**NYMPHS (4/150°)** live near tranquil pools or in forgotten woodland settings, appearing as female spirits so beautiful that to look at one causes blindness for one day unless the character (any gender) saves. They fight with faerie knives, becoming invisible as a last resort.

**PTERANODONS (3/180°)** are flying reptiles from the Mesozoic, some with massive (30°) wingspans and powerful enough to carry off a dwarf or halfling in their great beaks. Lightweight fliers, they attack once, retreating to the skies when failing to kill outright. A prehistoric threat.

**RHINOCEROSES (5/120°)**, being solitary, are not easily approached, charging and stampeding all who dare. Their tough hides mean that arrows never weaken them (although magic is effective), making them dangerous. Their powdered horns are valued as a sorcerous component.

**ROCS (12/240°)** come from a far-away land, being immense birds (large enough to carry off an elephant, or so the legends say). Arrows do not weaken them, and it takes double lightning bolts to have the effects of one. They are otherwise merely enormous, which is enough to cause grief.

TYRANNOSAURS (9/180°) are agile prehistoric carnivores fast enough to overtake most parties and devour them all. Indeed, their principal power is their size, (probable) strength, and the speed at which they move. The tyrant lizard dominates their prehistoric home.

WRAITHS (5/150°) were living men once, but now corrupted by dark magic, appearing as withered remnants and fighting with foul blades (that only they may use). These inflict SOUL SICKNESS, which acts as a regular (and eventually fatal) disease unless cured with a strong remedy.

WYVERNS (3/120°) are small (horse-sized) dragons found in rocky crags. These lack the flaming breath of their cousins, but possess a stingered tail that requires anyone suffering wounds to save or become paralyzed for three turns unless roused, much like ghouls or octopi.

#### MONSTER TEMPLATES

Of course, the above are generalizations, and the referee can use them to build their own enemy monsters. That said, the following entries from the original rules have been updated to better challenge newcomers and veterans alike...

DRAGONS are long lived provided they avoid heroic adventurers (and sometimes after, for they are fearsome). Indeed, they grow more powerful through the years, becoming physically larger and gaining both speech and magic:

YOUNG DRAGONS (6/120°) are little more than beasts, lacking speech, flight, and the deadly breath that comes with decades of maturity. These grow as large as a warhorse, but their wings cannot sustain flight. When confronted, they use their teeth and powerful claws to rend all comers.



MATURE DRAGONS (12/120<sup>0</sup>) are capable of speech, corresponding to the original rules with respect to everything from their fiery breath to rapid (quick-time) flight in outdoor settings.

ANCIENT DRAGONS (18/240<sup>0</sup>) can wield remarkable power within a setting, perhaps equal to liches, although most prefer to mind their hoards in secrecy (and a good thing). In addition to speech and flight, they act as sorcerers, making them formidable foes. Caution and appeasement are the best ways to survive an encounter...

Remember, fire-breathing dragons use their breath first for their full damage bonus, with an additional (equal) bonus applied to the rest of combat. All of them, even the young, are fearsome opponents and should be considered strong.

GHOSTS may now elicit fear (like a wight) to all within 30', although elves are immune.

GOBLINS represent a wide variety of humanoid monsters (bugbears are cousins). All are cunning, with some capable of formulating strategy:

KOBOLDS (1/120<sup>0</sup>) grow small in the dark, using numbers and deadly traps to even the odds. They seldom leave their foul lairs, but revel in the torment they bring to interlopers. Pits? Poison spikes? All are on the table, noting here that intruders can expect traps dealing the maximum possible wounds to confound and kill.

ORCS (4/120<sup>0</sup>) are surface dwellers carving out a space in remote places. They are more organized than their subterranean kin, forging weapons, making armor, and fielding archers and footmen to feed their lust for battle. Sometimes called HOBGOBLINS, living in the open has allowed them to grow strong, rivalling any human warrior.

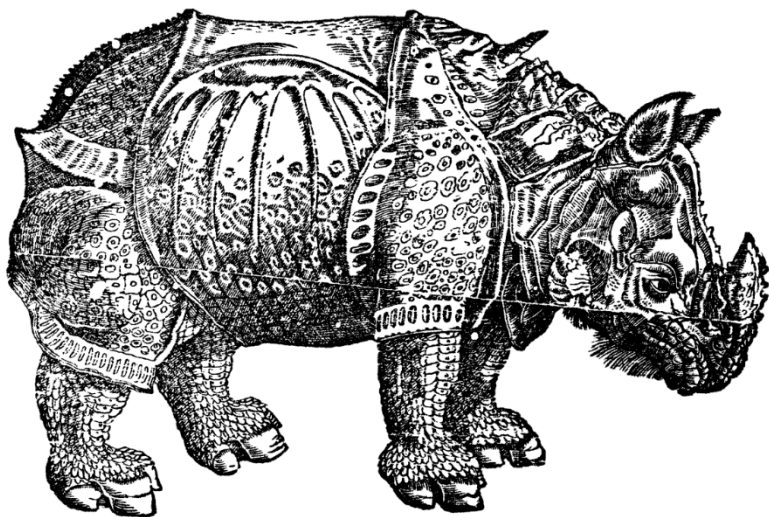
## PACING ENCOUNTERS

While strength indicates the number of rounds needed to defeat an enemy, combat can become predictable even with damage bonuses. To avoid this, the referee can simply add up the total wounds for an encounter (1/round + damage bonus) and distribute these as they wish, noting that some rounds may inflict zero injury. Round for round, a combat might proceed like this:

3/0/4/1/5/0/3

The above is for a strong tyrannosaur (9/180') fought over seven combat rounds for a total of 16 wounds, noting that this format can be adopted for writing up combat encounters.

Combat is a narrative, but also a strategic affair, and in the absence of random outcomes, players have little choice but to evaluate the (apparent) strength of an enemy and gamble. Put another way, Diceless Dungeons rolls the dice in advance, challenging the players to choose wisely and triumph. And really, what could be more real (or old-school) than that? Adventures await...



## FOUR: INTO THE WILDS

These rules expand gameplay beyond just the dungeons to a wilderness setting, which is every bit as dangerous, and while the original rules for movement and evasion clearly apply to much of this, the outdoors, with its uneven terrain and unpredictable weather, offers its own unique challenges. This world is deadly...

### MAPPING THE SURFACE

The surface world presents various natural environments, many of which are difficult (and often dangerous) to pass. As this represents a significantly larger area, the referee might use hexagonal paper, with each hex (or square if using graph paper) equaling a mile. Such maps should be marked or color-coded to represent terrain conditions for quicker reference:

| TERRAIN       | COLOR       | SYMBOL     |
|---------------|-------------|------------|
| Level/plateau | brown/white | open space |
| Overgrown     | green       | hatched    |
| Rocky/swamp   | dark gray   | wavy lines |

LEVEL/PLATEAU environments are flat and fairly open, which enables unimpeded movement with bursts of speed. OVERGROWN areas include forests and similar natural locales where vegetation obstructs visibility. Native occupants may not be subject to limitations, ambushing outsiders unless the party has a suitable plan.

ROCKY GROUND always slows movement, but not necessarily quick time, although careless speed can trigger an avalanche on snowy slopes or landslides in warmer climates. SWAMPY terrain combines vegetation with muddy ground for a double threat. Mounts (and their riders) can get bogged down in the muck, with the local fauna climbing at full speed out of their slimy holes.



Above and below ground, terrain can be just as dangerous as the monsters living there!

## WEATHER

While terrain can be mapped, weather cannot, and in the absence of any random tables, some other method is needed to account for what amounts to being an ever-changing landscape...

One method is a CAMPAIGN CALENDAR, with daily conditions arrived at beforehand. This approach requires work and should be done at least three months in advance, noting that a little research helps ensure a more realistic progression.

Another way is to employ REAL-WORLD weather conditions for a representative area. This can be fun, especially when the players have no idea where this is! Again, research is vital.

Of course, the referee is also free to utilize random tables behind the scenes, although this breaks immersion. Either way, the following rules apply to whatever conditions are expected, with consequences for those caught unaware.





Once the day's weather is determined, the referee can decide which hexes are affected and assign hazards as needed. Fair skies are a blessing, but conditions can change for the worse:

**FREEZING** is a risk for any party travelling in extreme cold without taking shelter (one hour for every three on the road), building a fire, and eating to preserve body heat. Failing to do so results in **COLD EXPOSURE**, wherein targets cannot heal normally and suffer an additional wound per day outdoors. A threat in winter, but also in higher elevations all year long.

**HEAT STRESS** comes on quietly. Travelling in extreme heat requires water and rest in the shade, again, one hour out of every three, for fear of **HEAT EXPOSURE**. This acts as cold, above, noting that tropical lands are always hot. Ascetics, dowers, and pathfinders enjoy clear benefits in extreme weather, but planning remains the best way to survive a punishing wilderness.

**LIGHTNING** is deadly, but luckily rare. For convenience, cloud-to-ground strikes happen once every 10 thunderstorms, which are only dangerous when the party remains exposed for at least one hour. Thereafter, the referee should describe multiple close calls, and when these are still ignored, lightning strikes for 15 wounds divided among those within its path.

## **HUNGER AND THIRST**

Even in fair weather, characters may only go three days without food and drink before hunger and/or thirst take their toll, resulting in a combined form of exposure, meaning no ordinary healing and one wound taken per day without nourishment. Ascetics hold out longer, but will ultimately succumb unless supplies are found, all of which speaks to the value of preparation.

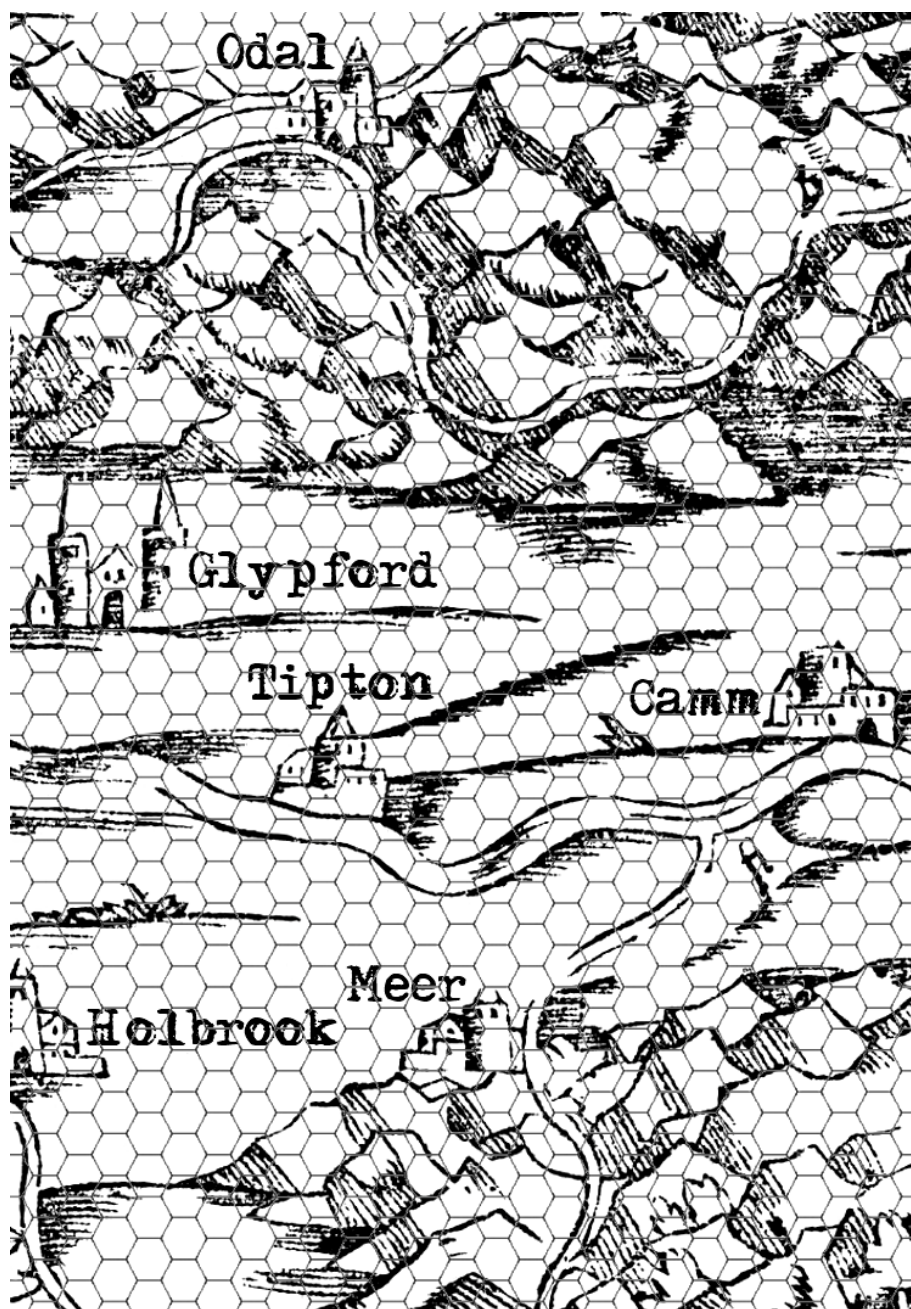
## PLACING PERILS

Most of the world is trackless wilderness, and these games make much of the so-called hex crawl, where characters explore and encounter random monsters. Of course, this is impossible in a diceless game (unless the referee cheats and uses random tables, that is), so another approach is needed. To keep things simple, the referee should number specific areas on their map and allocate encounters per the following...

- (1) Designated encounters can be monsters or natural hazards, each assigned a single hex and activated when the party arrives.
- (2) Once cleared, the hex should remain vacant for a while, although natural hazards persist.
- (3) The referee should periodically introduce encounters in different hexes, whether monsters and/or natural hazards, for variety.

Enemy encounters are deadlier because the outdoors offers many opportunities for ambush and enough room to attack or strategically retreat. Flying monsters, in particular, can soar beyond the range of arrows (or sorcery) and return for a lethal strike. Moreover, natural hazards are (potentially) more widespread, with some, like mountainous landslides, covering multiple hexes and burying whole towns!

Danger abounds, and if this seems to lack the randomness a setting demands, keep in mind that it is no different from the referee rolling in advance, and that the players have total control over where they go. Once again, by assigning realistic, area-appropriate encounters, players are challenged to exploit their knowledge of the setting, and the referee to fashion internally consistent worlds where such things can happen.



## SITING CIVILIZATION

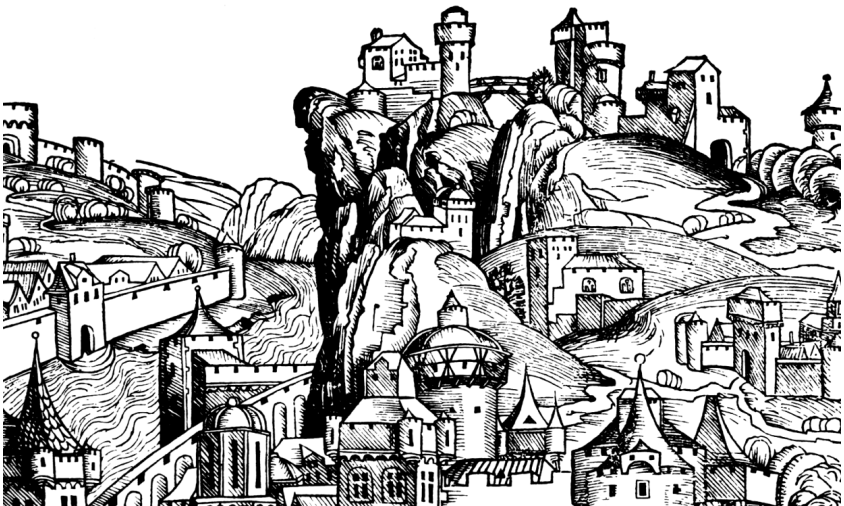
Finally, the referee should place the various towns and villages of their setting, siting these with the following kept in mind:

(1) Most medieval towns are built near water, and larger cities absolutely require this, both for trade and sanitation. The oldest of these feature vast sewer systems beneath their streets.

(2) Beyond the cities lie the estates of nobility, with arable land worked by commoners obliged under feudal law. The smaller towns and farming villages occupy this rural zone.

(3) The wilderness is uncharted and avoided by honest folk. The city guard, and even local militias, will not venture there, making this a lawless landscape. Merchant caravans travel under escort by armed guards, former adventurers familiar with the perils of the overland!

Of course, non-human settlements may differ, noting that halflings prefer rural shires close to human lands, where they might be subjects.



## OVERLAND ARTIFACTS

The wilds are vast, with lots of space to lose (and eventually recover) an assortment of magical items. In addition to the more commonly found artifacts, some of dwarven or elven make, the referee can place the following:

DWARVEN HAMMERS (5,000 SP) are extremely rare and might be a singular item. These can be thrown out to 30' in combat, faithfully returning to the wielder's hand at the end of the round. Forged from an unknown metal, these fabled weapons can weaken an enemy once per day like a bow.

ELVEN CLOAKS (3,500 SP) allow the wearer to blend perfectly with their surroundings, but only when remaining perfectly still. Of equal worth (and rarity) are ELVEN SHOES, which allow the user to travel noiselessly when fully armored, although they remain quite visible.

EVERFULL PACKS (10,000 SP) appear as the usual sort, but with a whiff of magic. Each can hold up to 48 items small enough to fit in a backpack or hang from a belt (or a single oversized item, like a jewel-encrusted statue, etc.) without weighing the user down. These are coveted things.

GRIMOIRES (12,000 SP) contain instructions for summoning one or more demons, who must perform a single action, within their power to deliver, for the character. This demands a ritual lasting several turns plus 1,000 SP, noting that demons are only bound to serve for one hour.

Of course, trafficking with demons should feel dangerous and damning, and the referee can extend their powers to make it worthwhile (and tempting) to try. Most notably, teaching one spell of high sorcery, resurrecting the dead, or restoring lost limbs (or eyesight) to use...

Alternately, grimoires bear instructions for creating a clay golem (10 wounds), although only by an apprentice at a price of 5,000 SP and one month of uninterrupted work. These cannot heal normally, but must be repaired by their maker, who spends 150 SP per wound erased.

HOLY RELICS (--) can be the personal effects (or sometimes bodily remains) of some religious saint imbued with divine essence. These may only be used by those sharing the saint's beliefs unless the deity (referee) sees some higher purpose to permitting it, noting that powers vary:

| RELIC           | EFFECT                 |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| Bernard's Tooth | cure diseased flesh    |
| Jacob's Femur   | erase up to 10 wounds* |
| Nadine's Cross  | repel minor undead#    |

\*Or restore limb (or sight) on touch

#Skeletons and zombies within 30' flee

Priceless, relics may be used but once per day, noting that it is up to the referee whether these are singular things (the churches of medieval Europe, had enough splinters of the true cross to build a whole fleet) or one of many.

SCRYER'S MEDIUMS (10,000 SP) are crystal balls through which an apprentice can remotely view some place. While far-flung lands can be seen, this act is draining on the diviner and requires a period of (undisturbed) rest as shown:

| DISTANCE            | DAYS OF REST |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Local dominion      | 3            |
| Neighboring kingdom | 15           |
| Overseas continent  | 30           |

Visions are brief (one turn) under the best of circumstances which, of course, are seldom seen.

WITCHES' BROOMS (3,000 SP) resemble the ordinary sort except for enabling flight. It takes an apprentice, who must straddle the broom and use the words of command they already know, for normal and quick-time movement, horizontally and vertically, plus one passenger.

WIZARD'S HATS (7,500 SP) look like a conical cap, gray, weathered, and unremarkable except for its considerable power, for it allows an apprentice to pull up to three normal (non-magical) objects out of it per day. Small as a key to as big as a ladder, the item disappears after a turn.

Of course, the referee is encouraged to add more, whether imported from some favorite game or original creations. This includes demon lords and saints, the latter complete with ancient relics, for both are sorely needed...

Diceless. It means fun, story-centric games where decision making and problem-solving are still important. Imaginary play free of any illusions about rules. To quote M.A.R. Barker, the story really is the thing, and the rules either oblige or they fail where it matters most!

