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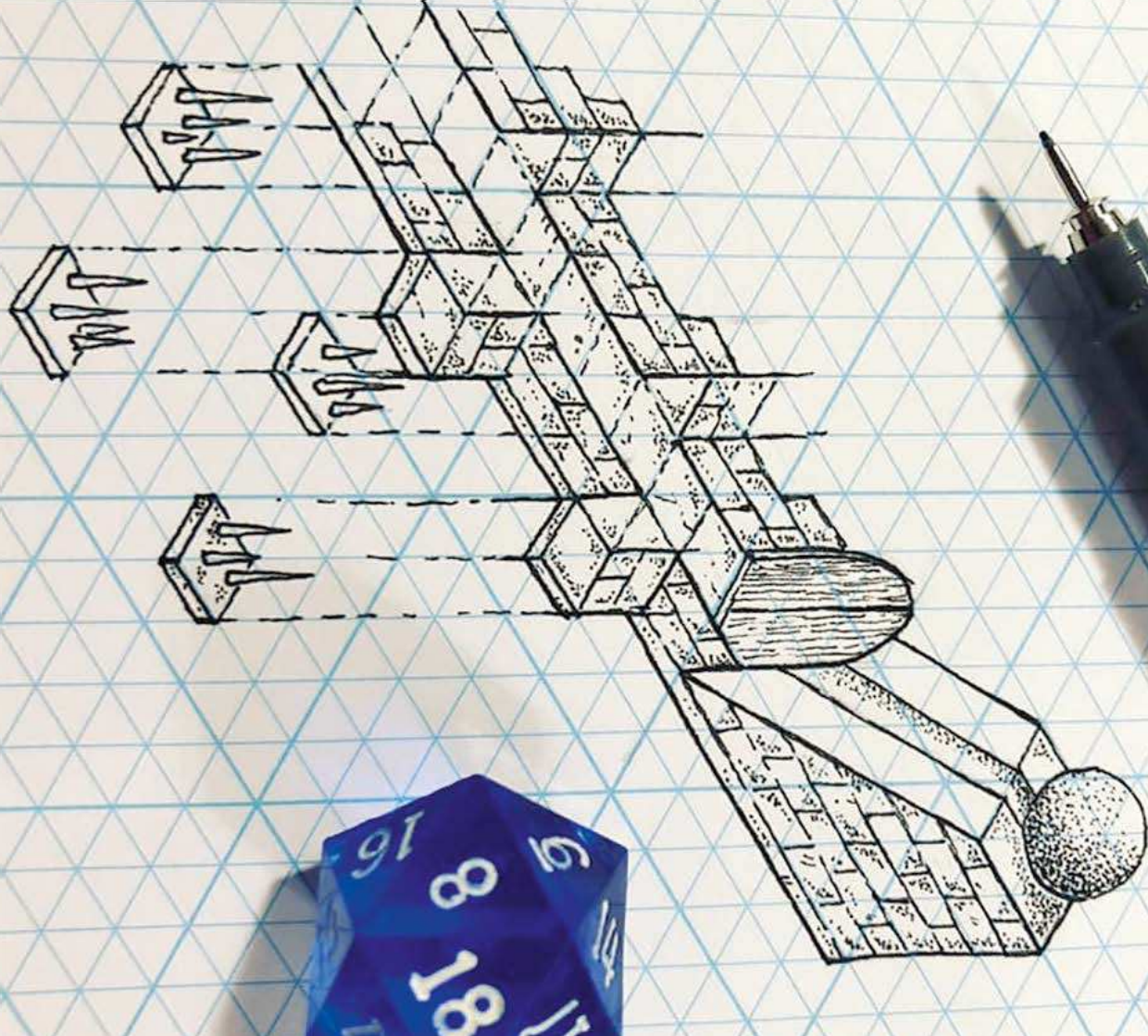# Knock!

An Adventure Gaming Bric-a-brac

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

THE MERRY MUSHMEN

present:

An Adventure Gaming Bric-a'brac

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Knock!

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d12 PAMPHLETS FOUND IN A DUNGEON

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by **Eric Nieudan**

Foreword

Dungeons & Dragons is everywhere these days.
But never far behind, skulking in the dragon's shadow, is an army of creative, crazy rebels. We come from all walks of nerd life, Gen X grognards and oat flat white sipping millenials, united in our love of the old, the weird, the easy to adapt. From our roots in nostalgia, we have warped into a breed of chaos mutants, all different, yet very much the same. Through the internet, we've become a planetary movement, a sizeable niche in the TTRPG industry. You can call us OSR, Sword Dream, Adventure Gamers, or just Those Weirdos. You decide, because you're one of us now.

We at la Maison Mushmen wanted to bring you a snapshot of our gaming culture, bound into the venerable codex form. A colourful brick of old-timey fun. This first issue is a bet: a bet on your interest in owning content you may have read before, collected in this dense volume for posterity and for prep sessions. If you're reading this, it means we've funded, and if we've funded, we'll bring you more issues, with a much larger proportion of original content. KNOCK! is opening the gilded doors to the bazaar of adventure gaming.

Care to react to something?
Write to us, or better yet, submit an article!
We like to keep our bazaar bizarre.

Thank you all! You're great!

CONTRIBUTORS

CONTENT

The classes and monsters in this issue use formatting borrowed from Necrotic Gnome's excellent retroclone of the B/X rules, **old-school essentials.** We cannot recommend this game enough.

by **Brooks Dailey** - Art: **Michael Sheppard**

WHAT I WANT
IN AN OSR GAME

For me, the OSR has always had a very specific appeal. I don't need it to be my end-all, be-all general tool.
I already have a dozen other options for character-focused, narrative heavy drama. Instead, OSR games are at their best when treated as an intentional, focused experience. In a time when the current edition of D&D is a kitchen-sink experience, the attraction to OSR is what makes these games different.

Objective, Challenged-Based Gaming

Most of the games I love actively embrace failure. Burning Wheel, Apocalypse World (even my own work in progress, Sword & Scoundrel), and similar games are all designed to Fail Forward. Failure is not only an expected part of play, it's relied upon to drive the narrative forward. You're not playing these games to accomplish things. You're playing them to see what happens. OSR design takes the opposite approach. Most games in this class base XP on two categories: defeating enemies and recovering treasure. These are both objective-based reward mechanics. If you want to advance, you have to succeed. You must actually accomplish something to move forward.

Sometimes, I'm in the mood for a tragic, twisting narrative, but sometimes I just want to be challenged. I want my players incentivized to be their smartest, most resourceful selves and be rewarded when they overcome the challenges set before them.
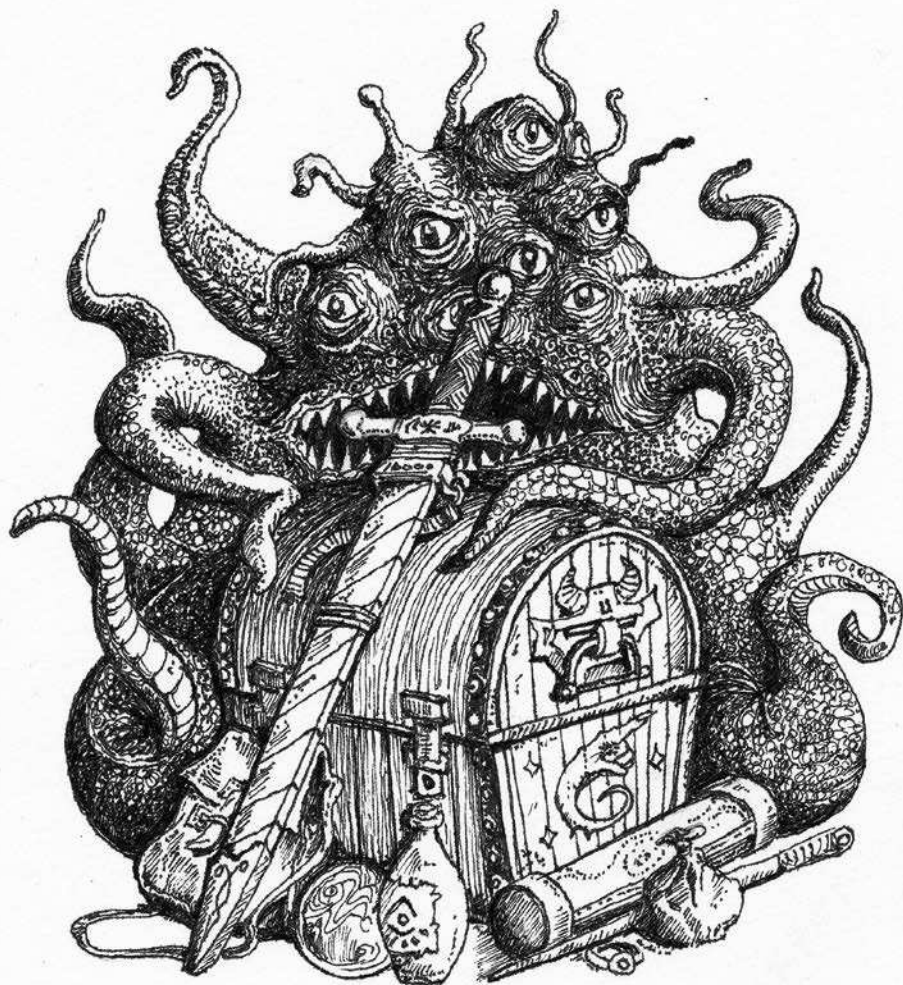
Encounter-Based High Adventure

As a corollary to the above, most games I'm into are intensely character-focused. They are built around exploring who the character is and what they are about. It's a deeply rewarding experience, but it can also be emotionally exhausting. I'm not always up for it as a player or as a GM. Sometimes you want to be playing Game of Thrones. Other times, what you really want is Conan the Barbarian.

OSR games are built to emulate the best kind of old-school pulps. Like any Weird Tales story, we aren't here to explore the internal conflicts of the protagonist. The lead character is there to give us a view into a world of exotic locales, thrilling heroics, and a whole lot of weird shit. This shift in focus brings an entirely different kind of creative outlet. Prepping for a character-focused game is all about finding ways to reincorporate aspects of those characters into the game and building events to force the PCs to make hard decisions. In an OSR game, the GM's creative efforts are the exact opposite. You are focusing entirely on the world itself, creating interesting scenarios, locations, creatures, items, set-pieces, and other encounters. You are creating things purely because you think they are cool. You don't need to worry about how the PCs' deep-seated philosophical issues will come into play. They'll come for the treasure anyway.

Oracular Dice and the Impartial Adjudicator

The more character-focused and story-oriented the game is, the more deliberate you want to be with how events unfold. OSR is all about the random: random encounters, treasure tables, mutations, even character generation. Not only do these create some neat artifacts of play, but the more randomized the elements of the game, the more objective you can be as a GM. When I'm playing B/X, my job is not to actively challenge the players or find ways to highlight the individual character traits of their PCs. My job is to prepare a situation for them to explore and then impartially interpret the results of the dice as they do. Their success and failure (and consequently, the XP they earn) is all between them and the dice gods. I am but the messenger.

Player Skill and Fictional Engagement

For many people, one of the major draws to the OSR is the way the games allow for direct engagement with the fiction. In many cases, you can bypass challenges through role-playing alone. This might take the form of negotiating your way through a social encounter, narrating your way through disarming a trap, or solving a puzzle with raw player intelligence alone. In a way, resorting to the dice can even be seen as a fail state. Once you have to fall back on mechanical abilities, you are leaving things up to chance

and usually putting your character at risk. This approach works so well in OSR precisely because the of very gameable gaps these systems leave. The lack of skills in most games mean that the players have to look elsewhere for solutions to their problems (see page 74 about that). Risk management is the most important skill players can master in the game, so any time you can overcome a challenge through fictional positioning, you're better off than you would have been letting the dice decide your fate. Combined with the challenge-based nature of the OSR, these games become a kind of creative problem-solving and critical thinking exercise that doesn't exist elsewhere in the role-playing hobby.

Adventure as Expedition

In nearly any other game I play, equipment and supplies are generally hand-waived. Tracking time, speed, and distance are just irrelevant trivialities that get in the way of the story being told. However, in OSR they are a crucial part of the logistics of exploration. Early D&D editions treated dungeon-delving as a full-fledged expedition. Players would have to carefully balance their supplies to ensure they had enough goods to make the journey, but this came with a cost. The more stuff you bring, the less room you have to bring stuff back. The more stuff you bring or treasure you're carrying, the slower you move, and

the longer exploration takes. The longer exploration takes, the more likely you are to run out of supplies or bump into something dangerous. Worse still, the more heavily encumbered you are, the more easily you can be overrun. The most common solution is to bring on hirelings and pack animals, but that has its own drawbacks. The more people you hire, the more expensive your trip becomes, the more supplies you need to bring, and the more attention you will attract.

In any other game, time, speed, and inventory are often unnecessary simulation and thus ignored. In OSR, they are an iron triangle of risk-management and an important expression of player-skill. Creating your own Lewis & Clark or Oregon Trail expedition is a fun experience that isn't really found in any other kind of game.

I could easily go on further about the rules light nature of the games, the ease of hacking, the flexibility of play, and so on, but here I wanted to focus on the things that really made OSR games unique. In turn, these are areas that future OSR games would benefit from exploring further, giving them the focus they deserve.

by **Gavin Norman** - Art: **Matthew Houston**

Old

A comparison of old and new D&D

As a long-time D&D player who has returned to playing a 30 years old version of the game, I thought it would be interesting to write a bit about my experiences with the venerable game, and why I'm now so much happier to be playing a very early incarnation of it.

A bit of background to my experiences with D&D: I started playing in the early 1980s, with the Basic / Expert sets. AD&D was also around at this time, and while I did buy a couple of the books I found them a bit overwhelming at that young age, and only got into AD&D when the second edition came out. I played «2e» a lot during my teens, and then gradually drifted away from roleplaying in my twenties. When I returned to the hobby several years ago, **D&D 4 was the big new thing**. I duly tried it out, and also tried out the 3rd edition, and Pathfinder. **The games I played were fun, sure, but somehow I found that none of these versions of the game really had that spark which the older editions had.**

So here are a few thoughts on the differences I've found between the older and newer styles of D&D, and why my personal preference lies with the old. (I'm sure a lot of people prefer the newer style, and I'm not trying to convince anyone of anything here, just expressing my love of "the old ways".)

The defining factor seems to be the terseness and sparsity of the older D&D rules, especially if you look at the original version of the game (OD&D) or the basic game which was released during the late 1970s to early 1980s. They don't cover very much, and rarely go into much depth. Later versions of the game progressively filled in these gaps (whether with the minutiae of AD&D, or the systemic rationalisation and «core mechanics» of D&D 3 / 4). However the early game solved the issue of «how to determine what happens in situation X» in a very different way: make something up on the spot! Need to know if a character can jump over a pit (there's no jumping skill)? – the DM has many options: just say yes, just say no way, roll vs DEX, give a 2 in 6 chance, etc. Completely dependant on the situation at hand.

There are many things about this system (or lack of system!), that create a play experience which I personally enjoy very much.

This is not a game of rules. The lack of specific rules and reliance on the DM to make improvised «rulings», rather than relying on pre-defined «rules», brings home an extremely important feature of old-school RPGs: the atmosphere of the game is far more immersive and mysterious if the players are thinking in terms of being their character, rather than in terms of what they're allowed to do by the rules. That's why in AD&D, for example, the players handbook only has rules for creating characters. All the other rules of the game are in the dungeon master's guide.

Improvisation. One of the things I enjoy most about the roleplaying hobby as a whole is the act of making stuff up on the spot with a group of people. It's much more fun than looking things up in books.

Growing characters vs character builds. When the procedure for character creation is as simple as: 1. roll ability scores in order, 2. choose a class, 3. buy equipment, there's no room for the mechanical tweaking which has come to be known in later editions as «character builds» (which is, I believe, something of a game in itself!). This further brings home the fact that this game is not about rules and mechanics. Your character is differentiated from others by how you play them, and what experiences you go through with the character in the game, not by what numbers you have written on your character sheet. In effect you're growing or «building» your character as you play.

Less is more. Another effect of this lack of mechanically stated character options is that it actually in practice tends to give characters more options, flexibility and creativity. Characters are free to try things which, in more rules-strict editions of the game, they just wouldn't bother with, due to perhaps not having enough in a certain skill, or not knowing a certain feat. As a result the game tends to feel a lot more open and free-form.

Saying yes. The lack of specific character abilities, in terms of "skills" or "feats", has another, perhaps surprising, side-effect: it allows the DM to simply let characters do cool stuff, when appropriate. Can my wizard read the ancient magical script of the Zagdobar people? Of course he can! (As opposed to: what's your Arcana bonus?) Can my fighter do a spinning attack and try to hit the three temple guards surrounding him? He can try for sure! – make a DEX check, and if you succeed you can make an attack roll at -2 for each of them. (As opposed to: well, let me see, isn't there a feat for that?) This point can be especially relevant where success at a certain action is important for the progression of a story.

Saying no. Of course, the other side of the coin is that if a player hasn't got specific abilities written down, then the DM is equally likely to just say "no way". Common sense generally prevails.

Making the game your own. When the «official rule book» is ambiguous and vague, DMs have a chance to interpret as necessary and as they see fit. This can give each campaign a unique flavour, as rules are interpreted in different ways.

Rules where necessary.

The lack of specifics in the rule books allows the DM to expand them, if areas come up during play which are important enough to demand further rules. The end effect is that you're starting from a very rules-light system, and expanding it if needed, rather than trying to comprehend or cut down a very rules-heavy system. For example, the «official rules» for wizards creating magic items say little more than «it's up to the DM how much it costs, how long it takes, and what components or equipment are needed».

If a particular group feels like this is too vague, then they can come up with something that suits their campaign. (Though I feel that this system is absolutely perfect as it is, as it allows the DM to suggest something completely tailored to the character in question.)

So that covers, in my experience, some of the big differences in style between older and newer editions of D&D.

monster design
FROM CLASSICS

THE LICH

The Cocktail Codex makes the bold claim that there are only six cocktails, with all recipes able to be linked at least tangentially to one of these root recipes. So a Martini is defined by the relationship between spirit (gin) and aromatised wine (vermouth), so a Manhattan is simply a relative that uses whiskey instead of gin, sweet vermouth in place of dry, and bitters added for seasoning the added sweetness.

So what's the point of all this beyond theory and list-making? It's really an exercise to demonstrate how new recipes can be created around classic structures, and understanding how to make changes without screwing up what makes the classic work. Can we do the same for monsters? It's not a perfect fit, but let's try one.

The Lich - The Classic

While dark wizards might seem like the true root, Liches feel much more iconic to me.

Lich: STR 7, DEX 7, CHA 18, 15hp. Ceremonial Dagger (d6), Lots of spells.

- Great magical powers
- Physically weak
- Themes of greed and immortality

Experimenting with the Core

In this case the core of the lich is its magical powers, which contrast its physical weakness.

- We can move the focus to psionics: we get the mind flayer.
- We can tighten down the magic powers to single extraordinary ability to give us the medusa, doppelgänger, dryad, and even the rust monster.
- We can keep things closer to arcane magic and focus on a particular school to get classics like the evil necromancer. You can tip the balance slightly, giving them more modest magical powers in exchange for appearing in greater numbers and being a touch more hardy to get drow and gnomes that still rely on magic and trickery over their swords.

And of course the point of this is to help us create new monsters, so what if we focused on summoning magic?

Elemental Conduit: STR 7, DEX 7, CHA 18. 12hp.
- An elemental cultist that has given up their sapience to become a channel for elemental beings to enter our plane.
- They are humanoid but clearly made up of chunks of raw elements barely held together.
- They want everything to return to raw elemental chaos, and can summon elementals at will.

Experimenting with the Balance

The lich's power is balanced by its weak physical form, classically a skeleton but sometimes taken to the demilich extreme of just a skull.
- Another extreme take is going for the brain in a Jar.
- Giving the lich a ghost form keeps them unable to have much physical impact, but gives them the added power of being immaterial, so you should pull back on their magical powers if you go in this direction.
- The balance doesn't have to be physical

weakness, but could be other forms of physical restriction. An aboleth is physically large but bound to water, and limited on where it can move. Some types of demons or devils can fit into the lich mould but they can be banished to their home or otherwise controlled by magic. Vampires have a similar combination of physical power with serious weaknesses to balance their magical abilities.

So let's make a new creation where the physical weakness is replaced with stupidity and a vulnerability.

Tome Golem: STR 15, DEX 5, CHA 5. D8 Smash. Lots of Spells.
- Literally made out of spellbooks but doesn't really understand them. Throws a random spell out in anger if provoked.
- Drawn to absorb more spell tomes into its form.
- Extremely flammable (any fire attacks get +d12).

Experimenting with the Seasoning

The Seasoning is what binds the core and the balance together. A lich that knows lots of spells but is physically weak isn't interesting enough to throw into your game, but if they're the last devotee of an ancient religion or the vain prince of a ruined kingdom then you've got something to grip onto, a reason why they're the way they are.

Most of the variants above change the seasoning from the classic, but let's see if we can keep everything else the same.

Eternal Apprentice: STR 7, DEX 7, CHA 18. 16hp. Dagger (d6), Lots of spells.
- Doomed to eternally wander the tomb of their truly dead master, tidying up, checking everything is in order, sweeping the floor.
- Can channel the power of their master if needed, but is woefully lacking in confidence and constantly scared of using the wrong spell.
- Their spirit is released if the master's corpse is destroyed.

DOES ENERGY DRAIN SUCK?

These rules may help if you think it does.

- Wights, wraiths and other lesser undead drain 1d6 Constitution.
- Spectres, vampires and other greater undead drain 2d4 Constitution.
- Shadows drain 1d6 Strength.
- Scores recover at a rate of 1 per day.
- A character drained to 0 in a score is lost, and becomes an undead of the given type.

With these changes in effect, undead represent a greater immediate threat, but do not damage long term character viability.

by **Daniel Sell** - Art: **Li-An** *(Mazirian the Magician, 2012)*

Wizard Weaknesses

Some wizards, tower wizards, necro-wizards, lonely wizards, have the time to commit to exceeding the typical human limitations of knowing the unknowable. As you approach the Planck scale of magical minutiae it passes beyond mere education and study, as this level you must **cheat.**

These cheaty boss-wizards should be freely given outrageous Skill and Stamina ratings. Huge, gigantic, suicidally dangerous sorcerous chops. The players can go ahead and literally brute force the issue of killing them, or they can be smart and figure out exactly how this bastard is cheating and catch them out. When these weaknesses are exploited the wizard's skill and (total) stamina is halved. Some might just apply to the individuals exploiting it, or it might cause the wizard to be generally weakened. The exact details will suggest themselves.

d66

11 Having his hat knocked off. Its special lining was keeping the spells inside.

12 The pet rat he keeps in his cummerbund, a great sorceror in its own right.

13 Seeing a tattoo of a bare bottom. Prude or ancient pact with Slaanesh?

14 An albino ferret, brandished. The wizard cowers and cringes, obviously disgusted. Whether this effect is magical or psychological is unclear.

15 The secondary brain they keep in a jar under their bed helps them think.

16 A deck of cards full of occult symbolism. The wizard has actually invented a revolutionary note-taking system allowing him to offload a lot of the mental strain on to small cue cards. Regardless, destroying them would be quite a setback.

21 Direct sunlight causes the warlock's crystallised plasmic crown to evaporate. It is otherwise invulnerable and irremovable.

22 The daemonic parasite which clings to the back of his head. To the ignorant observer it looks like a rather gaudy evil-guy hat, but those viewing it via Second Sight or other true-seeing ability will know differently. They must also test their luck or be blinded by the brilliance of the creature's true form. Daemonic hat - 5/20/4.

23 The true wizard is an old man behind a curtain in the room beyond, controlling this simulacrum with gossamer tendrils of plasma disappearing off into the ether. Requires a good few hours to rouse himself, so is essentially defenceless.

24 Warlock wands are old fashioned, something a grandpa-wizard would use. A few enthusiasts see past the passé and into the pragmatic, creating extravagant wands of manticore spine and unicorn feather to complement their abilities. They are tragically easy to break, however. When hitting the wizard successfully you may test your luck to break the wand. If you fail you do no damage to anything.

25 One thing that never goes out of style are bangles and talismans. One of these doodads is the source of the warlock's power. Test your luck when grabbing at them to nick the right one.

26 When the wizard says he has more power in his little finger than you have in your whole body, he is being entirely literal. Cut off that finger! Test your luck to hit the finger and deal at least 3 damage to it.

31 Once a year at a particular juncture of the aeons the wizard goes out amongst the people and, into the ear of one poor fellow, mutters the word that will unravel his power. The person listening doesn't know what the word does, but they do know they will die in a year and a day if they ever reveal it. Anyone else saying it is fine, and greatly upsets the wizard.

32 Every wizard worth his salt knows that copious consumption of fairy blood grants you elevated magical mind powers. However, it also makes you very weak to the touch of cold iron and requires an industrial quantity of tiny faeries. Ecologically unsustainable.

33 The wizard is careful to surround himself with mirrors at all times. While in the presence of a reflective surface he maintains his elevated state.

34 Usually kept tucked up in his gums, the wizard chews on the psychoactive mushrooms that grow in dragon turds. Separated from his stash he will soon come down.

35 The warlock stole all his power from demons way above his station, but because of his high-heeled ostrich boots covering his tracks he's kept the demons off his tail. He's strapped in quite securely so they'll need cutting off, but when his feet touch the floor the demons will come and claim him. 1 in 6 chance the gate stays open.

36 Standing in his foyer is what was once a flattering sculpture of the sorcerer but is now partially obscured by blue moss. As the sorcerer taps into the false image of the sculpture it is further taken over by the 5th dimensional moss. After a few years of everyday use, or 6 months of intense wizarding, he will commission a fresh one.

41 In an egg in a duck in a pond on an island in a lake in a pocket dimension in a box in a cupboard is the source of (half) his power. The box must be found, entered, and hex-crawled.

42 The warlock has sacrificed his mirror-self for power. While held in a full body reflective surface his powers are diminished as the astral corpse of his other self retakes its position.

43 Their claim to knowledge is so great that if they were to be presented a riddle that they could not answer their confidence would be shattered. Will always answer riddles. The group may collectively offer one per round and if the GM can answer it the wizard is assumed to have done so. The GM may also roll the wizard's luck once to solve it instead.

44 The wizard isn't bad, he's mad; subtle senility has settled over his already power addled mind. Anyone researching and performing an adequate impersonation of his wayward son will rattle him profoundly.

45 The wizard has replaced all his blood with liquid magic. He needs to put it back inside once in a while, and without it will be terribly weakened.

46 All of his organs have been put into (2d6) jars and hidden in secret places. Each one found and destroyed takes a portion of his power.

51 The wizard sits in the middle of a miasma of chemical unguents with the distinct tang of body odour. However, he is not just a disgusting human being too wrapped up in the pursuit of power to wash, he is cultivating a vast colony of bacteria and other ambulatory filth to offset some of his sorcerous strain. A good amount of soap and water should put an end to his reign of terror.

52 Light is a terrible trickster, if one could avoid the sloppy interaction of radiation and surfaces and get down the nitty gritty objective reality of things we would all be wizards. Now imagine if someone who was already a wizard got that insight. The wizard

is blind and manoeuvres around his manse with a series of seeing stones mounted in ceiling orbs and hidden on bookshelves. Inside his house his is powerful and omniscient. Outside he carries a small bag of variously sized stones for on-the-go observation of the objective world.

53 Being fully undead has many, many problems. Minor injuries become permanent problems, the smell is awful, your joints get all gunked up, and so on. Why not just have an undead heart? While it still beats in his chest he is immensely robust. Somehow he can function without it. I don't know how.

54 The wizard cannibalised a wily demon and took his hands and tongue. Allergic to religion.

55 Every night the sorcerer sleeps in crystal pod which guides his dreams and reverses the rigours of age. Without access to it he will lose its calming powers and become tired, old and cranky.

56 Bit by bit the warlock has replaced his bits and bobs with mechanical parts. His blood is creamy, plasmically charged goo, his hands weave spells without a thought and he's got sub-dermal weapons under his synthetic skin.

61 The warlock maintains many clones of himself. d6 are currently active while the others are in their rest cycle in vats of goo. If you can find and smash the original to bits they will lose their hub and focus.

62 The wizard doesn't have a weakness, he's just really great. He will however act like he does, begging them

not to touch his special deck of cards or say bad words. He finds it funny.

63 The unimaginative magic worker sold his soul. If you tear up the contract it's void.

64 In his basement he keeps a fairy/genie/angel or other adorable but magically potent creature rigged up to a transmitter tower and feeds of it ambiently.

65 The wizard has an agreement with a dark(er) lord to boost his powers.

66 The wizard delegates much of the physical toil of magic to his apprentices, who remain mind-linked throughout the apprenticeship. Any stress of hardships befall them instead of the wizard. Most don't last long.

A lot of these seem like the kinds of things that would be incredibly impractical limitations in combat. Remember they are wizards, not soldiers. Their magic is to further their inscrutable ends, not arm wrestle (unless they're endomancers I suppose).

by **Good-deal Nobboc** - Illustration : **Matthew Houston**
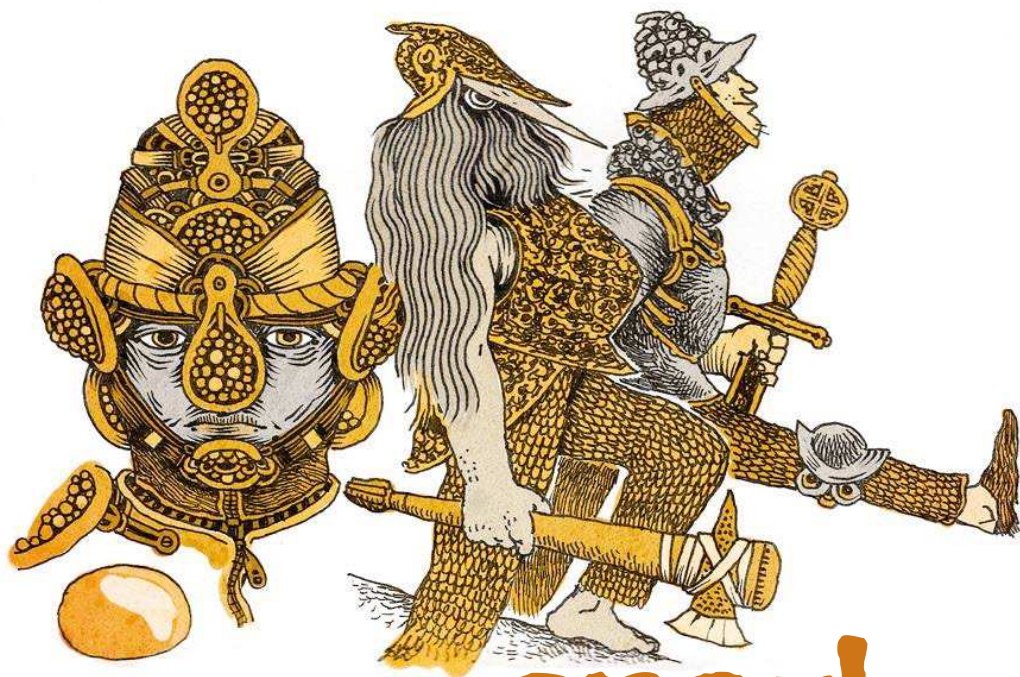
Get your gear!

**Roll d66 to get your starting gear.
You also get 1d6 coins for additional sundries.**

11 Loincloth, pair of sandals (the left one will give up soon), wooden sauce spoon, bitter turnip.

12 Brigantine, leather helmet, morgenstern, cutlass, nice pair of leather gloves, fragile telescopic periscope in a gift package.

13 Shabby leather armour, bow and 20 arrows, two short swords, shoe polish box, bottle of milk, 3 kittens in a basket

14 Leather armour, two daggers, slingshot and 20 dwarven steel bullets (+1 damage vs goblins), itchy woolly

hat, 15' knotted rope, folding grapple, red beard in a canvas bag.

15 Scale armour, kettle helm, halberd, short sword, light crossbow (no bolts), three iron pitons, unreliable ring of Feather Fall (2-in-6 chance of working).

16 Chainmail, unbalanced bastard sword (-1 to hit), pickaxe handle, shield, two flasks of holy water, pocket of high quality pipe weed, spyglass.

21 Padded armour, spear, studded club, helmet with ear flaps, bear trap, nice ivory pan flute, monocle of night vision (one hour a day).

22 Studded leather armor, helmet with a black feather, sabre, short bow and 27 arrows, flask of flammable oil, small bronze bell, 27 gold teeth in a purse.

23 Breastplate, winged helmet, flail with 3 spikey balls, round shield, blowpipe and 10 barbed needles (damage: 1), lantern at the end of a walking stick, goblin ears necklace.

24 Chainmail, glaive, heavy crossbow and 20 bolts, feathered hat, wokitoki (a box said to communicate up to a distance of one mile with a person owning another wokitoki).

25 Long sword, 6 throwing knives, pointy hood, boots made of strange hide (insulating, ignore electrical damage), French language manual, a tame rat under the hood.

26 Poorly adjusted plate armour (-2 to attack rolls and ability checks), two-handed curved sword, light crossbow and 20 silver-tipped bolts, bassinet helmet, pair of pincers, three magic beans (you don't know what they do).

31 Parade leather armour (no protection), dagger, masterwork long sword (+1 to hit), iron box containing

ten small vials of perfume, cape of the latest fashion, mummified baby's hand at the end of a silver chain.

32 Half plate armour (you only have the back pieces, it does not protect you in the front), war hammer, spiked shield (opponents take 1 damage point if they miss their attack), onyx dagger that belonged to the infamous serial killer Desmond the Beast.

33 Possibly magical scale armour (encumbrance is as leather armour), horned helmet, battle axe, 3 gallons of bad wine, large natural sponge, skull of a powerful enemy.

34 Monk robes, breastplate, walking stick, bowl helm, two flasks of holy water, bottle of premium wine, jar of honey, white crow on your shoulder.

35 Brigantine, bowl helm, scimitar, short bow and 20 black arrows, long dagger, thieves' tools, 2 lb of salt, three pinches of meteor powder in an iron tube.

36 Breastplate, short sword, conquistador helmet, two javelins, magic lantern with 12 weird scenes on colored glass plates in a varnished wooden box, a silver bowl.

41 Reinforced leather coat, long sword, spear, feathered beret, warm and waterproof cloak, lyre and roll of sheet music in a leather case, piece of lemongrass soap.

42 Brigantine with Sons of Zenopus Gang emblem, conical helm, heavy crossbow and 10 poisoned bolts (save or dazed for 1d6 rounds), short sword, mace, 10 ft of ultra-strong wire, carpenter's hammer and 10 long rusty nails.

43 Damaged chainmail (as studded leather), long sword, round shield with encrusted goblin skull, 3 healing mushrooms (1hp, save vs poison or be dazed for 1D6 rounds), handful of caltrops, strawhat.

44 Padded coat that smells like carrion, lobster pot helm, long sword, two daggers, spear, bottle of ink with an iron quill, two bags of lavender, wax ear plugs, wokitoki (a box said to communicate up to a distance of one mile with a person owning another wokitoki).

45 Leather armour, slingshot and 20 silver bullets, studded club, pointy yellow cap, flask of holy water, small leather bag containing colorful ribbons, pearl-encrusted buttons, sewing thread and a magic thimble.

46 Half plate armour (only protects on 3-in-6), guisarme, short sword, extravagant looking hat, beautiful red leggings, aged rum bottle, lucky rabbit foot (+1 to any roll once a day)

51 Scale armour, bastard sword, dagger, whip, leather belt with lion head buckle, 3 candles, 49 black varnished nails and 3 strands of violet hair in an iron box.

52 Leather armour, short sword, long bow and 20 whistling arrows, small hand mirror, 3 fake rubies, master key, tiny lead figurine representing you and changing stance every day.

53 Damaged scale armour (destroyed on rolls of 18+), nasal helm, two headed mace, slingshot and 20 odd pebbles (1-4: no damage; 5-6: 10 damage), box of coloured pencils, teapot and small bag of tea, metal handcuffs

54 War hammer, long sword, salad helm, 15 ft of fine and solid chain, vial of apple syrup, iron mask with a grinning face, goblin leather pointy boots, 10 tasty bananas, compass in a bulky wooden box.

55 Padded leather armour, skull headed club, black short sword, bowl helm, 10 ft of leather strap, oil lamp, 5 iron pitons,though file, 12 firecrackers.

56 Magnificient velvet doublet, silver studded beret, long sword, retractable dagger, 3 doses of blade poison (save or fart incontrollably for 1d6 rounds), spool of light and string cord (100 ft), WWI style gas mask.

61 Plate armour (too small, -2 to hit), bastard sword, war hammer, invisible helm, jar of grease, flashlight and 3 batteries.

62 Smelly troll leather armour (regenerates 1hp every 1d6 hours), scimitar, short bow and 20 arrows, 3 candles, small jar of exotic fruits seeds, slate and coloured sticks of chalk.

63 Barbed sabre, three bone javelins, oval shield, giant tricorn beetle in a cage, hookah and 100 doses of alzimar flower smoking paste in a leather case.

64 Padded armour, crested helmet, long saw-sword, 20 ft long rope ladder, healing potion, 10 stink bombs in an iron box.

65 Brigantine, long cutlass, hatchet, slingshot and 20 stones, pointy wizard hat, red baggy trousers, smiling two-headed homunculus in a glass jar.

66 Leather robes, long sword, six 5-sided ivory dice, a book of exotic images, snorkeling mask, grumpy mule.

by **Daniel Sell** - Art: **Luka Rejec**

The village's local retired adventurer...

1. HE 2. SHE IS...
3. THEY ARE...
1. old, almost spent.
2. past their prime.
3. too young for the burden they carry.
4. in what to others would be their prime

AND HAS
A REPUTATION AS...
1. the local drunk, harmless.
2. a raging drunk, don't make eye contact or you'll see the demons.
3. a broken soul, take pity.
4. a hard worker that never speaks of their past.
5. a recluse with an old sword from their days in the wars.
6. an inveterate story teller, entertaining the adults and terrifying the children.

THEIR PAST IS...
1. filled with violence committed for others.
2. one of avaricious plunder.
3. warhearted and swordblooded.
4. adventure and wild romance.
5. glorious and sung.
6. a tightly held secret.

THEIR SERVICES
CAN BE GAINED...
1. with a handful of silver.
2. for a worthy cause.
3. for a bottle of the good stuff.
4. with the chance for redemption.
5. with the promise of escape from this life.
6. over their dead body.

IF TAKEN ON, BEWARE
THAT THEY WILL...
1. break into inconsolable hysterics at the sight of a dead child.
2. drink every drop of alcohol while you sleep, if able, and stagger the whole day through.
3. be frozen by the sound of distant howls.
4. be unable to be in the presence of cooking meat.
5. constantly count their equipment. Check and re-check. One, two, three, one, two, three.
6. if party to the killing of innocents, wander off into the night never to be seen again.

by **Arnold K.** - Art: **Michael Sheppard**

Dungeon Checklist

Sometimes I write 𝔡𝔲𝔫𝔤𝔢𝔬𝔫𝔰. Today I wrote a checklist of things to put in the dungeon. The first couple items are pretty obvious, but it's still good to enumerate their usage.

How to Use This Checklist. Read it once before you write you dungeon. Then read it again when you're done, to make sure you got everything.

1. Something to Steal

Treasure gives players a reason to go into the dungeon in the first place. On a metagame level, treasure is money, money is XP, and XP is tied to the idea of character advancement. It's the prime mover of the system.

Two points.

First, remember that treasure doesn't need to be treasure. It can be:

- Shiny shit, such as boring ol' coins, or the jewelled brassiere of the zombie queen.
- Knowledge, such as where to find more treasure, or information you can use to blackmail the king. Or even a sage, who can answer a single question honestly.
- Friendship, such as an amorous purple worm that follows you around and protects you when it's hungry and a little bored. Occasionally, it leaves egg sacs laying around for you to fertilize (and it will get angry if you don't sit on them for at least an hour).

- Trade Goods, like a wagon full of tea (worth 10,000gp). When I give out large parcels of trade goods as treasure, I give half of the XP now, and the other half of the XP when it's sold off. (I just really like the idea of a mercantile campaign.)

- Territorial, like a tower the players can claim as their own, or an apartment in the nice party of the city (and the chances of being stabbed in your sleep are dramatically reduced).

- Useful adventuring shit, like a magic sword, scroll of blot out the sun, or a parachute.

Second, treasure tells a story, too. Cover your treasure in religious symbols, anoint it in trollblood. Don't let your coins be coins!

2. Something to be Killed

This is pretty obvious. Of course there are threatening things in the dungeon. There has to be some challenge otherwise it isn't a dungeon. The simplest way to do that is with things that are trying to kill you. (Yes, you can have monsterless dungeons based on traps. Those are cool, but that's why this checklist is written in pencil, not in stone.) There are many ways to make combat with even basic monsters more interesting.

Also remember that dungeons tell their story through nouns. The history of a dungeon is usually relayed through monster choices (why use orcs when you can use degenerate cannibal versions of the original dwarven inhabitants?) and descriptions of those creatures (a barnacle-covered zombie, an iron golem charred by dragonfire, the elven armor scraps that the goblins are wearing, the elven wand-rifle that one of the goblins has for some reason).

3. Something to Kill You

Dungeons are designed to be beaten. That's why we don't fill them with inescapable obstacles (rocks fall, everyone dies) or impenetrable barriers (sorry, the whole dungeon is wrapped in an adamantine dome, you can't get in).

BUT dungeons need to feel like they were designed to be unbeatable. It's important to feel like this isn't just a bowling alley where the DM sets up the pins for the players to knock down. You need to have deadly elements in your deadly dungeon for it to feel deadly.

Just follow these two important rules. Try to follow at least one

- **Label your deadly shit as such**. A sleeping dragon. A door barricaded from the player's side with a sign warning of deadly spiders. These things look deadly from a distance.

- **A chance to escape.** Maybe the dragon can't fit into the smaller tunnels around his lair. Maybe the manticore is chained to a rock.

Both of these serve the same function: they allow the players to pick their own battles, something you can't do on a linear railroad game. I think that's why a lot of OSR folks hate the idea of boss battles: because they're the one battle in the dungeon that is required.

Horrible monsters that are avoidable give the players agency and allows them to be architects of their own demise.

Sidenote: I think that nearly all combats should be escapable. Sometimes with a cost (dropped food, gold, maybe a dead PC or hireling). In my experience PCs will get themselves killed often enough even if the enemies never left the rooms they were in.

Also, putting «unbeatable» monsters in

your dungeon also allows the dungeon to be self-scaling. The level 1 party will just tip-toe past the dragon, while the level 6 party might consider fighting it so they steal the treasure it is sleeping on top of. And just like that, a dungeon becomes appropriate for both level 1 parties AND level 6 parties. (And this is another reason why I think OSR games have such a wide range of level-appropriateness--It's both easy and expected that players will flee from fights that they can't win).

4. Different Paths

Different paths allow different parties to experience the dungeon in different ways. It's a randomizer, similar to what you'd get if you ordered the dungeon rooms according to a random number generator. And it keeps you (the DM) from getting bored

Player agency. Players can choose the path they're better suited for. The party with two clerics can take the zombie-infested tunnel, and the party with air support can get themselves dropped into the courtyard. It also allows dungeons to be a little bit self-adjusting, too. Players who are more confident can challenge the front door, while lower level parties will creep around the outside.

It allows parties to walk away from rooms they don't like. Part of the OSR philosophy (as I see it) is the ability to walk away from fights. If a party doesn't want to fight a room with archer skeletons entombed in the walls (especially after two of them were blinded in the last room) they can retreat and find another way in. It's an option they have.

The last reason to have multiple paths is to allow for dungeon mastery. I don't mean DMing. I mean that, as the players learn more about the dungeon, they become better at exploiting its geography. They can lure the carrion crawler over the pit trap that they know is there. They can retreat into a looped path, instead of retreating into unexplored rooms (always a dangerous tactic).

At the same time, don't throw in random paths just for the hell of it. The more paths you put in, the less linearity there is in your dungeon. And sometimes you want linearity, especially when it comes to teaching your players things, or giving clues. Sometimes you want to show the players the eerily clean hallway before they bump into the gelatinous cube. Maybe you want them to meet the zombies with hook hands before they meet the room of crawling, animated hands.

There's nothing wrong with a little linearity if you're putting it in there for a reason. I still think that a heavily branched dungeon should be the default assumption, but linear sections of a dungeon are a venal sin, not a mortal one.

5. Someone to Talk To

EVERY DUNGEON NEEDS SOMEONE TO TALK TO. It's a roleplaying game. NPCs are the cheapest and easiest way to add depth to your dungeon. It's easy because everyone knows how to roleplay a generic goblin prisoner and has a pretty good idea of what information/services that goblin prisoner can provide. And it's got depth because there are so many ways that a party can use a goblin prisoner. There's almost no bloat--you don't need to invent new mechanics, and it takes almost no space to write «There is a goblin in a cage. His name is Zerglum and he has been imprisoned by his fellows for setting rats free.»

The problem is that a lot of dungeons are treasure vaults, tombs, and abandoned mines. The only creatures you usually

encounter in those places are undead, golems, oozes, and vermin with ambiguous food chains. None of those are really known for being chatty. So, here are some options:

- Rival adventuring party.
- Goblins never need explanation.
- Spell effect, like a chatty magic mouth spell or something.
- Graveyard nymph.
- Ghosts. Make a sympathetic one. Everyone expects them to be jerks.
- Ghoul head, sitting on a shelf. It can talk if you blow through its neck-hole.
- Old man trapped in a painting. Communicates by painting.
- Demon trapped in a mirror. Communicates by repeating your own phrases back to you.
- Ancient war machine trapped by a stasis field bomb. Seeks enemies who died thousands of years ago, will self-destruct when it learns that it lost the war.
- Consider giving your players speak with stones or speak with lock spells. Dungeons usually have those.
- Demonic succubus, who has spent the last 1000 years on a bed, trapped by the silver threads woven into a circle in the bedsheet
- Pterodactyl-riding barbarians who are looting the place
- Time-displaced wizard, caught in a paradox while exploring the place. Resets every 3 minutes.

6. Something to Experiment With

Aside from something that will probably kick the party's ass, I think this might be the most OSR-ish. These are the unexplainable, the weird, and the unknown. And I don't mean unknown like an unidentified potion is unknown. I mean something that

introduces a new wrinkle into the game.

- A room with two doors of different sizes. Anything that is put into the small door emerges from the large door at twice the size, and vice versa. Anything that goes through the doors twice in the same direction (double enlarged or double shrunk) has terrible consequences.
- A pedestal. If anything is placed on top of it, it turns into its opposite. (Okay, the opposite of a sword is an axe, but what is the opposite of a banana?)
- A metal skeleton. If a skull is placed atop it, a speak with dead spell is cast on it.
- Wishing wells that are portals to other small ponds in the dungeon. Where the portal goes is determined by what item you throw in the well before you jump in. Copper coins, silver coins, gold coins, gems, and arrows all lead to different places.
- Two doorways. Impassable when you walk through a single one, but if two people walk through them simultaneously, they are fused together and transported to a city of similarly-fused people.
- A machine that turns finished products into raw goods, and raw goods into ammunition.
- A sundial that controls the sun.
- A boat golem that flees from loud noises. You can direct it by standing at the back of it and shouting.
- Two holes in the wall. If two limbs are put in the holes, they are swapped. If only one limb is put in the hole, it is severed. Can be used to graft new limbs onto amputees.

There's some overlap here with magic items. There's also some overlap with non-magical stuff, too. There's also some overlap with combat, because some combats can be puzzly, or can rely on new rules/victory conditions.

Combat, for experienced players, for the most part, is a solved problem. Weird shit

is important because they give the players an unsolved problem.

Players know how to best leverage their attacks and abilities. Sure, you can mix it up a bit, and force them to think and use different tactics. But by and large, they already know how to use their character to their best effect. They've been practicing it for levels and levels, after all. (It's important to let player practice the stuff they're good at, i.e. combat with their character, but it's also important to put throw some wrenches in there, too.) Weird shit follows its own rules. Suddenly, players don't know anything about how to solve this problem, and they have to figure it out anew.

Bonus points if its something that could potentially unbalance your game. Nothing gives a player more agency than the ability to completely derail your setting. (Not that you need to go that far.)

More bonus points if its something that will probably hurt the players at first, but can be used to their advantage once they've figured out how it works.

One last perk: it gives level 1 characters a chance to be as useful as level 10 characters. Anyone can stick an arm into a hole in the wall, and anyone can figure out what it does. Weird shit often poses threats and rewards that are level-agnostic.

7. Something the Players Probably Won't Find

This one might be contentious. Why put stuff in your dungeon that your players won't find?

First, you don't have to put much in the dungeon. Just a few words here and there to reward the players who are more thorough. «Inside the purple worm's stomach is a bag of holding full of 1000 gallons of purple worm stomach acid.» Or «The pirate captain has a gold bar hidden in his peg leg, wrapped in felt so that it won't rattle.» It's not like you're designing multiple cool rooms that no one will ever get to enjoy. (I mean, I do that sometimes.)

I think it's important to hide things because there is a sincere joy in exploration and testing the limits. If all of the things in a dungeon are obvious, why even bother wondering what is at the bottom of the well? Is there anything interesting buried underneath all of this mud? Players who don't have the time or resources to explore a dungeon 100% (and they shouldn't) will always walk away with a feeling of enormity, that there was always more to find.

Sure, completion is a nice feeling, but so is wonderment.

I like to reward people who are good at the game. And being good at finding things (thinking about where they might be, exploring those places despite the risk it involves) is one of the ways that a player can be good at D&D.

It should be a spectrum. Some things (most things) should be out in the open. Some stuff should be hidden behind curtains. And some stuff should be tucked deeply away in the dungeon's folds.

So yeah, the next time you decorate a room with a mural of a defeated king presenting tribute to his conqueror, be sure to put an actual treasure chest in the wall behind the painting of a treasure chest. (I've run that dungeon three times and no one has ever found it. I get a little excited every time I describe it to players.)

There's also undead skeletons entombed in the wall behind the paintings of skeletons. No one's ever found them, either. But some day, some party with the right alloy of greed, cleverness, and patience will find them, and that will be great.

by **Ben Milton** – Art: **Luka Rejec**

What Kids' RPGs are Missing

A 5th grade girl (about 11 years old) is DMing D&D with a circle of boys on the playground of the school where I teach. I sit down to play along. She is having everyone roll a die.

Me: "Where are we?"
DM: "We're in hell."
Me: "Why are we all rolling dice?"
Player: "Hades cursed us to pick up his room. We're rolling to see if we can put away all the clothes."
Me: "Can I teleport out of here?" (I'm a magic user.)
DM: "No, there's too many clothes."[Rolling continues until someone rolls a natural 20. Everyone cheers.]
DM: "Hades teleports you all out of there! Roll a die to see where you end up!"

Me: 12.
DM: "You're in the top of a tree! A palm tree." [Everyone else rolls. They're in a tropical village nearby.]
Me: I want to climb down.
DM: Roll a die! [It works]
Me: I want to find out who's in charge of this place.
DM: Roll a die! Use your Charisma.
Me: 4 [I'm not charismatic].
DM: You have no idea who's in charge of the village. A lady walks by and is like, "Who are you?!"
Player: I want to find out who's in charge! [Rolls CHA. Succeeds.]
DM: You see a huge mansion on the hill. It has enormous billboards next to it saying, "The Guy In Charge."
Me: I want to knock on the door.
DM: Roll a die!
Me: 12.
DM: No one answers. They're ignoring you!
Me: I want to kick that door down.
DM: Roll a die!
Me: I'm a weak wizard, but I'll roll my Strength. 17!
DM: You kick a hole right in the door! You stick your head through and see the guy in charge.
Me: What does he look like?
DM: Roll a die!
Me: 14.
DM: He's a... half orc. A really skinny half orc. [The whistle is blown and recess ends]

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Let's analyze this.

For one, there was almost no railroading (apart from not being able to escape Hades' bedroom). It was a total improv sandbox, where you could try anything, and the DM would come up with a result.

Second: there was no cutesy theme, no polish. Character sheets were hand drawn and photocopied. Character art was about what you would expect: half rabid enthusiasm, half bored doodles.

Third: There was no moralizing, no paternalism, no appropriateness filter.

Fourth: There was no emphasis on storytelling of any kind. No narrative mechanics, no personal goals. There was also no combat (although I have observed sessions this DM runs with combat). The focus was on immersion and on doing what you found to be entertaining. Exploration and amusement were king.

Fifth: The DM let herself be surprised. She demanded rolls for everything, even rolling to see what kind of NPC the village leader was. She didn't have a table or anything, so I have no idea if she just made that up on the spot, or if it corresponded to how dangerous the species was, but it was funny anyway. She treated the dice like a kind of oracle that was guiding the game nearly as much as she was. In other words, it was utterly unlike every RPG on the market that's targeted at kids.

There's no shortage of "Kids RPGs" (*No Thank You Evil, Playground Adventures, Do: Pilgrims of the Flying Temple*), but they all seem like games written by people who haven't observed kids playing RPGs in the wild. The most worrisome was *Playground Adventures*, which actually pitches itself as a game about making good moral decisions. Kids are amoral little psychopaths, and no RPG is going to reign that in.

Most kids' RPGs are highly mission based. Set up a quest, have the kids go do it. Turns out that that kids love random tables and surprising twists that they have to deal with on the fly. Most Kids RPGs focus on carefully designed PCs who don't ever die. Turns out that kids love the high-risk, high-reward structure of lethal dungeon crawls, and love generating oddball characters with dice rather than planning them out. Turns out that kids don't enjoy games where violence is sanitized or glossed over, and enjoy dealing with real danger.

(Example: I had a game where kids were on a sinking ship in a storm. They piled into the lifeboat, but there wasn't enough room for the captain, who begged to be put on board. One kid looked at the others and said. "It's okay guys, the captain always goes down with his ship," and they rowed away.)

The biggest problem is that these games talk down to their audience, and kids (at least 5th graders) can smell condescension a mile away. Kids don't want to be "A cool robot that plays with ooey-gooey things," as No Thank You Evil! would have you believe. They want to be a character like the one this DM was using: Spike, A Chaotic Neutral Firedog Rogue with claws, fire fangs, and a 7d6 fireball spell.

by **Bryce Lynch**

1. Centipedes, giant (1d4+1)
2. Centipedes, giant (1d4+1)
3. Kobolds (2d4)
4. Bugbear (1)
5. Skeletons (1d6)
6. Rats, giant (1d8)
7. Green Slime (1)
8. Albino Ape (1)
9. Crab Spider (1)
10. Gelatinous Cube (1)

Wandering Monsters should have a purpose in wandering around

The above wandering **monster table**, in one form or another, is present in the vast majority of adventures. Sometimes monster stats are listed, sometimes they are not. And it sucks. A wandering monster in the dungeon is a tax; you need to move your ass because the longer you screw around the greater the likelihood the wanderers are going to get you. And yet they generally suck. The vast majority of them are just wasting space in the adventure that could be used for something else. The above example is illustrative. What value does it add that is not already provided in the DMG? There's surely a wandering monster table there, why not use it instead and use the freed space for additional content? The examples are more extreme when the wandering monster charts are expansive, with stat-blocks over the majority of a page, or even two. Everything in the adventure needs to inspire or get cut, and that wandering monster table doesn't inspire shit. The designer must inspire the DM. That's the purpose for the adventure. If it doesn't inspire then it needs improvement.

What the chart is missing is action. Any time you meet something, in a room or wandering, they should be doing something. It's this extra bit that inspires. The brown bear that shows up in the chart should be eating a deer, or getting goaded by a couple of goblins, or has treed a couple of goblins. Almost any activity would do. I say almost because there is one activity that I almost never like to see: "waiting to attack." That's stupid. It conjures up images of those old sucky adventures in which an orc stands on either side of a door, eternally waiting for someone to open it so they can attack. Get your creatures doing something.

I think the principle is so important that I have one entire page of my DM screen devoted to it. You can find examples from Sham (1), or

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1d8, or several other sources. Other good examples can be found in Jungle Ruins of Madoro-Shanti (2). In it you can encounter a deer on a hill chanting "Beware Cho-odo! Beware Cho-odo!" before it falls over dead. Examination reveals it's been dead for several days. Not only is this an action encounter but it also is directly related to what's going on in the adventure and helps build dread. Another good example is in Dzeegbagd. In this the animals act like animals, not psychotic rabid dogs. The other creatures will talk to you. That one gets a little long-winded, but the general principle of adding a bit more is followed. *"Looking for a straggler to pick off"* or some such gives the DM something to riff off of. Sometimes you have to narrow things down in order get the old brain juices going. Give your creatures a reason to wander about or have them engaged in something.

There's a line here between a good bit of extra detail and a bad bit. Dungeon Magazine #24 has an adventure called "A Hitch in Time" which includes a wandering monster table for the wilderness between town and the tomb. It has eight monster entires, with stats, and each has a little description. The description for the Shambling Mound says something like *"It resides in a stream or marsh and attacks only at night. It's lair may be found blah blah blah."* What's lacking here is action. Another entry has a flesh golem wandering the forest. It attacks anything it encounters. *"This monster was created by a wizard who subsequently lost control of the golem. It has been wandering the wilderness in a confused state for many weeks, and it attacks anything it encounters that it perceives as being animate. The monster may be met day or night. It cannot communicate with the PC's, nor will it obey any wizards attempt to control it. It may be mistaken for the golem rumored to be guarding [quest guy's] tomb, if the PC's heard that rumor in the village."* That adds nothing to the adventure. It adds nothing to the encounter. What we're looking for is something actionable. Maybe something like the flesh golem is clearing the forest of trees, and it may mistake the PCs for one. Or it is mindlessly stacking objects in a pyramid stack, including dead forest animals, etc. It may mistake the party for one. These are things the party can interact with and the creature is engaged in some activity. Maybe the shambling mound is lecturing some giant beavers, or tearing down a beaver dam, or damming a stream, or engaged in a commune with a dryad, or worshiping a fairy circle, or marking his territory with deer heads. All of that is better than what's given.

You don't have to write a book for each one, you just need more than a single monster entry and have a verb associated with it. (With 'hunting' and 'attacking' used VERY infrequently.) Something like "Brown Bear" is lame. A paragraph on the brown bear is better, but probably too much. "Brown bear being baited by 2d12 goblins" or "Brown bear family eating an owl bear corpse" gives the DM enough to riff on while still being terse.

1 - Some examples to riff off of: http://shamsgrog.blogspot.com/2011/04/monster-business.html
2 - https://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/89853/One-Night-Stands--Jungle-Ruins-of-Madoro-Shanti--Swords-and-Wizardry-Edition

1 CENTIPEDES (1d4+1): ① TRACING LETTERS IN THE DUST. ② LAYING EGGS IN A DEAD BODY. ③ WRAPPED AROUND A MEDITATING MONK. ④ SLOUGHING THEIR OLD SKIN AND MUTATING TO LARGER SIZE.

2. KOBOLDS (2d4): ① DEBONING A BUGBEAR ② TOTALLY DRUNK. ③ LOOKING FOR AN ANTIDOTE ④ CATCHING FROGS.

3 BUGBEAR (1): ① TRYING TO PLAY BAGPIPES ② DEBONING 2d4 KOBOLDS ③ LOOKING FOR A DENTIST. ④ CATCHING BUTTERFLIES

4 SKELETONS (1d6): ① TRYING TO EAT FOOD. ② SWAPPING SKULLS. ③ READING HAMLET ALOUD. ④ PLAYING DEAD.

5 GIANT RATS (1d8): ① BUILDING A PYRAMID OF BONES. ② ESCORTING A RAT WEARING A CROWN. ③ TRYING TO DISARM A BEAR TRAP ④ MOVING A HUGE PIECE OF CHEESE.

6 ALBINO APE (1): ① MASTURBATING LIKE MAD. ② WEARING A CROWN AND APING A KING. ③ THROWING COCONUTS ON EVERYTHING THAT MOVES.

7 CRAB SPIDERS ① GOING CRAZY, CHANGING COLOUR EVERY SECOND ② DRAGGING DEAD PREY. ③ VOMITING A HALF DEAD HALFLING ④ STRIKING RANDOM KEYS ON A XYLOPHONE

8 ACOLYTES (1d4): ① ARGUING ABOUT THE ORTHODOXY OF THE THEOSOPHY IN WICH 2O 2AM THE EIGHT-HEADED DEITY STRUCK OFF HIS TOE, WHICH THEN BECAME THE SUN, WHILE DROPS OF HIS BLOOD DISPERSED TO FORM THE EIGHT RACES OF MANKIND. ② BEGGING FOR FOOD. WILL TRY TO EAT PEOPLE WHO DON'T GIVE ANYTHING ③ TRYING TO RECRUIT NEW BELIEVERS WITH CUDGELS AND A FISHNET. ④ FUCKING THE STOLEN HOLY MUMMY OF A RIVAL CULT.

② MIMICKING THE CHARACTERS

by **Eric Nieudan** - Art: after **Holbein The Young**
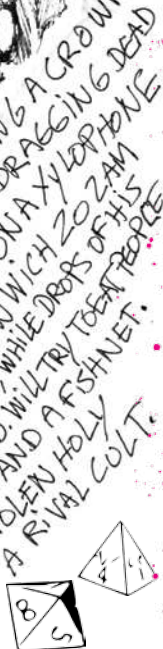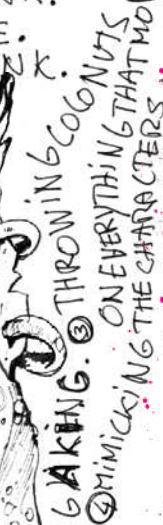
Papa Mushman wanted to publish one of my blog posts about hit dice(1). But not only is it very much inspired by Emmy Allen's Terrible Wounds house rule (which I'm hoping to see in print in KNOCK!), it's also something I'm not using anymore. Nevertheless, I want to argue that:

Hit Dice
ARE MEANT TO BE ROLLED

What is the point of having a mechanic called hit dice if you don't roll the dice when you get hit?(2) At least, after 40 years of D&D, someone made rolling hit dice a small part of the game. But we definitely can do better.

All the mechanics below assume that characters have hit dice instead of hit points. Third level B/X thief? You have 3d4. Fifth level Unearthed Arcana Barbarian, you have 5d12. This should work with most D&D-adjacent games.

Hit Dice as a Soak Mechanic

Every time you are hit, you must beat the damage with a roll of your hit die. You get wounded if you fail the roll. Being wounded gives you penalties; a set of conditions would make for inte-

resting situations here. Think dazed, blinded, off-balance, out of breath, and the such.
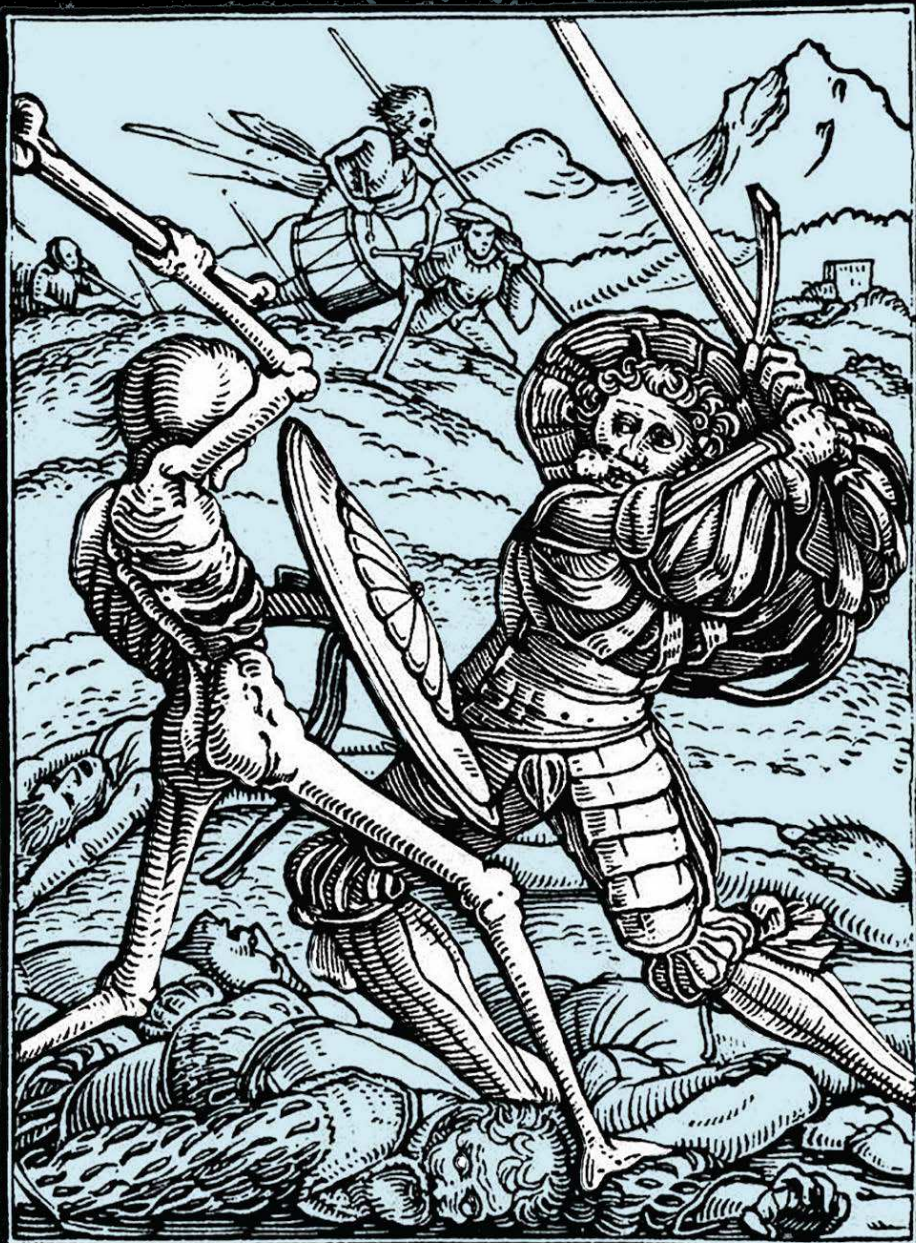
A wound also forces you to discard a hit die. When you're hit and you don't have HD left to roll, you're dead or dying.

Hit Dice as a Free Pool

Same as above, except you roll more than one hit die if you want to. Add the results together to beat the damage, and discard the dice. When you're out of HD, any damage taken kills you.

A failed soak roll can work as above. I for one am into gritty combat, so this is what I did in Lunchtime Dungeons: if you fail to beat the damage, you must subtract the hit dice total from it and look up the result on the table below. This is going to make combat doubly swingy and add a few rolls and arithmetic to your routine. Try trading the damage roll for the soak roll, which is what my game does. Each attack has a fixed damage rate: 15 for a fireball type spell, 10 for an musket, 7 for a battle axe, 3 for a knife. The system lets mid-level characters get out of the first couple of scrapes with a couple new scars, but they'll have to be careful afterwards.

Hit Dice as Stamina

Whenever you need that boost to make a d20 roll, you can spend one hit die and add it to (or subtract it from) the result. Hell, spend more than one HD if you really want to make this save (but then only the highest result counts). Fighty classes can spend their hit dice to add to damage.

Hit Dice as Risk Dice[3]

I could not, not include this one. Risk dice are meant to track dwindling resources and threats inching ever closer; why not use them for hit dice? You only have one hit die, whose type depends on your class (maybe using the more generous standards of 5E).

1-2: Maybe a scar

3-4: Painful blow. Save to stay conscious

5: Bleeding. Roll one HD: you will lose it in that many turns.
Keep doing this until bandaged or healed or out of HD

6-7: You lose something. Disadvantage on some tasks.
Roll d6: 1. Fingers (d4); 2. Hand; 3. Nose; 4. Ear; 5. Eye; 6. Looks.

8: Leg useless. Save to keep it when healed. Can't run.
Disadvantage on agility tasks

9: Arm useless. Save to keep it when healed.
Disadvantage when needing both arms or if it was the dominant hand

10-11: Head wound. Disadvantage on all rolls. Save or lose 1 prepared spell

12: Dead man walking.
You have a number of turns equal to 1 + CON modifier to live

13+: Vital organ destroyed. Instant death

Roll it in opposition to the damage every time you get hit.
- If you fail, you get some sort of penalty, lose your next action, etc.
- If you roll 1-3, your die is stepped down to the next smaller type (d12 to d10 to d8, etc.).
- If your hit die fizzles (you roll 1-3 on a d4), you're out.

Death, Dying and Healing: a Sliding Scale

However you choose to roll these hit dice, you have the option to make dying more or less easy.
A simple and balanced way to deal with death is: a character with zero HD who takes damage can save to stay conscious. Or use the table above with

the straight damage total. Or give them 1d6 rounds of unconsciousness before they die. Or...
Same thing with recovering hit dice. It depends on how heroic you want your game to be. Use the 5E rule, with a full night's rest bringing back half the maximum number of hit dice, or make it harder. Magical healing just gives a number of hit dice back.
That's all I got, peeps. Do get in touch if you're rolling hit dice in your game!

....

1 - It's here if you have a minute:
http://dragons.ie/thinking-about-hit-dice/
2 - I'm not the only one who thinks like this; Brian A. once showed me a HD-only game he designed. Pester him on Twitter if you'd like a look: https://twitter.com/BrianBloodaxe
3 - As seen in Macchiato Monsters. You may prefer the longer lasting usage dice from The Black Hack.

by **Eric Nieudan**

20 Gunpowders

Who said there should only be one type of gunpowder in the dungeonverse? Following a conversation about ancient handcannons on G+, I started a bit of **gygaxian democracy*** and we ended up with this table. I made some slight modifications and streamlined some prose for brevity's sake.

1. Kobold gunpowder is made from flammable beetle dung and has a very distinctive stink. Don't get caught in kobold gunpowder smoke clouds. (Check CON or become ill until you can rest.)

2. Archmage gunpowder can be snorted for magical power— it works as a magical reagent.

3. Ironsmoke is made by the dwarven clan of the same name. It uses white sulfur, harvested deep underground, in ghostworm infested caves. Guns that use it never get damaged.

4. Woodland gunpowder draws its special quality from dead treant charcoal. It has very respectable stopping power, but its flames are harmless and it will never set fire to anything. It has semi religious significance in elven culture and only the Knights of the Everburning Soul are allowed to use it.

5. The assassin's dust is rare and extremely valuable. It is made with dried and powdered displacer beast spleen, and blessed during a ceremony that requires the sacrifice of an invisible stalker. A gun loaded with this gunpowder produces only the briefest of flashes and no more noise than a cat's yawn.

6. Red gunpowder is very common, mostly because those pyromaniac bastards red goblins are somehow found in every major city. It produces loud whistling and colourful lights than can be quite distracting.

7. Wind of the fire giant. Strong sulfur and methane odors accompany the firing of this powder. While not particularly good as a propellant, it is ideal for starting fires. Long exposure to this powder tends to turn one's skin deep, bright cherry red.

8. Dragon powder. When a red dragon's gizzard is de-gristled, what remains is a hard chert-like gastrolith. Those with access to enough diamonds can grind down this stone into a fine powder that burns and burns and burns. Unfortunately, its ignition point is incredibly high, and requires an already burning furnace to light.

* When people collaborate on writing D&D stuff on the socials.

9. Feiqiang (false gun) is derived from an alchemical residue left over from an erectile dysfunction salve. Any application of this gunpowder will appear real, but is in fact be illusory. Requires an illusion save by the target: if failed, treat as if shot by a normal bullet. If successful, the target will be unsatisfied with their marriage and will look far another partner.

10. Huoyao (fire medecine) is made from the peppercorns of a rare and vicious plant. Harvesting these corns is a dangerous proposition as the slightest disturbance to the plant causes the whole seed husk to explode. If processed in the correct manner, this gunpowder can be taken as a drug which will numb the target to the physical and emotional pains of inflicting violence.

11. Living gunpowder is in fact a strange kind of flammable, yeast-like mushroom that grows very fast. At the end of the day, the powder's risk die is stepped up. If allowed to go above ▲12, it blows up, dealing d12 damage to everyone in the area.

12. Blessed powder. The high priests of the Temple of the Celestial Wind of Truth make a sacred gunpowder with ground relics and holy prayers. Guns shooting with this powder have advantage on damage rolls against demons and the undead.

13. Greek powder makes targets catch fire on top of the regular damage. They take ▲6 damage every turn unless someone can put the fire out. On 1-3 on the damage roll though, not only is the die stepped down, but the shooter catches fire as above.

14. Nonlinear powder is made with crystals normally used by planewalking magicians. When used, roll d6 to know when the BANG is heard: 1-3. when you shoot, as normal; 4. at a time of your choosing but in the same place; 5. at a time of the referee's choosing, but at the location you are at the time; 6. just before the shot, so your target was able to partially dodge : roll damage with disadvantage.

15. Flour powder is not very powerful (damage with disadvantage) but very cheap and you can bake bread with it!

16. Ice powder doesn't need shot or bullets. A ball of ice is formed when the powder ignites. On a critical hit the target is frozen for an instant. On a critical miss, it's you.

17. Reusable powder sometimes leaves flammable ashes after burning. On an even attack roll, you can instantly fire again. Without a bullet, this attack does half damage, only at short range.

18. Ghost powder. A specific ritual binds the spirit of a recently deceased good being to a measure of ground unholy wafers. When activated, the spirit is released, yearning for the next world, and its escape is the driving force that fires the bullet. This process does not require actual fire and can be used underwater.

19. Powder powder. It's so light, it floats. Unless stoppered tight, it can fill up a room with flammable powder. Just like an air burst.

20. Nightmare powder. is made out of the eye sand of people with bad dreams. Your bullet never misses the target but, right after firing, you fall asleep and have the worst dreams of your life.

(1) : from Macchiato Monsters, risk dice are a version of The Black Hack's usage dice. See page 42 for a quick explanation.

by **Ben Milton**

NAMING MY GAME

Here's a bit of an epiphany I had. If I had to sum up the kinds of games I like to play in a single term, the term I'd like best wouldn't be Old-School Renaissance, or Dungeons & Dragons, or DIY RPG, or even roleplaying game, but

OSR GAME

The term OSR often implies that the game is compatible with early D&D, which is often not the case for what I play and something I don't really care about. Of course, for too many people OSR means a style of play, but the term itself doesn't really give you any indication of what that is. There are too many steps from saying the term to getting someone to understand exactly what I mean by it.

D&D

Too imprecise and doesn't exactly capture the kind of game I want, especially given the variety of ways people play it now.

DIY GAME

While I'm a big believer in DIY, it again doesn't cover the style of play, only how people interact with it. There's lots of people hacking games apart and reassembling them, but that's no guarantee that I'll like it.

ADVENTURE GAME

The term "Adventure" does a lot of heavy lifting for a single word, and covers the vast majority of what I enjoy.

1. It implies authentic peril and the possibility of loss.

2. It implies strangeness, travel, the unexpected, and the confusing.

3. It implies variety and an episodic structure, a picaresque rather than a novel.

4. It implies cleverness, ingenuity, and cunning rather than a bloody slog.

5. It implies characters like Conan, Luke Skywalker, Elric, Hellboy or Fafhrd.

6. It's short, simple, and isn't obscure. Episodic-high-stakes-open-ended-lateral-problem-solving-fantasy-gamemight be more accurate, but good luck with that catching on.

7. It evokes (in my head) a game that's simple, unpretentious, and focused on fun at the table.

8. It doesn't include the term "roleplaying". Roleplaying almost always ends up happening in the games I like, but it isn't an essential element of them. It can also intimidate new players and give them the idea that they have to be good at roleplaying to enjoy the game.

The argument over what to call the experimental, non-traditional side of the OSR is a bit silly, but a good name goes a long way, and a clearer label than "OSR" for what we do here could make a big difference, especially since books from this scene are finally starting to capture the public eye in a big way.

by **Chris McDowall**

EXPOSE YOUR PREP

You've probably heard the phrase «attack every part of the character sheet» from Arnold K*. Let's flip that and see how the players can capitalise on every bit of your prep. I find that the crime of giving too much information is minor in comparison to the heinous crime of giving too little information. I lead with a good chunk of info, give good answers to good questions, and I want to give even more if the players are crafty. So what should you do to reward these exceptional player actions?

EXPOSE THE MAP

I like giving the group a blank map anyway. For the most part I don't consider mapping a strong part of the challenge of my games, so I'd rather the players be tested other ways. It cuts down on a lot of time spent describing the spatial relationship between doors or sketching out rough drawings on paper. But if the players find somebody that knows their stuff, let them have a partial or full map! If your environments are so lame that having the map negates all challenge then it's time to crank up your adventure location design.

EXPOSE THE NPCS

If they go to the effort of finding out about an NPC before engaging them, let them see their info. Show them the HP, their moves, their relationships with other NPCs.

EXPOSE THE FUTURE

Somebody has probably worked out what's most likely to happen if the players do nothing. If they do their research then show them that timeline you've planned out. Of course, it takes a lot of time to get to that point…

EXPOSE THE TABLES

Switched-on locals know the encounter table of their area. Of course there's a 50% chance of a rabid cat attack here, that's just how we live. The blister beast? Oh that thing doesn't come around all that often.

EXPOSE THE MECHANICS

You're going to be making rulings when you run Into the Odd. Be transparent about it, and reward information gathering with full access to the sub-system you've thrown together for conker games or debate contests.

by **Chris McDowall**
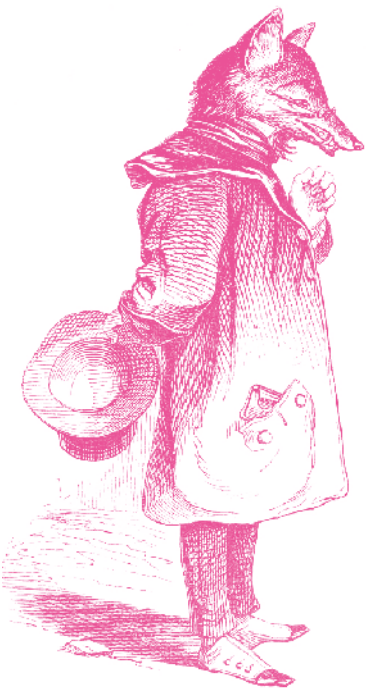
ENCOURAGE SCHEMING

Planning and preparing can be fun parts of the game, but how do you encourage that with a loo-sey-goosey system like Into the Odd?

NECESSITY TO PLAN

If you can take on any problem head-on then there's little need to plan. Brand new characters vs a thug with a club? It's probably just a fight. Same characters vs a Giant? Planning is the only way to succeed. The most straightforward way to do this to throw in one huge, seemingly impassable obstacle to the most obvious solution, and announce it in plenty of time to react. **Examples:**

• A dungeon where a force-field blocks all non-organic matter.
• A big metal monster, completely impervious to physical harm.
• You need to get past a field but it's patrolled by jerky guards riding giant birds. They'll just hover and shoot at you if you try to get through.

OPPORTUNITY TO PLAN

If you can't observe the bank or get hold of floorplans then it's difficult to have an exciting heist. Keep the difficulty high but give them as much information as they can take. Most importantly, for things that are really difficult, consider how much time pressure you're applying. If the only chance to rob the bank is right now then planning won't be an option. If the ideal window is in a week's time then you can really dig into the scheme. **Examples:**

• This terrible monster attacks every other night.
• Your assassination target recently sacked a huge number of staff. They have information and grudges.
• You have the travel diary of the last explorer to visit a distant island full of Treasure.

INGREDIENTS FOR THE PLAN

I'm obviously biased towards interesting equipment over interesting character abilities, but both work here. If your wizard spell list is «fireball, magic missile, lightning bolt, sleep» then you could have an okay heist, but it's probably going to be more of a head-on assault.

If it's «charm person, floating disc, summon toads, change weather» then you're going to have to get clever, but the result will be more fun.

Likewise, if you're running Into the Odd then make sure the players have access to weird, non-obvious tools. Oddities are great here, but make sure you've got shops selling all sorts of specialist items. **Examples:**

- The players get a voucher worth £100, but it can only be used at an elaborate pet shop.
- A wealthy benefactor offers the complete service of his staff on your expedition, but they're mostly just house servants.
- A gifted inventor can create any electrical device you can imagine, but the more useful it is the more bulky and unreliable.

by **Sean McCoy**

Why Setting HIGH STAKES Matters

I've had a lot more success recently describing Old School RPGs as "high stakes" instead of "high lethality" and here's why.

A lot of my new players or casual observers get the idea that high lethality equals arbitrary death, which in my game it doesn't. It means actions have consequences.

The whole benefit of a TTRPG to me, over say a video game, is that I have real agency, I can try anything. I can do anything. And see what happens. If the results of my experiments are always success, or even, success any time I roll 10 or more on 2d6, my actions feel arbitrary.

I want my great plans to succeed and I want my shitty plans to fail. I want enemies to surprise me. This all requires an impartial referee and of course, stakes that are sufficiently high such that I care about the result.

Does this have to mean death? Absolutely not. But putting death on the table consequently puts every other consequence on the table. Failure is a real option. And I find in games without death as a consequence, a lot of other fail states go out the window as well.

A common response to high stakes games is that players want to invest in their characters and it's not worth it if they're going to die. I think both can be achieved, and that the presence of death enhances rather than diminishes attachment to your character.

I did a Mothership actual play with Board With Life where the stakes were incredibly high. But you can really see the PCs getting into their characters because they know their choices matter. The follow their characters for good or ill.

If you're the kind of player who likes to write their backstory before session 1, then I can understand why you'd get frustrated if your character died in that first session. But I'm a big believer in growing attached to your character as opposed to starting attached to your character. DCC teaches this best with its funnel system. You start session zero with four zero-level farmers and ditch diggers fighting in their village's first confrontation against evil. Those who survive become 1st-level HEROES. Now that really is high lethality. But it teaches you that the game is hard, that your choices matter, and that heroics are something you earn, not something you're born with. And that's DCC, the most gonzo old school game around.

My point is: think hard about the stakes of your game. If you're a storygamer: are they sufficient for the kind of tale you want to tell? And if you're more challenge oriented: are they high enough such that clearing them is an actual accomplishment?

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by **Jack Shear**
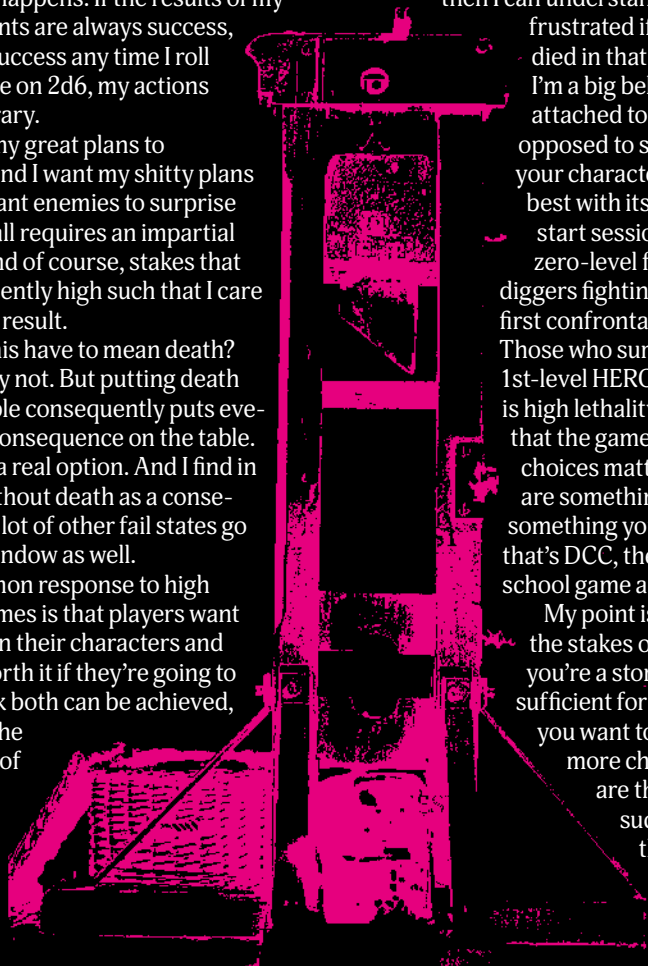
WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH IGOR'S HUMP?

FACT #1:
All mad scientists (and many vampires) have a hunchbacked assistant.

FACT #2:
That assistant is always named Igor (some pronounce it EYE-gore, some EEE-gore)

FACT #3:
Here's the deal with Igor's hump:

d10 - Hump Type (hey oh!)

1 - Black-Blood Blister – if Igor takes any damage there is a 50% chance it will rupture his hump, which is, in fact, a giant blood blister filled with the Black Blood of the Earth. If ruptured, the Black Blood takes 1d4 rounds to congeal into a coherent mass that then attacks everyone nearby (use the stats of a Black Pudding).

2 - Camel-like Fluid Storage – Igor's hump contains a randomly-generated potion. If Igor is killed without damaging his hump, the characters may be able to siphon it out of him as the least-appealing treasure ever.

3 - Demonstone Tumor – Igor's hump is actually a tumor caused by small pieces of demonstone that are embedded in his back. The demonstone causes any spell cast within 30' of Igor to trigger a roll on the Magical Mishap Table or any other random magical effect table you use.

4 - Embedded Meteor – what looks like a hump is actually a meteor from space that collided with Igor's back. The radiation from the meteor has been slowly mutating Igor; at the moment that is least convenient for the player-characters Igor will transform into an evil Shambling Mound.

5 - Hardened Bone – Igor's hump is a giant knob of bone. Indeed, Igor's skeleton is hard as iron, granting him a +2 bonus to his Armor Class.

6 - Mold Infection – Igor's hump is really a symptom of an inner mold infection. If Igor takes any damage, there is a 50% that his hump explodes into a cloud of mold spores (use the stats of a Gas Spore).

7 - Psychic Brain – Igor's hump houses a second brain that possesses the mind blast ability of a Brain Lasher.

8 - Pus-Filled – instead of being a solid mass, Igor's hump is really a pus-filled membrane. If Igor takes any damage there is a 50% chance that his hump bursts open, discharging a thick yellow and green ooze. This pus takes 1d4 rounds to congeal into a coherent mass, which then attacks everyone nearby (use the stats of a Green Slime).

9 - Stunted Twin – what looks like a hump is actually the visible portion of Igor's twin brother who failed to develop properly in utero. The hump can detach itself from Igor's body at will to wreck havoc (use the stats for a gremlin).

10 - Tentacle Cluster – Igor's hump is a gift from the Demon Lord Zzorch. It can sprout a multitude of tentacles to attack with; while the tentacles do no damage on their own, they possess the paralysis ability of a Cadaver Grub.

by **Daniel Sell**

We live in a world without hit points.
Death is not a countdown. Uncertain death is fun. Having a sense
of impending doom is fun. Knowing you can take a couple
of shots and keep on fighting is boring.

Life or death baby, I know which one I'm picking!

Some Ways of Killing D&D People

1. ROLL OR DIE SYSTEM.

Play D&D as normal but add your damage up. When your HP passes five times your level you must ROLL OR DIE. Roll d100 and roll over your damage total or die. Do this for every subsequent instance of getting hurt. Alternatively, for ROCK HARD TRU GAMERS you should ROLL OR DIE every time you take damage regardless of the threshold. Bookkeeping is for nerds.

2. I'M THE FUCKING DADDY SYSTEM

Everyone has standard D&D HP, except they are now used to hit things. Gamble your HP to live! Each HP you spend lets you roll a die, but you keep the same number as you usually would in a normal game of Dungeons & Daddies. For instance, while rolling to hit you might spend 3 HP, rolling 3d20 and picking the best one. Spend 8, roll 8, keep 1 and so on. All violent action takes energy. At 0 HP you are at the whims of the enemy. They can automatically kill you, or the DM can have them do something else like kidnap you or chop your arms off. Taking damage works like normal.

Alternative rules for HYPER LIT MEGA PLAYERS, use HP to roll all dice, including skill checks and saves. Especially saves. If you're only SOMEWHAT LIT MEGA PLAYERS you might consider raising HP all round.

3. DAMAGE DICE EXPLODE.

Rolling the highest number on a damage die now allows you to roll again, with infinite possibilities to go on. The d4 knife is now interesting.

Author: **Arnold K** - Art : **Christopher Johnson**

OSR-STYLE CHALLENGES:

"Rulings Not Rules" is

INSUFFICIENT

I was a Pathfinder guy who got inspired by blogs, and then spent some time trying to figure out what the fuck the OSR was. I read stuff, like Matt Finch's Quick Primer for Old School Gaming, which is where I first heard about Rulings Not Rules.

The idea is that the OSR encourages a sort of innovative, ad-hoc gameplay where players are always innovating and solving problems with outside-of-the-box solutions. They're thinking with their heads, not their character sheets.But saying Rulings Not Rules is merely a description of the system, which is only a small chunk of what actually contributes to gameplay.

What Contributes to Gameplay: **1)** The system. **2)** The adventure. **3)** The DM. **4)** The players.

The DM and the players could be bundled together, because the DM operates by a social contract, sort of like a charter. Anyway, it's not enough to have a system that allows for rulings and improvisation. If you want OSR-style gameplay, you need to encourage/allow it at all levels.

System Level

Like Mr. Finch says, this is about getting players to stop thinking with their character sheets. (This is why skill lists are potentially so poisonous--players thinking about solutions sometimes start and end by looking at their skill list as if it were a list of permissions.)

And to do that, you need an incomplete system. You need to have room for rulings, and that means that there have to be gaps between the rules. To put it another way, if I wrote up a game system that included two pages of rules on how to attack tiny animals in your stomach, I've codified the acceptable options and excluded more esoteric solutions. (I've also complicated the game by introducing a fiddly and highly-situational subset of rules.)

If a players is familiar with the game system, they'll think back to what they know about the rules as a first resort. Only when they've

exhausted everything they remember from the How To Attack Tiny Animals In Your Stomach page, will they start to innovate.

For an example of a more complete skill system, all you need to do is look at the skill descriptions from 3.5th edition. The more complete a ruleset is, the more tempting (and valid) it is to say «well, it's not covered in the rules, so you can't do it». Or worse «this is covered in the rules, and if we add up all the situational modifiers, you will do so at a -14 penalty even though I personally agree that this task shouldn't be that difficult».

This is why I like running games without Perception checks, Find Trap checks, and social skills. It leaves more room for player innovation.

You also need a system that supports rulings. There are two parts to this.

First, the system cannot have too much interdependence between the moving pieces. Some mechanics are isolated (XP) while others touch on many other mechanics (Ability Scores). The more interconnected a mechanic is, the more knock-on effects you'll have when you modify it. If you want to just make a quick ruling and get on with your game, you usually want to make sure that your quick ruling won't have any unforeseen consequences. For example:

DM: *«Alright, you all manage to tread water for 18 hours, but the act was so exhausting that you've all lost all of your healing surges.»*
Player: *«Wait, I can't use any of my class abilities without any healing surges. In fact, I turn into a pumpkin without any healing surges.»*
DM: *«Well, we've already established that exhaustion drains healing surges. That's been a house rule for months. And treading water for 18 hours is definitely exhausting.»*
Player: *«But that was before I picked up the Pumpkin King prestige class. It's unfair now.»*

A little caricatured, but you get the point.

Second, the system needs to have simple ways to adjudicate rulings.

My first resort is to just ask a player to roll under the most relevant ability score.

- It's fast.
- The player already knows what I'm talking about because their ability scores are written down right at the top of their character sheet. It's an associated mechanic, so it makes intuitive sense.

If it doesn't seem tied to any particular aspect of their character (i.e. it's entirely luck-based or dependent on some external variable that the character has no control over), I usually just ask for an X-in-6 roll, which I make up on the spot. I like using a six-sider for these, because even a 1-in-6 chance is likely enough that it'll happen every once in a while.

For more extended efforts, I like some variation of *«you need to get X successes before some other limit is hit»*. But I only use these extended rulings very rarely.

Bad rulings are ones that are slow or confusing. But the worse rulings are the ones that are ultimately unsatisfying, in the sense that they don't give results (or chances of results) that mesh with the player's expectations of how the world works. If your make some rulings, and the consequence is that halflings are more intimidating than orcs, that's (probably) a bad ruling. If you make some rulings, and the

consequence is that even the most untrained peasant has a 90% chance to track anything, that's a bad ruling. Just as players use common sense to come up with stuff that requires a ruling, use common sense to make rulings (as opposed to precedent or some other analogous rule you saw somewhere else).

Adventure Level

You also need to give players problems that are best solved through innovation.

If you give them a problem with three orcs in it, they're probably going to solve it through an already-established method: initiative and attack rolls. Here are some good examples of OSR-style problems.

- Get over this moat. It's full of crocodiles.
- There's a circle of mushrooms with a girl inside it. Everything inside the circle of mushrooms will do everything in their power to get more people inside the circle (no save). The girl is already their thrall.
- There's a tiny octopus inside your stomach and it's biting you.
- There's a bowl built into the ground. It's lined with gold but full of acid. (From ASE.)
- There's a smooth glass sphere, 100' high, with an opening at the top. It doesn't roll easily. Inside is something you want. (From some LotFP product, I forget which one.)
- The bad guy cannot be hurt by any weapon forged by mortal hands.
- This glass sphere (3' in diameter) is filled with gems and horrible undead snakes.
- Pretty much all of the dungeons that Chris McDowall writes. He's like a laser pointer when it comes to writing interesting problems.

Writing a good OSR-style problem is tougher than it sounds. It needs to be something that:

- has no easy solution.
- has many difficult solutions.
- requires no special tools (e.g. unique spells, plot devices).
- can be solved with common sense (as opposed to system knowledge or setting lore).
- isn't solvable through some ability someone has on their character sheet. Or at least, it isn't preferentially solvable. I'm okay with players attacking the sphinx (a risky undertaking) if they can't figure out the riddle, because risky-but-obvious can be a solution, too.

The fun thing about OSR-style problems is that they often require rulings-not-rules. (Try to solve the tiny octopus in 4E with RAW*.) So there's a benefit in having a system that's easily hackable.

But at the same time, OSR-style problems aren't dependent on system. You could plop them into any system and then players will still have to innovate to solve them (and probably have a lot of fun in the process).

It's also important to give your players OSR-style tools. (This is an idea I've half-articulated before.)

The anti-examples of this are going to be things like a sword +1, or a cloak that gives you +4 to stealth. Anything that gives you a numeric bonus is not an OSR-style tool. Anything that gives you a known, established ability is not an OSR-style tool (like a potion of healing).

These are tools that allow for innovative problem solving. They stretch the brain. Good examples include:

- Immovable Rod.
- Polyjuice Potion.

- Ring of Cadave-rous-but-Reversible Sleep.
- Love Potion.
- Psychic Paper.
- Sovereign Glue.
- Cursed Wand of Enlarge, only enlarges one part of an object.
- Bag of Infinite Rats.
- Some of these items (1).
- And some of these items, too (2).

I especially like to make these types of items single-use or limited-use. It prevents the item from becoming a known solution to an established problem (which is pretty much the antithesis of OSR-style problem solving).

DM Level

There's two things you gotta do. **First**, talk to your players like adults. Tell them that this game will have problems that aren't obviously solvable, and that some of these problems will have solutions that aren't on the character sheet. Actually, if you're dealing with complete newbies to tabletop RPGs, the less stuff that is on their character sheet, the better. A level-0 funnel can help get new players thinking about common-sense solutions to problems. Adding skills to the game after one or two sessions can also be a big help (if you ever add skills at all).

Second, you need to reward creativity when you see it. When players ask you if something is possible, say yes. (Or «yes, but».) When you are devising a ruling for some ridiculous player shenanigans, lean in the player's favor.

I'm not advocating that you should allow stupid ideas to succeed, but solving an OSR-style problem is usually going to involve some kludgery, so be lenient when deciding how likely crocodiles are to eat a bomb disguised as a pig.

Player Level

I'm writing this article with the assumption that everyone enjoys the same types of game that I do. This is not always true (unfortunately). Talk to your DM and each other about your expectations. Give feedback.

When it actually comes to solving these problems, I can't really help. It's just you and your brain. Here a few pointers, though.

- Think about all of the resources at your disposal, including resources in other rooms.
- It helps to take notes.
- Make the hireling do it.
- See if any of your magic items can do cool stuff if used in combination--sometimes the answer is spread across multiple peoples' inventories.
- Take it to someone who knows more about it.
- If it looks like it might do something horrible, pick it up on the way out.
  - Come back later with the right tool.
  - Experiment, experiment, experiment.
  - Before you do anything, ask the DM lots of questions.
  - Before you touch the dangerous parts, learn as much as you can about the non-dangerous parts.

1 - https://www.bastionland.com/2016/01/d100-oddities-for-new-characters.html
2 - http://goblinpunch.blogspot.com/2015/01/d100-minor-magical-items.html

by **Fiona Maeve Geist** - Art after **Gustave Doré**

My Goblins Are...

... unnatural creatures whose primary form of sustenance is 'inspiration' and uncontrolled emotional expression. They are usually followed by (mundane but extremely amplified) Chaos. While they have the appearance of rare and somewhat fantastical animals (always bipedal in locomotion), the most notable thing about Goblins is a profoundly unnerving nature with an overt and unnatural, but perhaps not immediately obvious, magical aspect. Goblins prefer frippery and are often dressed in outlandish combinations of clothing with no regard for form nor function—all Goblins may reach into their pocket to produce a random item (see "It Has Something In Its Pockets!").

Goblins, contrary to their popular perception, are not so much malevolent as incapable of understanding consequences other than their endless, capricious sense of wonder. They are attracted to the outbreak of mass hysteria (and often its cause), cults, heedless adoption of novel and unproven theories, hubristic and quixotic quests, and musical theater (all of which they encourage with unsubtle abandon—all Goblins can be identified by having perfect pitch and timing and successes testing abilities concerning performance, sleight of hand, misleading phrasing, etc. are critical successes). Goblins are notable for their cowardice, innovative thinking, lack of risk assessment, difficulty conceptually grasping individuality or death, chaotic joy and mischief. They all speak in the same voice of a surly, daydreaming retail clerk who would rather be elsewhere.

All 1HD goblins have the following abilities: Prestidigitation, Mend/Break, Knock, Hold Portal and can 3x/day cast Dimension Door so long as they are fleeing a volatilely emotional crowd.

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Roll 2d4 and roll that many times on the column, if wanted, or roll one to quickly generate a generic Goblin.

Roll d13

	ANIMAL	UNNATURAL	INNATE MAGIC	OUTLANDISH CLOTHING
1	Markhor	Levitates 5′	Grease	Cravat
2	Spring Hare	Emerald (2x 2d100 gp) Eyes	Feather Fall	Barristers Wig
3	Fairy Penguin	Spiderwalks	Mind Blank	Hoop Skirt
4	Coconut Crab	Ethereal	Mirror Image	Jodhpurs
5	Pangolin	30′ Radius Violet Shadow	Fog Cloud	Knickerbockers
6	Purple Frog	Touch Transmutes (Gold)	Fool's Gold	Domino Mask
7	Hawk Cuckoo	Glows (as Light)	Modify Memory	Opera Glasses
8	Raccoon Dog	Teleports to Move	Control Temperature	Opera Cape & Gloves
9	Quokka	Magic Mouths Speak For It	Speak With Dead	Tricorn Hat
10	Solenodon	Anti-Magic Shell	Passwall (Constant)	3d10′ String of Pearls
11	Kakapo	Overpowering Bergamot Scent	Stone to Flesh	Nehru Jacket
12	Aye Aye	Plants Grow in its Footsteps	Major Creation	Clogs
13	Linnaeus' Mouse Opossum	Clones (1d100x) With Water	Uncontrollable Dance	Pocketwatch (1d6-3 Time Stop)

It Has Something In Its Pockets!   Roll d100

1. Brass Fire Poker - **2**. 3d100 Matches- **3**. 1d10 Paper Sheets - **4**. d12 Vials (Ink) - **5**. d20 Vials (Acid) - **6**. d6 Vials (Poison) - **7**. Silver Knife - **8**. d100 lb Gunpowder - **9**. d666 Marbles - **10**. d20 lb Caltrops - **11**. Wagon Wheel - **12**. d4 Manacles - **13**. d6 Black Cat(s) - **14**. d4 Lanterns (Lit) - **15**. d100 lb Lard - **16**. A Fine Painting - **17**. A Persian Rug - **18**. 3d20 Bells - **19**. d20 Books - **20**. 2d12 Candles - **21**. Flaming Sphere - **22**. D6 Bottles (Wine) - **23**. Signet Ring - **24**. Jar (Spiders) - **25**. d20 Baguettes - **26**. d10 lb Ribbon - **27**. d8 Flagons (Beer) - **28**. Faerie Fire - **29**. d20 Skull(s) - **30**. 3d10 Rabbits - **31**. 4d20′ Yarn - **32**. 3d10 lb Utensils - **33**. d6 Axes - **34**. 3d6 Paints - **35**. 20lb Box (Salt) - **36**. Dulcimer - **37**. Spyglass - **38**. d666 Keys -**39**. Derringer - **40**. Riding Boots - **41**. d20 Gold Bricks - **42**. d4x100′ Silk Rope - **43**. Fireworks - **44**. d100,000 CP - **45**. d100′ft3 Fog - **46**. 3d4 Water Clocks - **47**. A Military Mule - **48**. d12 Frogs - **49**. d4 Cows - **50**. 2d8 ft3 Fire - **51**. Polymorph - **52**. d6 Bear Traps - **53**. D10 gallons (Milk) - **54**. 5-lb Box (Saffron) - **55**. Locust Swarm - **56**. d100 Pigs - **57**. d100 lb Brass - **58**. Keelboat - **59**. 2d20 Teacups - **60**. d3 Mink Coat(s) - **61**. d66 Barrister's Wigs - **62**. d20 Prosthetic Limbs - **63**. Gender Change Girdle - **64**. d10 Bottles (Olive Oil) - **65**. d6 Silver Scissors - **66**. Delayed Blast Fireball - **67**. Intelligent Sword - **68**. d8 Champagne Flutes - **69**. Anatomical Dummy - **70**. d4+1 Vials (Antivenom) - **71**. d1000 gallons (Water) - **72**. Grandfather Clock - **73**. 3d8 Cotton Tablecloths - **74**. Ring of Regeneration - **75**. d66 Enraged Geese - **76**. Prismatic Ward - **77**. 20-lb Box (Cinnamon) - **78**. Repeating Rifle - **79**. 2d12 Riding Dogs - **80**. 400 yds2 Sailcloth - **81**. Iron Cauldron - **82**. d20′ Silver String - **83**. Griffon Saddle - **84**. d13 Umbrellas - **85**. 4′x7′ Iron Door - **86**. Aurumvorax - **87**. Feather Mattress - **88**. d8 Partridges - **89**. d20 Mirrors - **90**. Cosmetics - **91**. 40 lb Garlic - **92**. Vial (Holy Water) - **93**. Petrify (Zone) - **94**. Lantern Boy - **95**. Vial (Red Slime) - **96**. 2HD Purple Worm - **97**. 3d12 Doves - **98**. 2d8 Yaks - **99**. d4 Elephants - **00**. Wish

The Labors of Hercules as OSR Obstacles

Arnold has been talking about what makes an OSR adventure (see page 30), and in particular what a good OSR challenge looks like.

- *It has no easy solution.*
- *It has many difficult solutions.*
- *It requires no special tools (e.g. unique spells, plot devices).*
- *It can be solved with common sense (as opposed to system knowledge or setting lore).*
- *It isn't solvable through some ability someone has on their character sheet.   Or at least, it isn't preferentially solvable this way.*

I'm okay with players attacking the sphinx (a risky undertaking) if they can't figure out the riddle, because risky-but-obvious can be a solution, too.

However, thinking about this keeps bringing me back to my favorite OSR adventure, The Labors of Hercules. In this episodic greek myth, which sounds exactly like something out of a D&D campaign, Hercules has to atone for killing his whole family in a drunken rage. His penance is to serve king Eurystheus for twelve years, and he ends up accomplishing twelve tasks for him. What nearly all of them have in common is that they require Hercules to solve a difficult problem in an unorthodox way.

1 – Slay the Nemean Lion.

The lion has an invulnerable hide. Hercules solves this problem by first sealing up one of the exits to the lion's cave, so it can't run away. Then he uses non-lethal damage and stuns it with a club, and then strangles it to death. In other stories, he shoots it in the mouth, which is another great solution. He wants to use its hide as armor, but of course he can't cut it. Solution: use its own claws to skin the beast.

2 – Slay the Lernaean Hydra.

The hydra lives in a cave in a toxic swamp, and it grows two heads whenever you cut off one. Solution: Hercules creates a breathing filter out of cloth and drives the hydra out into the open with arrows, then he burns each stump with fire to stop them growing back. In another version, he burns the heads with the hydra's own venom, which is even better. After it's dead, he dips his sword in its toxic blood, to create a poison sword. After this point, king Eurystheus stops giving Hercules tasks to kill things, and has him start capturing things instead, which makes the tasks harder.

3 – Capture the Ceryneian Hind.

The hind is so fast it can outrun an arrow in flight. Solution: Stalk it slowly and set a net trap for it while it sleeps. He then uses Charisma to talk Artemis into allowing him to take the hind to the king.

4 – Capture the Erymanthian Boar.

The boar is gigantic, dangerous, and very fast. It needs to be brought back alive. Solution: use the environment against it by driving it up a mountain into deep snow where it is immobilized until it can be tied up.

5 – Clean the Stables of Augeas.

The stables are full of a thousand divinely healthy cattle, and the stables have not been cleaned in 30 years. Solution: Divert a river into the stables to do the work for him.

6 – Defeat the Stymphalian Birds.

The birds are made out of bronze, can throw bladed feathers at enemies and have toxic dung. They live in a swamp. Solution: Shake a huge rattle that scares them out of the swamp, then shoot them with arrows as they flee.

7 – Capture the Cretan Bull.

This one isn't that interesting. Big bull destroying Crete, Hercules sneaks up behind it and throttles it until it passes out, then ships it to the king.

8 – Capture the Mares of Diomedes.

This is a good one. Diomedes has bred fire-breathing, man-eating horses, which are wild and uncontrollable. Solution: visit Diomedes, but stay awake all night to avoid being fed to the horses. Then cut the horses free and drive them towards the end of a peninsula. Once they are there, dig a trench through the peninsula to turn it into an island, trapping the horses. When Diomedes shows up, kill him and feed him to the horses, which temporarily calms them. Then bind their mouths shut and ship them off.

9 – Retrieve the Belt of Hippolyta the Amazon.

This is the first genuinely social task, but Hercules just kills Hippolyta and takes it. Boring.

10 – Capture the Cattle of Geryon.

Geryon is the three-headed grandson of Medusa, but the cattle aren't particularly interesting. Hercules just kills Geryon and drives the cattle back. One OSR moment is when Hera (who hates Hercules) floods a river to prevent him crossing with the cattle, so he throws huge boulders into the water until he is able to ford it.

## 11 – Retrieve the Apples of the Hesperides.

At this point, Eurystheus is just trying to set tasks that should be completely impossible. No one even knows where the apples are, and they are guarded by a full-on dragon. Solution: Visit Atlas, who holds up the sky. Atlas knows where the Garden of the Hesperides is, but he can't put down the sky. Hercules uses his strength to take Atlas' place, and in exchange Atlas goes to get the apples. When Atlas returns, he's decided he doesn't want the sky-holding job anymore. Hercules asks him to take it back for just a second so he can adjust his cloak, and then walks off when Atlas falls for it.

12 – Capture Cerberus.

A supposedly impossible task, but Hercules succeeds by being inducted into the Eleusinian Mysteries and getting two gods to guide him into the underworld. He then gets Hades' permission to take Cerberus by subduing the monstrous dog with his bare hands. Not a terribly creative solution. There are some great traps in the underworld, though: snakes that twine around your limbs and then turn to stone, and a chair of forgetfulness that prevents you from wanting to leave.

There's lots of other stories in which heroes overcome problems with ingenuity rather than brute force. Theseus and the Minotaur, Perseus and Medusa, the Trojan Horse etc. It seems to be a running theme in Greek myths, which is what makes them so entertaining.

Author: **Sean McCoy** - Art : **Michael Sheppard**
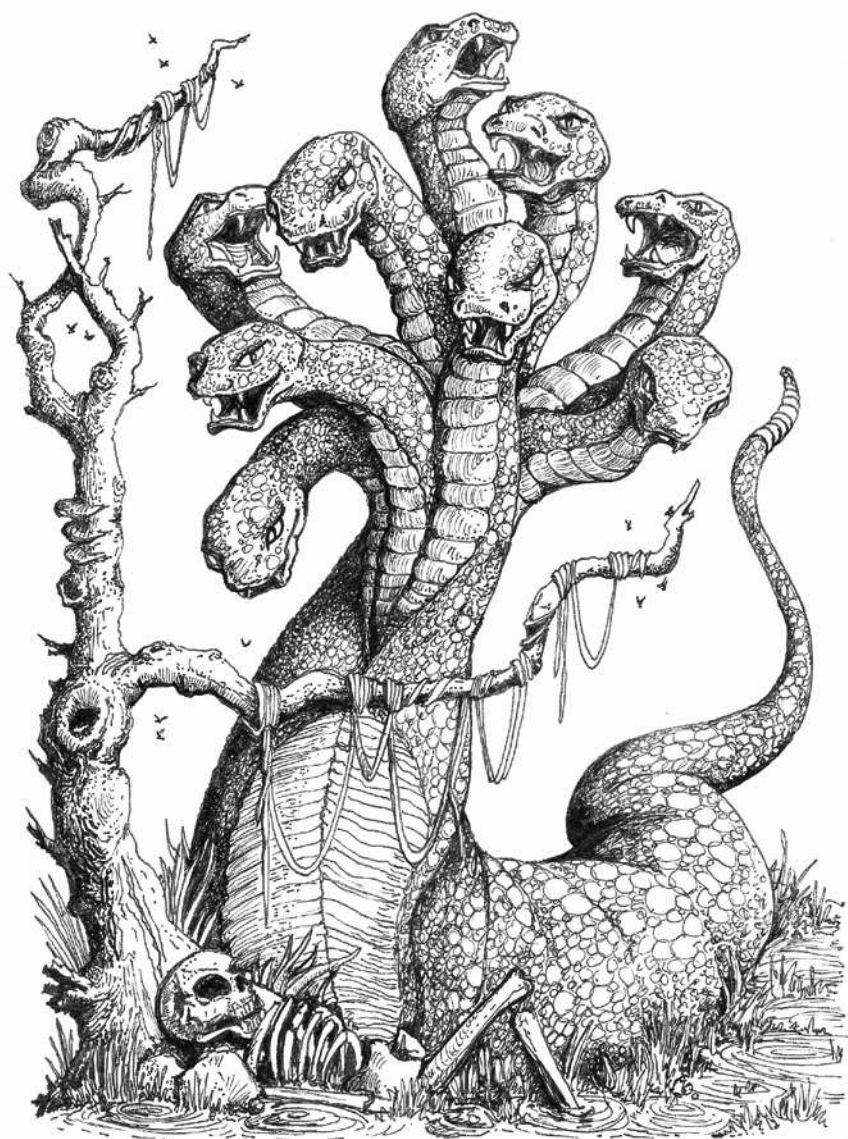
WHAT DO THE MONSTERS WANT?

One of my favorite tools in D&D is the reaction table. It's incredibly simple (three sentences of description) and if you want, it can adjudicate almost every social encounter the PCs run into in a game. I've written before that I can get biased against the players over time. You're seeing all their crazy hijinks and ridiculous plans go sideways, it's only natural to imbue all your NPCs with a kind of removed skepticism that causes them to never react positively towards the PCs. **The reaction table fixes that.**

MONSTER REACTIONS

Monster actions: Some monsters always act in the same way (such as zombies, who always attack). However, the reactions of most monsters are not always the same. The DM can always choose the monster's reactions to fit the dungeon, but if they decide not to do that, a roll of 2d6 on the reaction table can determine the monster's attitude.

Dice Roll	Reaction
2	Immediate Attack
3-5	Hostile, possible attack
6-8	Uncertain, monster confused
9-11	No attack, monster leaves or considers offers
12	Enthusiastic friendship

Dungeons & Dragons Basic rulebook, 1981 (Gygax, Arneson, Moldvay, Cook)

Players with higher Charisma get a bonus to rolling on this table, which makes Charisma absolutely not a dump stat in the older versions of the game (although, even the concept of a dump stat doesn't play when you're rolling 3d6 straight down the line). If you roll for reaction at every encounter, combat only immediately breaks out 3% of the time, which is amazing if you're running a more dangerous game. Combat can be avoided in almost every situation.

However, the hardest part for me is rolls between 6-8. Possibly just out of habit, reactions often spiral down quickly into combat. "Oh they're confused, so they yell at you and now uh roll initiative."

What Do The Monsters Want?
So what I have here is an addition to the reaction table for you to use. d10 things that the monsters could want. There's a lot of ways to use this: PCs can be bargaining with the monsters and what the monster wants can be something for the PCs to figure out; or it can just be something the monster demands or else they attack (like say, on a roll of 3-5 on the reaction table). But with this, a wandering monsters table, and a reaction table, your random encounters should have a lot more life.

Roll	What They Want	Description
1	Food	They're hungry. You can distract them with rations, point them towards corpses, cast a food illusion. They could be hurt and in need of heeling.
2	Gold	They want d100 gold x their HD. This could be a tax, a toll, tribute, tithe, or they could just be greedy bastards.
3	Treasure/ Magic Items	They want a number of items equal to their HD. Scrolls and potions count as well.
4	Random Item	Roll a random item from a random character's sheet, they want that for some reason.
5	Territory	This is their territory, they will defend it, but mostly they just want you to leave or prove why you should be allowed to pass through.
6	Information	They want to know about a rival faction, nearby NPC or monster, or dungeon landmark or location.
7	Help	They need something from further in the dungeon, or from a nearby wilderness hex. They may want you to kill other monsters in the dungeon or clear out a hex. They may be haunting the area and can only leave when their quest is fulfilled.
8	Trade	They have a random item from each category on the equipment list (one piece of armor, one weapon, one piece of equipment, etc.) and they're willing to trade those items or sell them. All trades made inside the dungeon are at a higher markup than you'll find in town.
9	To Complete a Mission	They're in service to the closest NPC in the dungeon and whatever that NPC wants, this monster is on a mission to help achieve that aim.
10	Directions	They're lost and are looking for directions out, or for someone to escort them to a safe area.

by **Vagabundork** - Art : after **Hobelin**

Save vs actual **DEATH**?

If your game is a little too lethal, you might want to consider a way to spare an adventurer's insignificant life. Just like when you burn ants with a magnifying glass, and allow one to preserve its life, just to see how its entire world collapses when you put one foot on its anthill.

But before you start saving lives, you have to let the players experience first-hand the game and its world as it was designed. Maybe they will love it (as many of us do). But if character death is not part of the fun for the players, something must be done. This is not very OSR, but here it goes.

Save vs actual death… sort of

At the player's choice, if a first level character dies in combat, once the encounter is over the player has the option of sacrificing something in exchange for saving the character's life. Jeff Rients proposes a saving throw vs death, but I would skip that roll.

The character drops and is given up for dead, but miraculously he has managed to retain one hit point. If at the end of the encounter a TPK has occurred, or if the fallen one is the first character created by the player for this campaign, this rule is ignored.

Roll 1d3 or choose what is lost: 1)Equipment 2)Treasure 3)Physical integrity

This loss must be significant, not trivial. The player decides what is sacrificed, but the referee can reject it and make a suggestion about the most appropriate loss. Some examples:

• **Equipment**. Her favorite sword or magic weapon is broken. Her full plate armor is ruined. Her spell book has become unusable.

• **Treasure.** Her bag of coins stopped the fatal blow, but her enemy has taken it. The great ruby was pulverized. The valuable wine bottles broke.

• **Physical integrity.** Her knee is shattered, reducing her movement rate by 50%, and her Dexterity goes to the next modifier below (if her modifier was +2, now it is +1, if it was 0, now it's -1, and so on). A frightening scar c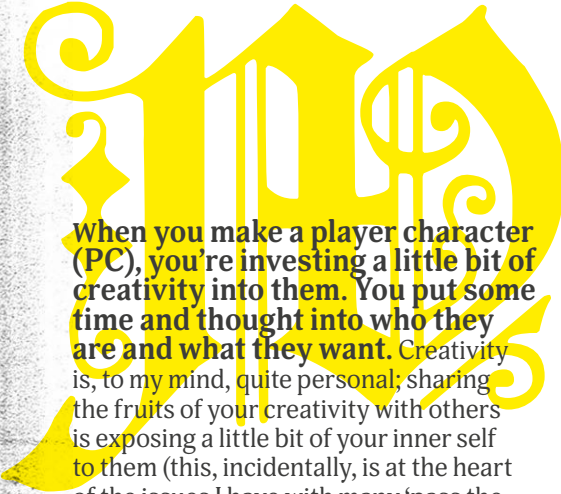rosses her face and destroys one of her eyes (her Charisma goes down to the next modifier below, and her attacks with ranged weapons, as well as her sight-related rolls, suffer a -1 penalty). Her dominant hand is cut (she cannot use two-handed weapons anymore, her Tinkering rolls and similar worsens one level).

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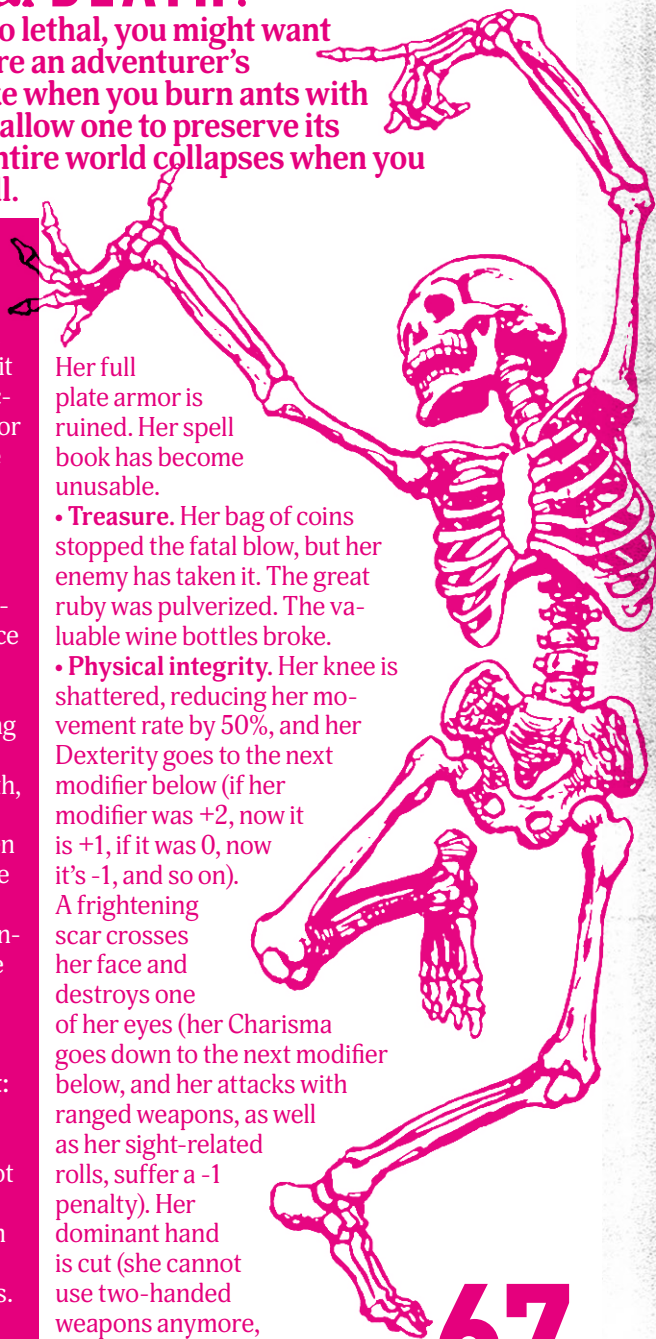
by **Emmy Allen** - Art after **Gustave Doré**

RPGs as Emotional Gambling

When you make a player character (PC), you're investing a little bit of creativity into them. You put some time and thought into who they are and what they want. Creativity is, to my mind, quite personal; sharing the fruits of your creativity with others is exposing a little bit of your inner self to them (this, incidentally, is at the heart of the issues I have with many 'pass the talking-stick' story-games). The more you play the PC, the more you invest in them emotionally. The more of an emotional stake you have in them surviving and prospering.

When a PC dies (or is otherwise irretrievably fucked up), all that emotional energy you'd tied to them is lost with them. It's a sudden gut-punch of loss. The risk of that upset is what makes the game exciting. In-character successes (gaining magic items, levelling up, increasing in-character status) feel good because we know that they make the gut-punch of character death less likely; in-character setbacks feel a bit bad for the same reason.

Things that drag the loss out (such as being temporarily turned into a frog, knocked unconscious or otherwise rendered unplayable) feel worse than mere death, because after a PC dies you can quickly recover, make a new character and get back into the swing of things. An extended time where your PC is useless means you're stuck in that low-point for longer, hoping to get the character you've invested in back soon.

Having agency over how a character's arc ends has been, in my experience, important. Retiring a PC who's become difficult to play (due to curses, injuries, etc etc) feels better than having them die, because the player gets to choose it, and can imagine them sitting in a nice cottage somewhere, with a big pile of gold, a sword hung over the fire-place, and a small child on their knee that they're telling the story of 'how I got my eye torn out'. It's a Good Ending. In effect, you're cashing out your 'emotional chips', and calling this gamble a success.

For this emotional gamble to be worth it, you need to carefully balance the emotions invested in the PC, the likelihood of death, and the magnitude of the gut-punch when the character does die. I think the OSR gets this right with its lower investment into new PC – rolling up a character is quick and doesn't require much deep thought, and low level characters are fragile as fuck – that allows greater investment over time, corresponding to greater survival chances. Compare this to modern D&D where character creation takes ages (resulting in high investment from the get-go), CR-balanced encounters mean that your chance of death is constant rather than scaling to reflect investment, and death is rare enough that its easy to disregard entirely; here, your investment-risk-gutpunch balance is all off, you invest highly in a PC but have little tension, there's no sense of safety from levelling up since the challenges get harder to match you, and when you DO die it feels arbitrary, unexpected and unusually horrid (which feeds back into GMs not being willing to kill PCs, resulting in EVEN LESS tension).

One thing which I do in my games is to include horrible wounds. These actually tend to result in slightly longer gut-punches, as playing a character missing a bunch of body parts is kind of difficult, and bleeding out extends the process of dying. However, they also soften the gut-punch as you're more likely to be able to successfully retire a (now crippled but also very wealthy) PC, getting them a good ending.

I tend to avoid anything which temporarily makes a PC unplayable (such as hard mind-control, extended unconsciousness, transformation, etc), **since this keeps the gut-punch just as horrid but draaaags it out**. Instead, these effects tend to be either permanent (effectively character death) or just a debuff that encourages you to retire the character.

by **Emmy Allen** - Art: **Matt Houston**

Leaving Kansas

One thing which I think is at the heart of a lot of old-school aesthetics is the clash between weirdness and familiarity. In particular, I find these games tend to have familiar characters from familiar locations visit somewhere strange. The thematic heart of the game, then, is this; can our representations of the familiar world survive and prosper from contact with the Strange?

Setting up the familiar is pretty simple. Most players of RPGs are acquainted with the 'default medieval fantasy' setting, with feudal lords, peasants, knights, priests, and so on. Likewise, the modern world, or mundane history, can serve as the familiar. So long as it's the sort of place and time that your players can readily understand, make assumptions about, and so on.

This is the background your player characters are drawn from. The options available to a PC come to

define the everyday normality of your setting, the baseline from which the weird departs. If you have wizards capable of casting spells as part of your 'normal', magic itself is not 'weird'. It is something the PCs can do and, presumably, might be familiar with. A vampire is never going to be scary when you can roll up a level 1 vampire character, after all.

I actually think that, here, a certain degree of blandness is good. Exotic and strange details in this part of the game world detract from its normal-ness, and likewise make the strange seem

stepping out of the familiar and into the weird. When you go down the steps into a dungeon, you enter the Weird. Sometimes, this process is drawn out (such as the mounting strangeness in the overland section of Deep Carbon Observatory, before descending to the observatory itself). Sometimes it's abrupt (such as stepping through the doorway to Ynn). However, for the weird to seem weird, it needs to be clearly marked off.

So now we have our PCs – little avatars of the 'normal' – entering into the weird. This is our 'through the looking

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...The weird is other. It is external to the players, unfamiliar, separated from them somehow. It might be a dungeon. It might be an unexplored wilderness or a strange foreign land. It might be intrusions from other worlds, even. But it must be different...

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less strange. The more default and obvious this baseline seems out of character, the easier it will be to see it as default in play.

This, then, is contrasted with the Weird. The weird is other. It is external to the players, unfamiliar, separated from them somehow. It might be a dungeon. It might be an unexplored wilderness or a strange foreign land. It might be intrusions from other worlds, even. But it must be different. The weird can, and should, break the rules that PCs operate by. Enemies can use spells, certainly, but they shouldn't have the same spells in the same spellbooks that the PCs do. Their capabilities should be unfamiliar.

It must likewise be clear when you are

glass' moment, our 'I have a feeling we aren't in Kansas anymore' moment. What happens then? Exploration, conflict, and consequences.

In short, the PCs explore and investigate the weird. They see how it is different to the normal, how their assumptions (and likewise the out of character assumptions of the players) do not apply to it. They uncover the true extent, nature, and weirdness of the Weird. This establishes the ground for the next stage.

Next up, we have conflict. We know the familiar, and we are becoming aware of the weird. The two are opposed. They simply co-exist as each is incompatible with the stability of the other. So, the Weird will threaten the characters, and try to destroy or weird-ify them.

Perhaps this is violent conflict with monsters, insidious mental effects, traps, environmental dangers, and so on. The weird strikes out at the PCs, and the PCs strike back at it.

Lastly, we have the consequences of this conflict. Perhaps the PCs are weakened, killed, mutated, crippled. Conversely, perhaps they overcome the challenges they face, grow powerful, gain useful things. It's very possible that by overcoming the Weird, they can incorporate it into the Normal (perhaps by seizing magical weapons for themselves – after all, anything the PCs do is the normal default). But, either way, the Weird changes them.

Finally, they will return to the familiar world to recover or enjoy the fruits of their efforts, and the normality of the normal world reasserts itself.

Start in the normal world, cross over into the weird, explore the weird, come into conflict with the weird, suffer consequences, return to the normal world. Repeat. It's an easy pattern to spot. Every trip into a dungeon follows this pattern, for example.

Likewise, because the weird needs to remain unusual, it naturally lends itself to picaresque narratives. Journeys through the comparatively normal where periodically, the PCs cross over into an area of the weird for an episode, explore it and return. Each episode on the picaresque is a new 'weird' to contrast against the ongoing normality of the campaign.

So far, so much arty wank with little application at the table. How to make this useful?

Firstly, understand that the PCs represent what's normal. If your PCs can cast spells, magic is normal. If your PCs can be elves and dwarves, elves and dwarves are normal. If your PCs have easy access to weapons and armour, violence is normal. Anything the PCs can be or do cannot, therefore, be the Weird. Magic, dwarves and fighting are not in and of themselves weird, for most D&D games.

(It doesn't have to be this way. In our normal lives, most of us are not familiar with real violence. In a purely mundane modern-day game, the introduction of warfare, weapons and so on can push things enough away from the 'normal' to be their own sort of weird. Look at the Bates Motel, for example...)

Second, it must be clear when you are no longer dealing with the normal. Clear transitions, marked boundaries, and so on. Make the entrance to your dungeon foreboding. Mark the start of the dangerous wilderness with border fences and sentries. Likewise, when leaving the weird and returning to the normal, put markers in the world for this.

A game that does this very well is Lacuna. By establishing the modern-day corporate world the players operate in, and then the process of plugging into Blue City, the weirdness of Blue City is accentuated and kept defined.

Lastly, the weird needs to stay weird on an out-of-character level. Basically every player by now knows what an orc is. Those that don't soon will if they're encountered more than a few times. So, to keep things weird, you need to vary them. Make them feel new.

The Danger of Skills

by **Brooks Dailey**

The debate between class-based characters and skill-based characters goes back as far as role-playing games themselves, with many modern editions of D&D leaning towards a hybrid of the two. The argument made in favor of skills usually relies on the idea that inclusion of skills allow players to expand what their character can do beyond the specific archetype of their class. I'm here going to argue that the opposite is true:

Skills, by definition, impose limitations on what your character is capable of.

Back in the halcyon days of the three Little Brown Books, OD&D had three classes, each with its own area of expertise: Fighting Men fought, Magic Users cast spells, and Clerics did a little of both with some additional tricks all their own. In addition to their archetypal talents, the premise of the game assumed they were all dungeon-delving adventurers with abilities appropriate to do such. The release of Greyhawk brought us the now-familiar additions of Paladin and Thief, and that's when things got weird.

The Thief is unique in that it was the first class based around having skills. Classically, these were Climb Walls, Hide in Shadows, Move Silently, Pick Locks, and Disarm/Detect Traps. As originally written, the Thief is _Dungeoneer: The Class_. This creates some implicit conflict with the original dynamic of the game.

When Dave Arneson talked about his early D&D experiences, he gave us quite a few details about the way it was played. In the early days, it might well have been the Fighting Man sneaking forward and scouting ahead. The Magic User may have been the one to discover and try to disarm the trap. The Cleric could well be the one trying to jimmy the lock (in the name of their god, of course). Before the addition of the Thief, everyone was the thief.

The introduction of the Thief class changed the way people understood the roles of the classes themselves. Because the Thief has a mechanic for doing certain dungeon tasks, those tasks are now seen as the domain of the Thief that class. Worse, because those rules only appear to only apply to the Thief, it sends the message that the Thief is the only class who could perform those actions.

When there is no mechanic for a thing, it's in the common domain of play. Anyone can attempt it by navigating the fiction. When you introduce a mechanic for something into a game, you codify it and in so doing impose limitations upon it. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it is an inherent side-effect.

To make this less esoteric, consider for a moment Aragorn in the Lord of the Rings. He is the defining archetype of the Ranger, but what you can do as Aragorn changes significantly based on which edition of the game you are playing. In OD&D or AD&D, Aragorn can stand on the wall at Helm's Deep and make an impassioned

speech to bolster the failing morale of his forces. You get up there and do your thing because of course you can do it. You're a big deal adventurer. The GM smiles and nods, maybe even gives you a roll of some kind to see if you give your men a bonus on the fight to follow.

Now pretend we're playing something in the d20 system and there is a Diplomacy, Leadership, or Speechcraft skill that exists to cover this situation. The existence of a skill means that in order for your character to be good at the thing it governs, you need to have invested mechanical resources into making them so. Making matters worse, because there is a mechanic attached there are now rules to follow. Even if you disregard your character's lack of skill and give the speech a chance, the GM may make you roll for it anyway because the rules are there. Now you've introduced a risk. At best, a failed roll takes some of the wind out of your dramatic sails and undercuts the cool speech you just gave. At worst, the GM decides you've dropped your spaghetti because most games are written with the assumption that a bad roll means the character is incompetent.

In an earlier version, you could have found yourself moved by the events of the game and on a whim done something you thought was cool, creating a memorable scene. Now, it is an area of the game that you can no longer meaningfully interact with unless you have built your character specifically to do so. You are buying back the thing you could have done before, had the skill not existed. Before, it was an optional thing that at worst would have been fun to play and at best might have given you a bonus from a GM trying to encourage such things. Now, you have to weigh the risks of even attempting a thing that the game says your character is bad at.

In the 3.5 Ranger's case, this situation is even more punitive. In the 3rd edition games, the bulk of your abilites have themselves become skills. Whatever flexibility you might have gained is immediately lost as you must now buy back with skills all of the abilities that previous editions gave just as part of your class. Even worse, different classes are given access to different skills. Stepping outside of your class is both more expensive and capped at a lower rank. For those keeping score at home, this is a design choice that specifically disincentivizes expanding what your character can do beyond their archetype.

Coming full circle, let's take an even more banal example. In OD&D, AD&D, or B/X, there is no character who cannot mechanically ride a horse at character creation. By virtue of being an adventurer, horseback riding is a thing within your wheelhouse. Now throw in Ride as a skill. In some editions, you can still technically mount a horse without it but only insofar as you are willing to hope that the GM never asks for a roll. Otherwise, you are dropping points into Ride.

In summary, making something into a skill inherently walls that thing off from the open domain of play. If there is no Cooking skill, the game assumes you can cook. The moment such a skill exists, your character is a terrible cook until you invest in their ability to do so.

When combined with classes you often end up with the worst of both worlds: being forced to buy back the abilities you would have already had while the system remains weighted to preserve the archetypes that the inclusion of skills were meant to broaden.

by **Paolo Greco** - Art : **Dean Spencer** *(2015)*

1D6 Thieving

This is a simple system to handle **rogue skill training**, so that each rogue can customize their abilities.

Each thief spent a lot of their time before adventuring honing particular skills, and can allocate 10 pips (or points) at character generation on the List below. Skills start at zero unless otherwise noted:

- pick locks
- climb walls (starts at 3)
- move silently
- hide in shadows
- pick pockets
- hear noises (starts at 1)
- find secret doors (starts at 1)
- read languages
- find and remove traps
- backstab (starts at 2, and is not a normal skill: it is used as an attack bonus, replacing the usual +4 rogues have while backstabbing. If the attack hits, damage is doubled, tripled if the skill is 10 or more)
- use magic items (failure implies a probably disastrous mishap. Scrolls with arcane spells have no difficulty modifier, anything else has at least a -5 modifier)
- use poison (again, failure probably means the thief got poisoned)

Two more pips can be allocated every time the rogue gains a level.

To determine if the skill has been used successfully it is necessary to roll less or equal to the skill with 1d6, with 6 being a failure. However, a particularly high skill (more than 5) makes it possible to roll again: subsequent rolls subtract 5 from the skill for every die. More simply:

- the first roll is against the skill
- the second roll is against skill -5 (so the skill must be 6 or more)
- the third against skill -10 (so the skill must be 10 or more)
- and so on

It's useful to mark skill levels greater than 5 already split in "rolls": for example 7 as 5+2 and 11 as 5+5+1. It's also possible to roll the dice together: differentiate them by colour.

This little system can also be expanded on with new skills, which might require expensive special training. It's also possible to introduce skills where the success margin becomes relevant:

- Appraisal: the character can estimate the value of an object. The precision is given by the margin of the roll: with margin 0 the most significant digit is known, plus one for every point of margin. For example if a character with Evaluate 5 rolls 4 while evaluating a jewel worth 1250gp they will know the two most significant digits (1 + 1 for the margin), so they'll know "about

1200gp". Had he rolled a 5 the result would have been "about 1000gp". Odd objects will have negative modifiers, as well as prices in zones where the character is not used to trading. **Training:** work as an apprentice for a merchant or a fence for a season.

It's possible to also get a bit wild and go for a rogue-only game, and giving our rogues access to martial and magic training:

• Fencing: for every three pips the character gains +1 to hit with a given weapon. The teacher must be a fighter and be a better fencer than the trainee: consider only the base attack bonus and the fencing skill. **Training:** 1 week per pip and at least 50 gp per trainer level per week.

• Wizardry: the character can memorize and cast spells as a wizard of level equal to a fourth of the number of pips. The rogue can memorize spells written in a spellbook provided that, while memorizing, they pass a Read Languages check. If a check is failed, the spell is too hard to focus on, but the character can try to memorize another spell; misread spells are simply not available for the day. To avoid miscasting a spell the character must succeed at a Wizardry test, with a modifier of -4 for every spell level beyond the first. **Training:** 1 month

of mentoring and 50gp per pip plus 50 for every existing pips (the first is 50, the second 100, the third 150, the fourth 200, for a total of 500gp to be able to cast 1st level spells, 1300gp more for the second four pips to get a second 1st level spell slot, 2100gp more for 4 more pips and a second level spell slot).

Other unusual skills can be learnt from sources found during the game, such as secretive guilds and forgotten tomes (refer to your DM).

by **Emmy Allen** - Art: after *The Duellists* movie poster
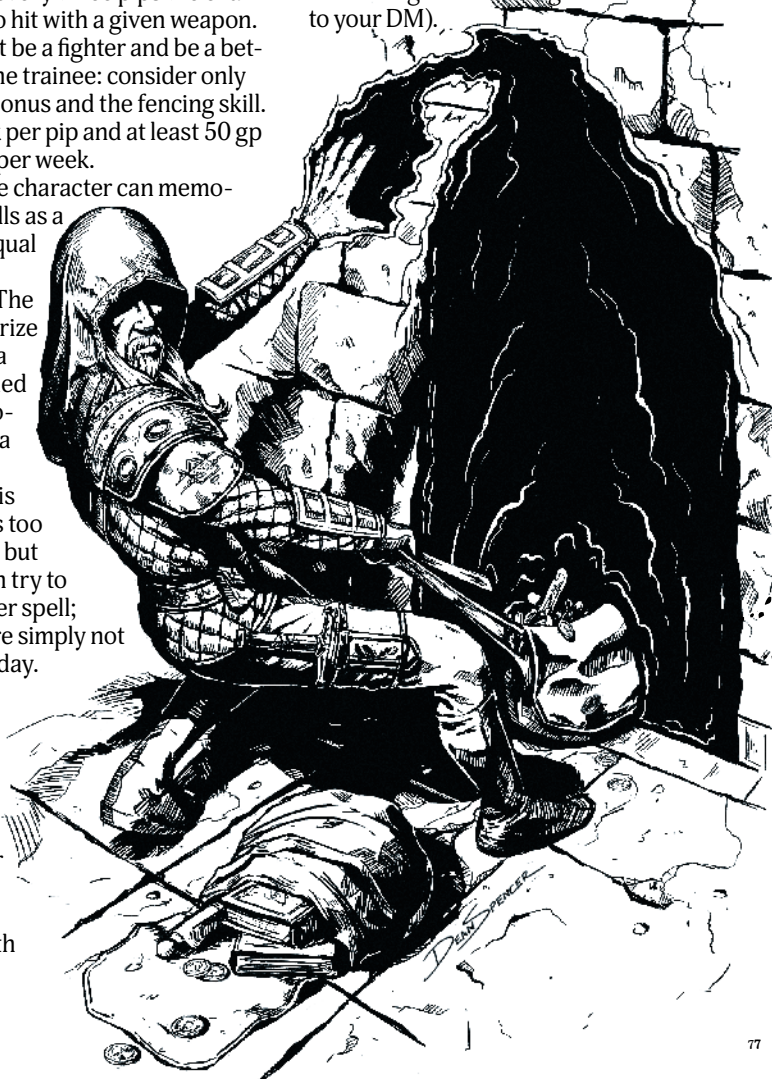
This is inspired by my work on The Dolorous Stroke, but adapted for OSR games.Here's a system for when two characters duel.

DUELS

Duelling requires that two combatants agree to one-on-one combat, and are not interfered with by any third fighter.

Once the duel has begun (which might be in the midst of a larger fight), the combatants continue to fight round-by-round as normal, until the duel ends. The duel might end because one duellist is slain, because a third party interferes, or because one duellist admits defeat or tries to break away from the fight.

The fight is resolved normally, with both sides rolling to hit each round on their action.

At the start of each round, however, both sides must choose their tactic

for that round; either **Push, Parry or Feint**. Each chooses secretly and reveals simultaneously, like for 'rock-paper-scissors'. Compare each fighter's tactics, which will modify the rolls for the round.

• **PARRY BEATS PUSH,** as the parrying character turns away the obvious attacks of the push. The character who parried gets +3 AC.

• **PUSH BEATS FEINT,** as the aggressive push forward batters through the attempts at finesse. The character who pushed does +3 damage if they hit.

• **FEINT BEATS PARRY,** as the feinting characters creates openings to strike past their enemy's guard. The character who feinted gets +3 to hit.

• **IF BOTH SIDES PARRY**, then the duel becomes a defensive stand-off. Both characters get +3 AC.

• **IF BOTH SIDES PUSH,** then they just batter at each other furiously for the round. Both characters do +3 damage if they hit.

• **IF BOTH SIDES FEINT, t**hen the duel becomes a complex dance of strikes and counters. Both characters get +3 to hit.

Feint/Parry/Push are named for sword-vs-sword duels, but you can use the same mechanic for other 1-on-1 fights. **For example:**
A joust has Evasive (+3 AC), Aim for the Body (+3 damage), and Aim for the Shield (+3 to hit).
A firefight with both parties shooting from in cover has Hunker Down (+3 AC), Shoot Recklessly (+3 damage), and Aim Carefully (+3 to hit).
A fistfight has Back Up (+3 AC), Swing Wildly (+3 damage) and Dirty Blow (+3 to hit). And so on.

WHAT'S MY REASONING?

I wanted 1-on-1 fights to have an extra layer of tactics to them, rather than just being 'roll to hit' each round. In my experience reenacting and LARPing, a 1-on-1 duel is a fairly tense affair, with both sides trying to read the other so they can take advantage of their opponent's mistakes. So, the rock-paper-scissors model works well here: predict what your opponent wants to do, and you can capitalize on that.

For predicting your opponent to be viable, there needs to be some asymmetry between the 3 options, otherwise which option is picked will be basically a 1-in-3 random chance. So, each option gives a different advantage if it succeeds, motivating you to pick different options depending on the situation. In a round, the duelist must decide if they care most about not getting hit, about damage if they hit, or about successfully landing a blow at all. If you're losing badly, pick Parry to go on the defensive, for example. Since different combatants will have different talents and priorities, you can take a good guess at your opponent's tactic based off that.

Likewise, it's possible that the situation can make one tactic obvious for you: perhaps you're down to 1 hit point and any hit will drop you. The obvious move here is to parry, for the AC bonus, but your opponent knows that and so will want to go for a feint in order to beat your parry and get that last hit in: if you instead go for a push, you catch them off guard, negating their feint entirely and getting extra damage in.

by **Nobboc the Half-Great**

8 statues
encounters

1) ON AN LONELY HILLTOP

• Twelve basalt idols 10' high in a 30' circle, representing austere crowned men.

• Always quietly mumbling among themselves. Become silent as soon as one tries to listen.

• Empty space clearly shows one statue is missing.

• **Bringing the missing statue** (3 tons) **back**: gain +1 in the attribute of your choice.

d4:

- 1: the missing statue is 6 miles away, in a deep ravine and the new idol for a clan of ferocious, mutant hillfolk.

- 2: the missing statue is 6 miles away, in the middle of a forest and now the favourite perch of a silverback manticore.

- 3: the missing statue is 6 miles away, in the hall of honour of (evil wizard) Zaratazarat's tower.

- 4: the missing statue is on the moon.

2) AT THE ENTRANCE OF A SUBTERRANEAN COMPLEX

• Life sized bas-reliefs of every adventurer's face, each bearing one added ludicrous detail (terribly long nose, crossed eyes, massive wart, etc).

• Whistle to draw attention. Then insult adventurers, spit, reveal embarrassing secrets, etc.

• **If a face is hit**, the corresponding adventurer's takes damages. A face always has as many hit points as the adventurer.

• **If an adventurer dies** (here or elsewhere, now or later), the face crumbles and reveals a niche containing an egg-shaped gem casting malevolent black light. Take it: save vs Death or lose your soul. Value: 1,000 GP, or twice as much to a chaotic zealot.

3) IN A FORGOTTEN LIBRARY CONTAINING ZILLIONS OF BOOKS

• Human-sized, dark green marble statue, representing an old man, his beard down to his feet, sitting on a chair, his gaze lost in the book on his lap.

• Facing gigantic wall of bookshelves.

• **Ask a question:** the statue points its finger towards a book containing the answer (which can be sometimes nebulous or allegorical).

4) IN A DEEP CAVE

• 10' high and carved in a boulder, this statue represents a large, naked woman, with hair down to her feet, globular eyes, prominent fangs, and six massive breasts, holding a large bowl in her hands.

• In front of her: an altar, covered in dried blood, and carved with grotesque faces.

• **Sacrificing a humanoid on the altar**: withish liquid flows from the breasts to the bowl. Cures 1d8 hp for each hit die the victim had.

5) IN THE WILDERNESS.

• Forgotten buried colossal (100' high) stone statue of a cyclops. Only the upper part of the face is visible.

• **Unearthing the statue** :

- Huge endeavour: 1d20 + 20 days for 10 well equipped and well paid workers.

- Statue animates as soon as feet are dug up, and walks straight towards the nearest city destroying everything in its path. It will not stop until the city whose founders buried it centuries ago is razed to the ground. Then, it crumbles to dust.

- Maybe treasure, probably cursed, at the bottom of the excavation

6) IN THE FORGOTTEN CELLAR OF A RUINED CASTLE.

• 6-foot high statue made of palladium. Represents a paunchy, jovial old man sitting like a frog, and arms in the air. «Feed Me! Feed Me!» engraved on his belly.

• The mouth is slightly open. **An item the size of a coin or ring can be slipped inside.** Roll 3d6 after doing so:

- If you get a pair : the statue spits back the item.

- if you get three-of-a-kind: the statue spits a number of exact copies depending on the result of the dice. (111 if you got three 1s, 222 with three 2s, etc.)

- with a triple 6, the statue produces 666 copies and explodes (causing 6d6 damage in a 20' radius)

- any other roll: the item disappears forever.

7) AT THE ENTRANCE OF A TOMB

• Two obsidian statues in the shape of horse-sized scrawny cats, sitting vigilantly on either side of a huge metal door.

• The door is engraved with shimmering illusory runes you must touch in a particular order to open it, as indicated in (evil wizard) Zaratazarat's grimoire.

- **Touching the runes in the right order**: the cats meow and the door opens.

- **Touching the runes in the wrong order:** all within a 30' radius must save vs Wands or be turned into giant rats for 1d10 rounds. The cat statues animate and hunt the rats (treat as faster, crueller mountain lions)..

8) IN THE TREASURE ROOM OF ZARATAZARAT'S TOWER

• A circular room with many locked chests, with a life-sized plaster statue of a masked halfling, with an astonished expression on his face.

• **Attempt to pick a chest's lock:** the statue shouts «Burglar! You're a burglar!». A cloud of green crackling energy envelops the statue and 'burglar'. When it disappears, the halfling tries to make her escape, leaving behind a statue of the unlucky character.

• The cursed character can still see around them. Catching the next burglar will release them.

Very bad art

by **Gabor Lux** - Illustration : **Li-An** *(2010)*
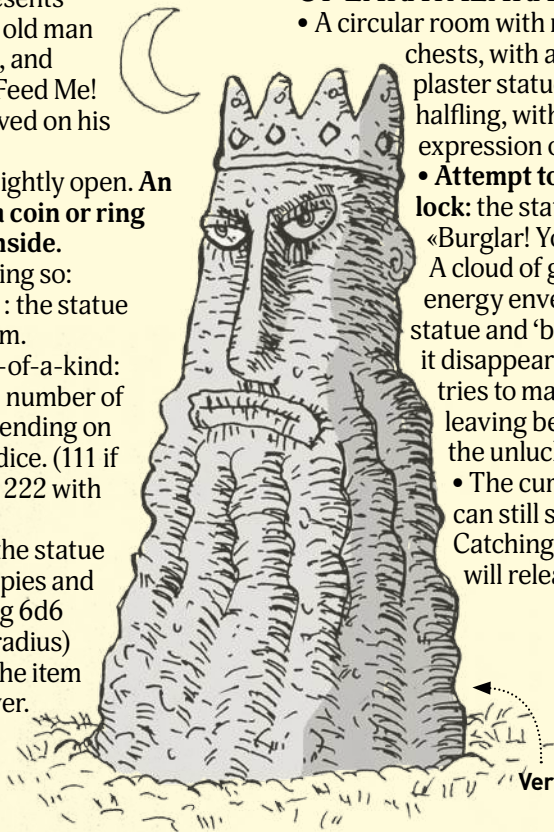
The Overly Thematic Dungeon

The common wisdom surrounding designing dungeon encounters has changed much over the years, yet the question of what makes for a good one, or what makes for a good room mixture has never been satisfyingly settled.

The original approach, developed at the dawn of gaming (and seen in such tattered artifacts as the El Raja Key Archives or First Fantasy Campaign), stressed the game aspect with a very brief key and very sparsely "seeded" dungeon levels. You would spend a lot of your expedition time looking for the carefully hidden lairs and those memorable "special" encounters, and – from our perspective – some of these games might now be described as first-person crossword puzzles.

This philosophy had a relaxed attitude about what goes into the dungeon: anything that's fun and challenging, and damn those pesky questions about why and how. That's how *Citadel of Fire* has an underground tavern on one of its upper level dungeons, how *Castle Amber* has an indoor forest, how *Tower Chaos* has an earth elemental named "Stoney" guarding the china room just off the kitchen, and how *White Plume Mountain* has... well, those canoes are a good start. You can rationalise it, but reason is an afterthought – what matters is the spirit of fantastic whimsy. At best, these adventures are great precisely because they take liberties with realism, and do it well. Without a vivid imagination and the skill to turn imagination into mini-games, the results just feel flat and randomly thrown together

(this problem haunts much of the early tournament scene, including, in my heretical opinion, a significant portion of *The Lost Caverns of Tsojcanth*). The best examples of this approach were always the modules which had a sense of cohesion around them – vague, hard to explain, but there in the background.

Then there is the fantastic realism school,

first expressed in a comprehensive manner by an ancient *Dragon* article whose exact references I cannot be arsed to look up. You know the one. It shows a dungeon room in two states: the original way it looked, and the dilapidated, looted and re-purposed state the party will find it during their expedition. Certainly, this approach provides a sense of realism, of "being there", and it is actually more intuitive than stocking your dungeons with random shit. If your dungeon was a temple, you stocked it with religion-related encounters, and if it was a crypt, you sure didn't put an underground tavern in it (and underground taverns just kinda vanished from the gaming scene). This approach often provided a complete blueprint for your dungeon: if you put in a sacristy, you might as well put in a crypt and a refectory, and how about a bell tower and some stables? It is no accident that this approach, lauded across the game design community, ended up the dominant one for decades, mostly displacing its predecessor. (It was, in turn, succeeded by the modern **"return to the dungeon"** model, a selective (mis?) reading of gaming history, which suggested that the good old days were all about *"killing things and taking their stuff"*, while silently dumping the heavy focus on exploration the actual old games had.)

There are many advantages to semi-realistic encounter design, but it can also go wrong in ways its proponents never considered. From my perspective, the most important of these is the taming of our sense of wonder, either by considering the fantastic impossible and an interest therein juvenile – a notion which had been particularly popular in Hungary, and as I hear, Germany – or by requiring the rationalisation of the irrational. This has a corrosive effect on any kind of fantasy game, but it is particularly damaging to D&D. Once you accept that fantastic things are dumb and beneath a serious person's interest, you remove much of what makes D&D worth playing. A "cabinet contents" dungeon of endless barracks with bits of string and mouldy old boots stuck in a succession of footlockers, or the *"this used to be a scriptorium, where scribes scribed their scripts"* school of pseudo-historical flimflam is often a recipe for a dissatisfying dungeon where nothing interesting happens. It subordinates fantasy to reality, when it should have done the exact opposite. In the end, one gets the idea that these dungeons are not worth playing. *"Told you so"* say the people who never liked D&D in the first place.

Rediscovering the fantastic side of RPGs is an important achievement of old-school gaming.

And there is no reason why we can't learn from multiple design philosophies and take the best they have to offer. My go-to compromise has been to go for thematic appropriateness, an approach found particularly often in Bob Bledsaw's writings. Thematic appropriateness links its encounters to an overall theme (be it a crypt, desert oasis or teeming fantasy metropolis), but operates on the basis of loose associations instead of solid, step-by-step logic.

When you say *"port"*, it says *"old panhandler sells musical sea shells with secret messages, 1:6 of ear seeker"*. When you say *"jail"*, it says *"Bluto and Balfour, two ogres (HP 17, 23) administer regular beatings and serve inmates Seaweed Slop; prisoners are Refren, musical pirate, Harko Fum, beggar of the 4th circle, Mythor Flax, last bearer of Princess Yarsilda's shameful secret"*. There are obvious connections here to a basic theme, but also large jumps of logic – somehow, we got from that port to an ear seeker and from a jail to a princess and her secret, although it does not immediately and necessarily follow from the starting point. You have to believe in your ability to jump to make it – you have to let go a little. This is how dreams connect things in our mind and how the better kind of random tables can prod our imagination: by coming up with odd juxtapositions and fantastic things that nevertheless feel real as long as we don't open our eyes too wide.

This was the conclusion I adopted a bit more than ten years ago. And yet, despite having been well served by the approach in multiple different campaigns, I am finding that it should have come with an important warning: use your themes, but don't let yourself get bound by them. Most recently, I have experienced this the hard way while experiencing a creative block coming up with encounters for *Castle Xyntillan*. As straightforward as designing about three quarters of the castle proved, the remaining quarter (and the dungeon level) has proved a tough nut to crack. I found myself in that state where I am too analytical, too much of a cynic to have good flow – I could probably continue through via sheer willpower, but the result would inevitably disappoint myself. What went wrong? A simple creative block would have been a convenient excuse, but after a little self-examination, I came to the conclusion that I let a coherent vision of Xyntillan overpower my idea of it as a loosey-goosey funhouse dungeon with improbable things. The existing structures and ideas of Xyntillan were closing off the range of ideas I entertained at the beginning. My thought process became path-dependent, predictable. All in all, I needed a break – not just for refreshment, but to forget and let myself wander again in directions I am not expected to go. Xyntillan needed to be less thematic to retain its theme.

Which again proves: there is a point where theory ends and fuzzier realms of the imagination begin; and in those worlds, we must often walk alone.

by **Jason Sholtis** - Art : **Jason Sholtis**
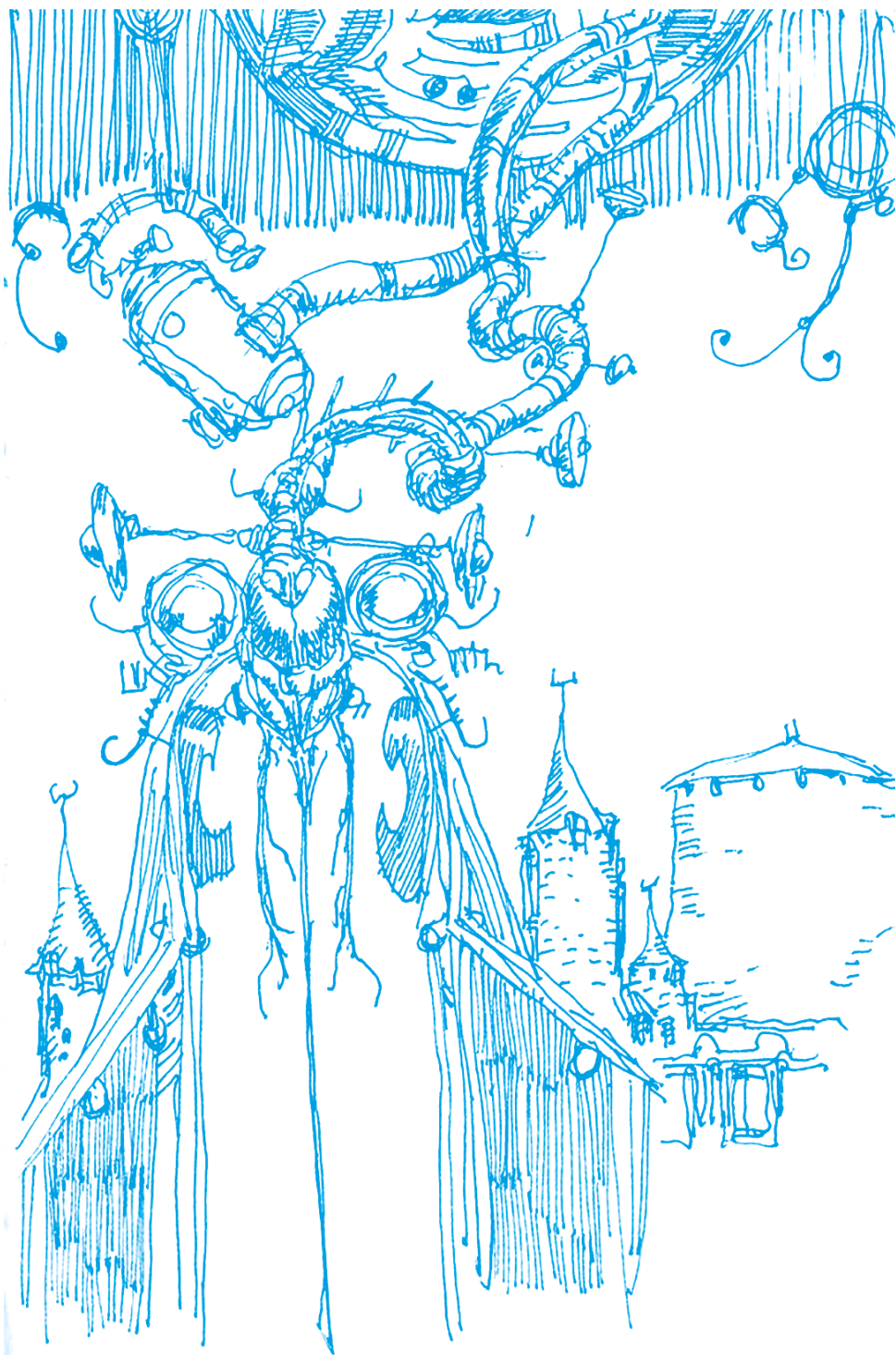
D12 Dungeon Geniuses

1. Telepathic giant spider with preternatural charm and persuasiveness: does what spiders do but with 100% cooperation from all fellow denizens subject to bamboozlement.

2. Caveman who split the atom using only advanced mathematics of his own invention: hunted by sorcerers seeking to exploit his talents.

3. Stone giant sculptor of undeniable originality and talent, gallery after gallery of breathtaking non-representational works hewn from marble and granite.

4. Dungeon pixie of exceptional intellect, arcane mastery equal to magic user of the highest order, has tiny spell book crammed full of unique spells.

5. Man-ape with mutant cerebral development: covered vast cavern walls with incredibly elaborate pictographs of his Rube Goldberg machine-based technological breakthroughs, exiled from his clan for aberrant nerdiness.

6. Living vapor, coalesced just after the origin of the universe, currently incarcerated by wizard: 99% of knowing the answer to any given question, wants its freedom.

7. Slug-man with magically enhanced intelligence acts as oracle, using superior logic and reason to predict future outcomes with a high degree of reliability.

8. Brilliantly insightful serpent man prophet: spreads salvation with the swords of his disciples.

9. Flesh golem with half a brain hemisphere online: now that its creator is dead, dedicated to elucidating the post-human condition through poetry.

10. Giant siliconian worm: consumed crashed alien spacecraft and subsequently assimilated the knowledge of digested computer banks, loaded with cosmic wisdom.

11. Escaped scholar/tutor lich, created by sorcerer as research assistant, now obsessed by its own unfulfilled academic ambitions.

12. Ogre that always wanted to be smart found ring with three wishes, two remaining.

by **Bryce Lynch** - Art by **Li-An**

Better T

"Each player receives a treasure parcel worth 250gp." "Place the treasure you wish in the adventure." "Treasure worth 2,500gp is present." "6 gems forth 50gp each." "Jewelry worth 1,000gp." "a +1 sword." "a broach of shielding." "a potion of flying."
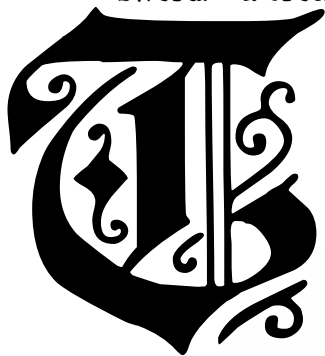
he above, in similar or one form, Is the usual part and parcel of the published adventure. Those treasures suck. No one is excited about finding one of those. *"Ohhhhh! A +1 sword! I'm a bad ass now!"* That's not D&D. That's some generic nonsense masquerading as D&D. Let's not forget: the job of the designer is to communicate imagination and wonder to the DM. That's what we're paying for, the designers imagination. Those treasures don't do it. There's nothing in those. Let's compare those items to an excellent example, from the 1E DMG:

"Seldom is the name of Vecna spoken except in hushed voice, and never within hearing of strangers, for legends say that the phantom of the once supreme lich still roamed the Material Plane. It is certain that when Vecna finally met his doom, one eye and one hand survived. The Eye of Vecna is said to glow in the same manner as that of a feral creature. It appears to be an agate until it is placed in an empty eye socket of a living creature. Once pressed in, it instantly and irrevocably grafts itself in to the head, and it cannot be removed or harmed without slaying the character. The alignment of the character immediately becomes neutral evil and may never change. The Eye bestows both infra vision and ultra vision to its host, and give the following additional powers/effects. The minor or major powers may be used without fear of harm, but the use of the primary power causes a malevolent effect upon the host character."

Now THAT'S a magic item! If I found an agate I'd immediately pluck out my own eye and shove it in the socket. *"DM: You find an agate. ME: I rip out my eye and shove the*

reasure

*agate in the socket! Do I have infravision?!?! DM: No you moron, you do not. ME: Crap! Are there any other agates around in the hoard?"* That's the kind of behavior you are looking for. You want your PLAYERS excited about what they find.

You don't have to go all super-backstory on things either. It's pretty easy to reskin something. A bag of holding? Lame. How about … A Maggot! It's actually a Maggot of Opening. A couple of inches long, squirmy, pale… ie: looks like a maggot. Except it can open its mouth REALLY wide, let's say the size of a fist. It has an extra dimensional stomach so it otherwise acts like a bag of holding and it never digests anything. Ya gotta reach in to pull stuff out. Who knows what else it's swallowed? It tries to digest, so reaching in is a bit slimy and gross. A horn of blasting? The horn is either a tuba or a stork like bird that you squeeze like bagpipes. A potion of flying? How about the potion is full of flies? And the user grows fly wings? Or a scroll of flying that is actually magical window cling film that is used like a tattoo? If you use it on a pig you have a pig balloon… and then what happens when

you eat the pig? All sort of weird and wonderful things happen when effort is added to a magic item. None of that shit happens with "sword, +1".

A +1 sword? Nope. How about AIDRU - SLAYER OF MEN. A longsword engraved the full length with arcane runes. The hilt is bare and will need to be recovered. Created by the death-priests of Ghoekra and wielded during their bloody crusade to rid the earth of all life. Moderately well know; feared and coveted. Drips blood, not because of the creation but through the sympathetic magic caused by all of the bodies it has been soaked in while killing them. Disturbing dreams while possessing; slaughter, etc. +1 hit, causes immediate morale check for any creature/group that recognizes it. (Who then inevitably yell *«Aidru – Slayer of Men!!!»)* Glows with a pale red light and gives the wielder a +1 Charisma bump when wielded BECAUSE OF FEAR! Aidru is a kick ass magic item. If I was playing I would use Aidru long after I found a +2 sword, or even a +3 sword. Fuck those things; they don't cause monsters to yell *"AIDRU! Slayer*
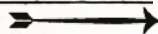
1. A potion of Youth: become 1d6 x 10 years younger, lose 1d8 levels
2. A Lucky deck of cards: becomes cursed and unlucky after 1d20 games
3. A unique charm of Cure... (d4): 1. Incontinence, 2. Rheumatisms, 3. Senility, 4. Impotence
4. The Drake's diamond skull: confers immortality while touched, but weighs 100 lb
5. The sword Kinslayer. 2x damage on wielder's species, 4x on family members and adventuring partners. Tends to strain relationships.
6. A crystal orb containing the damned soul of his long lost love
7. The mountain's copper mine: guarantees low but steady income for up to 10 miners, forever.
8. A +1 ruff: any action attempted while wearing the 3-ft wide, outmoded collar gets the bonus.

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of men!?" A broach of shielding? How about a snake circlet that comes alive and eats magic missiles? See, it's not hard at all! So why the fuck are you putting a +1 sword in your adventure? I'm paying for your imagination... so IMAGINE!

You can see an excellent example of this in *Fight On!* Magazine, issue #3, in the *Spawning Grounds of the Crab-Men*, by Dave Bowman. In one of the rooms you meet a crazy crab-man who has picked up something he shouldn't have ...

«Grog the Gladius is a finely crafted short bronze stabbing sword. Grog glows a dim violet when held by a living being. Grog is a Lawful Sword +1, +3 vs. Dragons. Intellect 7, Egoism 12, with the power to See Invisible. Grog will communicate the presence of such things via Empathy.» It's going to be hard to argue that this represents a wall of text, and yet the magic item is flavorful and is found in an environment (wielded by the crab-man, accidentally) that heightens its interest. Similarly, I just reviewed *They Came from the Stars* from the ... And the sky full of dust blog. The aliens have death ray guns and force field belts. These are nothing more than the same effects of a wand of magic missiles and a broach of shielding. Flavor. Reskin. Repeat. Ambiguity is OK, and even in some sense desired. Boring is not OK.

Further, don't focus on the mechanics. Focus instead on the effects. Too often items gets bogged down in game mechanics. The designer attempts to divine all the ways the item can be misused by the players, or attempts to make the item "make sense." You don't need to do that. Over explaining kills mystery and the DM is present to arbitrate rules. Again, the role of the designer is to inspire, not explain. Kas and Vecna are much more interesting when left as throw-out references in a magic item description. Your magic item is much more interesting when it turns something to concord jam once a day. No volume reference. No details like "save for apricot", no boring shit to weigh the world down. If you are taking a paragraph to describe the game mechanics for the device then you have failed. Magic, Mystery, Wonder, Whimsy, and THE FANTASTIC are the enemies of Aristotle. If you tell me the bumble helmet lets me shoot poison bumblebees from its mouth once a day then I'm cool.

Mundane treasure is similar. Your PLAYERS should want to keep it for their characters, not melt it down in to slag. The treasure in room 46, level 1 of *Dwimmermount* is boring. A jeweled pin. A gold necklace. A comb. Lame. The jeweled pin (800gp) will be adjusted to a jeweled CLOAK pin worth 800gp that is in the shape of scantily clad female elf

beheading an orc. The splattering blood is shown in small rubies. [Someone is gonna keep that one and wear it, for sure!] The gold necklace is a locket and shows the face of a loved one back and a family name that still exists in Marburg today. They would love to have it back (sentimental value) but they are also poor and selling it would make a world of difference in their lifestyle. The comb is part of a 3-piece set. Finding the other two (mentioned previously) brings the value of the set to 200gp. Taking any of the coin treasure will result in wandering monsters being checked for every turn, and they will always be Lab Rats, as long as the coins are carried in the dungeon. That is all SO much more interesting. The PLAYERS are now interested in the treasure. Those items have some backstory, but you don't even need that. A jar of saffron, or ANYTHING with an adjective attached is going to be much better than "gold necklace.»

For my own home game, I keep an entire page of custom gemstones, jewelry, and art objects printed out and handy. I have another full of magic items. When I run across something boring in my DungeonWorld game I consult my chart and substitute. I really like the Chaotic Shiny magic weapon generator. It generates lots of ideas for you to build something off of. Aidru came from there. Just hit the button enough times and something interesting will come out: http://chaoticshiny.com/weapongen.php

¡Its a Trap!

To Roll or Not To Roll?

How do you disarm or avoid a trap without making a roll? Is it possible? Of course it is, let's look at some examples:

Referee: To one side of the road there are bushes with wild berries. They look delicious.

Player A: I approach and start collecting blackberries.

Referee: A snake bites you. You are dead.

Player A: Oh, come on!

Player B: With a ten foot pole, I examine the bushes for any danger.

Referee: When lifting the pole, a snake has curled around it.

Player B: I throw the pole like a javelin and collect the berries.

Referee: There's some haze but you can see the bridge well.

Player A: I advance to the other side.

Referee: You fall and die.

Player A: What?

Player B: I advance slowly so as not to slip.

Referee: You get to the other side without problem.

Referee: There is a door in front of you.

Player A: I open it.

Referee: You trigger a trap. You feel the needle, but you are dead before your body hits the ground.

Player A: Fuck you!

Player B: I look for traps around the lock.

Referee: You don't see anything.

Player B: I use my lockpicks to try to disarm the trap, if there is one.

Referee: You trigger the trap. You are dead.

Player B: Why? It's not fair!

Referee: Okay, you disarmed it.

Player A: It's not fair! You killed me, and you let him live!?

There it is. Traps without throwing dice. Lovely, ennit?

In the first two cases, success is automatic if players take some precautions, but then failure is also automatic if they do not. Is it unfair? No. No, it's not. It's not unfair but it might seem so and people's feelings might get hurt. Adjudication makes sense in both cases, but from the players' perspective, it can seem arbitrary.

In the third case it's more difficult to adjudicate success or failure by just following the fiction, since suspecting that there is a trap and trying to disarm it, is not enough to guarantee that it will be deactivated. Both success and failure feel arbitrary, unfair, and too much like cheating. A referee's job should be easier.

That's why baby jesus invented dice rolls

When players fail after making a dice roll, they won't (usually) blame the referee or believe that their failure is an injustice, but a product of chance although in reality it is not (only) chance: a failure isn't the fault of a bad roll but of a bad decision. You can always choose not to cross the bridge, not to collect berries, not to open the door, doing something else instead, and return later, when you have made preparations, purchased potions, or whatever.

If we follow the rules of the game (as we are supposed to), Mr. Player A will have the opportunity to make a Save versus Poison to avoid dying from the snake bite, and a Save versus Paralysis to avoid falling into the abyss. And both players will have the opportunity to disarm the lock trap with a successful Tinkering roll (or equivalent), and to avoid damage if this roll is failed, making a Save versus Poison; they could even have a bonus to the first roll if they have tools (like Player B has).

Last words

Sometimes you really have to throw dice to discover or disarm a trap (like the proverbial poisonous needle in a door lock), and to avoid damage (or death) if the first roll was failed.

Other times the trap is obvious (such as the slippery bridge) and it only requires one roll to be avoided. Success can be automatic (at the referee's discretion) if appropriate measures are taken (such as walking slowly, wearing mountaineering boots, &c).

Finally, at times the trap is discovered and disarmed by performing a specific action (such as the snake between the bushes that is removed with a pole), and would only require a roll to avoid the effect if sprung.

by **Jack Shear**

What Happened in 1266?

Some of the best game setting inspiration is a casual browse through Wikipedia because the history of the real world is so much weirder and wonderful than any purely fictional setting. Did you know that you can basically search for any given year on Wikipedia and get a nice little list of interesting things that happened over the course of 365 days? Even if you want to bend history a bit, or add fantasy into the mix, it gives you plenty to work with. For example, let's say you want to run a medieval fantasy game... set in 1266. Here's some adventure seeds I came up with on the fly **while reading the Wikipedia entry for that year**:

• Charles of Anjou makes war against the wicked Prince Manfred of Otranto at the Pope's behest. Manfred's Satanic rule of Sicily must be stopped at all costs! (Why not combine this historical event with Walpole's The Castle of Otranto?)

• Mary de Ferrers, a noted witch steeped in occult knowledge, has sealed herself within Liverpool Castle; the agents of King Henry III have so far been unable to overthrow her defenses and force Ferrers's surrender to the crown. (In truth, Ferrers just surrenders... but why not spin this into a siege scenario with added witchcraft?)

• The Scots battle the Norwegian Vikings over the Hebrides. (Any time you have Vikings you pretty much don't need to add anything else.)

• A civil war is being fought on English soil; a group of barons led by Simon de Montfort challenges the forces led by Edward Longshanks–in the balance hangs the threat of the king's submission to the Magna Carta and the dissolution of England's absolute monarchy. (Ditto civil wars.)

• Niccolo and Mafeo Polo have returned from the Pleasure Dome of Kublai Khan with wondrous reports of the wealth and magic of that realm. Kublai Khan wishes to know more of Christianity and the Pope is casting about for a few good envoys. (Mixing a real medieval voyage with a bit of Coleridge is my peanut butter and chocolate.)

• The Mamluk Sultan Baibars has recently captured the castle of Toron from the crusaders; it must be won back to secure further footholds in the Holy Land. (Crusades are plenty action-packed and weird on their own.)

IMPACT

So, you're playing D&D and you're fighting some orcs. All the orcs are armed with feather dusters, so they actually incapable of harming anyone. And your DM doesn't give XP for combat, so they'll yield 0 XP upon death. This combat is a waste of time. You're just rolling dice until the orcs die. The encounter is shit because the encounter has no impact.

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Impact: the ability to permanently change the game. The opposite of impact is fluff.

Impact correlates with how your players care. If no one's invested in the outcome of this encounter, it's hard to have fun. I think a lot of DMs make the mistake of crafting low-impact encounters.

I'll start by talking about combat encounters, but a lot of this applies to non-combat encounters as well.

How To Increase Impact

• Deplete Resources

Yes, depleting their spells/HP/potions is a form of impact. It's low impact, almost by definition. We can do better.

In a lot of published adventures, the fights are strongly stacked in favor of the PCs, who usually don't have to spend many resources to win. The only reason to run a combat like this is to make the players feel cool/powerful (not something I recommend designing for--it happens on its own, when it's deserved) or to teach them the rules (and there are better ways to do this than wasting everyone's time with a fluff encounter).

• Killing Characters

For most players, this is the most impactful thing that can happen. It's also shitty when it happens. We can have a talk about how much lethality is desirable on another post, but the point I want to make is. . .

High risks make people pay attention. For this reason, difficult combats are necessarily high-impact.

Dear non-OSR readers: this is one reason why OSR folks are always advocating for potentially lethal combat. Not because we enjoy rolling new characters, but because the combats are more significant. It's the same reason why lots of sandbox DMs are okay with players deposing kings, burning down cities, and basically just making a mess of things.

I'm not gonna argue that you should make all of you combats brutally difficult. Easy combats have their place. But if you are going to make an easy combat, it needs to be impactful in a different way (see also: the rest of this post).

It's entirely possible for a high-lethality combat have everyone attentive, stressed, and bored. Being trapped in a room with a wight, and no way to hurt it, rolling dice for 20 turns while all of your characters die inevitably. (This is no different from the feather duster orcs, really.)

If you find yourself in a low-impact combat, hand-wave it. Last time I played D&D, my players ambushed three old (non-magical, level 0) priests. Combat took 30 seconds because I just let the player's narrate how they won.

• Mutating Your Character Sheet

When I say *«attack all parts of the character sheet»*, this is what I'm talking about.

This is a pretty broad category. Yes, it includes actual mutations. This is me telling you that

giving the orcish raiders an Axe of Mutation is a great idea. You can destroy items (rust monster), drain levels (wight), etc. (PSA: big negative effects like that should be telegraphed and players given a chance to avoid the combat. Don't ambush players with wights.) You can also mutate items, mutate spells, turn gold coins into copper coins, turn copper coins into silver coins, permanently blind a PC, permanently give a PC the ability to see in the dark, mess with stats, mess with skills, steal an item out of their inventory, burn all the scrolls in their inventory with dragonfire, change their sex, give them curses.

And remember, all of these effects should be telegraphed before you smack the party with them. The idea is to get the party invested in the outcome by raising the stakes, so it doesn't work if the players don't know the stakes.

Angels who can forcibly convert your character to their religion. Since it takes a few «hits» before the PC converts, they have time to run away (which is the point of HP, really).

Nymphs who convince the party to live with her for a two years can also have a pretty big impact on the game. Players should know the risk before they seek out a nymph. And everyone knows to avoid gurgans. Ew.

• «I Search The Body»

Yeah, bread and butter. I know.
PROTIP: Increase player investment by having enemies wield the cool item in combat; don't just leave it in their pocket for them to discover afterwards.

It doesn't even have to be magical. Like, give one of the orcs a whip with an eagle claw on the end of it, and an eagle skull on the handle. Fucking awesome.

Or they have crazy potions. Permanently lose a point of Constitution to enter a super-rage. Make sure at least one orc drinks the potion during combat, with more vials visible inside his vest, so the players know what they get if they win.

Or like, the next time the players crit on the orc, the orcs coin purse rips open and coins spill out all over the floor (in addition to the regular effects of the crit). Show players what the stakes are.

• Gaining XP

Yes, this is a thing that exists.
When I used quest XP in my Pathfinder games, I used to give the players a handout with all the available quests on it, and the associated rewards. I kind of roll my eyes at that sort of thing now, but it accomplished the goal of showing what the stakes were.

• Relates to Other Parts of the Map

This is what I mean when I say «random encounter doesn't mean unconnected encounter». Maybe the really well-dressed orc is the chieftain's son, and asks to be ransomed back when he surrenders. (Random encounters need to be connected to things outside of themselves.) Maybe they're saving the king's life. If they lose this combat, the king will be assassinated. This is also a chance for your players to show their values. Let them have the ability to change the game map, and make sure they know it.

• Information

Maybe the fact that one of the orcs are in the castle at all means that someone probably

smuggled them in. . . but why? Maybe one of the orcs has an incomplete map of the nearby dungeon. Maybe the orcs promise to give you the password to the Wyvern's Tower if you let them escape.

They can also convey setting information, or useful information about the dungeon.

The orcs have their hands tattooed black, indicating that they've trained in Ungra, specialize in killing mages, and were hired at a steep cost.

One of the orcs is carrying lockpicks and is covered in recent acid burns. (Nearby lock is trapped with acid hoses.)

Fluff is Okay

There's nothing wrong with a fun combat. Fluff has its place.

• Respite: Easy combats can be a nice respite after a recent meat-grinder.

•Power Trip: Maybe you're playing with ten-year-olds and the birthday boy needs a magic sword.

• Ambiance: A corpse being eaten by hungry ghosts can really set the mood. (No useful information was learned, no real interaction except observation).

• Personal Goals: There's no benefit to it, but maybe one of the PCs swore an oath to humiliate every bard they came across. Whatever. It's important to their character concept.

• Comedy: Fighting drunk goblins in the middle of a pig stampede.

Just remember that you can raise the impact without raising the difficulty. Maybe give one the goblins a red-hot branding iron. Same damage, but now the character has a QQ permanently seared into their rump.

-Doesn't change the game.

-Can still be interesting (e.g. you meet a peacock-man being devoured by hungry ghosts; he has nothing interesting to say or give).

-Can be good for an ego trip.

Using Impact Wrong

Impact is not the same thing as fun. Use it in ways that your players react to. Maybe they're scared of dying and despise lethal combat. Maybe they want to be heroes and respond really well to civic heroics, such as king saving.

Just be mindful of impact the next time you throw a random group of 3d6 goblins at your party. Don't let it be just fluff.

by **James Holloway**

My Aesthetic is
PATHETIC
And Yours Can Be Too.

"Everyone in this party is a scoundrel, except for Tag, who is a ruffian. Oh, and Frances, who is a weirdo."

I said this quite casually during the D&D campaign that brought me back to fantasy role-playing, but it's stuck with me through the years, and I still use those categories – ruffian, scoundrel, and weirdo – to divide player characters. For me, this was the thought that led me toward what I would come to know as "the pathetic aesthetic."

The term "pathetic aesthetic" originally comes from music criticism, but I first saw it applied to gaming in a blog post by Andy Bartlett*. In that post, Bartlett describes a style of gaming found in early D&D and especially common in British games such as Fighting Fantasy and early Warhammer: a style of gaming filled with *"elements that aroused pity over awe."* In these early games, characters were exceptional – but not superheroic – people dealing, not always successfully, with dangerous situations using quick thinking and improvisation. Failure was a real possibility and death could be sudden. Bartlett argues that a gaming world focused on bigger, more heroic characters and bigger, more dramatic situations has lost many of the pleasures of games about poor suckers in bad trouble deep underground.

Bartlett's description tracked with what I liked about some of the fantasy games I'd played in. The feeling of risk, of frantic improvisation; the humble, grubby aesthetics that introduced a

* https://drbargle.blogspot.com/2013/02/the-old-school-is-pathetic-rant.html

note of absurd humour; the grim satisfaction of ganging up on a much more powerful foe and delivering a jail-house-style beatdown. I'm not dogmatic about this style of play. It's a thing you can have in your games if you like it, or not have if you don't; I happen to like it, even if it's not for every session.

A lot of people who enjoy this type of play came to it through one of the games of the 1980s, but that wasn't true for most of my players, and they still had a great time. Even if you grew up with more heroic games – or are completely new to RPGs – there's a lot to enjoy here.

So how do you bring the pathetic aesthetic into your games?

Andy Bartlett seemed to think that there were certain system elements you needed, and I think that can certainly help. But I ran that first game in D&D 3.5, which is hardly the ideal system for the old-school dungeon-delving experience. While I agree that quick, random character generation, swingy lethality, and a system that rewards cunning all do help, there are plenty of ways you can inject some pathetic into your game.

In my experience, the best way to inject a little pathetic aesthetic into your game is to ground some of the game in the small things of everyday life. This could include monsters; for instance, consider the humble dog. **A character eaten by wolves is dying in a tragic, heroic way, while a character eaten by dogs is dying in a horrific, ridiculous way.** This applies even if there's no mechanical difference between wolves and dogs. It's not the rules that make a thing pathetic; it's how the players feel about it. You can apply the same thinking to weapons. In a system where all weapons do 1d6 damage, there's no difference between a rapier and a sharpened screwdriver, except that getting killed with a screwdriver is a pauper's death. If the thing that kills you is something you might find in your own garage, the pathetic aesthetic applies.

Perhaps most importantly, the pathetic aesthetic is about the characters. A suitably unimposing group of player characters can paint a layer of grime over the noblest and most impressive quest. Self-interested dirtbags, scheming opportunists, deluded fanatics and naïve idiots find themselves in the kinds of environments where sensible people don't go. These kinds of characters give players permission to make bad-but-fun decisions. They also inherently add a note of the absurd: while going into an ancient ruin to fight monsters, retrieve the Blue Jewel and save the world might make a certain kind of sense, descending into the depths as part of a hare-brained get-rich-quick scheme is an inherently funny idea.

Humble, grubby and dangerous, adventures in the pathetic mode offer something different not only from the heroic excess of mainstream fantasy gaming but also from the high-art gonzo that represents the other major strain of the OSR.

Even if it isn't your regular style, try spending some time as a copper-pinching, monster-fleeing, trap-fearing wretch with a rusty dagger. **It isn't glorious, but it's fun.**

by **Nobboc** & **Éric Nieudan**

- d20 Hooks -

Why the fuck
did you enter
the Goblin caves ?

1 – The purple-lightning storm outside seemed more dangerous than this.
2 – Goblins kidnapped one of your fellow adventurers and the bastard owes you money. 3 – You drunkenly bet your horses that you could bring back seven goblin heads before noon. 4 – You heard that the goblin boss is hiring adventurers. 5 – A weird halfling offered you good money for goblin babies. 6 – The magician Zaratazarat needs fresh kidneys, brains, and eyes, for his alchemical research. 7 – Momtholta the spider wants her caves back. She will grant a favour to whoever drives the goblins out. 8 – The miners guild suspects there is a silver vein deep in the caves. Find it and you'll be rich. 9 – A successful adventurer says the caves are only the first level of a huge complex full of treasure. 10 - Zaratazarat the magician needs to know if this new protection from goblin spell actually works. 11 – You've been hired by a knight who secretly wants you to steal his cursed sword. 12 – You're escorting the famous geologist Concrescero who wants to investigate a talking stalactite in room #239. 13 – You've been told that goblin hirelings are the best value for money in this economy. 14 – Sir Gorghius, the half-orc paladin, wants to "beat some religion into the little fuckers' heads." 15 – They're not goblins! They're famished deserters with face paint who prey on credulous merchants. 16 – The goblins abducted the son of a gnome village chief who doesn't want to pay the ransom. (Actually the young gnome and his goblin lover need the gold to start a new life in the big city.) 17 – Local farmers are dying of the Grey Death, a plague that was traced to these caves. 18 – The goblin witch stole the divine secret of goblin parthenogenesis. She must die for her crime! 19 – A magically gifted thief stole your most valuable possession and ran away. You tracked them to the entrance of these caves. 20 – Raiders of the Goblin Caves is listed in Tenfootpole's "the best" category.

by **Nobboc** with **Eric Nieudan** - Art: **Matthew Houston**

d20 Magic Helmets

Helmets are cool. Helmets are fun. Helmets are a good way to distinguish your full-plate wearing warrior from the rabble. Helmets are the Last Chance Save. And quite frankly, I think that fighters without helmets look like shit.

My rule for helmets: once per encounter the character is hit but before any damage dice are rolled, the player may declare: «I trust my helmet!» and roll 1d6 (adding +1 for a magic helm). On 4-6, the damage is canceled, on 1-3 it is doubled.

1 - *Pulphilos*. Dark green bronze **CRESTED HELMET**. ESP once per day. Disturbing voices in your head and horrible headaches for the next night (no resting benefits).

2 - *Owlie*. Titanium **BARBUTE**. Infravision. When the wearer is next in daylight, or takes off the helm, save vs Wands or become blind for the amount of time you used the power.

3 - *Tangrisnir*. Massive **RAM-HORNED LEATHER HELM**. Every hour, 1-in-6 chance of bleating vociferously for a few moments. Cast Knock once per day.

4 - *Hob*. Always clean, sparkling **KETTLE HAT**. Anything organic boiled in it is hopelessly bland but always edible.

5 - *Godhic*. Sinister dull black CHAINMAIL COIFF. Twelve living eyeballs encrusted in mail. Wearer can see in every direction. Immune to back stabbing. Charisma is -2 with most people, and +2 with mutants, warlocks, and other weirdos.

6 - *Matilda*. Glamourous **FROG-MOUTH HELM** encrusted with colourful and indestructible gems. +1 to AC (distracting) and +1 to Charisma. If touched by anyone but the owner, explodes for 1d12 damage. Owner's face is marred by incurable leprosy (-4 to CHA when helm is off).

7 - *Xororox*. Large **SKULL** of a (now dead) murderous arch-wizard. Cast black psycho-lightning (6d6 damage in a 20' radius) at will! Putting the helm on drains a level.
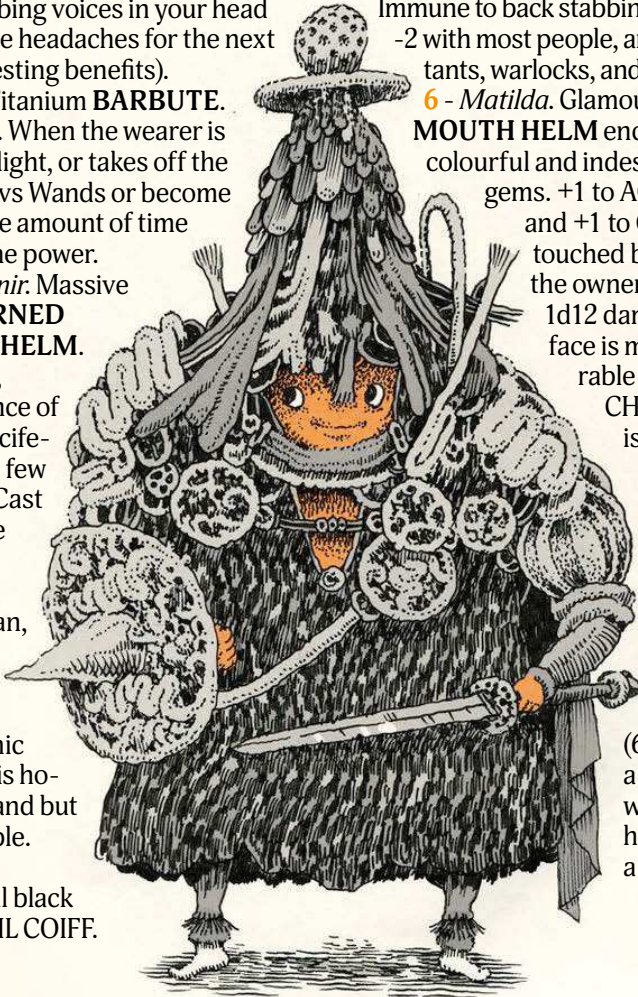
8 - *Brakamar.* Crimson **BASCINET** forged in a volcano. Fireball once per day. Can only be cast around the wearer, who takes damage as well (but saves at +4).

9 - *Gyro.* Shiny **GREAT HELM**, casting flashing red and blue lights when goblinoids are within 100 feet. Everyone but the wearer must save vs. Paralysis or attack with a penalty of -1d6.

10 - *Ylary.* **CERVELIERE** of hammered red silver with a red feather. Once per day, the wearer can perfectly mimic a face they know for 6 turns. Save vs. Wands afterwards, or the wearer's head looks like an attractive lizard person's for the next 6 hours

11 - *Flash.* **SALAD HELM** with sweeping red light through eye slit. Mighty impressive.

12 - *Sufikk.* Extravagant, cone shaped **SCALE HAT** with bone trinkets, talismans and tiny bells covering the wearer's face. Casts Mirror Image, Blur or Hypnotic pattern as long as bearer dances like a whirling dervish on acid. Dancing reduces the character's Wisdom by 1 point per turn (recovered at the rate of 1 point per full night's rest).

13 - *Artye.* **MORION** with encrusted ivory stars all around which gently shine in darkness and vividly glow when extraterrestrial or extraplanar creatures are in the vicinity.

14 - *Björnsson.* **GALEA HELMET** topped with a polar bear pelt. Bear hug attack once per encounter: 2x claw (1d4); if both hit, crush for 2d8 da-

mage. Save vs. Spells to resist fishing with your hands when near a stream, taking down bee hives, oversleep in winter, etc.

15 - *Maratha.* Light **GODEN-SCALED HELMET**. Wearer can turn into a pangolin for a total of 6 turns every day. Upon assuming their normal form, their mouth is full of fire ants. Save vs Poison to spit them out without taking 2d6 damage.

16 - *Squeak.* Battered and rusty **SPANGENHELM**. Entirely ineffective as armour. Creaks and wails when the wearer is about to touch a cursed item.

17 - *Sélénite.* Moonstone encrusted **LOBSTER-TAILED POT HELMET**. Once per day for a turn, breathe in any environment and resist fire and cold. Save vs Spells whenever exposed to the night sky (for the first time in the day) or gaze thoughtfully at the stars during a full turn.

18 - *Leonessa.* **SALLET** shaped like a cat's head. Acrobatics are really easy (+4 to ability checks, +2 to saves). Alignment switches to Chaotic.

19 - *Karu-Kura-Shu.* Red lacquered **KABUTO**. The wearer takes half damage from falls and collisions. They can extend the protection to as many people suffering from the same source of damage, but take 1d6 damage for each one of them.

20 - *Rhün.* Elven **HOLLOW HEAD**, made of sculpted ironwood. Looking at its angelic face causes fear in all non-elves (save vs Spells). A non-elf wearing it wants to murder all elves (save at -2).

by **Gabor Lux**

The Tapestry and the Mosaic Box: On the Scope of Module Design

The inspiration for writing this article has been Pookie's review* of Echoes From Fomalhaut #02. Positive reviews make you feel good inside, while critical reviews make you rethink the things you are doing, and why you are doing them. Something Pookie has criticised (in a point he has also brought up WRT issue #01) was the apparent purposelessness of the adventures in the zine: that is, the lack of strong plot hooks and background information to get the player characters involved. This is a fair point, but it is something I do entirely on purpose (sorry!), because I believe it ultimately makes the adventures stronger, and more suitable for others' home games. Our disagreement lies in our ideas about what should go into the module text (what should be its scope) — except we may not actually be disagreeing at all.

The purpose of adventure modules is to assist the GM in setting up and running a home game. This much is obvious, even if many people use them for loose inspiration for home games they are or aren't running. At the end of the day, they are a combination of a reference document and inspiring material – a module communicates an idea about running a game, something which can't be faithfully replicated, but which can be recaptured and created anew through our collective imagination. It is both "the" Keep on the Borderlands and your own Keep on the Borderlands. Adventures are personal and products of the moment, while modules are fixed in terms of both intent and time. Good modules recognise and accommodate this contradiction as an integral feature of role-playing games, something which separates them from literature and drama (I will not consider here the failed forms of adventure design which try to imitate either). They create the potential for action and adventure

– we could say the module is the question, and the game around the dinner table is the answer. Much has been written about why some adventures work so well in creating memorable game experiences and some don't; this article focuses on one aspect of published modules – the relationship between their scope and purpose.

In my mind, there are two main approaches setting the scope for published old-school modules: we could call one the tapestry and the other the mosaic box. There are no clear boundaries between them, and both encompass multiple different sub-types, but the basic distinction is present. The tapestry is what we would consider a mostly self-contained scenario. In this case, all the necessary information you might need to run a home game is presented in the text, in a more or less set way. TSR's classic module line is a prime example of this design approach. These modules, many of them originating in tournaments, have a fixed premise (from "stop the giants" to "explore the Ghost Tower of Inverness") and assumed boundaries of play, which suggest the scope of the described material. They also have set structures; the way the bits and pieces in the adventure connect together are decided in advance. The module is "complete" with its elements already in place – like a colourful tapestry, it has been woven together, and the threads are there to hold it together. This approach gives the adventure a focus which makes them straightforward to use and rewarding to play: the players are motivated, the action flows well, and the conclusions are memorable.

You are not going to make friends with the giants. Theoretically, you could (it is a valid solution to convince them the drow are probable oath-breakers and using them as disposable cannon fodder against human kingdoms who will eventually hunt them down), but you probably won't. The adventure works from this assumption, and sets out to describe what you need to run the adventure. There are possible courses of action and probable outcomes – dungeons, for instance, can be described as flowcharts, and flowcharts have more or less likely paths in them, as well as beginnings and end points. At the end of the day, either you or a lot of giants will be dead, you may or may not have discovered why they are raiding the human lands beyond the lulz and plunder, and you might have found a few bothersome details which present a greater mystery behind the giant clans. The module is over for most intents and purposes, and you may move on to the next one.

These adventures are not closed systems. They are adaptable to different campaigns and circumstances; they are sometimes considered generic, but what campaign world doesn't have a place for a bunch of evil slavers to kill, or bands of rampaging giants to stop? They also offer up interesting and worthwhile choices which can lead the participants to different (anticipated or entirely unplanned) conclusions. The boundaries which exist in presentation are permeable in play; the module's scope is not rigid. You can expand, repurpose, and in a way, "break" these modules, from exploring

the unwritten parts of *Descent Into the Depths of the Earth* to flipping *Keep on the Borderlands* on its head*, and breaking the great piggy bank that is the keep itself. These choices exist as unwritten potential due to both the adventures' focus (they describe what they need to describe) and flexibility (they leave open what they don't need to describe). The possibility is there if you need it, although in most cases, the players won't cross the module's planned boundaries. Many will head into the ogre cave or the minotaur lair in the Caves of Chaos; fewer will choose to seek out the Cave of the Unknown on the edges of the wilderness map, and very few indeed will set up a deal with the denizens of the Caves to lead merchant caravans into their ambushes to split up the resulting loot (and, this being D&D, the easy XP!). You are not running the module wrong if only the first one happens, although it can be very cool if all three do.

Let us move on to the other approach, the mosaic box. This is a much looser and more probabilistic way of giving you playable materials, and it should come with a standard warning: "Some assembly required!"

Mosaic box modules are as notable for the content they choose to exclude as they are for the material they have. They come as loose frameworks of disparate components whose connections and place must be decided by the GM, or even spontaneously "discovered" with the group over the course of play. These frameworks are incomplete because they invite further input to make them work; they are also open to all sorts of use and abuse. This approach was pioneered by Judges Guild's early products: not always ready-made adventures per se, but play aids which could range from "adventure construction kits" to "adventure components" (the original meaning of the word "module" – an interchangeable component you can insert into our own design!) It also crops up in TSR's output, most clearly in *The Secret of Bone Hill*, a multi-purpose adventure kit if there ever was one, but also in *The Lost City* and other looser site-based adventures. These modules have a different take on information design, and a different scope. Some of the high-level
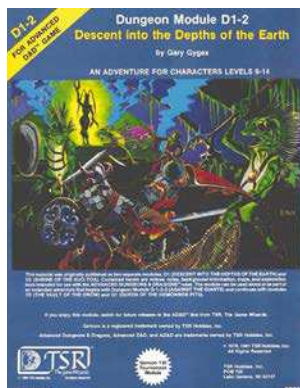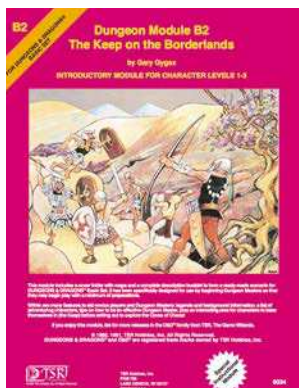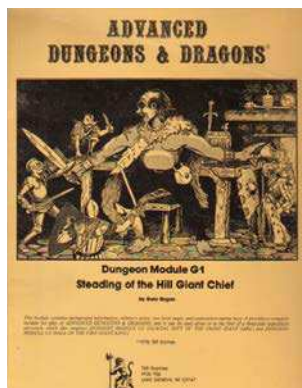

* See p 128 for some ideas

information is not present on purpose. Many of these modules have no pre-determined goal or even a set way to engage with their content: there are easy guesses but no universal answers. *The Thieves of Fortress Badabaskor* never tells you how to approach it (not even in an out-of-game way like Gary's classic "Realms of Man" intro to B2), even though it easily could. The owners of the titular fortress are bandits and other assholes who maintain a slave market on the premises; the dungeon is half their hideout and half the headquarters of an evil cult, separated by a level containing a cluster of super-deadly dragons. You could do a lot of things in and around this bizarro universe Keep on the Borderlands (or its one-page cousin, Huberic of Haghill), and the way your GM integrated it into his campaign would probably set the stage for the way you ought to approach it, but there is no firm premise like in the G series. Interestingly, even the lines between good and evil, friend or foe are less clearly drawn.

   It goes further. *The Thieves of Fortress Badabaskor, Tegel Manor* or *The Secret of Bone Hill* present a fairly systematic, organised playground to explore and have fun with, but the outlines, relationships and boundaries can become even more blurred. Hex-crawls,

city supplements and other sandbox settings (even those which don't present physical settings but, for instance, social relationships and interpersonal conflict) are truly mosaic-like in that they are composed of several bits which may or may not be connected by a network of pre-set relations. The pieces can connect virtually any way, since there are so many of them and they are typically linked in a fairly loose manner. Perhaps there is a war going on between the island-kingdom of Croy and the city state of Warvik; perhaps the nearby islands are connected via a smuggling ring the characters might come into conflict with; and perhaps the assassins' guild from Zarthstone is fanning the flames of conflict from the background. It could, however, also be that Croy and Warvik co-exist in an uneasy alliance against the smugglers, descended from a group of freedom fighters the
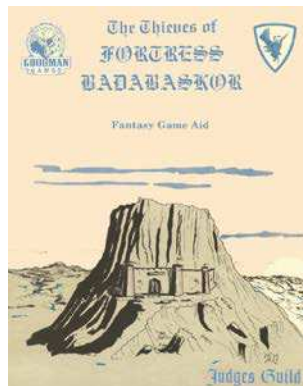
characters may team up with; and that the assassins are minding their own business while doing stuff for the highest bidder. Which piece goes where and how is your responsibility, but they will prove useful either way.

The eventual purpose of the material is created by the GM, or the GM and the players working together and surprising each other. This kind of module is a framework to insert your own adventure scenarios into, and a puzzle where the pieces might fit together in a dozen different ways. Some uncertainty is actually fairly helpful in this situation. Ideally, not spelling out the connections lets other GMs discover their own, and leaving some things mysterious evokes a sense of wonder which is conductive to personal imagination. We can actually see this well in tapestry-style adventures: the most intriguing and speculated-on parts of the G-D series involve the role of the Elder Elemental God and his abandoned temples, while the Caverns of Tsojcanth leaves open the mystery of Iggwilw. Leaving those doors open is essential for less deterministic scenarios! In the case of the mosaic, presenting a complete pattern (as opposed to a vague outline or a departure point which can lead in several possible directions) would defeat the purpose of handing you the box of pieces, just like LEGO has been reduced from its early universal sets to highly specific, expensive collectibles.

There are multiple possible scales here as well.
We could bring up JG's less known *Verbosh* (a complete mini-setting complete with wilderness, dungeons and multiple towns, which are sufficiently described to serve as adventures), *Portals of Torsh* (a self-contained alternate world reached through magical gates, again containing multiple towns and adventure sites), or the more recent *Vault of Larin Karr* from Necromancer Games (a mini-setting describing a valley, its communities and dungeons, all connected in various ways). At the end of the line, we could have the likes of the now sadly out of print *City Encounters,* an excellent 600-entry city encounter table which is a full-on toolkit and has very little explicit structure. And yet, *City Encounters* does have rhyme and reason: through a myriad unrelated encounters which might take place, it presents a certain idea of a grand city, sinful and dangerous; generating conflict, adventure, and even links between the different entries through the table's consistent application. You could run a city campaign with nothing more than this supplement, a good map, and perhaps one or two pages of background.

The mosaic approach is fun but tricky. While we may correctly assume game materials made this way allow for a high degree of freedom, this freedom is not always easy to achieve, nor necessarily superior to a focused play experience. The absence of concrete hooks and boundaries can be immensely liberating, or it can halt a game right in its tracks. I enjoy the sandbox gaming they foster and accommodate, but also see a lot of online discussions describing dysfunctional or even "false" sandbox play: because the players are lost, because there is a communication pro-

blem between the GM and the players about how they should play in an open setting; or because there is subtle railroading going on (you can do "anything" but only the GM's assumed adventure will be "real" or provide a fun play experience, etc.). This approach is neither universally applicable nor truly superior to the more focused tapestry approach.

Finally, where does this leave me? I have employed both approaches to adventure design, and don't consider them an either/or proposition. I gravitate slightly towards the second in running a campaign, but my published materials are often closer to the first. It is generally easier to write a focused module because it lends itself to a logical and structured presentation. The mosaic box approach works more on intuition, making connections and leaps of logic; therefore, its design is often more impressionistic and reliant on imagery and loose association. This is always harder to do, so it happens less often, even if it comes fairly easy to me by the table.

However, I also think that even more structured and precisely adventures are fairly easy to place in someone's game with some forethought and adaptation, and that they benefit from keeping them reasonably open and a bit mysterious. This is why the majority of the adventures and campaign materials I have published in *Echoes From Fomalhaut* (and

before it, *Fight On!, Knockspell*, and various places all over the Internet) are "missing" bits and pieces, and aren't coming with strong adventure hooks and specific setups. I find it interesting that multiple people have singled out *The House of Rogat Demazien* from among my stuff as something they have used and enjoyed in particular. For some time, this came as a complete surprise, since Rogat Demazien was never more than a minor project, an afterthought to the much more complex city-state of Zothay; it was also directionless without offering more of an adventure hook than "it is there and there may be treasure involved". And yet, it has been reasonably popular with people. And that's my guess now: while a bit aimless, it is on the right scale, it is adaptable, and it is open enough for multiple different purposes. This has been my guiding philosophy for the materials I am releasing for the Isle of Erillion mini-campaign, too: they will make sense as pieces of the whole, but they will also be useable on their own (future releases from our City of Vultures campaign will be a bit more tightly integrated, but they will also retain a basic modularity and open-endedness).

Make no mistake, this is not a universal solution, but it is the way that, at least to me, makes personal sense.
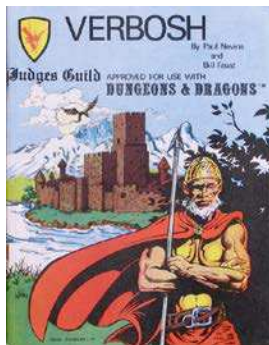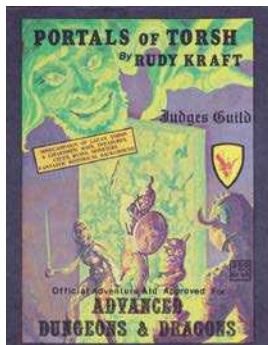
Liven Up Those Corridors!

by **Graphite Prime**

Dungeons are a thing of beauty, but too often I see empty, endless looping corridors where nothing ever happens save for the occasional wandering monster. Mazes are awesome, options are great, but what is beautiful, isn't always playable.

Take Map A above.

All good right? Nothing you haven't seen before. But unless something happens in those passageways, you're going to waste a lot of time slogging from room 1 to 2 (especially if someone's mapping.) It might look cool, might be fun to draw, might look fun to play, but it kind of isn't. You could just do this:

Map B might seem dull,

but it's gonna make your session run a lot smoother. You just saved about 20 minutes of unnecessary slog. But that's no fun. You want that dungeon to be a labyrinth. You want that sense of exploration. You want those players cautiously peeking around every corner. You want them interested in the entire place... not just the rooms. Too often, hallways are just time-killers.

They shouldn't be. Almost every time the players turn a corner something interesting should happen. This doesn't have to be a fight, just something interesting. Dungeons should not only be places of danger, but places of wonder.

Now look at Map C below.

I've added a fountain, a one-way door, an altar, a statue, a portcullis, a curtain, some stairs, and a huge pile of rubble -- all outside of rooms. Not everything will be dangerous or meaningful, but the players sure as hell don't know that. Every turn of a corner becomes interesting now.

Many of these objects should do something. There should be a trick, something hidden, a treasure, a trap, a penalty, or a perk. At a minimum on Map C, the players will have two encounters while traveling between the two rooms. These encounters can make sense or not make sense, but most of them should adhere to the theme of the dungeon.

And that's all it takes to liven up the place. Now that small, 2-room section of dungeon is packed full of goodness.

by **Chris McDowall** - Illustration : **Didier Guiserix** (Casus Belli, 1982)
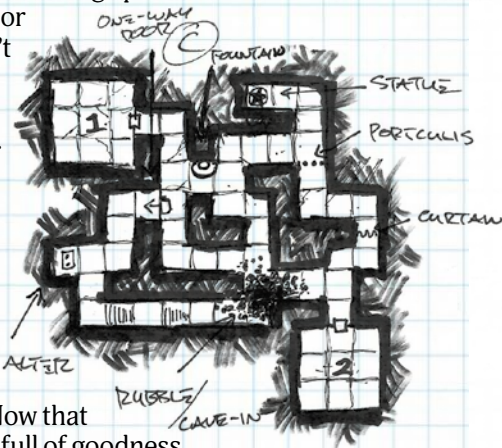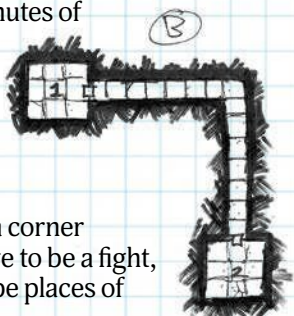
My measure of a good trap:
· At least one part of it is immediately visible.
· It allows interaction and investigation.
· it has impactful consequences for the victim.

34 Good
TRAPS

I've gone on before about the three pillars of running a good game (Information, Choice, Consequences) and you'll notice they match up with these three points.

In short, your trap should have room for interesting interaction between «oh, a trap!» and «I'm dead». The trap doesn't have to announce itself immediately, it can even «trap» the players before announcing itself as long as there's still room for interaction beyond that. You can break the rules if it's connected to the theme of your specific scenario. Like your Tomb of Horrors style deathtrap dungeon might be full of hidden traps that don't announce themselves, but you're breaking that rule as a specific exception for this particular dungeon. If you're going to do this, make sure the payoff is worth breaking the rule for.

Context is also important. You don't just stick a trap in a corridor and call it a day. Connect the trap to its location, most typically a passageway to somewhere desirable, a piece of treasure, or link it in with a monster. You wouldn't just drop a monster into an empty room, so give trap placement the same level of consideration.

I blur the line between puzzles and traps a lot, but here I'm sticking to things that are placed deliberately to impair intruders, with nasty consequences.

So here are 34 good, simple traps. Some classics that meet the benchmark, some new stuff I just made up, some lodged in my brain but originally stolen.

01 - Open pit onto deadly spikes. Both sides of the pit are sloped into it and greased up.

02 - Concealed pit into piranha-filled water.

03 - Metal sword audibly humming, hooked up to electric charge.

04 - Green Devil Face with gaping mouth. Anything going into the mouth is annihilated.

O5 - A fishing rod propped up and cast into a lake. The rod is covered in fast-acting glue and tension on the line triggers a springboard beneath the victim, casting them into the lake.

O6 - A column of light. When a being enters they are frozen, and an evil duplicate of them is conjured. The victim is only freed when the duplicate is killed.

O7 - Walls dotted with arrow-slots. Any movement in front of them fires the arrow, but each hole only has one arrow.

O8 - Upside-down spiked pit on the ceiling. Gravity is reversed under the pit.

O9 - Clusters of bright orange fungus growing on one or more corpses. Any disturbance triggers a deadly spore explosion.

10 - Glass vials of green slime hung from a ceiling, a guard with a crossbow watching from behind a barricade.

11 - Two panes of glass blocking passage, filled with deadly bugs.

12 - Shimmering, thick air that slows all movement down to a quarter of normal. Guards with missile weapons waiting around the corner.

13 - Glossy, friction-less floor and spiked walls.

14 - A metal room filled with crushed remains, visible moving parts to floor, and a sealed door leading forward. Two buttons. One opens the door, the other seals all doors and commences the crushing process.

15 - A peephole blocked up with glass fragments. Breaking the fragments releases a toxic gas.

16 - Giant chomping blade that must be passed through to progress. Visible pressure plate on either side. Blades are triggered when a pressure plate is released, unless the other plate is also depressed. Going slow poses no risk.

A

17 - Stuck door with a gold snake-head handle. The handle will bite and poison anybody putting their hand near, unless they slip a coin into its mouth, allowing safe passage through the door.

18 - Disguised springboard, launching the victim straight up into the air. There is a hanging bar they can grab to avoid the fall, but weight on the bar triggers the release of giant spiders onto it, and rained down onto anyone below.

19 - Room dusted with a deadly white powder. Any rapid movement disturbs the powder, sending it into the air and then the lungs of anybody breathing nearby. Hidden pressure plate in the centre of the room triggers a loud siren, alerting any nearby threats.

20 - Locked door, key visible in a stinky fountain.
The liquid is fast-acting acid, the key made from a special resistant ceramic.

21 - Rope bridge primed to split in the middle when the majority of the crossing weight has passed the mid-point. The characters can grab their half of the bridge and climb back up easily enough.

22 - Damp, underwater tunnel with glowing treasure at a visible dead end. A pressure plate halfway through triggers flooding of the tunnel. A normal human could get back to the tunnel exit with breath to spare, but not if they try to grab the treasure first.

23 - Two doors in sequence. First sprays anybody passing through with highly flammable liquid. Second spits out a flash of flame, harmless on its own but enough to ignite the liquid.

24 - Sloped walkway in a freezing cold room. Pressure plate halfway up releases a flood of water down the slope, freezing near instantly.

25 - Haunted pots, audible screaming within, placed on wobbly plinths on an uneven floor. Any sort of weight on the floor is sure to release at least one angry wraith.

26 - Pool of lava, a metal idol partially submerged in the centre. It's glowing hot, but valuable.

27 - Big metal skull with a gem in its open, toothy mouth. Obviously it bites anything put inside.

28 - Quicksand, just like in cartoons.

29 - Giant spider lair, huge boulders suspended in the highest webs. Too much disturbance might release a boulder, fire will definitely release them all.

30 - Bear trap.

31 - Sealed door with two identical handles on the adjacent wall. One releases snakes from above, the other opens the door.

32 - Hidden jet spraying you with disgusting smelling liquid. Not harmful in itself, but might attract scent-based creatures or warn inhabitants that you've been poking around where you shouldn't have.

33 - Pressure plate triggers part of the floor to move down, slowly transporting the victim into the now-visible lair of a horrible monster.

34 - Giant cauldron filled with treasure. Any weight added to the cauldron causes the lid to slam shut and a fire to spark to life underneath it.

This article has been published in Electric Bastionland.

by **Chris Tamm**

300 Useless Magic Loot

Gamma World players **gra**b piles of weird crap for barter or later identification. Surely fantasy heroes need the same - piles of semi useful items worth something but not necessarily what adventurers would like. I think there was a *Dragon* article about issue 71-ish. These are a mix of useless, tasteless and childish. Just blame me if something embarrassing or awkward pops up.

1-2 **1** Everlasting Dye - permanently changes colour of hair, skin or items but mostly for hair - 1d6 doses. **2** Everlasting Dye - as above but is a highlight kit with 12 colours. **3** Music box - plays same tune again and again, hand size. **4** Orchestra in a Box - a chest with miniature musician golems know 1d20 tunes. **5** Hair Removal Potion - meant to be applied, permanent if drunk. **6** Hair Growth Potion - meant to be aplied, if drunk grow 1 inch per hour for ever. **7** Hat of Many Styles - can change to any hat for job at hand, helmet, hunting hat, courtly hat etc. **8** Landscape Paint Set - anyone can use to paint one scene with photographic accuracy. **9** Portrait Paint Set - anyone can use to paint one detailed flattering portrait. **10** Character Paint Set - anyone can use to paint one mocking picture that outrages subject. **11** Wig of Many Styles - Change colour and style, comes in facial hair and mirkin style. **12** Gender Change Girdle - like the normal one but not cursed. **13** Undying Lantern - everburning lamp also comes in torch or candle styles. **14** Heroes Tankard - get no hangovers from booze drunk from this. **15** Spectacles of the Sage - make you look profoundly wise and knowing. **16** Everflowing Paint Brush - paint brush that never needs to be dipped in paint - one colour. **17** Singing Doll - knows 1d20 nursery rhymes and 1d10 scary fairy tales. **18** Hat of the Dunce - hat lets wearer sit drooling quietly for hours. **19** Sleeping Potion - lets drinker have pleasent sleep. **20** Sleeping Cap - lets drinker have pleasent sleep. **21** Milk Jug of Keeping - preserves milk or cream till used up. **22** Hat of Protection from Bees - bees will not initiate combat with wearer. **23** Spoon of Stirring - stirs itself till stopped once started. **24** Spoon of Tastiness - any stirred food or drink becomes yummier. **25** Wand of Pointing - a beam of laser light that is handy for lectures and pointing stuff out. **26** Scroll of Dictation - blank scroll when unfurled records everything said for 1d6x100 words. **27** Knife of Easy Carving - chef knife that always makes neat slices. **28** Rock of Holding - placed on paper, this protects from being blown away even in gaol. **29** Boots of Many Trails - randomly changes foot prints to different creature every 100 yards. **30** Boots of Ever Shininess - always clean enough to eat off. **31** Trunk of Junk - whenever opened find a useless item of junk - boot,

pot with hole, broken mug. **32** Cards of Fairness - Cards scream if any cheating attempted by players (card counting OK). **33** Coin of Flipping - always lands on flippers choice. **34** Wand of Penguin Summoning - once a day calls a tasty penguin from icy realms. **35** Collar of location - put on pet or person, always know their location. **36** Girdle of Chastity - magically locked until legally married on wedding night. **37** Girdle or Manhood - Protects your genitalia from harm in battle. **38** Shirt of cleanliness - Shirt is always pressed and clean. **39** Cape of Protection from Weather - keeps elements at bay - stay dry and warm. **40** Mechanical Beaver - Wind up and once per day fells one tree. **41** Pan of Cooking - self heating pot or frypan. **42** Pan or Recipes - sentient pan gives sneering advice on cooking to any cretin using it. **43** Salt Sellar of Plenty - 10 doses of salt per day. **44** Pepper Grinder of Plenty - 10 doses of pepper per day. **45** Everlasting Candy - piece of candy you can suck forever - who knows who used it before. **46** Nurse's Ring - makes you lactate while worn, also wanted by farmers. **47** Ring of the Rake - make infertile but still vulnerable to STD. **48** Dancing Shoes - give the wearer basic dancing skills or improves professionals abilities. **49** Thimble of Defence - 1pt resistance to impaling damage. **50** Mother's Necklace - whispers motherly advice and commentary about everything you do. **51** Flattering Mirror - improves comeliness in mirror view. **52** Mirror that Flatters Not - makes viewer look aged, ill, bald, toothless horror. **53** Pillow of Sloth - allows you to lay about for years without harm. **54** Idol of Depravity - on command attractive idol dances erotically. **55** Spectacles of the Letcher - makes clothing invisible when looked through. **56** Pipe of Smoke Rings - pipe let you blow awesome smoke rings to entertain others. **57** Pipe of Black Lung - pipe never runs out - one type of smoke weed per pipe. **58** Pipe of Ignition - pipe lights self and never blows out. **59** Flint of Sparks - flint starts fires easily - dont let kids play. **60** Eyepiece of the Immoral - Can see depraved scenes of otherworldly orgies. **61** Statue of Prayer - If placed in church statue prays for your well being. **62** Goat Leggings of Frenzied Dance - allows wearer to dance lustily all night. **63** Pole of pokery - pole regrows back end if damage under 20% damaged up to 3 times a day. **64** Wizards Beard - a strap on beard that bonds with wearer as real growing beard forever. **65** Waterbowl of Wizards - 3 times a day fills with water, animals can learn to use. **66** Foodbowl of Wizards - 3 times a day fills with horrid gruel that animals seem to like. **67** Gilded Birdcage of Capture - leave the door open and birds are attracted and trapped. **68** Saddle of Comfort - saddle is always pleasant for rider and horse. **69** Horn of Alarm - anyone can blow a loud trumpet, heard up to a mile away. **70** Instrument of the Minstrel - plays self for up to 12 hours a day. **71** Knitting Needles of the Elves - knit for 2 hours a day if enough wool. **72** Butter Churn of the Cowlords - turns cream to butter in one hour, various sizes. **73** Fish hook of plenty - magical lure catches 3 fish per day quickly. **74** Oil of Shininess - any metal polished stays shiny forever. **75** Necklace of Purity - if given as a gift the giver knows if lover cheats. **76** Hat of truth - changes colour if wearer lies. **77** Hen of Eggs - Ceramic hen container has a fresh egg each day. **78** Unsoiled Girdle - Wearer never needs to go to toilet. **79** Blanket of Bravery - when wrapped in blanket with both hands immune to fear - pink or blue. **80** Ratters Hat - attracts rats who come from curiosity. **81** Vermin Bane Cube - this cube keeps rats, bugs and critters out of one room. **82** Sealed Jar of Ancients - preserves contents fresh if lid sealed - 50% chance already full. **83** Tankard of Booze - Fills once a day with one type of ale or beer. **84** Goonbox of Plenty - wooden box with a tap produces 4 litres of cheap wine a day. **85** Paddle of Spanking - wielder never tired or strained using this to spank. **86** Animated Spanking Paddle - once a day will spank a victim up to 10 times. **87** Broom of Sweeping - once

a day sweeps one room. **88** Egg Cup of Breakingfast - cooks an egg placed in cup. **89** Quill of Ink - self inking quill. **90** Quill of Infamy - any written text filled with abuse, swearing and insults. **91** Ledger of Seeking - book turns to page requested by subject. **92** Book of Secrets - cannot open without spells unless you have written in book. **93** Unburning Book - resilient book cannot burn, be harmed by acid, water except by muscle power. **94** Books of the Messengers - what is written by one appears on both copies. **95** Mechanical Rooster - alarm which sounds dawn every day if wound up. **96** Kings Wrist Sundial - tells the time night or day. **97** Hourglass of Wizards - flow slows or speeds or reverses on command. **98** Notebook of sorting - everything written is re arranged alphabetized**.** **99** Shells of Talking - each shell in set can hear through the other one like a radio. **100** Book of the Critic - sentient book complains about your work quality, heals if damaged.

3-4

1 Dice of deceit - always roll best outcome, pretty obvious after a few rolls, bone or jewels. **2** Shears of trimming - cut wool, trim hedges, vines, 2 hours a day. **3** Tent of Assembly - tent pitches self and is rainproof - various styles and sizes. **4** Mechanical Dog - if wound daily, it barks when intruders come near. **5** Little Snitch - figurine repeats conversations it has heard in the last 24 hours. **6** Mechanical Parrot - wound daily, it repeats recorded phrases. **7** Mechanical Nightingale - Sings beautiful haunting melody. **8** Wizard's Umbrella - unfolds automatically in sun or rain. **9** Fan of the Ancients - once started, this hand fan keeps fanning for an hour. **10** Toothpick of the Titans - this can be used to remove teeth from mortals. **11** Everfull Makeup Container - either rouge, or lead based whitener, or kohl. **12** Scrolls of the Fiend - pornographic prints, show as blank if seen by romantic partners or family members. **13** Dark Elf Goblet - anyone drinking from this becomes aroused (save allowed). **14** Goblin Cup - anyone drinking from this becomes a goblin for one hour.**15** Hammer of the Gnomes - blacksmith hammer which animates for 1 hour a day. **16** Mechanical rabbit - if wound runs away, never to be seen again. **17** Spectacles of fearlessness - turn black if they see anything scary or offensive. **18** Spectacles of the otherworldly - view horrible beings in other dimensional void. **19** Magical Fruit - preserved forever tasty fruit, also makes nice ornament. **20** Ointment of Youth - look 2d6 years younger for 2 hours, 1d6 uses. **21** Dentures of the Magi - replaces real teeth with magnificent gold ones, removable on death. **22** Ice Bucket of the Giants - A small barrel with a lid; full of of ice cubes once per day. **23** Glass of the Magi - turns any drink inside to any other drink of same value or less. **24** Goblin Tankard - turns pee into beer. **25** Mechanical Kitten - when wound up, it plays for 10 minutes, then goes to sleep. **26** Ever Frozen Icecube - good for one drink, but will never melt into water. **27** Codpiece of the Titans - offensive novelty fashion item; sings if anyone touches it. **28** Singing Carp - magical stuffed fish sings song if touched; knows one song. **29** Abacus of Counting - aids in counting fabulously high numbers. **30** Everfull Sponge - remains clean and absorbs 40 litres of fluid; weight doesn't change. **31** Spade of Digging - itself for up to 2 hours. Handy for graves. **32** Sandbag of Plenty - one pound sandbag, when emptied (once a day), releases 100 pounds of sand. **33** Everlasting Sausage - as long as there is some left, regrows 1 lb per day. **34** Everlasting Cheese - as long as there is some left, regrows 1 lb per day. **35** Ever Bulging Nut Sack - refills with 1 lb of nuts per day.**36** Tiara of Sparkling - makes wearer sparkle and glisten. **37** Undead Monkey Servant - obeys whoever holds his rod. **38** Sink of the Old Ones - this steel kitchen sink has a garbage eating horror in its drain wormhole. **39** Spectacles of Attractiveness - makes anyone wearing the accompanying hat look gorgeous; often found in pairs. **40** Pie Tin of Bounty - as long as one slice left: fresh yummy pie every evening. **41** Meat Grinder of Plenty - any meat in grinder is turned to yummy hamburger mince. **42** Goggles of Red Rage -

sees bloodstains even if cleaned up long ago. **43** Azagor's Angry Ants - box of ants will clean any organic matter from a room or corridor once. **44** Mechanical Carpentry Crab - makes basic wooden items for 2 hours a day from wood and spittle. **45** Ever Edible Pig - small, 20 lb pig can have 6 lb of meat cut out every day, regrows by dawn. **46** Chastity Belt of True Love - only the one true love can unlock it. **47** Wand of Housework - each charge cleans one room or person; 1d100+30 charges. **48** Wand of Sausage Frenzy - makes a tasty sausage appear in victims mouth 1d100+30 charges. **49** Wand of Grilling - cooks a small portion of food or inflicts 1 damage; 1d100+30 charges. **50** Wand of Wands - each charge makes a non magical wand; 1d100+30 charges. **51** Rainbow Staff - shoots pretty rainbows 1d100+30 charges. **52** Hair Ribbon of Majesty - pretty ribbon attracts everyone's attention if they fail a save. **53** Candy Wand - each use creates one pound of candy; 1d100+30 charges. **54** Endless Soap - always suds up . **55** Flaming Coat - Illusionary fire surrounds wearer when mad. **56** Deck of infinite cards - lost cards are replaced daily if you have at least 27. **57** Wand of Fruit - ccreates a piece of healthy fruit; 1d100+30 charges. **58** Bag of Bottomless Turnips - all the delicious turnips you can eat (or 100 lb per day). **59** Soul Gem Medalion - princess' soul trapped inside; talks to wearer about princessy stuff. **60** Skull of Necromancer - has a trapped wizard's soul; talks non stop.. **61** Wand of Glitter - shoots cone covering all in sparkly glitter, 1d100+30 charges. **62** Staff of Flowers - hoots cone of flowers, or covers 300-ft radius if broken; 1d100+30 charges. **63** Mushroom Sickle - when cuts a mushroom, it grows back instantly (non magic mushies only). **64** Feedbag of the Horselords - feeds a horse grain, chaff and molasses once per day. **65** Ring of Sanctity - protects from normal fleas, bedbugs, leeches, mosquitoes and flies. **66** Boots of Warning - get a twinge if ground unstable or monsters burrowing underfoot. **67** Liquid Flesh - used to repair cosmetic damage from missing flesh, scars, burns - one dose. **68** Lover Potion - if smashed, a willing sex partner appears; melts one hour later. **69** Magical Mattress - handkerchief turns into sweet smelling goose feather double mattress. **70** Sack of Infinite Rags - pull out 100 lb of dirty rags per day. **71** Ring of Hygiene - keeps skin and clothes clean, no toilet paper needed. **72** Oracle of Love - box prints tiny scroll with random romantic euphemism. **73** Dentures of Dazzlement - bond with user for life, glimmer impressively. **74** Dentures of Destruction - bond with user for life, 1d3 bite, can eat anything organic. **75** Mom's Meatball Bowl - bowl creates a delicious steaming meatball once per day. **76** Blanket of Picnicking - keeps away bugs, vermin and pets from food. **77** Basket of Hybrids - put in 2 animals under 10 lb and create a hybrid beast; 1d100+30 charges. **78** Bell of Children Summoning - when rung, children within 300 yards come running; 1d100+30 charges. **79** Razor of Shaving - never blunts or cuts, needs no lather. **80** Wand of Unvandalism - removes unauthorized marks on walls; 1d100+30 charges. **81** Mechanical Monkey - wind him up: it runs crazily around, snatches something, escapes forever. **82** Ball of Returning - child's ball always returns on command. **83** Duck of Quacking - toy, follows owner and quacks constantly. **84** Stove of Evil - if fire started from human fat, it burns for one year, 20lb. **85** Wooden Spouse - life size wood mannequin, 2 hours a day animates and cooks and cleans, 65lb. **86** Chamber Pot of Old Ones - this chamber pot empties into a universe of imprisoned evil gods. **87** Wand of Flaming Balls - inflicts itchy VD on victim who fails save 1d100+30 charges. **88** Wand of Vandalism - sprays paint onto any surface, one colour, for one minute; 1d100+30 charges. **89** Wand of Bubbles - fills air with bubbles 1d100+30 charges. **90** Canteen of Effervescence - Any beverage in canteen becomes fizzy and chilled. **91** Gruel Pot of Gods - makes up to 100lb of prison quality gruel. **92** Wooden Lover - mannequin works1 hour per day, may cause injuries if using when it stops. **93** Bag of Gremlins - once per day, pull out a screaming newborn gremlin. **94** Headband of Dreams - creates particularly vivid crazy dreams you remember clearly. **95** Wand of Flatulence -

makes victim let loose fouly (save allowed); 1d100+30 charges. **96** **Magical Tail** - bonds to target permanently, usually donkey; lizard version grows back if cut. **97** **Ring of Chastity** - removes all sexual desire and capability (also found as priests robe). **98** **Ring of the Egg** - wearer lays one chicken egg a day. **99** **Hatchet of Chopping** - will animate 2 hours a day and cut fire wood. **100** **Knife Ring** - ring turns into small knife (1d3 damage) and back within a second.

5-6 **1** **Hobos Boots** - cook dinner for 4 inside them after a day's march. **2** **Wand of Hair Styling** - point and changes hair style, save if unwilling, 1d100+30 charges. **3** **Hobbit Boots** - made from hobbit feet, they leave false trails and annoy hobbits. **4** **Hanky of Snuffles** - unblocks sinuses, ears, nose and airways of mucous. **5** **Defiling Kit** - unholy water, innocent's blood and pack of hog dung in separate bottles. **6** **Jeweled Bird of Command** - can orders other animated devices in room at set time per day. **7** **Rat Idol of Modest Wealth** - makes 1 copper piece per day (some stop at 2000). **8** **Rod of the frog god** - creates 1 bucket of frogs per charge; 1d100+30 charges. **9** **Chum Bucket of Glory** - refills daily with yummy shark bait. **10** **Soup stone** - boil in water to make tasty soup one pot per day. **11** **Mood Ring of the Gods** - changes colour to indicate mood of nearest deity. **12** **Sphere of the Sage** - when shaken generates a random answer: yes, no, or maybe. **13** **Hat of Useless Crap** - 3 times a day pull random, man-made, not useful item. **14** **Rubix Cube of Mystery** - puzzle box takes new users days to open, contains random thing. **15** **Glory Hole of Thrills** - simular to portable hole - comes in male and female. **16** **Robe of Tastelessness** - changes patterns and colours every 10 minutes, all hideous. **17** **Clothes of Invisibility** - clothes turn invisible at will. **18** **Clogs of Cleanliness** - these clogs are bug free and never get soiled. **19** **Girdle of Slimming** - makes you look 10 lb lighter. **20** **Wand of Animal singing** - targeted animal sings for 10 minutes; 1d100+30 charges. **21** **Student's Hat** - improves odds of guessing multiple choice questions by 25%. **22** **Bottle of Spinning** - owner wills who bottle spins at. **23** **Stones of Skimming** - 3d6 stones in box skim 2d10 times if thrown at water. **24** **Box of Birds** - once per week 3d6 white doves fly from box - very tasty. **25** **Monster Seeds** - 1d6 in bag: throw on the ground and a random monster appears. **26** **Hat of Rabbits** - once a day a rabbit can be pulled out of hat. **27** **Hat of Horror** - once a day pull monster from hat which attacks you. **28** **Cloak of Drama** - looks impressive as if gentle breeze blowing. **29** **Shoes of Flying** - when activated, fly off your feet and into space. **30** **Deck of Dodgy Things** - each card drawn turns into a shameless object of vice. **31** **Chiken Wand** - fires a live chicken 100 y 1d100+30 charges. **32** **Book of Knowing** - once a day, displays a random fact about the world. **33** **Book of Planar Facts** - once a day, displays a random fact about a different plane. **34** **Idol of Esoteric Evil** - once per month may commune with elder god, answers in lost language. **35** **Jar of Enchanted Ovum** - makes one pound of pickled eggs per day. **36** **Wand of Polymorph Fruit** - turn one normal fruit into another of same mass 1d100+30 charges. **37** **Gauntlets of the Old Ones** - turn hands into tentacles 10 min later - some are cursed. **38** **Wand of the Deep** - shoots fish 300 ft; 1d100+30 charges. **39** **Arcadian Meadows Towel** - ever clean and dry towel, makes a good nappy. **40** **Gloves of the Masseuse** - gives nice massage every day, oiled or non oiled. **41** **Gloves of the Lover** - as above but happy ending. **42** **Rock of rock detection** - as named 100y. **43** **Ring of Molten Fire** - warns you if you touch boiling lava or metal. **44** **Ring of Afterthought** - ring tells you what you should have done after each wound taken. **45** **Ring of the Nose Goblin** - detect nose picking up to 300 ft.. **46** **Ring of Silence** - says Shhhh! if anyone within 15 ft or the wearer makes a sound. **47** **Girdle of the Centaur** - 2 extra legs appear, not handy, but you can wear another pair of boots. **48** **Sword of the Bard** - this sword causes no harm but the victim looks wounded. **49** **Dish of Fish** - once a day an edible grilled carp appears on plate. **50** **Sauce of the Fool** - 1d10 doses of sauce that

turns any substance into a portion of safe food. **51** Sauce of the Gods - 1d10 doses of sauce that makes one meal addictively delicious. **52** Fool's Crown - wearer sees as crown fit for a king, everyone else sees a steaming coil of poop. **53** Hat of Invulnerability - hat cannot be damaged while not on person's head. **54** Wizard Eye - works as human eye if put in eye socket. **55** Wizard Hand - works as human hand if put on stump. **56** Eunachs Reward - works as human member if attatched to damaged area. **57** Adamant Nails - remove fingernails then attatch - 1d3 damage, cuts rope, etc. 2d10. **58** Lance of the Unicorn - A horn which attaches to your head, one extra attack; 1d10 damage. **59** Gills of the fish - fleshy lumps with gill slits, attatch then you breathe water not air, permanant. **60** Breast of venus - 1d6 fleshy lumps, attach to increase size or gain extra breast. **61** Mask of Flesh - a malleable living mask of varied colours, can be moulded if skilled. **62** Gliding Cape - takes 20 foot off fall. **63** Uranium Golem Battery - glows nicely, makes everyone feel warm if outside lead box . **64** Bagpipes of Wonder - play bagpipes for 12 hours, next roll gets a +1. **65** Stockings of Splendour - never tear, self repairing, always clean, various styles. **66** Amazing viewer scope - wind handle, bend over and peek in large box slot see 160 second film. **67** Gremlin Scope - microscopic viewer see beholders battle miro terrasque and other stuff. **68** Vulcanic Suit - fragile glass suit allows you to walk into volcanoes (but not lava) unharmed. **69** Diver's Suit - 80 lb technomagical heap allows you to walk under water slowly for 30 minutes. **70** Bag of Air - permanently turns into 10 ft square pillow, damage from fall reduced 30 ft. **71** Khessemer's Tiny Sled - toy sled enlarges to fit a human, lasts one hour. **72** Mechanical Spider - spins web: 200 ft per month. **73** Salamander Horde - burn seal calls 3d100+50 various coloured luminous garden salamanders .**74** Iron Heart Ring - this ring take away romantic pains, feelings and memories . **75** Armband of Grief - prevents uncotrolled public displays of grief. **76** Mechanical Finch - guards one child or group thereof, flies and reports to parent. **77** Octopi Sentinel - slimy octopus hat warns you if threat in 360 degrees, needs daily drink and snack **78** Fishy Idol - gives owner increasing bad dreams, if thrown in water calls evil fish men party. **79** Flippers of the Frog God - +50% aquatic movement, bonds to feet forever on the 3rd use. **80** Goggles of the Chameleon - seperate moving eyes with 290 degree vision. **81** Fangs of the Bat Race - replace fangs with these permanently, become hemovorous . **82** Goggles of Truth - detects magical bodily alterations and gender changes. **83** Octo-Epaulettes - 2 shoulder mounted octopi whisper different advice to each ear about the sea. **84** Amphibian Lungs - 2 fleshy lumps stuffed in gills of at least dog size beast lets breathe air. **85** Helm of Ghost Rider - head appears as burning or glowing skull, spookifies voice too. **86** Candle Spike - sticks into any rock or stone or brick, holds candle. **87** Helm of Mining - 30-ft, 90 degree cone light from top of helm at will. **88** Healers Ring - can donate 1 HP to the patient when using skill based healing, first aid, etc. **89** Mask of Shadow - once per day, renew a 1st level arcane spell by killing a small beast **90** Eye of UnessZee - Magic eye pendant reports telepathically any spell it sees on wearer. **91** Hydrobolt Wand - squirt water up to 300 ft; 1d100+30 charges. **92** Prehensile Beard or Hair - bonds to head, can streach 10 ft and crudely grab anything. **93** Shock Beard or Hair - bonds to head, electric zap 1d4 damage to nearest foe in melee. **94** Ice Beard or Hair - blue of white, bonds to head, immuneto environmental cold, icy touch. **95** Blood Beard or Hair - bonds to head, drinks 1HP blood from foe, turns red after each battle **96** Flame Beard or Hair - bonds to head, burns in battle 1d4 damage to nearest foe in melee. **97** Death Beard or Hair - bonds to head, if killed raised as zombie and walks to home or temple. **98** Rat Statuette - turn to 3 HD riding rat one hour a day. **99** Cauldron of the Hag - monthly gate calls idiot son of Earth goddess, wants to fuck everything he sees. **100** Fishermen's Friends - tin pail with lid, once day fills with earthworms or maggots or grasshoppers.

by **Nicolas Dessaux -** Map: **Dyson Logos**

Borderlands

Being selected excerpts of a never ending essay on Anthropology, Archeology, Geography, and other knowledgeable and hare-brained ideas concerning the Borderlands

About the Lack of Names in the Borderlands.

It is a common criticism about this famous module to say: *«they didn't even give names to NPCs»*. The common answer is to explain that, being a very generic module, the lack of names helps to includes in the DM's own campaign. The most subtle explanation I read until now was, once again, from Geoffrey McKinney, who suggested this was a major feature of this module, a part of its mystery, as names like The Castelan could be related to some kind to tarot figures.

My own explanation is probably less brilliant and esoteric, but maybe easier to include in a campaign: In the Borderlands, it would be very rude to address someone by their name rather by their title, and knowledge of a personal name is a mark of real familiarity. Asking someone their name would be considered as offensive, and asking someone the name of another, a mark of silliness. So, people find absolutely natural to speak about the Castellan or the Money-lender.

Weird? Maybe not so much. Personal names have strong ties with magic and sorcery, and some cultures dislikes using them. In her book on the Yanonami people of Amazonia, Helena Valero explains she has been one the wives of a well-known chief, but learned his name only after years. So, this can become a feature in a campaign. *«Who are you to ask my lord the Castellan's name?»*

About the Borderlands Geography

I searched for clues in *Keep on the Borderlands*, and I found evidences of a major fact: Borderlands are set in British Columbia. I studied it first in the French version, which was the first D&D module printed in my native language. But, to check some details, I went back to the original and found out something very important: the pine trees where the spiders live are Tamaracks -- a detail omitted in the translation. So, I looked after tamaracks. Tamaracks are actually two species, both specifc to Canada and, oh surprise, Great lakes region.

Then, I looked at the fauna. Few animals are listed, unless we take the generic wandering monsters table into account. Among those listed, ravens and vultures have a very wide distribution, so should be discarded for that purpose.

Note that, from a European perspective and judging by its fauna, the world of D&D is set in North America. Actually, this becomes even more obvious in AD&D, as the red box has a more of an North-East Asia feel to it.

An exemple of a specific animal is the mountain lion, the hermit's pet. When I was a kid, I saw the mountain lion as a very D&D creature, as there's no such a thing in French - the word we use is *puma*, but it wasn't translated like this in the Red Box. So, I looked at the geographical distribution of mountain lions.

There are some variations between maps, but it's pretty clear the area where you could find both Tamaracks and mountain lions is British Columbia, and maybe west of Alberta. I just needed a confirmation. It was clear, for the bits of geology I studied, that the caves are a karst landscape. Just have a look at the photograph below!

But, is there any karst in British Columbia? That was the blind test. According to the canadian ministry of forests and ranges, *«British Columbia is blessed with an abundance of world-class karst, (...) as well as Canada's longest and deepest documented caves»*. The same ministry adds, about the cultural uses of karst that: *«Karst caves were not only used for shelter, but were also conside-red by some groups to be sacred places for burial and ceremonial purposes»*, something which fits our caves as well.

So, British Columbia definitely fits the mood for our Borderlands. Being west of the still hidden Castles and Crusades Society map, it even fits the idea that Greyhawk is around Chicago while Blackmoor is around Milwaukee.

About Borderlands agriculture

The nearest villages, not to speak of towns, are located far away to the West, in the Kingdom. There is no sign of a settlement in the Borderlands. But we know, from the fountain square entry in the Keep's description, that farmers live around, as they come to sell their products on holy days. As Gary expressed many times his conception of a typical fantasy setting being filled with petty landowners and freeholders, as opposed to the common use of salves in Dave's Blackmoor, or to serfdom (which is not mentioned) I guess we should read farmers in that meaning: owners of a farm who pay a yearly rent to the Castellan. These farms are scattered in

the landscape, the Keep being the only real "village", as Gary refers to it on page 2.

To know how much is needed to feed the more than 200 people living in the Keep, we could use several means of calculation, but I will use two very rough ones. According to John Ross' Medieval Demographics Made Easy, it means two one-miles hexes are sufficient for this purpose, and a 40-people per 1-mile density seems to fit the region. So, let's say around 80 farms surround the Keep in a one-mile line of sight from its towers. Another means of calculation would be to use a 10% ratio for "urban" population. Even if the Keep is not a town, this is a correct ratio for how many peasants are needed to feed non-peasants. If so, almost 1,800 people could live in these farms, which means that more than 20 people dwell in each one. Note this fits John Ross' supply values system, as 1,500 people are needed to have 100% chance to get a smith, and 2,000 for a inn.

I first thought a farm could include an extended family (a couple with kids, old relatives, unmarried siblings, etc.), but the Keep's typical family is rather small: husband, wife, and two kids, without any elderly people, which weakens my hypothesis. Demography is harsh: such numbers means that people marry late, children death is common and living to an advanced age is not. So, I would suggest another model: farms are held by a farmer and their small family, surrounded by many daily workers and some guards, as the region is dangerous.

The Tavern's list of meals is an interesting source for local productions. You can't find anything such as tea or coffee, but local people use bark tea as a warm drink, a very local custom. Wine is ob-

viously imported from the West, as two tuns' of wine are available in the common warehouse. Ale and beer, however, could be local, which suggest that barley and hops are grown around the castle. Cool and contrasted climate suggest wheat as a prime cereal, so I suspects farmers practice shift of crops: one year with wheat, one year with barley, and one year with vegetables, most probably carrots and cabbage. This is what you can expect in the Tavern's soup and stew. Fruit could be the common apples, closely followed by pears. Raspberries and cherries are also very common in farmers' personal orchards.

Honey mead may be from local bees, but its price two times higher than wine let suspects it could be either rare or imported from the West. Various quotes about meat are not so useful, as stew and roasted joint could be from any animal, while roasted fowl could mean almost any bird. My suggestion is that the most common fowl is turkey, while the most common meat is hog. The occurence of a hard cheese (in the ogre's cavern!) and the fact that cheese is sold by wedges at the Tavern strongly suggests it is made from cow's milk, probably a variety of Cheddar. So cows are probably raised in the lands surrounding the Keep, but for milking purpose rather than meat. It seems no textile is produced in the Borderlands, as clothes are also listed as products for merchants in the warehouse. So, sheep are unlikely to be raised there.

So, the common Borderlands farm is probably like a little keep, as the keep is like a little village: a yard for the farmer's house and another for his workers, with a common room, a barn, the pigsty, and building for cows and turkeys, all being surrounded by stone walls to dissuade raiders.

About the Archeology of the Keep

Archaeology is my day job, so when I'm not writing about Dungeons & Dragons or about Marxism, I practice archaeology. That's why, when I started studying Keep on the Borderlands, I decided to carefully analyse the Keep's plans. They reveal details which seem interesting enough to share, even if I'm still struggling with most details.

1. The general outlook of the Keep's Fortress suggests a taste for symmetry. It seems to be in the middle of the north wall, but a careful look shows it's not: it is **6** squares from one corner, and **8** from the other. Why? Probably because the Fortress is older than the wall itself. The structure of the wall is tied to topography; when it was built, it was not possible to find a symmetry because there was already a building. A possible clue about the Keep's inner chronology. There is an alternative I'll explain below.

2. Same thing for the Inner Gatehouse. Its position on the middle wall is not aligned with the Fortress. Fore sure, middle-age construction is not always obsessed with symmetry, but my experience is that such details often show a lot about the phases of a building's life. Here, something similar to the Fortress happened: most probably, the Chapel was already built when the Inner Gatehouse was added.

3. The north-east tower is really incongruous, as it looks to be built directly on the cliff. Sure, it commands over the road, but why bother with such a difficult building? I must admit I don't have a clear answer to this question, but it's worth noting.

A possible yet strange answer is that a first tower was built, then the cliff collapsed under its weight, destroying the whole thing. With stubborn energy, another tower was built on the very same location…

4. Did you notice the fountain is the only one recorded in the Keep? Water supply is a major issue for such a castle. Are there wells or cisterns? None is indicated, but the fact there's a fountain suggests a hydraulic system could have been built. If not, this makes the Inner Yard very dependent of the Outer Yard in the event of a siege.

5. Why is the smith's workshop built like a tower? Stronger walls could be explained by the risk of fire, but this doesn't explain battlements and the like. The best explanation I can provide is, it is really a tower, a vestige from a first keep or a first version of the Outer Fortress.
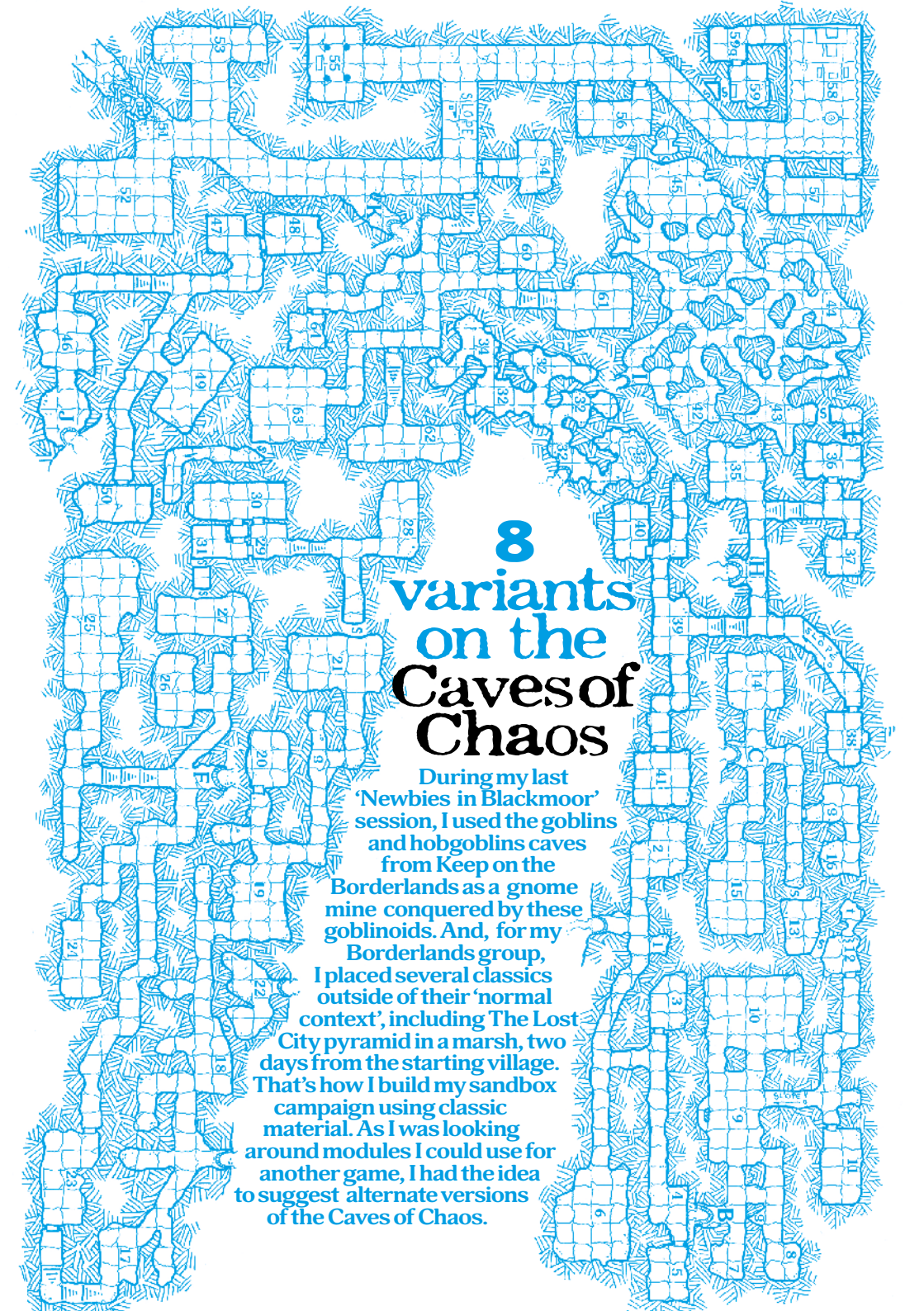
6. This hypothesis is strengthened by the east wall of the Stable and Warehouse. This strong wall in front of the main door is a means of defence, as it forces the invaders to run from the main gate under a rain of arrows after they bashed the doors down. This is a common feature for a concentric castle like the Keep. However, it looks somewhat old-fashioned, as two sets of double-doors have been fitted in the wall for a better access to the stable and warehouse. An asset for trade, probably a wise idea of the Guild Master, it takes away from the defensive potential of the Keep – this is why I consider these doors as being a later addition. If I'm right about the Old Tower (the Smith's workshop), the wall is itself probably part of the first version of the Keep.

7. Could the Inner Bailey have been built before the outer one? Maybe.

This is the point I'm still struggling with. I might provide my conclusions about it later, but here's the point: the plans of the Outer Bailey seem less structured than the inner one's, as if it was a village later enclosed within a wall. It could even have been built in two different periods, the "smith's tower" being a fossil of the first period.
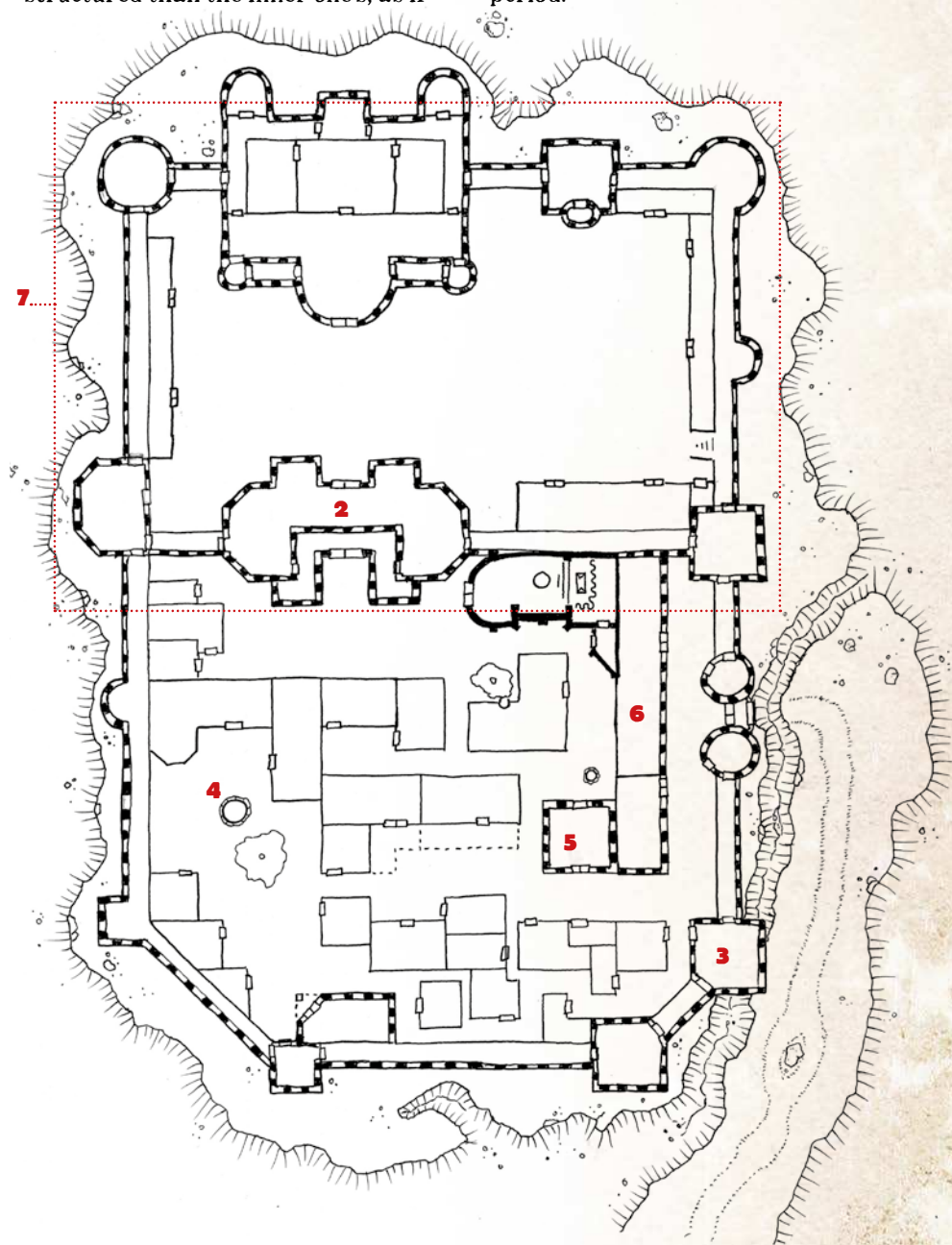
8
variants
on the
Caves of
Chaos

During my last 'Newbies in Blackmoor' session, I used the goblins and hobgoblins caves from Keep on the Borderlands as a gnome mine conquered by these goblinoids. And, for my Borderlands group, I placed several classics outside of their 'normal context', including The Lost City pyramid in a marsh, two days from the starting village. That's how I build my sandbox campaign using classic material. As I was looking around modules I could use for another game, I had the idea to suggest alternate versions of the Caves of Chaos.

by **Nicolas Dessaux** - Map: **dyson Logo**

1 – The mountain caves.

No changes, except reverse the level lines, so goblins, kobolds, and so on are on the upper side. Maybe have a skull entrance in 51 (the tunnel to the temple), in the lower part of the mountain.

2 – The frozen caves.

Same map and creatures, but the caves are dug in ice, not rock, in a polar setting. The Keep is probably set on an island. Tunnels are slippery and orcs wear furs and use seal bones as tools. It's easy to make others options like the desert caves, the jungle caves, and so on…

3 – The undersea caves.

Same map, all creatures being replaced by their water cousins if any, or other thematic monsters (a bloothirsty killer whale instead of the owlbear ?). Sahuagins could fit the role for Temple of Chaos priests. A few traps should be changed, but not that much.

4 – The urban caves.

Same plan, but the caves are set under a city, and their openings lead to some well known buildings. The Keep could be the town's keep as well. Maybe replace some creatures, like bugbears or gnolls, by a thieves guild or a smugglers gang.

5 – Caves of the giants.

Turn kobolds to ogres, goblins to hill giants, hobgoblins to stone giants, gnolls to frost giants, bugbears to fire giants, the ogre to an athatch, the minotaur to an ettin, and give each of them a few pets. Sure, make the Temple of Evil Chaos a drow fortress and link it all to the G, D, and Q modules.

6 – The vertical caves.

Same creatures, but use the map as if it was a side view… The blank space in the middle is a very big cave. Then, add a lot - a lot - of ladders, ropes, stairs and other means of going from one room to another. It turns to a nightmare to explore… A variant is the pit caves: turn the map so that the East side is on top.

7 – The alien caves.

Same maps, some technological changes. Equip the creatures using range attacks with technological weapons, and give the whole dungeons a sci-fi look. The caves are located on an asteroid. Optionally, combine with 5 (without gravity), or replace the monsters with Barsoom creatures. Use the keep as a space ship, of course.

8 – The caves of Law.

Use halflings for kobolds, gnomes for goblins, dwarves for hobgoblins, elves for gnolls, hsiaos (from the Rules Compendium) as bugbears, and a temple of Law protected by statues. Use it as a home base, or send avengers from the Keep of Chaos.

by **Jason Sholtis**

EffectS of Monster DERaNGEMENT SyndromE

Widespread, atypical, highly disruptive monster behaviors and altered states of consciousness result from unknown spores/germs/curse/damnation/deranging gas/etc. disseminated throughout the dungeon. Generate additional side effects as required by rolling again.

d12

1 - Population drawn inexorably to dungeon pools, subterranean rivers, lakes, etc. by sudden compulsion to immerse/cleanse themselves, battles break out for control of waters between terrestrial factions and aquatic denizens.

2 - Delusions of grandeur fill dungeon with would-be field marshals, captains of industry, messiahs, avatars of various godlings, all simultaneously vying for admiration, esteem, worship of one another.

3 - Manic obsession with cleanliness has overtaken sentient dungeon occupants. Watch as they busily scrub, sweep, mop, dust, polish, chemically cleanse walls, floors, doors, pits, traps, bringing an unprecedented sparkle & freshness to dungeon environment.

4 - Irrational edginess expresses itself in loud, pointless squabbles among allies, rules lawyering, totally unnecessary acts of violence, mayhem. Prickly servitors are put out by master's typical commands, surly dungeon noblesse heap meaningless punishment upon underlings, even non-intelligent inhabitants seem grumpy as hell.

5 - For a period of 1d6 hours, dungeon dwellers function at half their normal intelligence, becoming foggy minded, forgetful, and twice as credulous.

6 - Even the most chaotic overtaken by uncontrollable urge to restructure dungeon society into extremely orderly new arrangement, binding documents drafted by wisest undead, ratified by representatives of every faction, strong anti-adventurer measures among first acts of new ruling body.

7 - Monsters find human beings irresistibly charming/lovable, make best attempts to roughly woo adventurers into warm friendship, offer food and drink, betray secrets of rival factions, provide insider dungeon information in effort to secure long-term relationships.

8 - Weird catatonia takes hold, creatures stagger around zombie-like, drool copiously, no longer able to control bodily functions, show zero interest in adventurers, 1 in 6 chance every ten minutes of snapping out of it en masse.

9 - Sensory abilities temporarily enhanced exponentially, literally seeing through walls, hearing things a mile away, cannot be surprised, attempts at stealth (even at professional level) useless.

10 - Outbreak of insatiable hunger with side order of cannibalism-of-convenience, but more than willing to eat anything or one.

11 - Denizens giddy with wild-eyed, sweaty, artificially-induced self confidence. Will take any risk secure in the knowledge of inevitable victory, positive can-do attitude of evil.

12 - For a period of 1d6 hours, dungeon dwellers function at exponentially enhanced level of intelligence, Algonquin Round Tables of giants theoretically solve world's problems while exceptionally gifted puny humanoids pursue their predilections with a preternatural acuity soon to vanish, formerly dumb brutes take opportunity to comment on foibles of so-called intelligent species .

by **Vagabundork**

The "I search the body" random table is a staple of fantasy games, but a weird fantasy game needs something more, something else. Each part of a dead creature's body has different effects on the adventurer turned cannibal.

I Eat the Body!

Heart

When a player announces that her character eats the still beating heart of her victim, roll 1d4; this is what happens:

1 - You develop a second heart. The veins of your eyes burst and become permanently red; your Charisma-based rolls are made with a penalty of -2. From now on, when you gain a level, roll your new hit points with the next bigger die (a Fighter rolls d10, a Magic-User rolls d6 and so on).

2 - You suffer a myocardial microinfarction and you lose your next action. Roll all your Hit Dice again minus one (if you are level 4, roll 3 dice); if the result is less than your current hit points, that's your new HP; if the total is greater, keep your current points.

3 - You lose control of your body. Any time something important happens (encounters, mainly), you must save vs Paralysis to avoid having a physical reaction that fits the situation in some way, accompanied by a mechanical penalization (miss a round, -1 to attack rolls, and so on.)
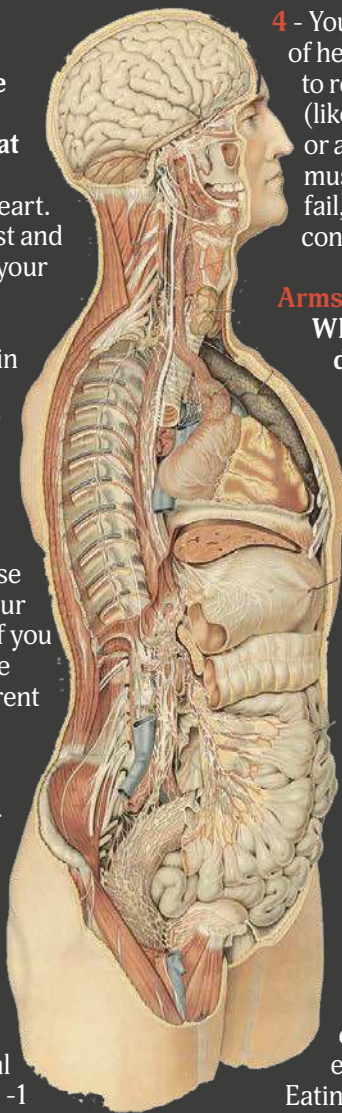
4 - You have a chronic change of heart. Whenever you need to remain silent or hidden (like during a Stealth roll or an Ambush round), you must save vs Magic; if you fail, you start laughing uncontrollably.

Arms or Legs

When you are lost in a dark dungeon with nothing to eat, your buddy starts looking really tasty, right? Go ahead, roll 1d4 and see what happens:

1 - A phalanx bone, or a similar bone gets stuck in your throat. Save vs Death or die from suffocation.

2 - Your hit points are replenished.

3 - Your hit points are replenished. But. Save vs Poison or you will be infected with (horror fantasy) scurvy. After one day, make another save vs Poison, and if you fail, suffer d6 damage; roll again every eight hours until you either die or are cured. Eating a bunch of citrus fruit means that you can skip the next

saving throw, but you can only benefit from this once every 24 hours.

4 - You just ate cursed flesh. Now you're cursed. At the most inopportune moment, your hand will act by itself, usually to your detriment (it's up to the referee). On the bright side, your unarmed attacks never miss.

Brain

Even if you are not a zombie, a brain is a delicacy you won't want to miss. Roll 1d4 and see:

1 - A strong migraine. You can't make rolls or any tiring actions for the rest of the day. Also, your Intelligence is decreased by 1.

2 - Your Intelligence is increased by 1. You gain a one-time only spell slot, with a random spell (any!)
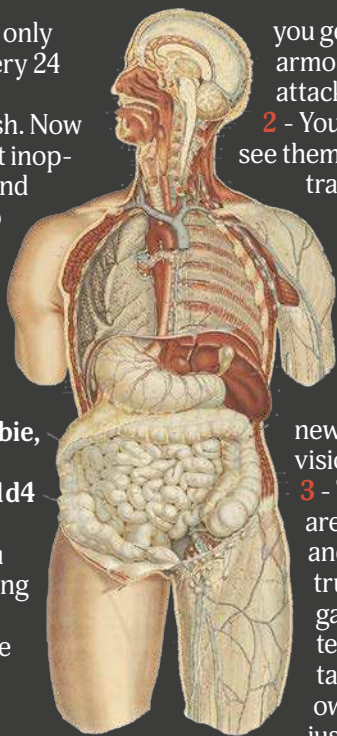
3 - Your Intelligence is increased by 1 but you have weird nightmares. And I mean weird! Each morning, save vs Magic, and if you fail, you spontaneously cast *Summon* spell. The entity summoned is of your level.

4 - You develop immunity to brain diseases, dementia and mind-control, including magical effects, but you must consume human brains at least once every fortnight or your Intelligences is decreased by 1.

Eyes

Eyes are tasty. They keep secret knowledge, they know stories, they have seen it all. What do you see? Roll 1d4 to find out:

1 - You can anticipate the movements of your enemies. For the rest of the day, you get a +2 bonus on your armour class and +1 to your attack rolls.

2 - You see dead people. You see them all the time, they distract you, you can't help it. All your rolls requiring concentration are done at -1. You need a barber surgeon to perform eye surgery on you (removing your eyes and attaching new ones) to get rid of these visions.

3 - They say that the eyes are the windows of the soul, and there must be some truth in that. You have gained one of the characteristics or some important knowledge from the owner of those eyes you just ate (referee's choice).

4 - You can see in the dark. But in the light, you need to save vs Paralysis or be blinded until you get cover.

Viscera

For some reason, I don't know. Ask your players!

1 - You're disgusting. CHA -1.

2 - Yeah, you are disgusting. CHA -1 and you smell funny. Your smell makes dogs want to attack you..

3 - Oh, yeah. You are disgusting. CHA -1. You now have an unpleasant aura and dogs and all kinds of beasts want to avoid you.

4 - Have I told you how disgusting you are? CHA -1. You develop a taste for it. You don't recover hit points when you sleep if you didn't eat viscera during that day (either animal or human).

by **Nobboc the Scrap Dealer**

12 Magic Blades

1 - Throw this silver **DAGGER** in the air, its blade always points north when it is on the ground. **2** - The pommel of this **SHORTSWORD** represents an owl's head which hoots gently when the sun goes down. The sword is +1 during the night, but -1 in the daytime. **3** - Stick this **LONGSWORD** in the ground and the gem encrusted in its pommel shines like a candle. **4** - This gleaming **GLADIUS** does variable damages, depending of the day. On the first combat of the day, roll 1d6: 1 = 1, 2 = 1d4, 3 = 1d6, 4 = 1d8, 5 = 1d10, 6 = 1d12. **5** - Three times per day, the magic mouth on this +1 **LONGSWORD** sums up the activities of its wielder during the last eight hours. Loudly, rudely, with harsh comments. **6** - When ordered to, this snicker-snacker **SCIMITAR** can do 1d10 more damage to your target and cause you to lose 1d6 points of Wisdom for 1D4 days.

7- When in combat, the gloomy song of this black **GREATSWORD** reduces the AC of everyone in a 15' by 1 point (but not yours). **8** - On the command word «Biggus!» this little ivory **KNIFE** becomes a longsword for 1d10 turns. This works 3 times per day. **9** - When you hit one of your fellow adventurers with this shiny black **KRISS**, you gain as many HP as the damage you caused. Only 1 HP if it's a hireling, though. **10** - This rusty **SCRAMASAX** loves your blood. Use it to scarify yourself and the blade becomes +2 for as many rounds as the number of HP you sacrifice (maximum 6).

11 - This runic **FLAMBERGE** has a demon head for a pommel. When you score a critical hit, the head laughs hysterically, causing everyone within 15' (including you) to save vs Paralysis or run away from the sword for 1d6 rounds.

12 - The barbed blade of this **FALCHION** turns blue when rain is coming.

Text, art and maps by **Chris Tamm**

Sewers
of Mistery

Why would you let your players hike all the way to White-plume Mountain when they can find as much adventure under their feet? The sewers of any city worth its fantasy salt should be full of treasure and weirdness. Roll a few dice on these tables and you should be good to run a session that won't be giant rats guarding copper coins.

Note: Channels are deliberate or carved by water; most are as high as they are wide. If no channel, explorers walk where liquid waste flows.

D4 STANDARD TUNNEL SIZE

1 Cramped: yard wide; most humans must crawl on all fours – no channel - **2** Tight: five-foot wide; most humans must stoop awkwardly – 1-in-6 chance of 2-foot wide channel - **3** Ten-foot wide with 2d4-foot wide channel for waste water - **4** Twenty-foot wide with 12-foot wide channel

D6 HOW DEEP IS THE WATER?

1 Dry - **2** Trickle of liquid a inch deep - **3** Foot deep - **4** Two-foot deep - **5** Yard or half yard deep - 6 Channel or pipe mostly full

D4 WATER QUALITY

1 Mostly clean and drinkable water, tastes nasty - **2** Contaminated by human waste, garbage, disease, and industrial waste - **3** Slimy horrible waste; dangerous to touch - **4** Thick sludgy, slow moving, tar like waste

EACH SECTION OR JUNCTION MAY HAVE

1-in-6 chance of ladder going up or stairs in wider tunnels • 1-in-12 chance of ladder going down or stairs in wider tunnels • 1-in-12 chance of a door • 1-in-6 chance of a hazard • 1-in-6 chance of something strange

D6 DOOR TYPES (1-IN-6 UNLOCKED)

1 Equipment storage with shovels, barrows, buckets, bricks, and ceramic pipes - **2** Access to pipes and air vents - **3** Worker accommodation with bunks, kitchen, and stores - **4** Room has been repurposed by gangs or homeless - **5** Room has door missing and is now a creature lair - **6** Door is secret with some strange repurposed function

D20 WEIRD SECRET ROOMS

1 Lab used for illegal drugs or poison; operated by guild - **2** Lab used for alchemy for illegal potions or monster making - **3** Lab for wizard research with books, charts, and comfy chair - **4** Sleazy den where sorcery cult lay about enjoying drugs and other vices - **5** Cell with torture equipment; 1-in-4 chance of d4 prisoners - **6** Cult shrine with idol, manacles, robes, altar; 1-in-6 chance of a prisoner - **7** Crypt with treasure and 1-in-4 chance of no dangerous, angry undead - **8** Safehouse for people smugglers; often full of undesirables, mutants, or escaped slaves - **9** Secret police safehouse; agents rest there between missions and raids - **10** Humanoids or demihumans have made a secret home here - **11** Secret treasure stash; 1-in-4 chance of no living, vindictive owners - **12** Secret bar where sewer dwellers enjoy grog and forbidden cheap vices - **13** Witch hideout with cauldron, herbal supplies, fetishes, and a weird familiar - **14** Secret shop where sewer dwellers buy and sell strange goods - **15** Safehouse for paranoid adventurers on the run; can't afford risking being found - **16** Secret hideout; now occupied by shadows or doppelgangers or poltergeist - **17** Guarded hellmouth where agents of Hell come and go - **18** Spies for a prehuman race, come to observe the city and seek lost relics - **19** Hibernating unhuman tech-sorcerers; awaiting their time to return in living pods - **20** Gate chamber of the Ancient Ones; won't work without the secret chant

D12 ADJOINING STRUCTURES

1 Sluice gate where rubbish and solids are filtered by bars or nets (cleaned every few months) - **2** Cistern where water is collected for emergencies; a huge area with hundreds of columns - **3** Water wheel; its mechanical motion used on upper level (accessible through a locked door) - **4** Underground canal boat station; underground waterways used to move goods across the city - **5** Huge chamber choked with garbage; often with an encounter and possibly some interesting junk - **6** Large junction chamber with many levels of scaffolding and ramshackle scrap shacks - **7** Underground prison complex; well guarded, guests not welcome (also possibly abandoned) - **8** Complex of underground storage vaults, sealed behind gates that weigh tons - **9** Complex of abandoned mining tunnels with remains of mining equipment - **10** Catacombs used for burial

with coffins and urns in niches; mostly avoided - **11** Remains of streets built over or buried in some disaster; empty houses and shops - **12** Plaza remaining from prehuman occupation with strange carvings, idols and decor

D66 STUFF FOUND IN DRAINS

11 Giant pile of feces- **12** Congealed lump of fat accumulated over years - **13** Broken cart with bloody tools - **14** Pile of old beer bottles - **16** Stalactites and stalagmites - **21** Package of illegal drugs stuffed in a hole - **22** Dead, half eaten crocodile - **23** Chunk of stone in a wall with prehistoric carvings - **24** Sign from a shop or tavern - **25** Page from a spellbook, covered in feces - **26** Pile of corpses with slit throats - **31** Sheets of shed reptilian skin - **32** Tree roots - **33** Shovel, buckets, and sacks of feces - **34** Sodden pile of posters removed from street walls - **35** Huge broken teeth - **36** Lost puppy - **41** Gelatinous harmless blob, grazing on filth - **42** Giant maggot, crawling about, eating scraps - **43** Thousands of cockroaches covering walls - **44** Thick cobwebs blocking area - **45** Coffins with rotten corpses fallen through a collapsed wall - **46** Cultist graffiti - **51** Mound of human hair - **52** Mound of dirty bubbling froth - **53** Scaffolding supporting sagging ceiling - **54** Several boxes arranged as furniture with cups and empty bottles - **55** Huge toad sitting in a hole - **56** Half a broken boat - **61** Tree branches tangled with string and hair and mud - **62** Sloppy wet mud with strange footprints - **63** Candle stubs stuck on walls - **64** Someone smashed holes in the walls, probably looking for something - **65** Eels gnawing on chunk of rotten mystery meat - **66** Chart of local tunnels pasted to a wall

D66 SEWERS ENCOUNTERS

11 A colossal rat, the size of a grizzly bear - **12** Thief gang; don't want any trouble, scatter if approached - **13** Homeless young child crying - **14** Fisherman with buckets of sewer fish and eels - **15** Sewer workers with digging tools and a cart full of bricks - **16** Old thief guild member with a gang of urchins in training - **21** Family of mutants looking for food - **22** City rat catchers with sacks of dead rats and noisy terriers - **23** Orc sewer gang; unemployed and looking for trouble - **24** Zombies patrolling the sewers for gangs and monsters; not very discriminating - **25** Shrieking fungus patch - **26** Giant dung beetle, rolling a huge ball of turd over everything in its path - **31** Giant flies laying eggs, caring for their maggots and looking for food - **32** Dark elves, spreading exotic fungi spoor - **33** Goblin children having a turd throwing fight - **34** Otyugh wallowing in a pile of filth; demands worship - **35** Feces golem; furious with being created from shoddy materials - **36** Skeleton witch with her skeleton guards, seeking long lost relics - **41** People smugglers, helping their customers cross the city district walls - **42** Doppelgangers; will adopt a plausible form to close in - **43** Starving peasants, looking for rats to eat - **44** Giant cod, will try to snatch people close to the water - **45** Floating eyeball controlled by a bored wizard; follows the party - **46** Militia, mounting a manhunt for an unlicensed assassin on the run - **51** Down on their luck murder hobos; hunting monsters for city bounties - **52** Assassins guild members; on training mission for initiates, sworn to kill any witnesses - **53** Cultists on the run from a demon after a deal gone bad - **54** Takoctopus faerie nobles; exploring human civilization from their castle under the sea - **55** Secret police moving unseen for a surface mission - **56** Roper; lays in wait in water, expects sacrifices - **61** Carrion crawler with d4 egg filled corpses - **62** Chaos Troll eating feces; it would prefer fresh meat, especially hands - **63** Mushroom men collecting dung to take home - **64** Lamprey folk looking for blood - **65** Squid people, carrying a set of cursed relics to cultists - **66** Giant gecko on ceiling, tries to snatch and run with a humanoid

D66 STRANGE SEWER SECRETS OR SURPRISES

11 Rats stacking d2000 copper coins into neat piles - **12** Ancient, sealed iron bar gate crumbles to the touch - **13** A tentacle slides back into a pipe in a wall up ahead - **14** Crude bas-relief of tentacle faced god, made from river clay and covered in dried fish skin - **15** Corpse of a rat catcher, impaled with harpoon trap and partially eaten - **16** Man sized cocoon like skin, slimy on the inside but dry and camouflaged with filth on the outside - **21** Zombie nailed to the wall with iron spikes; it twitches and moans when anyone comes close -**22** Stone archway with serpent man symbols,

Sewer Geomorphs

Roll d4 and d6 to find the next section,
then d4 to find out which way is North.
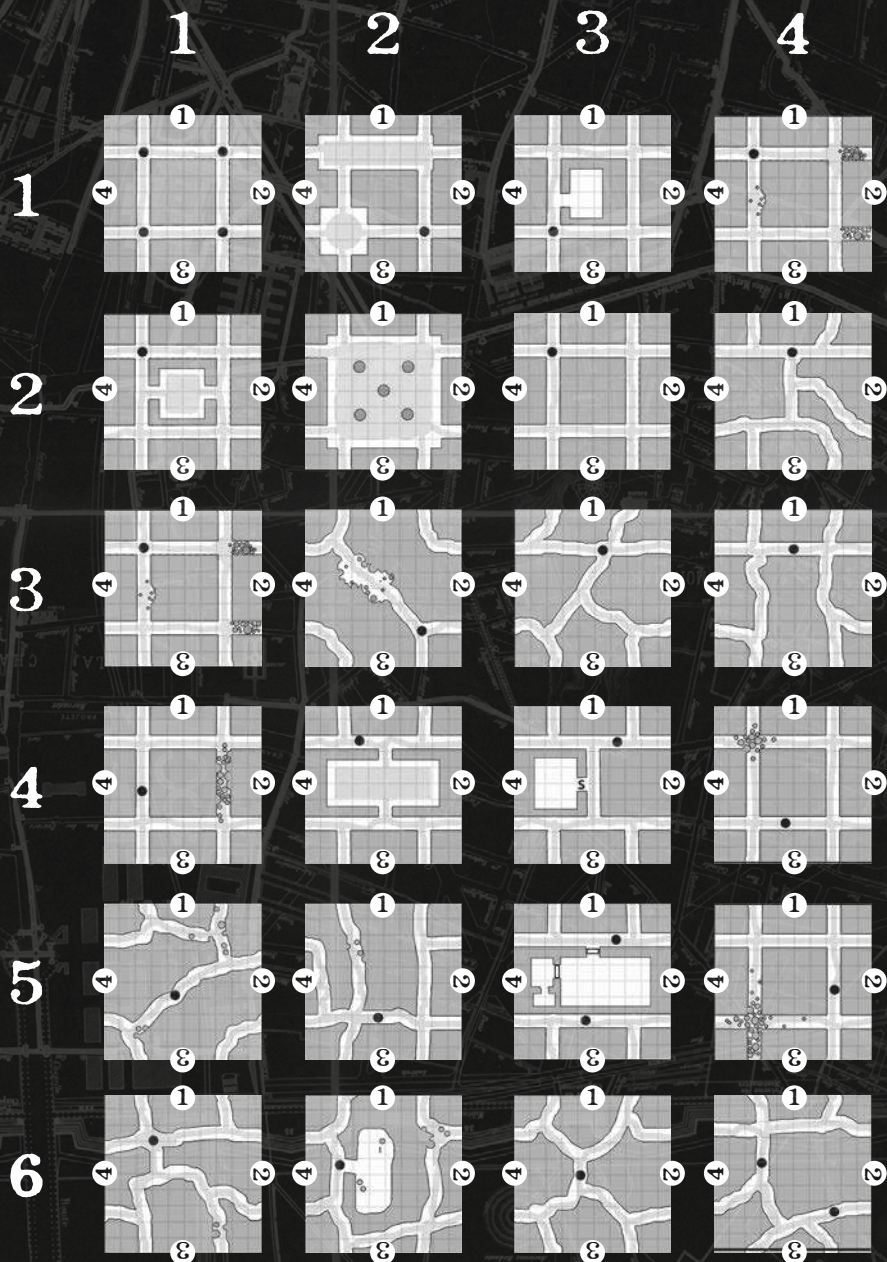
sealed with different, more recent brickwork - **23** Corpse of a mask wearing hunchback; wanted by secret police for inspiring peasants - **24** Severed hand holding a map of the local sewers with several X marks on it - **25** Sea trunk; full of shrunken heads with souls trapped in them - **26** Area frozen; what looks like normal muck is incredibly slippery - **31** A black billy goat steps from the shadows, twitching its tail an staring - **32** Mummified giant bat wrapped with its own wing membranes; covered in arcane tattoos - **33** Vampire hunter bag with stakes, garlic, holy water, and a comprehensive collection of holy symbols - **34** Strange mist and noises, like a busy marketplace chattering in alien voices - **35** Remains of a student necromancer with a beginner's book of d4 evil spells - **36** Trail of gore, leads to a pile of headless and limbless corpses arranged in circle - **41** Fish-person with missing legs, crawling across the ground, trying to get to open water - **42** Remains of a black market with rotting stalls, skeletons, and some salvageable goods - **43** Stacks of coffins, some spilled open with half eaten bodies - **44** Shadows cast by explorers seem sinister, making everyone uneasy - **45** Moaning phantasm tries to communicate something, then gives up in despair - **46** A scrying pool; offers visions of the past when monsters ruled the world - **51** Piles of old boots with mummified feet still in them - **52** Water is bubbling and producing strange mist that makes travelers feel woozy - **53** Iron bar grill choked with rotten human and animal corpses, causing a water level rise - **54** Blasphemous poetry written on walls with permanent chalk - **55** Tattered remains of book pages; detailing leach points and lamprey therapy - **56** Hundreds of broken clay figurines of a squid headed demon god - **61** Bronze idol of a fly demon, vomiting maggots into its cupped hands - **62** Fake sewer monster costume; used by smugglers to scare away meddling kids - **63** Drain pipe in the wall; blood from the surface pouring into waters - **64** A magic mouth appears, muttering abuse in a long dead language - **65** Piles of shed skins and clothing; recognisable as belonging to several missing bards - **66** Huge matted lumps of hair blocking drain pipes and clogged with filth
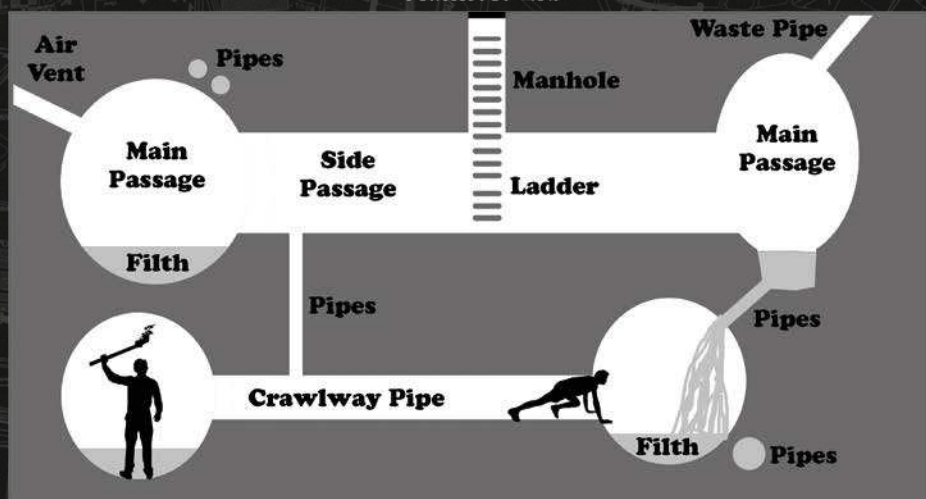
D66 SEWER HAZARDS

11 Swirling rainbow patterns on the water (flammable oil) - **12** Plague riddled piles of filth (highly contaminated) - **13** Dozens of gremlins having a horrible party with a tied up "guest" - **14** Ancient runes: save to avoid curse if reading -**15** Witch child pretending to be a lost orphan - **16** Cave in if loud noises or walls struck; may block an exit or unearth a lost passage - **21** Walkway collapses, dumping people into a filthy river below - **22** Water levels rapidly rise from torrential rains above - **23** Swarm of slippery crawling worms or leeches covers the floor - **24** Slimy pipes come from every wall; explorers must climb over them - **25** Stooping for long periods of time becomes painful, possibly crippling for a while - **26** The floor collapses into a lower level - **31** Tangled mats of roots; block passage or cramp space - **32** Passage submerged; it has a middle section with bad, maybe toxic air - **33** Water is thick with eels; tear holes in clothes, swim inside, and start eating - **34** Water and air are chilling; risk of hypothermia with long exposure - **35** A junction or chamber has been taken over as a lair - **36** Flow has become sludged up with sticky, tar -ike mass that can swallow people up - **41** A whirlpool in the water; sucks swimmers down to hidden depths - **42** Hot fluids are poured down a drain from the surface - **43** Gigantic mass of froth from the water; it covers the walkways, possibly hiding hazards - **44** Silvered traps left to catch were-beasts (valuable) - **45** Crude tripwire: an alarm using old pots; left by a gang or underfunded cult - **46** Trap: an iron portcullis blocks a passage; militia comes to investigate - **51** Colony of giant aquatic spiders with their underwater nest - 52 Piercer colony on the ceiling; hidden among natural calcium formations - **53** Sewernami! A flash flood of excrement; often preceded by a swarm of rats running away - **54** Huge monster; grown too big and trapped in a section, very hangry - **55** Sewer zoo: an area where monsters are dumped from surface menageries - **56** Black market run by gangs; willing to eliminate witnesses, or turn them into accessories to their illegal trade - **61** Area contested by gangs; regular fights break out, strangers are often ambushed - **62** Chaotic magic zone; makes spells and items behave chaotically - **63** Elder gods were once worshiped here; the place reeks of their evil taint - **64** Stone vault with an arcane puzzle lock; contains a enraged shoggoth trapped here for aeons - **65** Tainted burial area; attracts undead as well as would be necromancers - **66** Elemental node; attracts planar beings who delight in playing in liquids

Sewer Cross-Sections

Show these to your players when they complain
from all the penalties you give them.

Manhole Lid

Air Vent

Pipes

Manhole

Waste Pipe

Main Passage

Side Passage

Ladder

Main Passage

Filth

Pipes

Crawlway Pipe

Pipes

Filth

Pipes

COMPLETE THE DUNGEON

Are you only half inspired today? Great, us too! Let's collaborate on this
dungeon through the spatio-temporal magic of the print medium.

TITLE:

Roll 1d3+1 times 1d6 to name our adventure and write the title above.
You can also roll on one or more of these if you need themes to stock rooms.

1. Phalanx	1. of the Eyeless	1. Cult	1. of Ultimate Doom!
2. Gathering	2. of the King	2. Master	2. Featuring wizard nudity
3. Curse	3. in the Dragon	3. Mirror	3. A Stupidly Difficult Dungeon
4. Mouldering	4. in the Shadow	4. Realm	4. Enchantress
5. Asylum	5. for the One	5. Ghost	5. of the Seven Serpentine Swords
6. Escape	6. for the Last	6. Winter	6. Part Three

Roll 3d10 twice for two or more factions. For each faction,
add the dice results together to get a relative order of power.

NATURE	GOAL	SECRET
1. A gang of desperate bandits	1. Just survive	1. Sworn to peaceful conflict resolution
2. A clan of crafty Kobolds	2. Control the dungeon	2. Hate leader, coup imminent
3. An army of rotten skeletons	3. Manipulate the opposition	3. Just harmless, sentient images
4. A sisterhood of fighting nuns	4. Make a lot of gold, quick	4. Disgruntled clique ready to leave
5. A coterie of manic assassins	5. Rule over the opposition	5. Infiltrated by opposition
6. A boxing cabal of muscle wizards	6. Reopen an ancient portal	6. Faking: roll for real goal
7. A cell of black powder terrorists	7. Take over the Kingdom	7. Disguised: roll for real nature
8. A coven of undead hags	8. Create a nexus of eldritch power	8. Double secret: roll again
9. A pair of hungry dragons	9. Become gods	9. Have powerful allies outside
10. A trio of demon princesses	10. Start a new world on the ashes of this one	10. Sold souls to a Demon God

BACKSTORY:

NOTES:
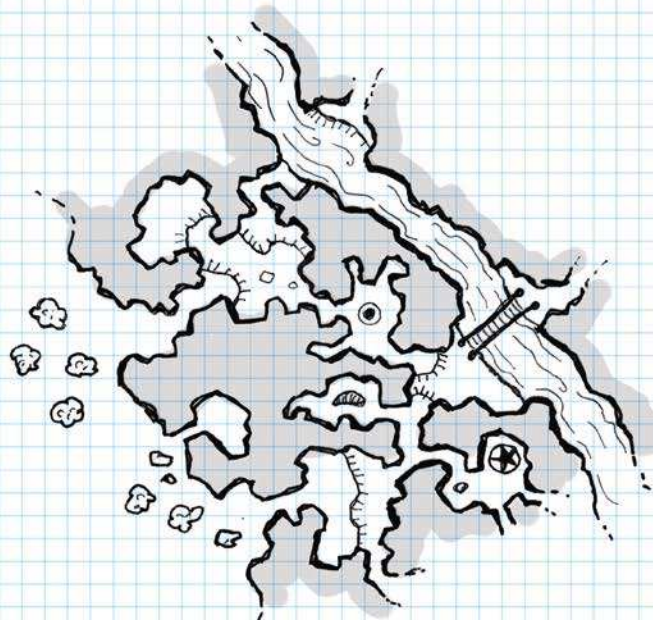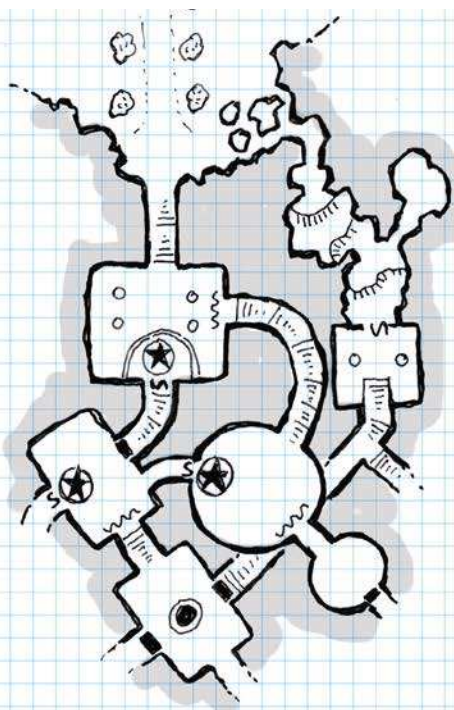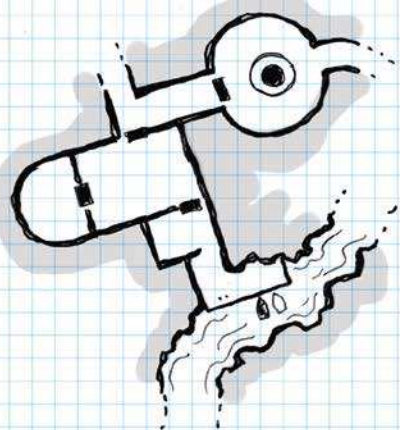
COMPLETE THE ENCOUNTER

BEWARE THE
FROM _____!

The green cyclops are _____
they want _____
and _____ makes them mad as hell.

In the silver suits, _____
are trying to _____
But they didn't expect _____

This battle is happening because the _____
have _____

and the _____
are reacting by _____

This is happening in _____
and everything is on fire because _____

The players cant get involved by _____

or if _____

ITEM STATS

SILVER SUITS

POWER BACKPACK

ANTENNAE HELMET
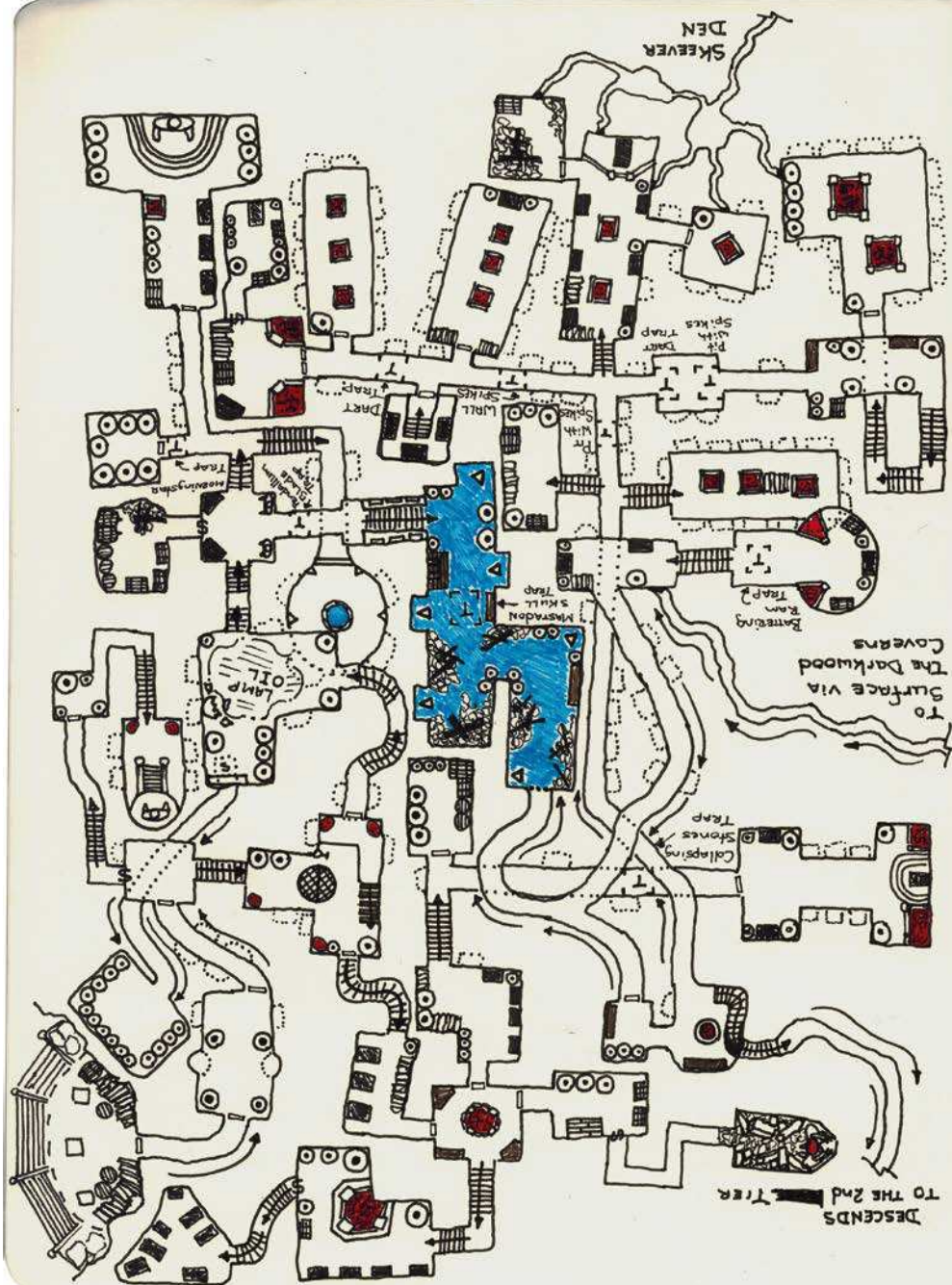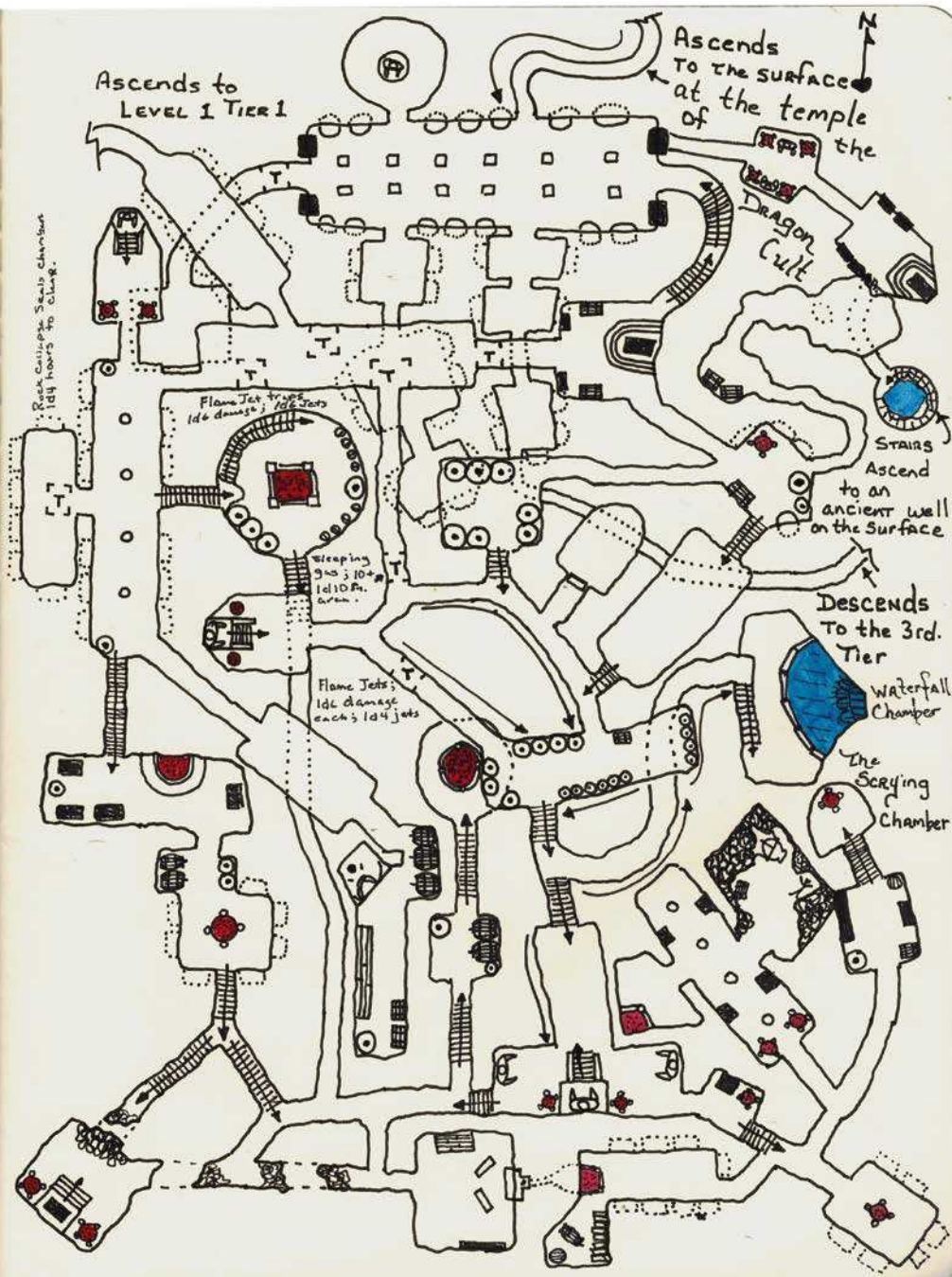
RAYGUN

ENCOUNTER STATS

GREEN CYCLOPS

SILVER SUIT FOLKS
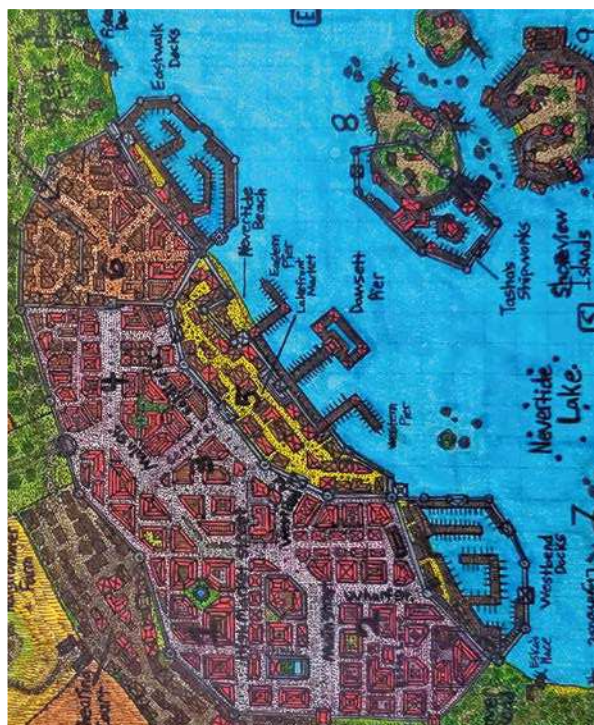
by **Jack Shear**

Just use BEARS

So, the characters in your old-school D&D game go somewhere you haven't yet prepared and you describe some cool, weird-ass monster that you don't actually have stats for: «At the bottom of the Bone Pit of the Succulent Orb a vast form rises from the sinkhole; its reptilian body glistens with antediluvian slime and its pteroid jaw opens, revealing rows of serrated fangs in what appears to be a most unholy welcome.» In situations likes these, I just use the stats for a bear and no one is the wiser. Re-skin appearance, methods of attack, and add special abilities on the fly if you absolutely must... but when in doubt, just use bears.

Knock's Portfolio of Cartographic Curiosities

SKEEVER
DEN

Dart Trap

Pit with Spikes Trap

DART TRAP

WALL TRAP

Pit with Spikes

Morningstar Trap

Blade

LAMP OIL

Mastadon SKULL Trap

Battering Ram Trap?

To Surface via The Darkwood Caverns

Collapsing Stones Trap

DESCENDS TO THE 2nd TIER

Ascends to
LEVEL 1 TIER 1

Ascends
To the surface
at the temple
of the

Dragon
Cult

Rock Collapse. Seals chamber
1d4 hours to clear.

STAIRS
Ascend
to an
ancient well
on the Surface

Flame Jet traps
1d6 damage; 1d6 Jets

Sleeping
gas; 10+
1d10 ft.
area.

DESCENDS
To the 3rd.
Tier

Waterfall
Chamber

Flame Jets;
1d6 damage
each; 1d4 jets

The
Scrying
Chamber

N

River Cassos (Lower)

River Cassos (Lower)

Eastwalk Docks

Nevertide Beach

Eastern Pier

Lakefront Market

Dawseth Pier

Tasha's Shipworks

Shadeview Islands

Nevertide Lake

Westend Docks

The Abomination Machine

Freaky Specimen

Ransacked Library

Hermit's Terminal

Sentient plant

Secret Door

Church of the Spawnlord

Room of Echoes

Ominous Entrance

Dark Reception

Caves of the Gigatoad

Slime Chute

Quivering Eggs

Barricaded Tunnel

Skittering Spawnlings

Smoking Spines

Collapsed Mine

Bone Merchant's Shop

Haunted Excavation

PARASITE EGGS, QUIVERING...

1.

2. THEY HATCH IF DISTURBED

FIRST DWARVES TO DIE

3. INFECT PCS ON A CRIT!

E

3 DWARVES GUARDING ENTRANCE: "SOMETHING HUGE! IT KILLED THEM ALL"

A FEW MANAGED TO FLEE

IT CAME FROM HERE!

VALUABLE MINERALS

PARASITE-CONTROLLED DWARVES BANGING ON THE DOOR

SCRAPS OF FOOD, FEW DROPS OF WINE, 100% DESPERATION

2 SCARED DRUNK DWARVES

E

SAFETY (?)

LOTS OF GOLD, JEWELS. STATUES SHOOT LIGHTNING IF NOT DWARF!
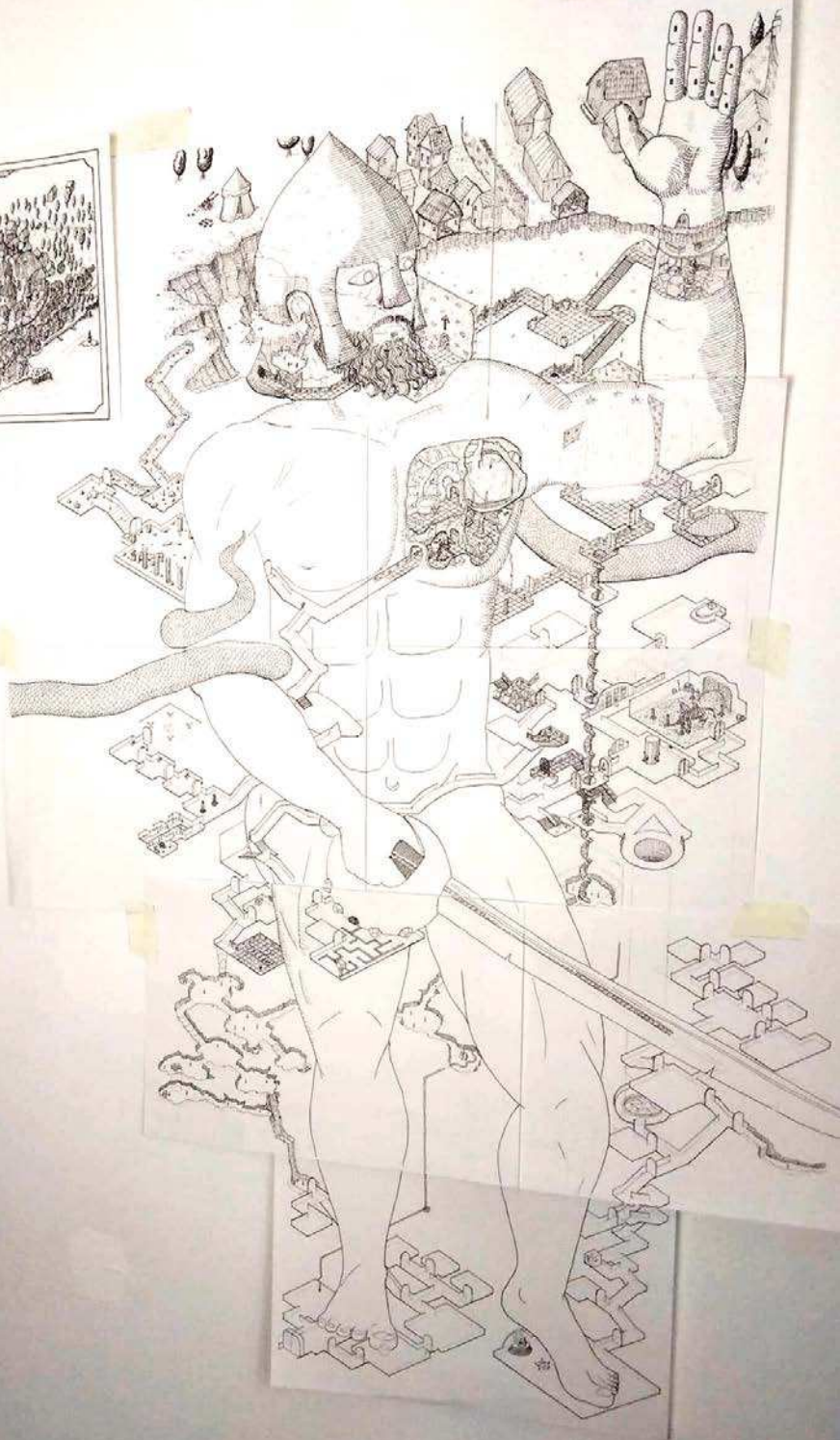
PARASITE-DWARVES CHEWING ON BODY PARTS. THEY HUNGER FOR MORE!
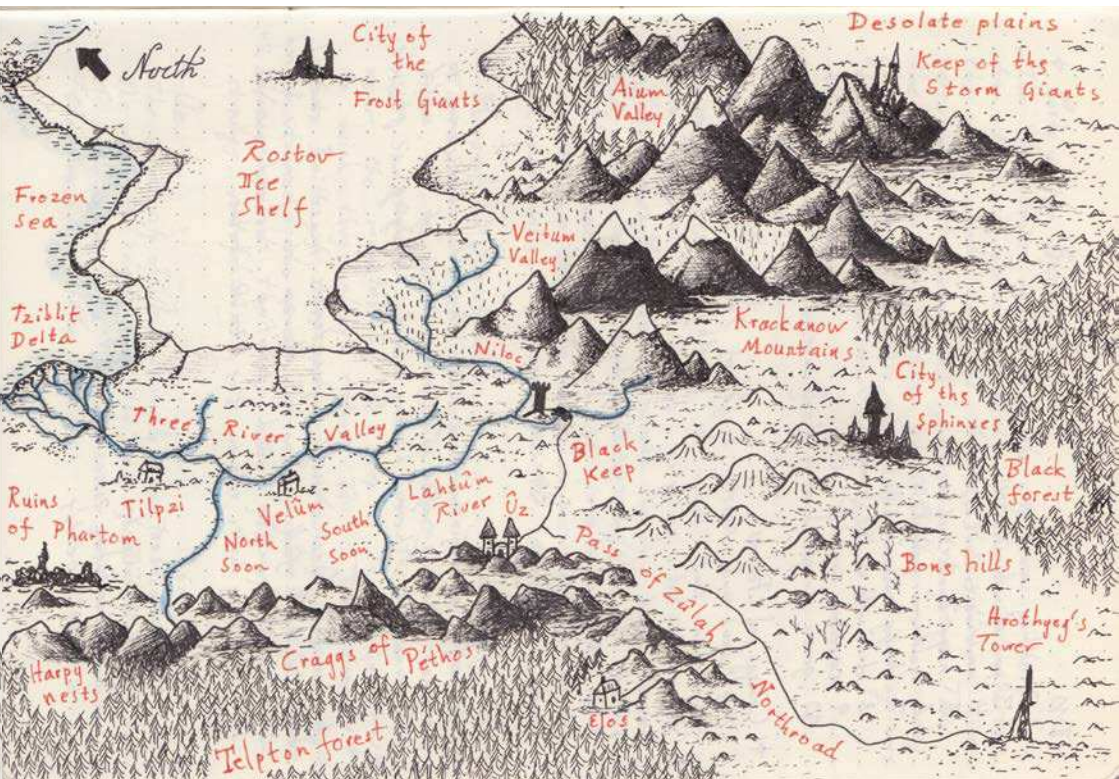
A TERRIBLE BURROWING THING

BURST THROUGH THE WALL KILLED A BUNCH OF DWARVES AND BROUGHT WITH IT SOME REAL NASTY PARASITES...

WHO GOES THERE!?

1. PARASITES.
2. DWARF, RUNNING FOR ITS LIFE.
3. DWARF, CONTROLLED BY PARASITES
4. SQUELCHING SOUND
5. LOOSE ROCKS FROM CEILING
6. DWARF IN BERZERK MODE.
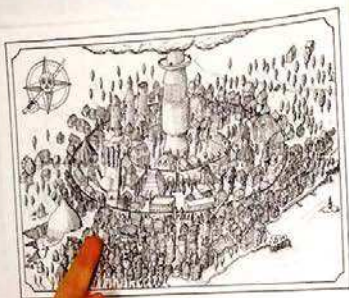
A Fabled City
of Brass

Sea of El Kerkar

Sea of El Kerkar
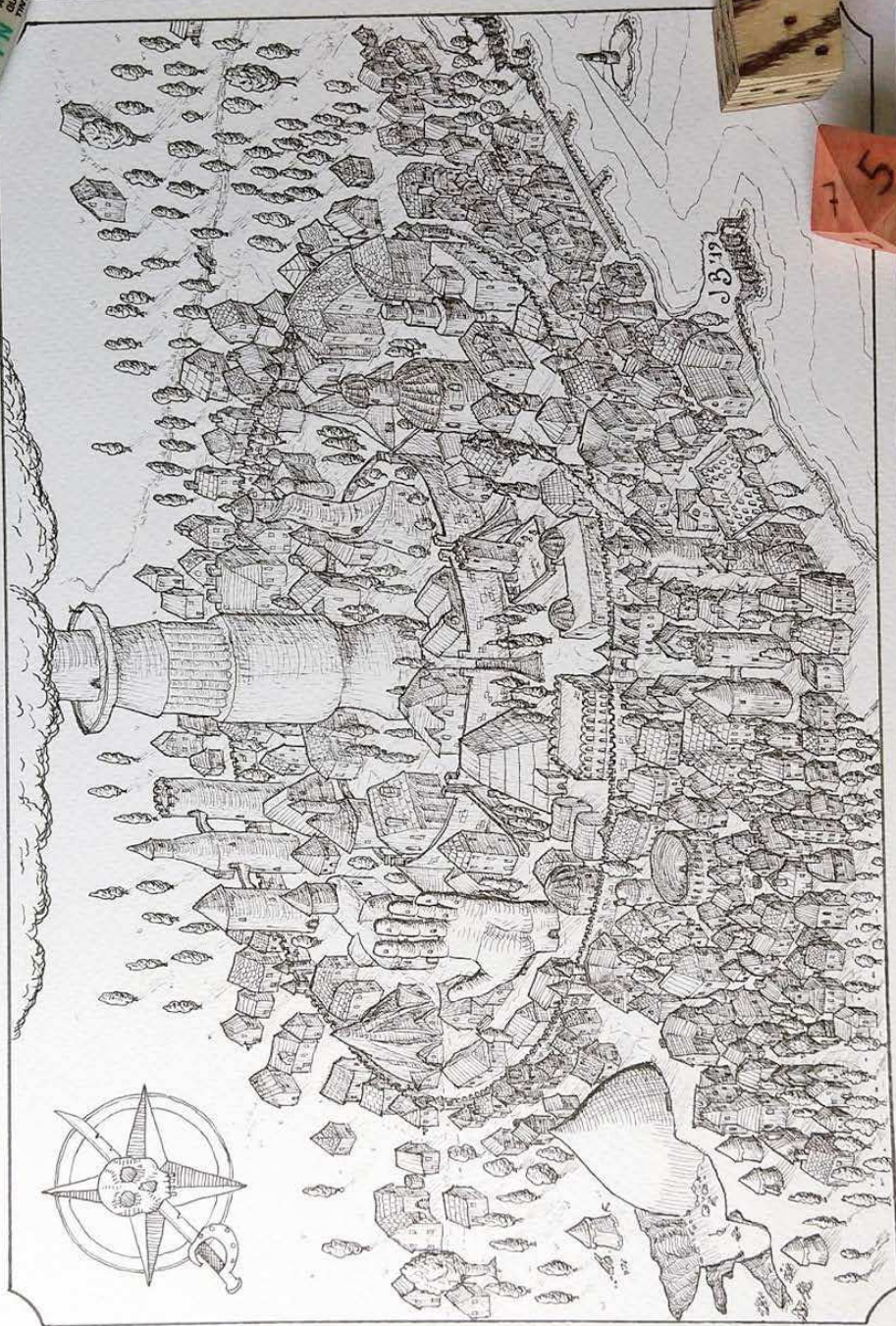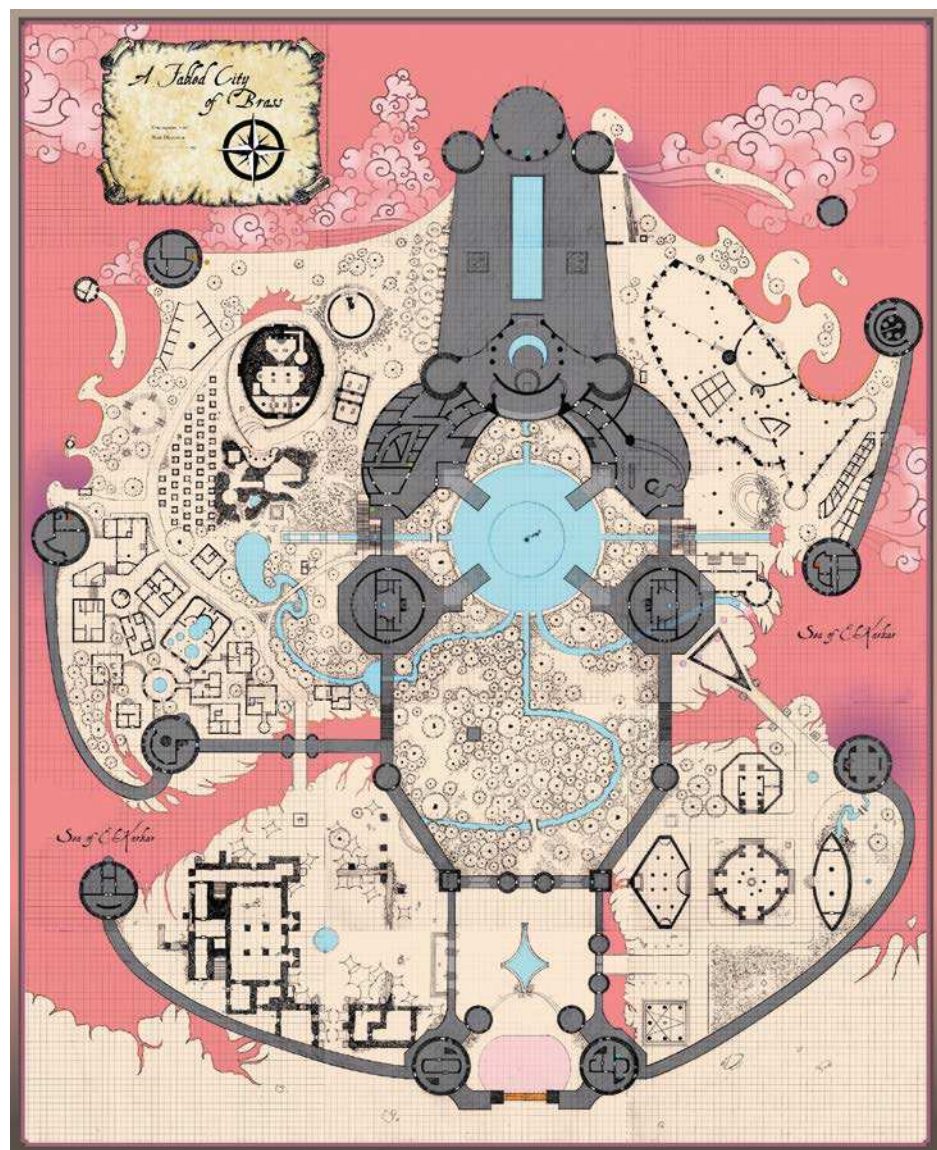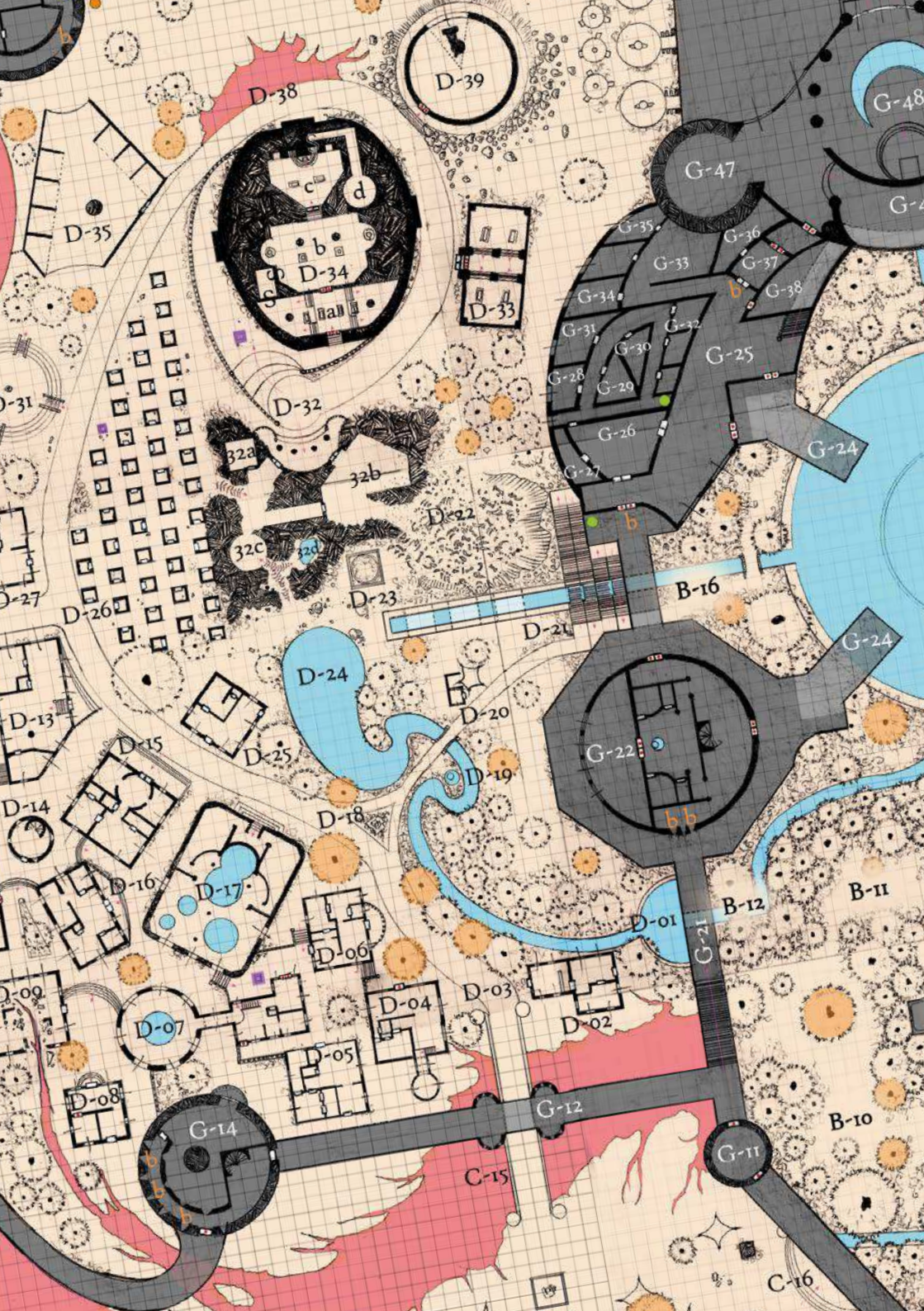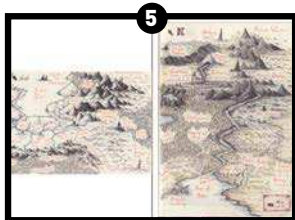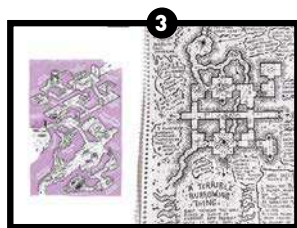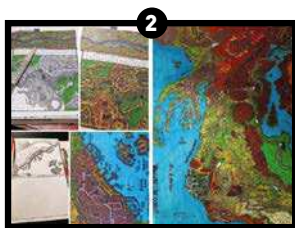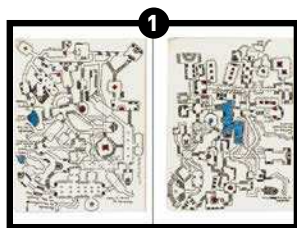
1 - Icehearth Barrow- By **Sean Stone -** Drawn with Pitt art pens in a moleskin blank paper notebook. They were inspired by the time I spent playing Skyrim with my sons.They are tier 1 and 2 of level one. I was intending for there to be at least 3 tiers per level and was hoping to assemble them into a mega-dungeon map of sorts.The blue was standing water and the red was either open flames or beds of hot coals.

2 The DragonClaw coast - By **Caleb Burks -** 1. Rheistal straddles the largest river in the land, ideally built to allow for the domination of trade and travel within the nation of Gradiged. As the gate between the north and south of the country, it is well known for its massive gladiatorial-style arena, an incredibly opulent open air bazaar, and the Gradivald Military Academy. 2. Centerpool is the trade center of the New Haven Colony, which formed after a rebellion from Gradige Originally built as an outpost to defend Gradigedi settlers, Centerpool has grown to become the center of commerce within New Haven Colony since its official rebellion and separation from the fatherland, Gradiged. Here one can find a bountiful fish market just next to the lake, as well as a thriving trade in ancient relics discovered by divers beneath the clear waters of the Centerpool. 3. The DragonClaw Coast remains the most diverse area on the continent, inviting travelers and traders from around the world, affording adventurers and treasure seekers alike with ample opportunity. Although historically considered the ancestral home of humankind, the Coast is home to the Jhaedoan Empire, the rebel Coastal Nations, and what remains of the Elves, sequestered in hiding within their wooded borders to the north. Welcome one and all, for the Realm is full of bounty, brimming with wonder and mystery.

3 - By **Skullfungus -** Skullfungus likes to draw dungeon maps, their inhabitants and everything in between! (and we love it)

4 - Velki and the Dungeon of Tyr - By **Jog Brogzin -**While making Azia's map of Velki for my patreon, they asked me to add a hand shaped building. I really felt there could be a dungeon underneath this, wrapping around a massive statue. So I took January off from patron maps to tackle this project - I felt compelled to. Under Velki is the Dungeon of Týr, the petrified avatar of the Sword God. Made on nine A4 pages and stitched together in Photoshop, this took me the entire month of January 2020 to complete

5 - By **Patrick Ollson -** "It started with The Lord of the Rings." I was maybe 12 years old and fell head over heels. I had never read anything like it, I was totally hooked. The Fellowships journey across this fantastic and magical lands, I loved it. And the maps! Showing these weird and wonderful places. So, many years later, writing OSR adventures, my maps are very much an homage to that wonderful book and those days of my youth, long past. The sense of wonder and adventure."

6 - The Fabled City of Brass - By **Anthony Huso** «A Fabled City of Brass» by Anthony Huso is an homage to first edition AD&D gaming. You can find more of Huso's creations at www.thebluebard.com.

Knock's Retinue of Rogues

These suits of plate armour once belonged to superheroic fighters who died on a dark and moonless night. Sometimes, no one knows how nor why, a hero's harness is awaken. It walks out of the crypt or museum where it was left (getting rid of the mannequin or rotting corpse inside it) and wanders the countryside, pondering the meaning of life.

Living Harness

Requirement:
Minimum WIS 9
Prime Requisite: WIS
Hit dice: d8
Maximum level: 14
Armour: It's complicated
Weapons: All
Languages : Common, Alignment language.

- **Deluxe hinges :** +1 Dexterity (pay a dwarf engineer 2d6 x 1000 GP)
- **Gnomish actuators :** +1 Strength (pay 2d6 x 1000 GP to a gnome artificer)
- **Spikes:** unarmed damage is 1d8 (1d3 x 1000 GP to a master blacksmith)

Particularities & stuff

• **Breathing:** Not affected by oxygen starvation or deterioration of the ambient air.
• **Dismantling:** A Living Harness can detach parts of itself, which can prove useful to look over a wall, get the keys to its own gaol cell, travel in a crate, etc. Each part of the harness acts independently. Any damage received when the harness is dismantled is doubled. Additionally, if two or more pieces are more than 15' apart, the character takes 1d6 damage per round.
• **Electricity:** Damage from electricity is doubled
• **Food:** No need to eat or drink (although it's always fun to see it try)
• **Healing:** Cannot receive mundane or magical healing. The harness must repair itself. For each full day of work

Combat

The Living Harness cannot wear any extra protection. It has a natural AC of 3 [16]. It can use any weapon.

Upgrades

A Living Harness upgrades itself once every three levels (see table). Choose from the list below or discuss another improvement with your referee. Each upgrade can only be chosen once, and requires a week of work at prohibitive cost).
- **Masterwork plates:** +1 AC (1d3 x 1000 GP paid to a master armourer)
- **Engravings:** +1 Charisma (1d6 x 1000 GP paid to a master goldsmith or silversmith)

Garagante, level 12 Living Harness

Living Harness Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THAC0	D	W	P	B	S	Upgrade
1	0	1d8	19 [0]	12	13	14	15	16	-
2	2,000	2d8	19 [0]	12	13	14	15	16	-
3	4,000	3d8	19 [0]	12	13	14	15	16	X
4	8,000	4d8	17 [+2]	10	11	12	13	14	-
5	16,000	5d8	17 [+2]	10	11	12	13	14	-
6	32,000	6d8	17 [+2]	10	11	12	13	14	X
7	64,000	7d8	14 [+5]	8	9	10	10	12	-
8	120,000	8d8	14 [+5]	8	9	10	10	12	-
9	240,000	9d8	14 [+5]	8	9	10	10	12	X
10	360,000	9d8+2*	12 [+7]	6	7	8	8	10	-
11	480,000	9d8+4*	12 [+7]	6	7	8	8	10	-
12	600,000	9d8+6*	12 [+7]	6	7	8	8	10	X
13	720,000	9d8+8*	10 [+9]	4	5	6	7	8	-
14	840,000	9d8+10*	10 [+9]	4	5	6	7	8	-

using appropriate tools (the Living Harness owns a full kit), it recovers 1d6 hit points, 2d6 if assisted by a good blacksmith (at a cost of 10 GP a day). If the work is interrupted, the character doesn't heal that day.

• **Noisy:** Living Harnesses have trouble moving silently. Unless they stay totally motionless, opponents are only surprised on 1-in-6.

• **Poison:** Immune to poison.

• **Born Again Philosopher:** the harness has a +2 bonus to reaction rolls with sages and other intellectual types.

• **Sleep:** Living Harnesses don't sleep and are not affected by the sleep spell.

• **Water:** The worst enemy of a Living Harness. For every hour in a wet environment (or wet weather), it has a 1-in-6 chance of losing 1 hit point. Moreover, if it is submerged in water, it must dry completely, apply grease and oil, etc. for 2d6 turns, or lose 1d6 hit points per hour.

• **Weight:** stangely enough, Living Harnesses weigh as much as a man in an armor.

• **Weird presence:** A Living Harness is often confused with a taciturn knight. However, in its presence, dogs bark menacingly, babies cry, milk turns sour, a halfling loses their appetite, etc.

After reaching 9th level

A Living Harness finds a modest dwelling to build up and fortify. It attracts 2d6 scholars who wish to help with its philosophical research.

By **Nobboc the Half Clever** - Art: **Li-An**

Ne'er-do-wells are lazy vagabonds, nonchalant outcasts, clever pro-fiteers, or malicious ragamuffins. They learned to survive in the worst of situations, developing many talents without ever improving any of them.
They are masters at the art of avoiding unpleasant, boring, arduous, or banal aspects of daily life. They often join a band of promising adventurers who they hope will help bring about a better life or self-promised destiny.
Their motto : «Good for nothing, ready for anything!»

Ne'er-do-well

Requirement: Minimum DEX 9
Prime Requisite: CHA
Hit dice: 1d6
Maximum level: 14
Armour: Leather
Weapons: Any
Languages : Common , Alignment language.

Opportunist

When attacking an unaware opponent, the Ne'er-do-well gains a +2 bonus to hit. If successful, the attack causes maximum damage.

Rogue

Ne'er-do-wells master a thief's skill of their choice. They use it as if they were a thief of the same level.

Obtuse

Ne'er-do-wells gain a +2 bonus to their saving throws against mind affecting spells, like charms and illusions.

Penny pinching

When a Ne'er-do-well bargains, the referee may allow a Charisma check with a modifier adapted to the circumstances. A success is generally greatly beneficial, but a failure often has undesirable and unpleasant consequences.

Audentes fortuna juvat!

Ne'er-do-wells are lucky bastards. They can reroll any die roll once per day at first level, twice per day starting at

Combat

Ne'er-do-wells firmly believe in freedom of movement, flexibility and lightning reaction. Leather is the heaviest armor they tolerate.
They can use any weapon.

Defensive bonus

Avoiding blows is a second nature for a Ne'er-do-well. They gain a +1 bonus to AC at first level. This bonus increases to +2 at 5th level, and to +3 at 10th level

Ne'er-do-well Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THACO	D	W	P	B	S	AC bonus	Lucky
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	13	14	13	13	15	+1	1
2	1,500	2d6	19 [0]	13	14	13	13	15	+1	1
3	3,000	3d6	19 [0]	13	14	13	13	15	+1	1
4	6,000	4d6	19 [0]	13	14	13	13	15	+1	1
5	12,000	5d6	17 [+2]	12	13	11	11	13	+2	2
6	25,000	6d6	17 [+2]	12	13	11	11	13	+2	2
7	50,000	7d6	17 [+2]	12	13	11	11	13	+2	2
8	100,000	8d6	17 [+2]	12	13	11	11	13	+2	2
9	200,000	9d6	14 [+5]	10	11	9	9	10	+2	2
10	300,000	9d6+1*	14 [+5]	10	11	9	9	10	+3	3
11	400,000	9d6+2*	14 [+5]	10	11	9	9	10	+3	3
12	500,000	9d6+3*	14 [+5]	10	11	9	9	10	+3	3
13	600,000	9d6+4*	12 [+7]	8	9	7	9	8	+3	3
14	700,000	9d6+5*	12 [+7]	8	9	7	9	8	+3	3

5th level, three times per day starting at 10th level.

Sense of danger

Ne'er-do-wells have a 1-in-6 chance to sense a close by source of danger, like a trap or an ambush. The referee rolls for the player.

Wizard Wannabe

Ne'er-do-wells are clever and obsessively observant, especially when it comes to magic and magicians. Starting at 3rd level, they can memorise and cast arcane spells from scrolls. There is 10% chance per spell level that the spell does not function as expected with disastrous and/or humorous consequences. Ne'er-do-wells can memorise one spell, plus one spell per Intelligence modifier bonus.

After reaching 9th level

A Ne'er-do-well may acquire a stronghold, generally a eccentrically appointed manse or manor, and live the good life, attracting 2d6 Ne'er-do-wells and profiteers to works as lackeys, bodyguards, masseurs, entertainers, exotic dancers, etc. while regularly attempting to run off with the silverware.
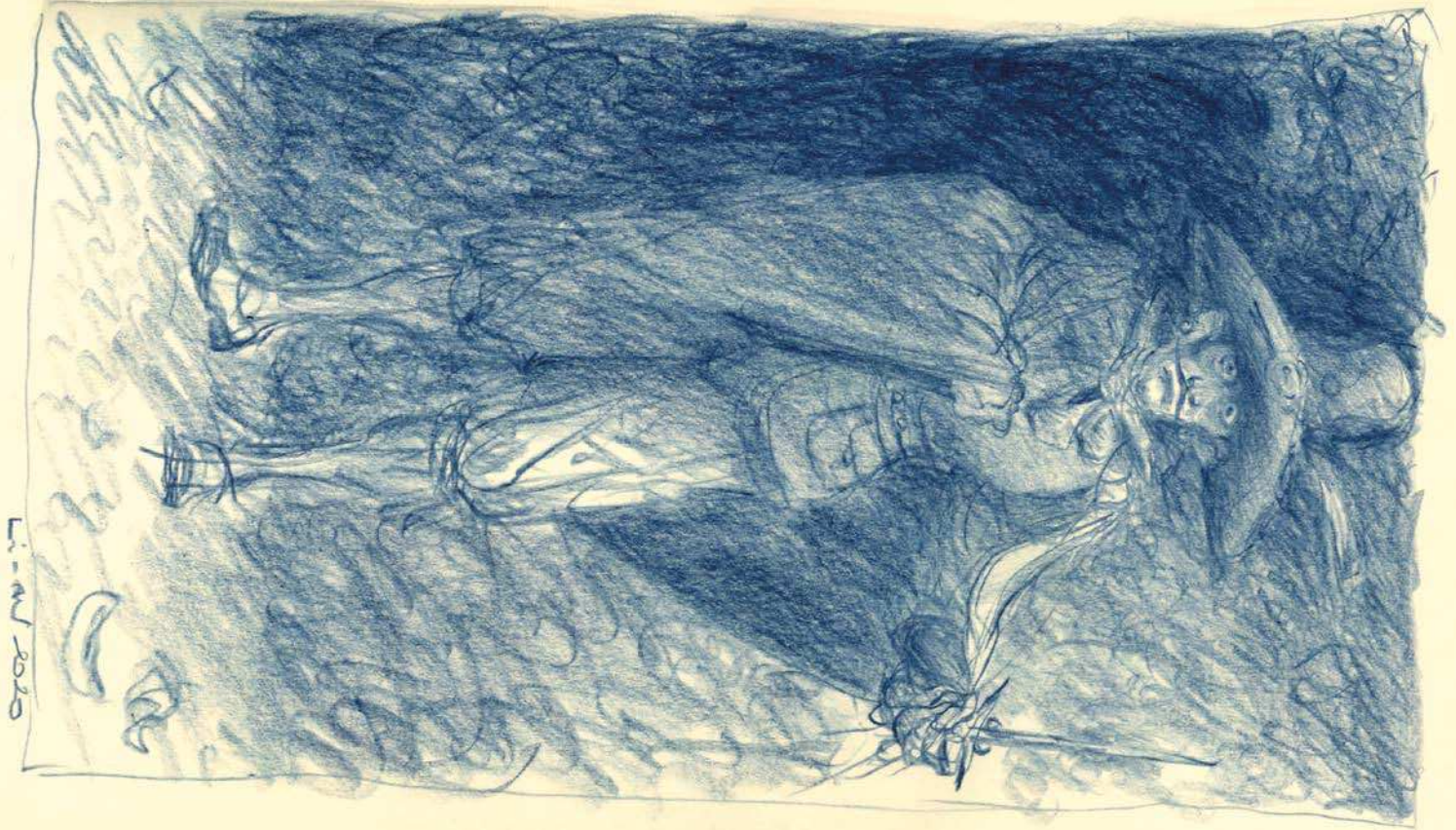
Elvirio Pompelo, 4th level Ne'er-do-well

By **Éric Nieudan**

We all have heard stories of these barely clothed people delving into unholy crypts with only a blanket and a crowbar, but somehow avoiding the deadliest traps and salvaging more treasure than anyone else. Some say they are cursed by the Gods of Wealth, richer than royalty, more destitute than beggars. Some say they are planewalkers in a permanent quantum state. Other assume they are just incapable of taking care of their stuff – or anyone else's.

Naked Wanderer

Requirement: Minimum CON 11
Prime Requisite: CON
Hit dice: 1d8
Maximum level: 14
Armour: Any
Weapons: Any
Languages : Common , Alignement language.

Combat
Naked Wanderers can use all types of weapons and armour (and see *Tinker*).

Wanderer's skills
You start with a wanderer's die (WD) of d3.

Robust
Add your WD to saves against disease, cold, and all weather or endurance related effects.

Tinker
• Add or subtract your WD whenever you use an item for another purpose than the one it was intended for. The referee decides how it applies. If the game doesn't use roll under stats, make it a +1 to d6 rolls with an additional +1 at levels 5, 9, and 13.
• In combat, add your WD to the damage of any improvised weapon, and to the AC of makeshift armour (Roll once for every fight.).

Intuitive Learner
You have a chance of understanding magic and mundane script equal to 5% per level. This means you can cast spells from scrolls, activate magical items, and possibly disarm glyph. The referee decides what happens on a miss.

Bare Necessities
• At the start of each session, roll your WD; that's the number of items you own – remove the rest from your equipment list. It is lost forever (stolen, broken, quantum disintegrated…). This includes immobile goods and animals, but not followers. Every piece of clothing is an item, meaning that pairs of boots or gloves count as two items. 100 coins, 7 rations, 20 arrows, etc. are considered one item, but the container that holds them is a separate item.

Naked Wanderer Level Progression

Level	Title	XP	HD	THACO	D	W	P	B	S	WD
1	Wanderer	0	1d8	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12	d3
2	Dungeon Bum	2,000	2d8	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12	d3
3	Barefoot Fighter	4,000	3d8	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12	d6
4	Exhibitionist	8,000	4d8	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10	d6
5	Disrobed Robber	16,000	5d8	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10	d8
6	Hobo	32,000	6d8	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10	d8
7	Murderhobo	64,000	7d8	14 [+5]	4	5	6	7	8	d10
8	Planar flasher	120,000	8d8	14 [+5]	4	5	6	7	8	d10
9	World Wanderer	240,000	9d8	14 [+5]	4	5	6	7	8	d12
10	Clothed Master	360,000	10d8	12 [+7]	2	3	4	4	6	d12
11	Clothed Master	480,000	10d8+1*	12 [+7]	2	3	4	4	6	d12
12	Clothed Master	600,000	10d8+2*	12 [+7]	2	3	4	4	6	d12

• During play, you can only borrow a number of items equal to your level every session. Whenever you use a permanent item above this limit, it is lost (as above) if you fail a saving throw vs spells. This includes stuff carried by followers, or held for you by fellow adventurers, but not items taken from monsters, or found in a dungeon.

• Handing or giving away any of your possession triggers your curse as well: an item is lost in a number of rounds equal to the result of your WD.

• At the start of an adventure, you can forgo your equipment WD roll, losing everything you had, and roll on the table **P. 168** instead. Have the referee replace the entries that come up more than once. Alternatively, they may want to give you something that fits their plans.

After reaching 10th level

Upon reaching level 10, stories of your exploit attract d20+level apprentices, all 1st level Naked Wanderers, who travel with you. They expect you to share food and lodgings, however basic. You can roll their numbers again at every new level.

Skimperator, 7th level
Naked Wanderer
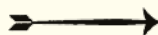
d30 Possessions

1: A piece of string and a vampire tooth. **2:** A miniature portrait of a lost loved one. **3:** A quarterstaff, a mail shirt, a crossbow and d6 bolts in a case. **4:** A tin box of delicious and nutritious cinnamon biscuits (heal 1HP, 10 uses). **5:** A chest containing d100 SP, d30 GP, and 3d6 PP. **6:** A holy symbol, still charged with divine energy. You can turn undead once as a cleric of the same level. **7:** d20 horse shoes, d4 of them are silver and worth 3 GP each. **8:** A pound of crimson coffee worth 150 GP. Can be brewed to give d20 temporary HP to 5 people. **9:** A set of maximilian style, finely adorned platemail. **10:** A set of excellent traveling clothes, suitable for all weathers, but no boots. **11:** A freeze raygun (as longbow, but damage is doubled) with enough power for 10 shots. **12:** A pair of shoes made of dragon hide, worth 300 GP. +2 to save vs Breath. **13:** A copper lantern that doesn't need to be refilled. **14:** A large bag of stone marbles (several hundreds). **15:** A crowbar, metal file, skeleton key, and 10 iron spikes. **16:** A lover letter implicating a popular crowned head. **17:** A portable hole, filled to the brim with someone's precious furniture (worth 2,000 GP to the right buyer). **18:** A leather canoe (sits five) and two paddles. **19:** The deed to a contested property, with your name on it. **20:** A beautifully illustrated book of erotic poetry (200 GP to a collector). **21:** A +2 exotic looking sword with a gem studded scabard worth 500 GP. **22:** Three large sacks containing salt (10 GP), flour (5 CP), and exotic spices (200 GP). **23:** A tamed axebeak, packed for a long journey (10 items of your choice, no clothes or weapons). **24:** A large basket containin d12 rather smart, but decidedly needy kittens. **25:** A platinum crown worth 500 GP. Belongs to a nearby noble. **26:** The mounted head of a catoblepas. 50% chance of attempting to petrify anyone looking at it. **27:** A random potion and a random scroll. **28:** A spellbook containing 2d4 spells of random levels . **29:** A complete pack of adventuring gear (choose 20 items from the normal list). **30:** A permanent magical item, randomly generated.

By **Gavin Norman**

«Sheep (Ovis aries) are quadrupedal, ruminant mammals typically kept as livestock. Sheep are most likely descended from the wild mouflon and one of the earliest animals to be domesticated for agricultural purposes»

From Wikipedia.

Sheep

Requirement: -
Prime Requisite: -
Hit dice: d6
Maximum level: 5
Armour: None
Weapons: None
Languages : Sheepish, Goatish, can roughly understand simple words of Common well enough

It should be noted that, as adventuring companions, sheep are contrary and stubborn. They are notoriously difficult to train, and equally infamous for their wilfulness.

Creating a Sheep character

Of the standard six ability scores, sheep roll 3d6 as normal for STR, DEX and CON. They roll 1d4 for WIS and INT, and have no CHA worth talking about.

Sheep Level Progression

Level	Title	XP	HD	THACO	D	W	P	B	S	Dam.	Special
1	Flocking	0	1d6	19 [0]	12	13	14	15	16	1d4	-
2	Ram	1,000	2d6	19 [0]	12	13	14	15	16	1d6	-
3	Stud	2,000	3d6	19 [0]	12	13	14	15	16	1d6	Charge
4	Battle Ram	4,000	4d6	17 [+2]	10	11	12	13	14	1d8	-
5	Flock Lord	8,000	5d6	17 [+2]	10	11	12	13	14	1d8	Rampage

Combat

• Sheep cannot wear armour. Their wool gives them a natural armour class, depending on season:
- Summer : 8 [11]
- Fall: 7 [12]
- Winter: 6 [13]
- Spring: 9 [10] Shearing season!

• Sheep cannot use weapons. Sheep have a natural butt attack which does 1d4 damage. This damage increases to 1d6 at 2nd level, and 1d8 at 4th level. (Note that it is assumed that an adventuring sheep is male, possessing the aggressive nature and full horns of a ram.)

Rampage

At 5th level, a sheep gains the ability to rampage. When rampaging, a sheep gains +2 to hit and damage, and a -2 penalty to armour class. Once a sheep has begun rampaging, it cannot stop for 2d6 rounds, and will attack anything which moves.

Lord Artus, 4th level Sheep

Charge

At 3rd level, a sheep gains the ability to charge. It must be able to run toward an opponent for 20' in a straight(ish) line. If the attack hits, it causes double damage.

One the PCs in my Dreamlands campaign has been blessed (via a table of random starting equipment) with the companionship of a sheep. At first the sheep was just a walking ball of wool, but inevitably questions started to be asked about its hit points, armour class, combat capabilities, etc. The sheep (named Steve) has now been elevated to the status of a henchman, and I said that the player could give a share of the PC's XP to the sheep, allowing him to advance gradually. That requires a class, thus...

Requirement: Minimum DEX 9
Prime Requisite: DEX and CON
Hit dice: 1d6
Maximum level: 6
Armour: No
Weapons: Any appropriate to size
Languages : Alignement language, Hamstlinguo, Common, Gnomish, and the secret and rudimentary language of small burrowing rodents like logs, apodemus, shrews or mole rats.

These small (3-ft tall) humanoids are fairly robust, with small legs and arms, anda pudgy figure due to their thick, puffy fur.
Hamsteros are often mistaken for extremely shy, but most of them are merely restrained and modest. They make loyal companions to those who treat them with respect.

Hamstero

Defensive Bonus

Due to their small size, Hamsteros gain a +2 bonus to Armour Class when attacked by large opponents (greater than human sized).

Climbing Sheer Surfaces

Hamsteros are generally barefoot. Their small clawed feet make them amazing climbers. Their base chance of climbing is 70% + the Hamstero's level.

Cheeks of Holding

• A Hamstero can use their cheeks as a storing space. They can hold one small object per level (the referee is the final authority as to what counts as a small object).
• Moreover, the Hamstero can look for other items in their cheeks. Once per day and per level, any small mundane item can be found with a 3-in-6 chance.

Silly Shrieking

When a Hamstero is surprised, they can't help but briefly cry out in fear. All opponents with less than 4 HD must save vs Paralysis or be dazed for one

Prime requistes: A Hamstero with at least 13 in one prime requisite gains a 5% bonus to experience. If both DEX and CON are 16 or higher, the Hamstero gets a +10% bonus.

Combat

Hamsteros are unable to wear any armour over their thick fur. They have a natural AC of 6 [13].
Hamsteros train with all sorts of weapons. They cannot use longbows or two-handed swords.
An unarmed Hamstero can bite with razor-like incisors for 1d4 damage.

Pulkypuk, 3rd level Hamstero

Hamstero Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THACO	D	W	P	B	S	Climbing
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	16	9	10	13	12	94
2	1,500	2d6	19 [0]	14	9	10	13	12	95
3	3,000	3d6	19 [0]	12	9	10	13	12	96
4	6,000	4d6	17 [+2]	10	7	8	10	10	97
5	12,000	5d6	17 [+2]	8	7	8	10	10	98
6	25,000	6d6	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10	99

round. The Hamstero's allies are generally used to this embarrassing behaviour and can act normally (unless they were surprised too).

Constant Activity

Hamsteros have a hard time staying still and focused. They tend to want to hop about, run on all fours, turn an empty barrel into an improvised wheel, etc. The referee should feel free to apply penalties to reaction rolls, ability checks, and the like when this constant activity may prove problematic.

Underground Orientation

Being natural burrowers, Hamstero adventurers always know the direction they are facing when underground

Fast Hibernation

Every full day of uninterrupted rest in a safe and comfortable area, Hamsteros heal 1d6 hit points instead of 1d3. If the hibernation is interrupted, the hamstero must save vs Wands or lose 1d6 hp

After reaching 6th Level

A Hamstero can build an underground stronghold that attracts friendly humanoid rodents from far and wide. They will serve the Hamstero and ensure the security of the burrow. In exchange for this service, the Hamstero must tirelessly tell their epic adventures, train the most valiant of his retainers, and encourage them to seek their own fame on the roads.

By **Benjamin Baugh** - Art: **Evlyn M**

This class is a more generic version of the Goblin Enchantress, found on Evlyn's Chaudron Chromatique blog*.

A Swarm Lord is a person who has learned the trick of summoning and controlling some small creature, nearly harmless individually, but powerful in mass. The Swarm Lord forsakes martial and magical training, instead dedicating themselves to mastering the ways of their small subjects, of perfecting their rule over their vermin kingdom. These princesses in rags, these gutter queens, they may appear harmless, and indeed, most are.
But it is not the Swarm Lord you should fear, but the swarm.

Swarm Lord

Restrictions

Swarm Lords use four-sided dice (d4) to determine their hit points. They may wear leather and chain armor, but if so armored, can not use some of their special abilities (see below). They may not use shields. They may use any type of one-handed weapon, but if armed, may not use some of their special abilities (see below). Further, because of their special relationship with swarming vermin, they may never have normal retainers or followers, though they can take on giant intelligent versions of their swarm creatures as retainers.

Requirement: -
Prime Requisite: CHA
Hit dice: d4
Maximum level: 10
Armour: special
Weapons: special
Languages : Alignment language, Common, Goblin.

Special abilities:

• A Swarm Lord surrounds herself with a mob of eager and utterly loyal vermin - or indeed, any kind of small creature, such as birds, insects, snakes, rats, spiders, and similar. Some Swarm Lords summon a mixed mass of tiny nasties, while others control a specific type. Regardless, the abilities of the swarm are the same.
The strength of this swarm is represented by a swarm die (dS). This die begins at d6, and improves as the Swarm Lord levels, and the swarms she is able to summon grow in size and power. At first level, only a single command may be given to a swarm, but a Swarm Lord can issue more complex orders as she gains levels of experience.
Sometimes, a swarm will be reduced in strength. If used for a dangerous or risky action – as noted below – and if the swarm die rolls a 1, then it is reduced in size one step. So a d6 becomes a d4, and a d4 becomes a d2. There is always some vermin about, so it can never be reduced below a single point. The Swarm Lord can rebuild their swarm by taking an exploration turn (10 minutes) to summon more vermin to rule, using her sirenlike influence. The swarm die is then increased by one step, up to the maximum her level allows.

Swarm Lord Level Progression

Level	Title	XP	HD	THACO	D	W	P	B	S	Swarm Die	Swarm Actions
1	Scumlick	0	1d4	19 [0]	13	14	13	16	15	d6	1
2	Brownhood	4,000	2d4	19 [0]	13	14	13	16	15	d6	2
3	Gutter Boss	8,000	3d4	19 [0]	13	14	13	16	15	d6	2
4	Midden Mogul	16,000	4d4	19 [0]	13	14	13	16	15	d8	2
5	Mad Piper	32,000	5d4	19 [0]	13	14	13	16	15	d8	3
6	Sewer Shaman	64,000	6d4	17 [+2]	11	12	11	14	12	d8	3
7	Alley Count	120,000	7d4	17 [+2]	11	12	11	14	12	d10	3
8	Hundred Eye Duke	250,000	8d4	17 [+2]	11	12	11	14	12	d10	3
9	Prince of Vermin	400,000	9d4	17 [+2]	11	12	11	14	12	d10	3
10	Swarm King/Queen	600,000	9d4+1	17 [+2]	11	12	11	14	12	d12	4

With at least a turn, swarms may be commanded to...

 • **Perform Domestic Services** - as they're able, by combining their tiny strength, to cook, clean, and mend.
• **Perform Manual Labor** - such as tunneling and burrowing, clearing rubble, gnawing corpses into oblivion, and similar. This is risky and many tiny bodies may be crushed in the process.
• **Forage and Scavenge** - the swarm can produce enough food for individuals equal to the result of the swarm die, though it takes a strong stomach to eat it.
• **Bear Burdens** - the swarm vermin are individually weak, but collectively strong. They can be commanded to carry weights of up to 100 x dS in coin weight, but must drop it all to perform any other action.
• **Carry Their Lord** - if the Swarm Lord is unencumbered, then the swarm can collectively carry her at a speed of 10 x dS. At 5th level, they can carry her up sheer surfaces on a roll of the swarm die that is 3 or greater. At 10th level, they can carry her through the air slowly, flying at a speed of 20.
• **Search an Area** - the swarm can find traps, hidden doors, and other secrets in an area with a roll of the swarm die of 3 or greater. If traps are found, the swarm accidentally triggers them on a 3 in 6, which results in the swarm die being reduced one step.
• **Scout Ahead** - the swarm can be very stealthy, and spreads out to watch and warn the Lord. While the swarm will never willingly get more than 30 feet from the Lord, its keen senses allow it to avoid surprise and spot ambushes on a roll of the swarm die of 3 or greater.

Within a round, swarms can act quickly to...

• **Protect their Lord if she is unarmored** - if commanded to protect their lord, improve AC by a roll of the Swarm Die. This is risky for the swarm.
• **Attack their Lord's enemies, if she is**

**unarmed** - inflicting the swarm die in damage to all enemies within 30 feet. This is risky for the swarm.

• Sacrifice their lives to protect their **Lord's** - if struck, the swarm will sacrifice itself without being commanded to. Reduce the swarm die by one step, and subtract a roll of the swarm die from the total damage suffered by the Lord this round. Additionally, Swarm Lords are never attacked by creatures similar to those making up their swarms, and if they encounter wild swarms during their adventuring, can use them to refresh their swarm die if it has been reduced.

After reaching 10th Level

At 10th level, a Swarm Lord may found a Warren where they may always refresh their swarm up to full strength, and it attracts 4d6 intelligent giant vermin who will guard it. While within the bounds of their warren, they gain an additional swarm action as well.
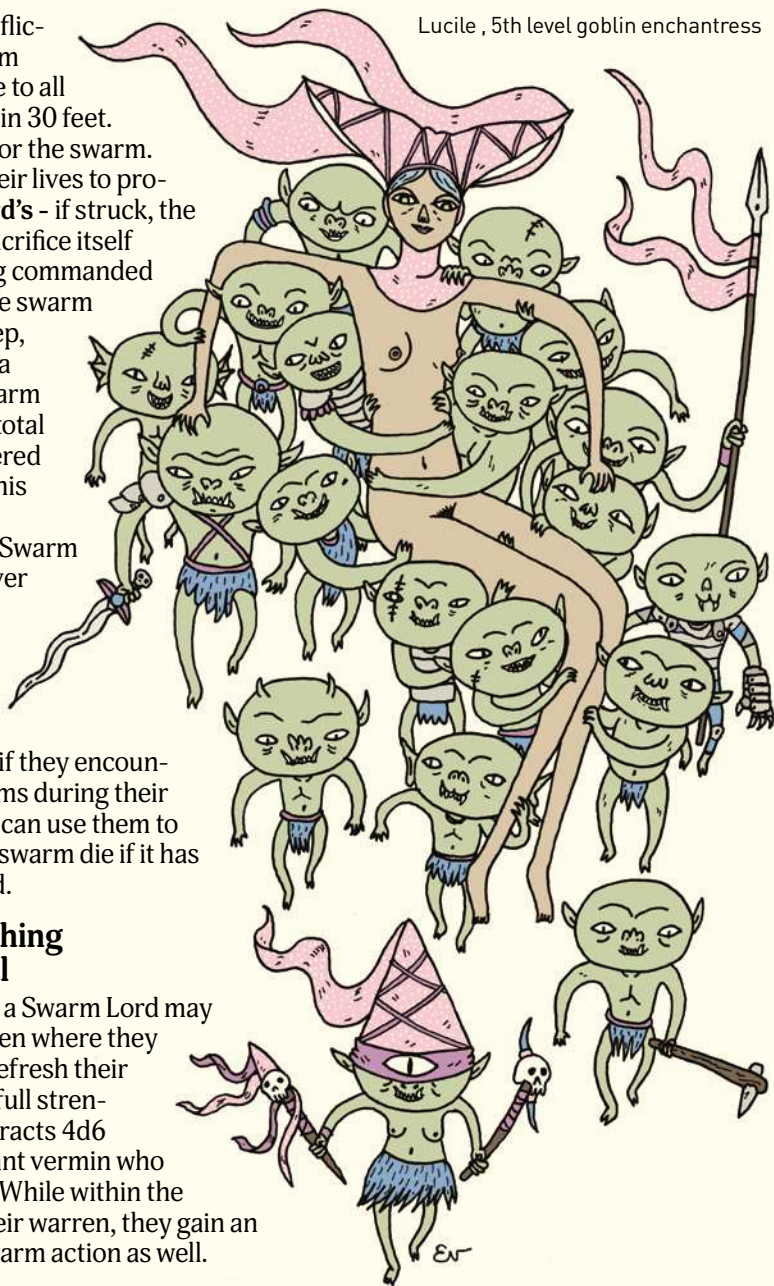
Other actions With the referee's approval, some types of swarms may perform other actions. For instance, the Goblin Enchantress is known for the entertainment value of her goblin swarm's capers. Along the same lines, kobolds would be very good at mocking and taunting gnomes, pixies could poison or charm, etc.

By **Nobboc**

d66 Former Occupations

You just rolled your character and feel lucky?
Roll d66 to define your former occupation. Then roll d6: 1-2: get the pleasant side (a). 3-4: get the not so pleasant side (b). 5-6: get both.

Before leaving for adventure, you were a...

11 - Grave Robber.
a) 1-in-6 chance of resisting energy drain.
b) 1-in-6 chance per night of being haunted (no benefits of rest).

12 - Burglar.
a) Pick Lock like a thief, +10% to the skill if already a thief.
b) The Thieves' Guild is looking for you.

13 - Itinerant Dog Shaver.
a) Even bad dogs like you.
b) Whatever you do, you have fleas.

14 - Wizard's Factotum.
a) Save vs Spells at +1.
b) Fear of magic (like a Barbarian).

15 - Apprentice Sorcerer.
a) Cast one 1st level spell per day (choose randomly every day).
b) 1-in-100 chance to spontaneously cast fireball when entering a tavern, inn or market place.

16 – Nobleman's Child.
a) Start with 1d100+100 GP.
b) Your stepfather paid the Assassins' Guild to have you drowned.

21 – Peasant Kid.
a) Magic bag containing a tasty turnip when you wake up.
b) Your father paid the Pig Farmers' Guild to bring you back in a sack.

22 - Highway Bandit.
a) Proficient with clubs whatever your class, +1 to hit with them if you are a Fighter.
b) A price on your head.

23 - Blacksmith.
a) Good at fixing metallic stuff.

b) Face burned by terrible accident, -1 to Charisma.

24 – Housewife/Househusband.
a) Your other half gave you a good luck charm: you don't fumble on a natural 1.
b) Father in law paid the baillif's men to bring you back in a jail wagon.

25 - Bard's Handyman.
a) Good at singing.
b) Sing only bawdy songs, always at the wrong time (at referee's discretion).

26 - Troubadour.
a) Good at walking on tight ropes, miming or juggling
b) You took the week's earnings and ran. They're after you and you lost everything.

31 - Executioner.
a) Proficient with axes whatever the class, +1 to hit if you are a Fighter.
b) Your hands are permanently stained with blood.

32 - Tax Collector.
a) Good at noticing shady shit.
b) Someone you bankrupted is preparing their merciless revenge.

33 - Miner.
a) Always know where the north is when underground.
b) Caustrophobia. 1-in-6 chance of occurring every six hours underground: disadvantage on all dice rolls for six hours.

34 - Exotic Dancer.
a) Good at seduction.
b) A decrepit wizard enamored with you sent his minions to bring you back in a golden cage.

35 - Palace Guard member.
a) Proficient with halberds whatever your class, +1 to hit if already a Fighter.
b) Got intimate with a prince or princess: a price on your head.

36 - Exorcist.
a) You can turn undead like a 1st level Cleric; like level +1 if you're a Cleric.
b) Energy drain kills you on 2-in-6.

41 - Beggar.
a) Good at catching rumors. Roll twice.
b) Malnutrition got you. Roll every hit die at -1.

42 - Shoemaker.
a) You have nice shoes.
b) You developed an allergy to leather.

43 - Changeling.
a) Dragonfly wings in your back under a large silk coat. Works like feather fall.
b) You're a jinx: on 1-in-6 twice a day, something happens to you or yours (referee's discretion).

44 - Abducted by Faeries.
a) Twitch your nose to cast any 1st level illusionist spell once a day.
b) The King of the Fey sent his three best goblin knights to bring you back in a portable hole.

45 - Slave.
a) +1 to Strength
b) Your former master is after you.

46 - Bonesetter.
a) Heal 1d3 hp per 6 turns of continuous work (assuming you have salves and bandages).
b) Magical healing doesn't work on you.

51 - Zealot of the Serpent Cult.
a) +1 to saves vs Poison.
b) Infamous occult tattoo on your forehead, -1 to CHA and bad reputation.

52 - Fanatic Acolyte of the Righteous Lawbringers.
a) +1 AC vs Chaotic opponents.

b) 1-in-12 chance of becoming berserk when meeting Chaotic creatures.

53. Quarryman.
a) +1 to Strength.
b) -1 to Constitution.

54 - Poacher.
a) You have good survival skills.
b) A bear took your left arm.

55. Landsknecht.
a) Advantage to damage with Flamberge (proficient whatever your class).
b) Bad wound and worse reputation, -1 to Dexterity, -1 to Charisma.

56 - Ghost Hunter.
a) Advantage to damage vs incorporeal undead.
b) You always get the shakes, -1 to Wisdom and a difficult social life.

61 - Fisherman.
a) Magic fishhook: in an hour of fishing, catches enough to feed 1d6 people.
b) Cursed by river spirits: whatever you do, you smell like dead fish.

62 - Butcher
a) Your attacks with a butcher's knife do 1d8 damage.
b) Vegan fanatic.

63 - Rat-catcher.
a) 3-in-6 chance to resist disease.
b) The Rat king sent three giant rats to eat your heart, alive.

64 - Pilgrim.
a) Always pay half price at an inn.
b) -1 to Wisdom until you have prayed in 77 different temples.

65 - Gravedigger.
a) Undead only select you as a target if there is no one else in range.
b) You never laugh.

66 - Dead.
a) All mundane damage you receive is halved.
b) -1 to all your abilities.

+1 - Beekeeper a) Immune to normal insect stings b) Bears always attack you first if they can – unless there's a one-armed ex-poacher in your group, then it randomizes between the two of you for main course and dessert. (Thanks to Dick McGee!)

✠ ANIMATED WEAPON!

A Race-Class for: B/X-OSR-DnD. By Ethan J. Lefevre
ReQ-N.A. • Prime-Con • HD.-D6.

Lvl	Title	X.P.	H.D.
1.	Obnoxious Loot	000	1d6+Con
2.	Selfish Side-Arm	1,000	2d6+Con
3.	"Rare"	8,000	3d6+Con
4.	Quality Aqcuisition	16,000	4d6+Con
5.	"Verry Rare"	32,000	5d6+Con
6.	Sentient Slayer	64,000	6d6+Con
7.	"Legendary"	120,000	7d6+Con
8.	Arcane Armament	250,000	8d6+Con
9.	"Artifact"	400,000	9d6+Con
10.	"Regalia"	600,000	9d6+2
11.	Royal Regalia	800,000	9d6+3
12.	Allmighty Artifact	1,000,000	9d6+4

AC = 7 Apply Dex and Con mod to AC.
Attack Die = Whatever Kind of Rad Weapon you are.

❖ Whether you were a Person Cursed into this form, or a Weapon bestowed with "Incredible Power!" You are an Animated-Sentient Weapon and that's __Rad__!

➤ You Attack as a fighter. Are you Dwarven-Made? Save as a Dwarf. Elven-made? Save as an Elf. Otherwise, Save as a Fighter (Duh.).

➤ Magical Construct:
You Hover at the Speed of a normal p.c. You do not need to Sleep, however You must spend at least 4 hours per day innactive to gain the benefits of a Rest. Obviously, You cant use Weapons or equip Armor, however, You can equip Rings and Amulets by wrapping them around you. If Someone Casts dispell magic on you, Save Vs. Death or become Innactive for 1d6 rounds, If you roll a 1 on your Save Vs. Death you become a mundane Weapon.

↯ Charges:
You have a number of charges = ½ Your Lvl + Con-mod (min 1). Once per turn, When you hit a Creature, you can spend a charge to deal an extra 1d6 of damage. This goes up to 1d8 at 5th Lvl, and 1d10 at 11th Lvl. You Regain all of your charges after a Successful Rest.

✺ Inhale Spells:
At 2nd Lvl, You Can choose a Single Spell of first lvl from any Spell list, You may cast that Spell by expending 1 of your Charges. At 4th Lvl, You learn another 1st Lvl spell of your choice. At 8th Lvl, You Can choose a 2nd Lvl. Spell, it Costs 2 charges to Cast. At 12th Lvl. You Learn a Lvl. 3 Spell, It costs 3 charges to Cast.

❖ Weapon Of Power:
At 5th Level you become a +1 Version of yourself, and all of your Attacks become "Magical." At 10th Lvl. this bonus goes up to a +2

Multiclassing -Dm's Descretion, not Advised until after 5th Lvl.

Knock's Menagerie of Monstrosities

Ambler

AC 0-3 [20-16], **HD** 5-8* (22-36 hp), **ATT** 1-4 x weapon, **THAC0** 14-12 [+5-+7, **MV** 60' (20'), **SV** D8 W9 P10 B10 S12, **ML** 10, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 300-1200, **NA** (-), **TT** None

An ambler (a contraction of the words "armored" and "shambler") is an elemental creature created from the massive sphere of armor and weapons located at the center of the Demi-plane of Electro-magnetism. When one of these anomalies escape their home plane (e.g., ported in by a powerful magic-user), the ambler appears as a shambling mishmash of mismatched pieces of armor in a vaguely humanoid form with 1-4 usable limbs, each of which has a 75% chance of holding a small-to-medium weapon (hand axe, dagger, 1-handed sword, etc.).

Because producing an ambler requires it to be summoned (as opposed to being conjured from existing material), control of the ambler is not automatic, nor will it serve any creature (even its summoner), so it will not follow orders unless compelled to do so my some additional force (e.g., a charm or control spell). The ambler can understand any language that was possessed by the previous owner of any piece of armor used in its composition, or weapon it holds (usually this will include common, dwarvish and elvish, though it is not unheard of for this to also include halfling and orcish; other languages known are at the discretion of the DM but is suggested that there be a 90% chance of the ambler knowing any common language, 30% for any uncommon language, 10% for any rare language, and 1% for any very rare language, assuming the language in question is spoken by species that normally wears armor).

The electromagnetism in the ambler is so strong that should a successful melee strike be made against the ambler by a normal (i.e., non-magical) weapon made of a magnetic metal (e.g., steel or iron), there is a 50% chance that the weapon will become "stuck" to the ambler, and useless by the attacker.

Amblers are affected by protection from evil spells, and can be returned to their home plane by dispel magic, but can also be dealt with using extraplanar dismissal or banishment. If dismissed or banished, any weapon stuck to the ambler will be transported with it.

by **Eric Nieudan** - Art: **Eric Nieudan**
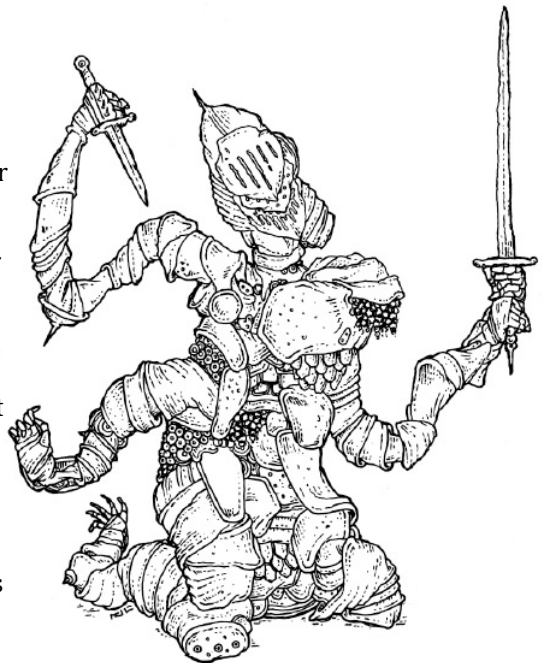
Thurible Cat

AC 2 [17], **HD** 7* (31 HP), **ATT** 2 x claw (2d4), Fragant ash cloud (3d6), **THACO** 13 [+6], **MV** 60' (20'), **SV** D8 W9 P10 B10 S12, **ML** 11, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 1200, **NA** 1-2, **TT** None

A construct made of cast iron and in the shape of a portly feline deity, this creature is often found guarding temples and other sacred places. Its hollow body must be regularly (once a week) filled with coal and incense, or it will go dormant. This permament smouldering heats the iron, which is burning to the touch, causing 1-6 damage when the Thurible Cat is attacked with natural weapons. Items in prolonged contact with it need to save versus normal fire or be set ablaze.

The Thurible Cat attacks with both front paws. Its claws have 10% chance of setting fire to organic material, such as cloth or fur, and do another 1-6 damage every round for three rounds unless doused.

Twice per day, instead of attacking with its claws, the Thurible Cat can breathe a cloud of ash that smells heavenly but burns lungs for 3-18 damage. Anyone caught in the cloud (2" in diameter) must save versus Poison or remain inside, unaware of the danger, and happy to breathe in the wonderful odours. The cloud dissipates in 2-5 rounds.

The Thurible Cat doesn't hoard riches, though it often defends sacred treasure rooms. If incense is salvaged from its body and doused, it can be lit again to produce the effects of a Protection from Good, 10' radius spell as cast by a 7th level Cleric.
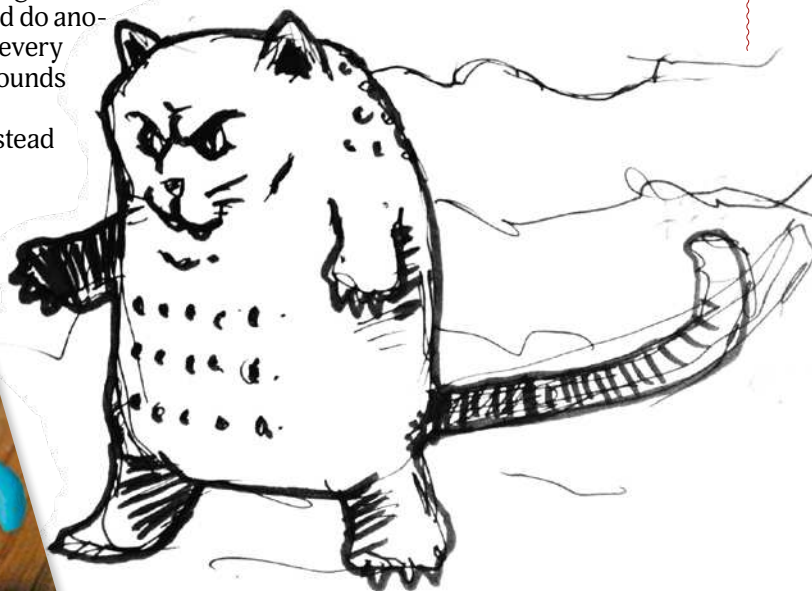
This monster was my entry for the Monster Man contest 2017.
(This is actually a tea infuser)

Mossling

AC 5 [14], **HD** 2*** (9 hp), **ATT** 2 x fist (1d6) or 2x whip **THAC0** 18 [+1], **MV** 60´ (20´), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 12, **AL** Chaotic, **XP** 35, **NA** 1, **TT** None

Mosslings (or Mossies, or Moss-Men) are undead creatures born from the rotting corpses and lamenting souls of people who died alone after getting lost in the heart of an ancient forest. A heap of soil, roots and vines wrapped around a skeleton, they could easily be confused with particularly aggressive shambling mounds. Only their burning hatred for all civilised life animates them, and they spend most of their time in a dormant state. If the noise of travelers comes to a Mossling, it immediately rouses and lets loose of its fury, frightening the small animals that build their nests or burrows inside it.

• **Charm:** Anyone who hears the deep bass despair song of a Mossling must save versus spells or be charmed. They must then: move towards the Mossling (resisting those who try to prevent it); defend all Mosslings; they are unable to cast spells, use magic items, and unwilling to harm any Mossling. A character who saves is unaffected for the rest of the encounter. Killing the charming Mossling breaks the charm.

• **Protective ivy:** A weapon hitting a Mossling has 1-in-6 chance to become entangled, thus unusable until the Mossling is killed. If unarmed, the attacker has 1-in-6 chance to be entangled and unable to act (save vs Paralysis every subsequent round)

• **Regeneration:** 3 rounds after being damaged and as long as they are touching contact the forest soil, regain 3 HP per round. Severed limbs reattach.

• **Return from death:** If killed (0hp), and as long as they touch the forest ground, regenerate and fight again in 2d6 rounds.

• **Fire:** Cannot regenerate damage from fire. The only way to permanently kill a Mossling.

• **Fear of fire:** Morale 8 when attacked with fire.

• **Undead:** Makes no noise until it attacks. Immune to effects that affect living creatures (e.g. poison). Immune to mind-affecting or mind-reading spells (e.g. charm, hold, sleep) except bardic music (see below).

• **Melancholic:** Bards and Elves may attempt to calm a Mossling with their music or song. After 3 rounds of uninterrupted music the Mossling must save vs Spells or be unable to act. If the music continues for another 3 rounds, the Mossling falls asleep and disappears in the ground, where it will sleep for 1d4 years.

by **Eric Nieudan** - Art: **Iván Cáceres**

Molefolk

AC 6 (13), **HD** 1+1 (5 hp), **ATT** 1 x weapon (1d6 or by weapon) or 2 x claws (1d4), **THAC** 19 (0), **MV** 60' (20'), **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16 (1), **ML** 5, **AL** N, **XP** 10, **NA** 1d8 (2d8), **TT** B.

on't forget to oil your tools before bed, smooth-chin. Or the molefolk will dig under your room and take you and raise you as one of theirs.» Most dwarven cities have stories about the evil quasi-people who tunnel under their cities to steal from the larder and disorganise the weapons in the armoury. No one knows if the molefolk are devolved dwarves, or their long forgotten ancestors (as everyone knows humans are descended from moon apes and elves from arboreal cats). Molefolk live in family groups close to dwarven settlements.

They burrow an entrance into a fortress or mine complex and take what they can before the Vermin Control Guild comes in with their oil-throwers and plague-traps. Molefolk only defend their burrows if they are not able to evacuate them (often because their young are too feeble). Otherwise, they simply dig an emergency exit and cave it in behind them. Then they wander in cave systems until they find another dwarf or svirfneblin community they can live off of. Molefolk are great craftsmen with leather and deeproot wood, but as they avoid fire and all sources of light, they only fashion the most crude of metal weapons.

• **Blindsense.** Molefolk use smell and air movements to see in the dark.

• **Allergic to light.** -1 to-hit in artificial light, -2 in bright conditions (such as magical or day light).

• **Burrow.** Tunnel through soft ground at 1/3 speed. Usually carry tools to break stone tiles and other barriers.

by **Eric Nieudan** - Art: **Michael Sheppard**

Moon Siren

AC 4 [15], **HD** 4* (18 hp), **ATT** 2 × claw or blade (1d8), **MV** 120' (40'), **SV** D10 W11 P12 B13 S14 (4), **ML** 12, **AL** Chaotic, **XP** 50, **NA** 1d4, **TT** U.

When the blue moon bathes a battlefield in an eerie haze, long dead selenites leave their cold graves to ride the moonbeams towards our world. They knit tangible shapes from the carcasses and armour left by the armies who fought there and, humming a lugubrious chant, they drift towards the nearest mortal dwelling. Those who hear the moon siren's call are seized by an urge to take arms and re-enact long forgotten battles. When their bodies are found the next morning, one is always missing. The common folk say that moon sirens take the best warrior of every battle back with them to feast in the cyclopean ruins you can sometimes see on the moon.

• **Undead.** Immune to powers affecting the mind or the living body.

• **Immune** to mundane weapons.

• **Moonlight funeral.** Hearing the moon siren's song, a character must save versus spell or be charmed and forced to fight to the death. The monsters will use charmed characters to defend themselves.

by **Eric Nieudan** - Art: **Michael Sheppard**
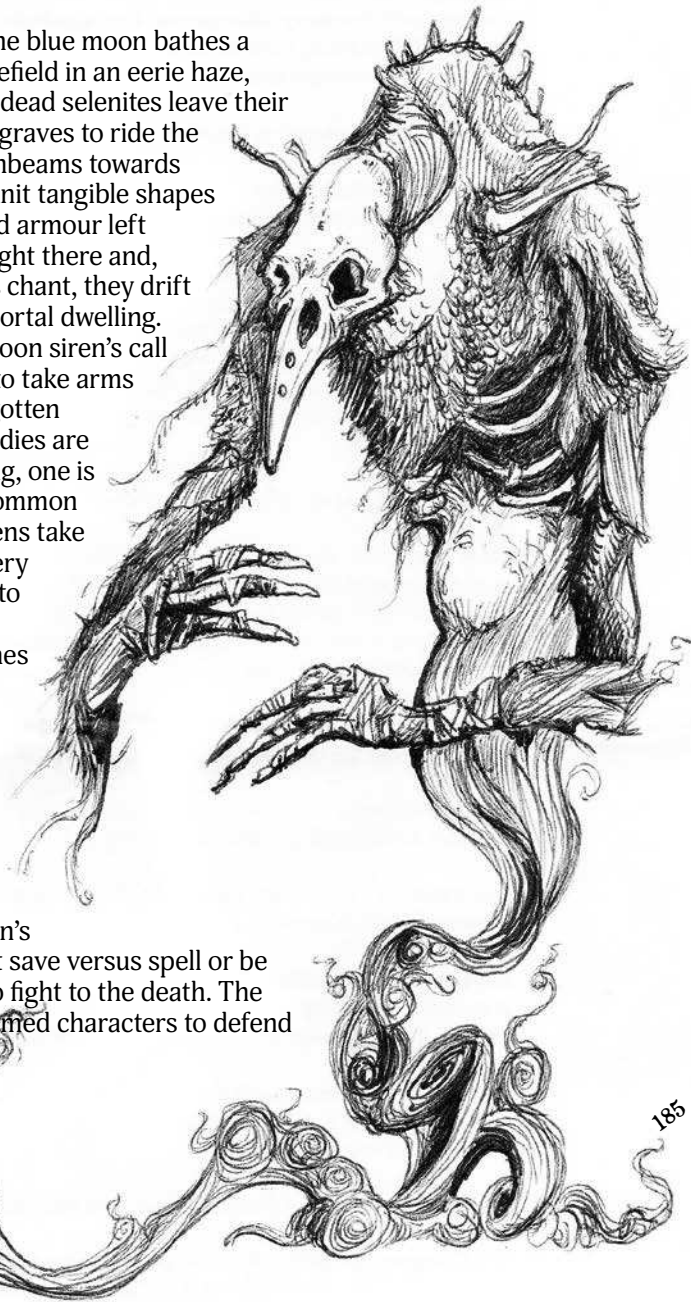
The Troad

AC 3 [16], **HD** 12* (54 hp), **ATT** 1 x tongue (1d8 and swallow) or by magic, **THAC0** 10 (+9), **MV** 120' (40'), **SV** D6 W7 P8 B8 S10 (12), **ML** 10, **AL** Lawful, **XP** 1,200, **NA** 1, **TT** D.

This immortal being was born of the unholy union of a troll and a giant toad. Fancying itself the monarch of swamplands past, present, and future, the Troad rules from its magical mushroom throne. It expects fealty and tribute (in the form of treasure and delicacies) from resident and traveller alike, and in return can be called upon to arbitrate disputes and dispense justice. The druids and witches who dwell near marshes and mangroves know the rituals needed to summon the Troad. Once a year, the Troad holds court in the heart of a large swamp of its choosing. Representatives of all surrounding communities are expected, humanoid and otherwise. Several Fey lords and ladies are in attendance, as are some of their fiercest enemies. The Troad Court lasts five nights. Intrigue is woven, opportunities are offered, and rulings that will shape the following year's political landscape are proffered. No adventurer worth their salt would miss this opportunity to bargain for power or magical favours.

• **Retinue.** The Troad is guarded by 2d6 fey-touched lizardfolk in full knightly regalia.

• **Detect lie.** The Troad knows the truth of any statement.

• **Magic powers** (each usable once per day):
  - **Curse.** Save versus spells or be turned into a newt (harmless but able to regenerate).
  - **Summon retinue.** 2d6 fey-touched lizard knights.
  - **Conjure treasure.** A chest with the equivalent of a type V treasure (disappears after 1d8 weeks).

• **Sticky tongue:** attack up to 30' away. On a hit, prey is swallowed.

• **Regeneration:** regains 3 hp per round. Damage from cold iron and magical fire doesn't regenerate.

• **Mushroom throne:** this living artefact has the power to teleport to any piece of sunken land on the same plane.

Treasure Frog

SMALL : AC 7 [12], **HD** 1 (4 HP), **ATT** 1 x bite (d6), **THAC0** 19 [0], **MV** Swim/Hop 90'/120,
SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 8, **AL** NEUTRAL, **XP** 10

MEDIUM : AC 7 [17], **HD** 2 (8 HP), **ATT** 1 x bite (2d4), **THAC0** 18 [+1], **MV** Swim/Hop 120'/90',
SV D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 8, **AL** NEUTRAL, **XP** 15

LARGE : AC 5 [14], **HD** 4 (12 HP), 1 x bite (2d6) swallow* **THAC0** 16 [+3],
MV Swim/Hop 120'/90', **SV** D10 W11 P12 B13 S14, **ML** 9, **AL** NEUTRAL, **XP** 75

HUGE : AC 3 [16], **HD** 8 (32 HP), 1 x bite (3d6) swallow**, **THAC0** 12 [+],
MV Swim/Hop 120'/90', **SV** D8 W9 P10 B11 S2, **ML** 10, **AL** NEUTRAL, **XP** 650

Treasure frogs are used by frog folk and other amphibian humanoids to find, carry, and sometimes store valuables. Their supernatural sense of smell steers them towards precious stones and metals. With a life span of several centuries, treasure frogs often outlive their masters, colonising wet areas that are rich in loot such as flooded dungeons. These creatures love their free, roaming life and are as difficult to train as they are prone to escaping. Even a faithful treasure frog may escape after a few decades, and most of them will forget the command word to regurgitate all the loot they carry in half a century or so. Some frog folk tribes keep their untrained frogs locked in a room. Opening the door without precautions, visitors are faced with a bunch of large croaking, bouncing creatures that not only will ruin any attempt at sneaking in, but might also try and swallow their valuables. Even if they don't normally attack human-sized creatures, a number of them may become feisty enough to attack a party of adventurers carrying treasure.

• **Small** carries: d4 x 100sp, 1-in-6 chance of a semi-precious stone worth 10gp. Roll d4: 1. 15gp silver ring, 2. 20gp carved agate seal, 3. cat skull, 4. semi-digested fish.

• **Medium** carries: d3 x1 00gp, d4 semi-precious stones worth 10gp each. Roll d4: 1. 45gp gold ring, 2. 100gp jade idol, 3. kobold skeleton, 4. corked beer bottle.

• **Large** carries d6 x 100gp, d4 x semi-precious stones worth d3 x 10gp each. Roll d4: 1. 100gp ruby gold ring, 2. 2d4 healing potions, 3. knight's helmet, 4. rotten goat corpse.

• **Huge** carries 2d4 x 100 gp, 2d4 semi-precious stones worth d3 x 10gp each. Roll d4: 1. 500gp diamond ring, 2. crate of beer, 3. +1 dagger in scabbard, 4. semi-digested adventurer.

*hit rolls 20+ swallows victim whole and flees crushing them for d6/round
**hit rolls 17+ swallows victim whole and flees crushing them for 2d6/round
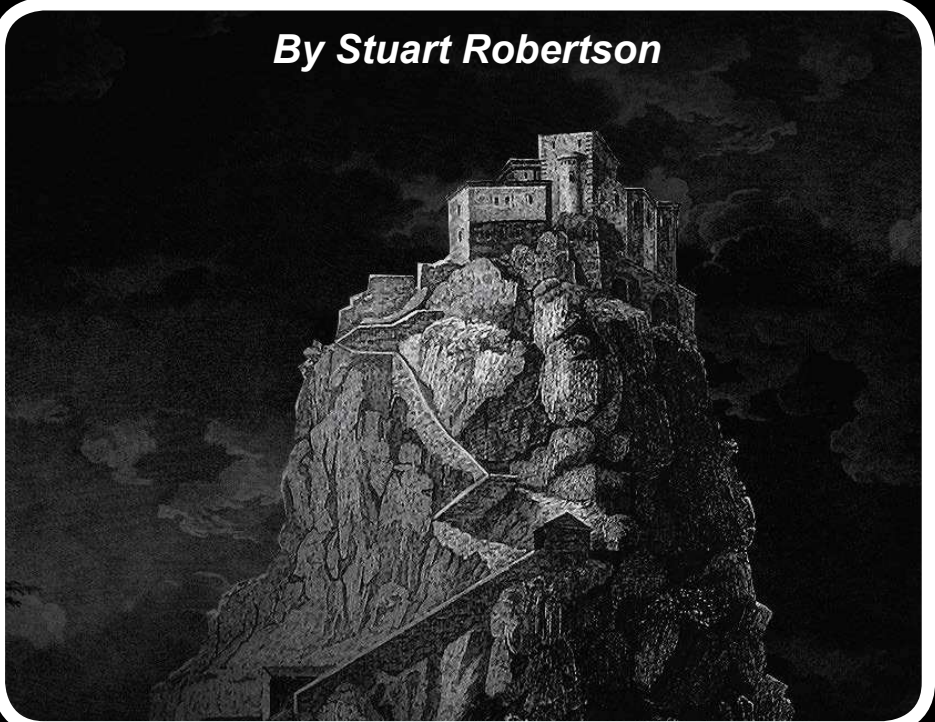
Knock's Extraordinary Excursions

Basic Game Adventure

Citadel of Evil

By Stuart Robertson

The Citadel casts a dark shadow from its mountain. Can you find a path to the top and rescue your kinfolk? For levels 1-3

A. THE CAVES

1. Entrance Cave - Illuinating this large natural cave is the lantern from 2 **Gnomes** looking for their companion.

2. Dank Tunnel - The floor is wet and treacherous from water dripping from the ceiling. A dank, earthy smell fills the air.

3. Pool Room - This room is lit by a dim red glow from 3 Fire Beetles on the walls. A **Blessing** pool contains 12 coins.

4. Fungus Garden - This room is filled with a wide variety of different mushrooms. Characters have a 2 in 6 chance of releasing hallucinogenic spores (**Phantasmal Force** for 1d4 turns). Eat a mushroom **Cure Light Wounds** + **Phantasmal Force**.

5. Stincky Cave - A thick yellow mist clings to the ground here. Characters have a 2 in 6 chance of falling in the hidden pit.

6. The Well - The floor is wet and slippery. Anyone looking into the pit must make a saving throw or slip to their doom!

7. Insect Room - Characters edging around the narrow ledge have a 2 in 6 chance of slipping down into an **Insect Swarm**.

8. Spider Lair - 4 Giant Spiders scuttle out to attack! Within their webs is a cocoon with a weakened Gnome inside, as well as 70 coins, a silver dagger and a *Magic Spear*.

A

B
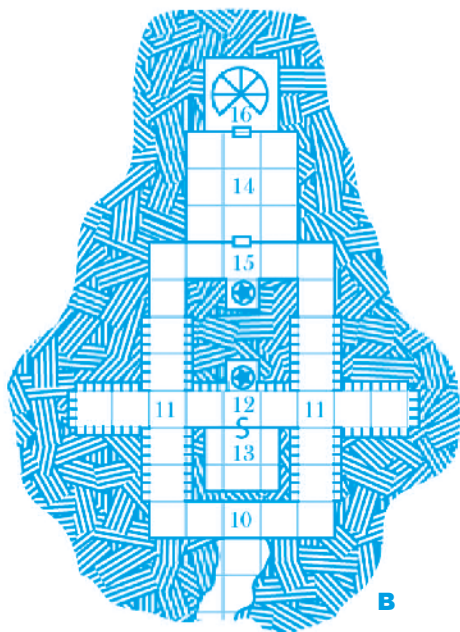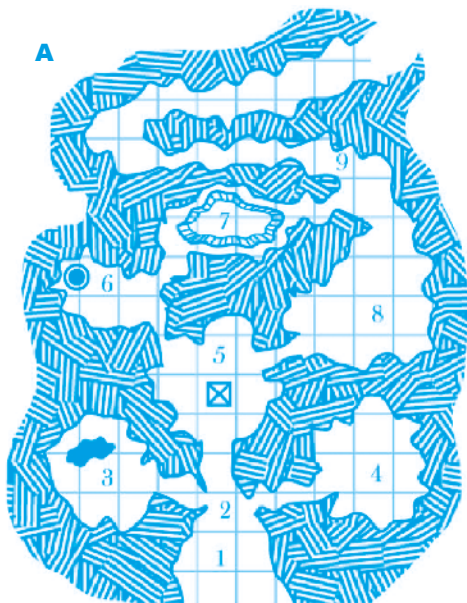
9. Stone Stairs - Weak characters or those in heavy armor have a 2 in 6 chance of falling 10' during the 100' climb to the Crypt Level above.

B. THE CRYPT

10- Hall of skulls - Characters must break through the wall (open door check) to enter this hallway. Niches along walls hold 12 **Undead Skulls** that politely answer questions about the crypt in an ancient language

11. Dusty Catacombs - alcoves along the walls contain scores of skeletal remains. Several bodies have missing heads. A **Wood Golem** rattles about keeping the place orderly. It only attack in defence (see next entry).

12. Pointing Statue - an 8' tall stone statue stands pointing straight ahead (it's pointing at the Secret Door). This **Living Statue** activates if the Wood Golem is destroyed.

13. Forgotten Room - a skeleton sits slumped over on a chair behind a desk. Scrolls of **Protection from Undead**, **Feather Fall** and a **Treasure Map** and a gold candlestick are on the desk. A locked chest contains several rare historical texts.
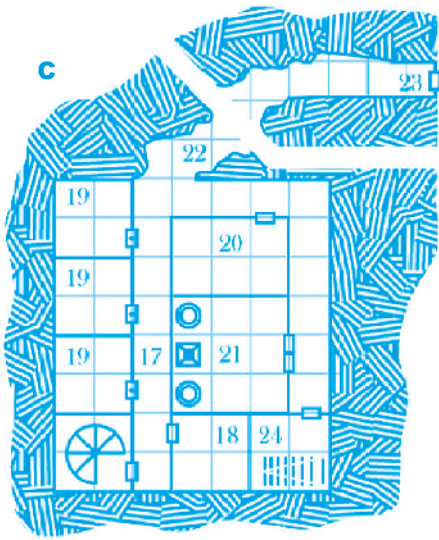
14. Antechamber - This room is magically silent. The doors are heavy and require an Open Doors check.

15. Smashed Statue - the arm of this 8' tall statue has broken off and a bowl of (50) coins is scattered at its feet. If anyone touches the coins the statue recites **Animate Dead**.

16. Spiraling Stairs - thes stone stairs spiral up 100' to the Dungeon Level above. They end in a stone floor block, which must be pushed aside (Open Doors Check) to open.

C. THE DUNGEON

17. Dungeon Hallway - Torches along the walls light this area.

18. Storage Room - This room is filled with barrels of rotted food. 12 **Rats** and 4 bottles of wine can also be found.

19. Prison Cells - The **Bugbear** in room 20 has the key to the locked doors. Inside each cell is a missing villager.

20. Guard Room - 2 **Hobgoblin Mercenaries** and a **Bugbear** drink and play dice games here. They have 46 coins and several casks of wine.

21. Temple of the Slime Lord - Two braziers illuminate the room. A group of 5 **Cultists** preparing to lower a Villager into the pit and the Ochre Jelly kept at bay by the heat from the braziers.
The **Conjurer** who leads this cabal can cast **Fear** and **Mirror Image.**

22. Winding Passageway - This roughly cut tunnel slopes steeply down and continues for 100'.

23. Sally Port - This heavy, Wizard Locked iron door is engraved with a leering face with a long tongue tied into a knot. Saying the word 'NEPO' opens the door and leads to the Mountain Walkway below the Gatehouse. Noise or light alertthe Main Gate's occupants who fire arrows at anyone on the path.

24. Wooden Staircase - Leads up to the Citadel Level above.

D. THE CITADEL

25. Mountain Walkway - This long path leads up the side of the mountain to the Gatehouse. The Sally Port (Room 23) is located at the 'X' on the map.

26. The Gatehouse - A raised drawbridge and heavy iron bound portcullis prevent anyone from entering or leaving the Citadel. 14 **Hobgoblins** fire arrows at intruders they notice in the courtyard or on the Mountain Walkway.

27. Deserted Shrine - A few old candle sand bits of crockery litter the floor. Lighting a candle will **Cure light Wounds**.

28. Crumbling Courtyard - Two **Cultists** and a **Hobgoblin Mercenary** are discussing the need for more villagers.

29. Ruined Keep - The upper floors of this building are in ruins but the ground floor is still intact. A wooden staircase leads down to the Dungeon Level below.
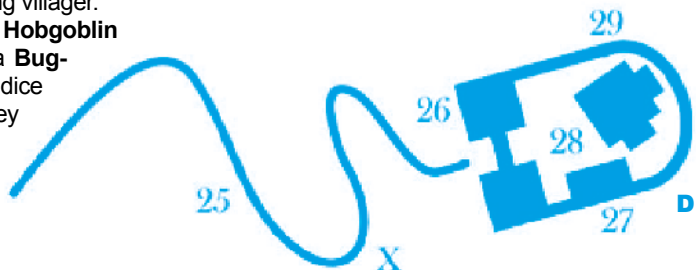
By **Graphite Prime** Art: **Graphite Prime**

An OSR styled module compatible with most versions of the world's most popular role-playing game. **Level 2-4.**
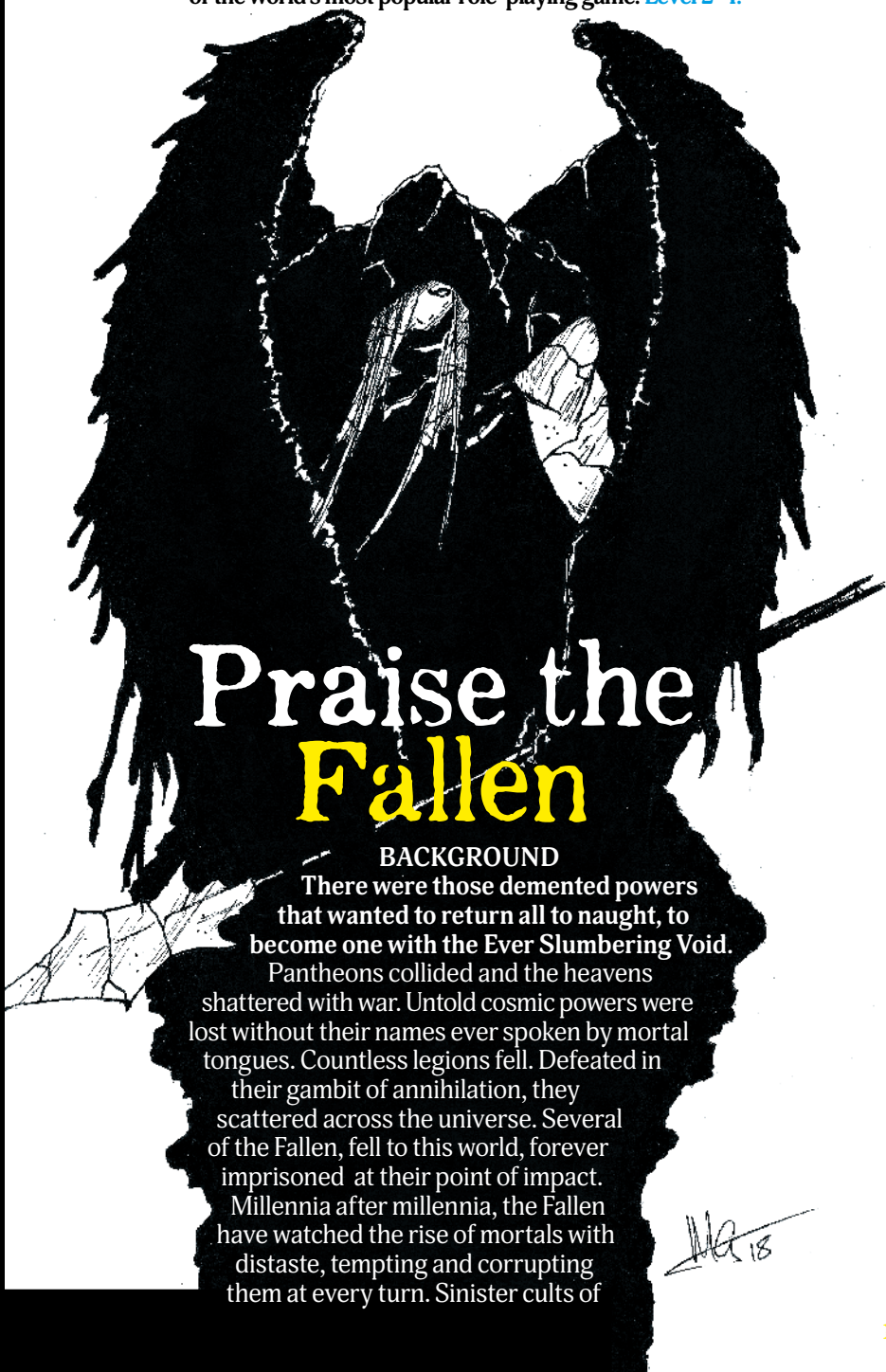
Praise the
Fallen

BACKGROUND

There were those demented powers that wanted to return all to naught, to become one with the Ever Slumbering Void. Pantheons collided and the heavens shattered with war. Untold cosmic powers were lost without their names ever spoken by mortal tongues. Countless legions fell. Defeated in their gambit of annihilation, they scattered across the universe. Several of the Fallen, fell to this world, forever imprisoned at their point of impact. Millennia after millennia, the Fallen have watched the rise of mortals with distaste, tempting and corrupting them at every turn. Sinister cults of
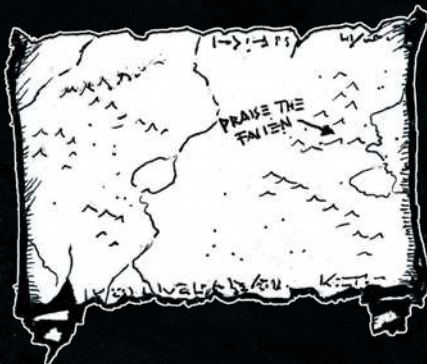
chaos have arisen in the shadows ignorantly doing what they can to undo all things. The Fallen are their ———, their champions, their gods. The cultists tirelessly seek out the prisons of their masters with the hope of freeing them and unleashing an entropic orgy of destruction.

A NOTE ON KEYS.

Anytime the PCs encounter cultists, there is a 2 in 6 chance that one of the cultists has a key. Any time the PCs encounter a locked door, there is a 2 in 6 chance that a key that they have found will open that door, so long as that key has not been matched up with another door. If a key opens a door, then that's the only door it can open.

If you're feeling generous, there is a 1 in 6 chance that a key is a Master-Key that opens all locks.

The Map and the Fallen...

This map contains directions to the location of a Fallen Angel named ————-. The map is drawn on parchment with the words *"Praise the Fallen"* written in crude common, pointing to a location. For the sake of this adventure, it is assumed that the PCs have the map in their possession. In part of an ongoing campaign you can simply place this map as part of a treasure hoard. In a one-shot, just tell the PCs the backstory and let them have at it. There are many Fallen, use the table below to determine the name of the one in this module. Roll 1d12 (2 or 3 times.) Add hyphens and/or apostrophes for an ancient effect. The dungeon entrance ideally should be placed in a crevasse on a barren mountainside, but you can place it anywhere. **Inside, the dungeon is not lit unless otherwise noted.**

MEDALLION OF THE VOID

(a.k.a., **Void Medallion**): Built of a metallic substance so dark that it's actually hard to focus on, the Void Medallion has the essence of non-existence in it. **Wearing one turns your eyes black and lets you see in absolute/ magical darkness.** Void medallions also allow you safe passage through some areas of the dungeon and lets you gaze safely into the Void Pool (area 24). You intrinsically know these things.

d12

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
An	Az	Bath	Bel	Dez	Glaz	Lev	Mal	Or	Sah	Zaph	Zep
el	selu	zena	noth	pa	mur	phel	paz	sti	lixi	raja	hash
ael	aza	bas	ax	mon	ius	niah	ith	thon	moth	lith	mar

Random Encounters...

Be sure to make an encounter check if you feel **the PCs have lingered in one area too long or have created too much noise.** Also, if the PCs have had several encounters with cultists and/or the Phaen Witch, then word spreads of intruders. Any random roll of cultists should be cultists on the hunt for the PCs. You can set your own dial for frequency, but **1 in 6 should do.** Roll 1d12.

1. 1d4+1 **cult acolytes**.
AC: unarmored, **HD**: 1 (4 hp), A**ttack**: 1 dagger, +1 to hit, **Damage**: 1d4,
AL: chaotic, **XP**: 20.

2. 1d4+1 **acolytes** (see above) and a **High Priest**.
AC: chain, **HD**: 6 (22 hp), **Attacks**: 1 mace, +4 to hit, **Damage**: 1d6+1, **Spells**: *cause light wounds* (2), *hold person* (2), *continual darkness* (1), **AL**: chaotic,
XP: 300. **Wears a Void Medallion**.

3. 1d4+1 **Ghouls**.
AC: as chain -1, **HD**: 2 (10 hp), **Attacks**: 3 claws/bites, +3 to hit,
Damage: 1d4 + paralysis for 2d4 turns, **AL**: chaotic, **XP**: 100.

4. An **acolyte** that is trying to escape from the cult.

5. 1d4 **prisoners of the cult** that have escaped and are trying to find their way out.
AC: unarmored, **HD**: 1 (3 hp), **Attacks**: 1, +0 to hit, **Damage**: 1, **AL**: neutral, **XP**: 5.

6. A single **Shadow**.
AC: as leather (can only be harmed by magic; can not be turned; immune to sleep, charm, and hold), **HD**: 3 (17 hp), **Attacks**: 1 shadow-blade, +3 to hit, **Damage:** 1d8+2 (anyone killed becomes an angel-shadow), **AL**: chaotic, **XP**: 150.

7. 1d2 escaped **ogres**. If the PCs freed any ogres there is a 3 in 6 chance that these are the same ogres and they won't bother the PCs.
AC: as chain, **HD**: 4+1 (18 hp), **Attacks**: 1, +7 to hit, **Damage**: 1d2 +3 or by weapon +3, **AL**: chaotic, **XP**: 125.

8. 1d4+1 **Shadows** (see above)

9. 2d4 **Giant Rats**
AC: as leather −2, **HD**: 1/2 (4 hp), **Attacks**: 1 bite, +1 to hit, **Damage**: 1d6 + disease (save vs. poison or take 1d6 damage per day until save is made), **AL**: neutral, **XP**: 15

10. 1d4+1 Escaped **Undead Bludigar**
AC: chain, **HD**: 2 (13 hp), **Attacks**: battle-axe, +3 to hit (1d8+1), **AL**: neutral, **XP**: 50.

11. A hole opens up in a wall nearby as 2d4+1 living **Bludigar Dwarves** break through. They are looking for their long-lost brethren who were mining under this mountain.
AC: chain, **HD**: 3 (16 hp), Attacks: battle-axe, +4 to hit (1d8+1), **AL**: neutral, **XP**: 65. Each have 1d6 x 10 GP on them.

12. The Phaen Witch. (P.196)

The Phaen Witch

AC: as chain+1, **HD**: 9 (45 hp),
Attacks: 1 dagger+2, +5 to hit,
Damage: 1d4+2,
Spells: *sleep* (2), *charm person* (1),
continual darkness (1), *invisibility*
(1), *mirror image* (1), *hold person*
(3), *confusion* (1), *polymorph other*
(1), *cloudkill* (1)
AL: chaotic, **XP:** 900.
The Phaen Witch is almost 200
years old and has learned the
following

Special Abilities:
• **Teleportation:** she can
teleport to any location in the
dungeon 9 times per day.
•**Summon Skeletons**
(recharge, 5-6): She carries
a pouch of bone and iron
dust which she can spread
around causing 1d6+1
skeletons to rise from the
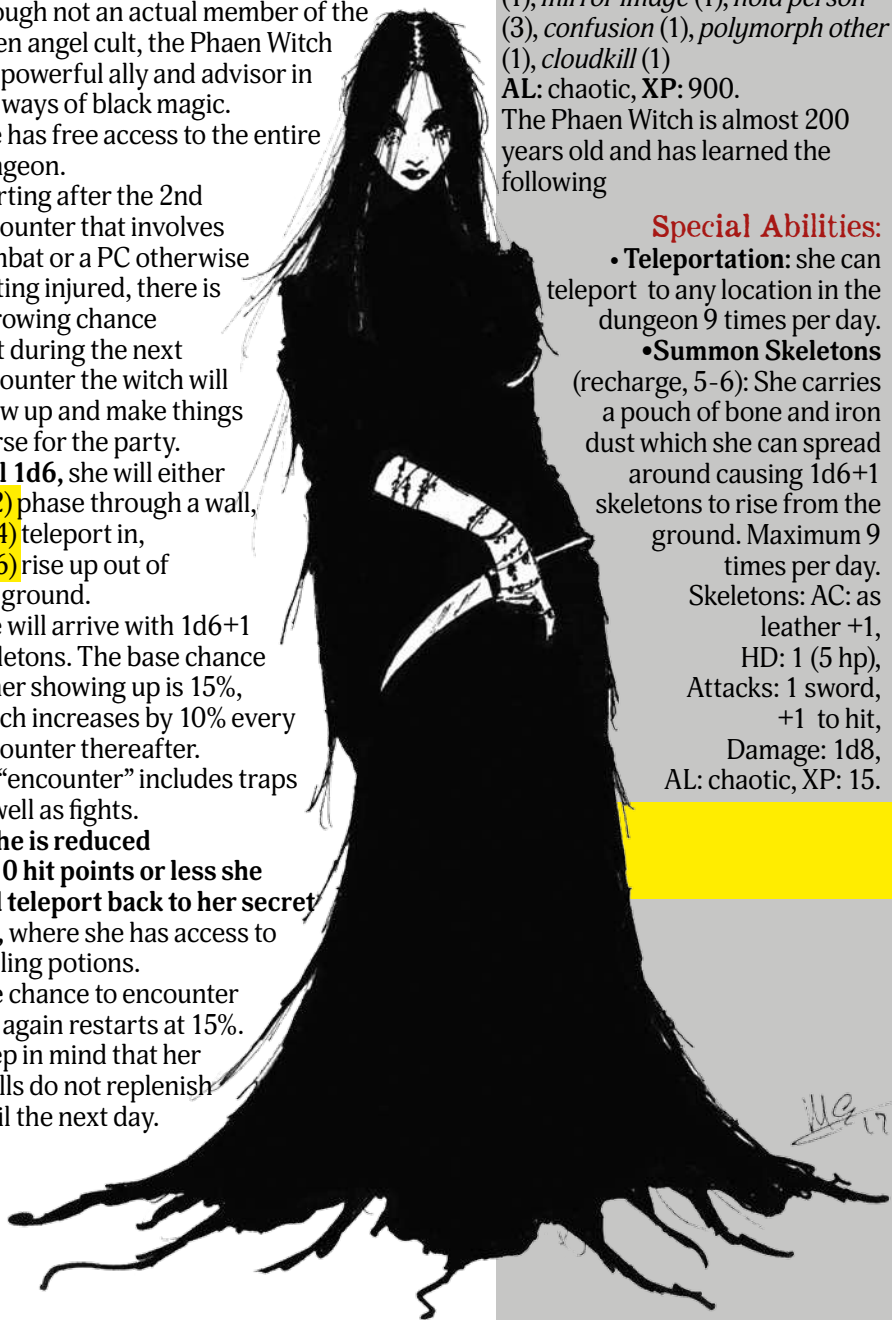ground. Maximum 9
times per day.
Skeletons: AC: as
leather +1,
HD: 1 (5 hp),
Attacks: 1 sword,
+1 to hit,
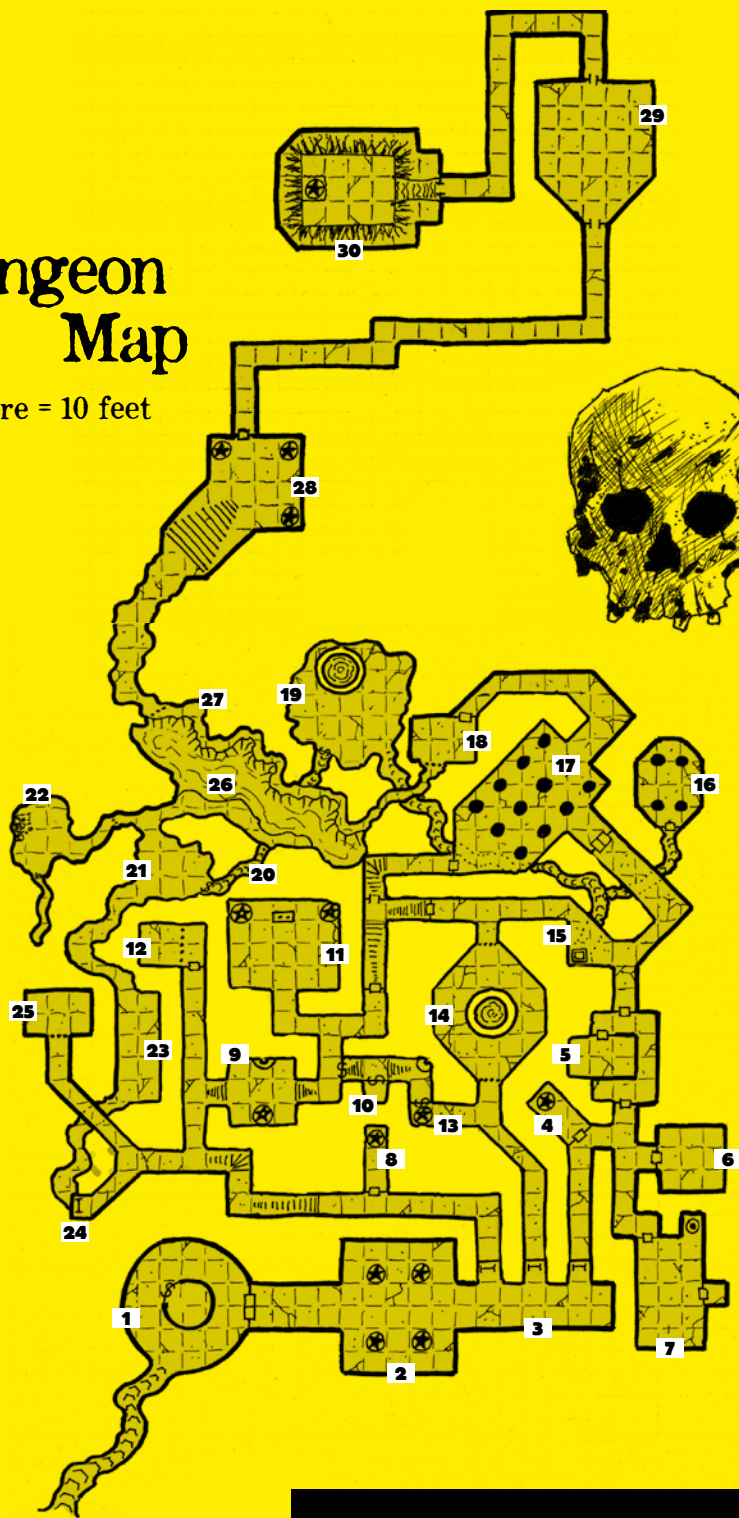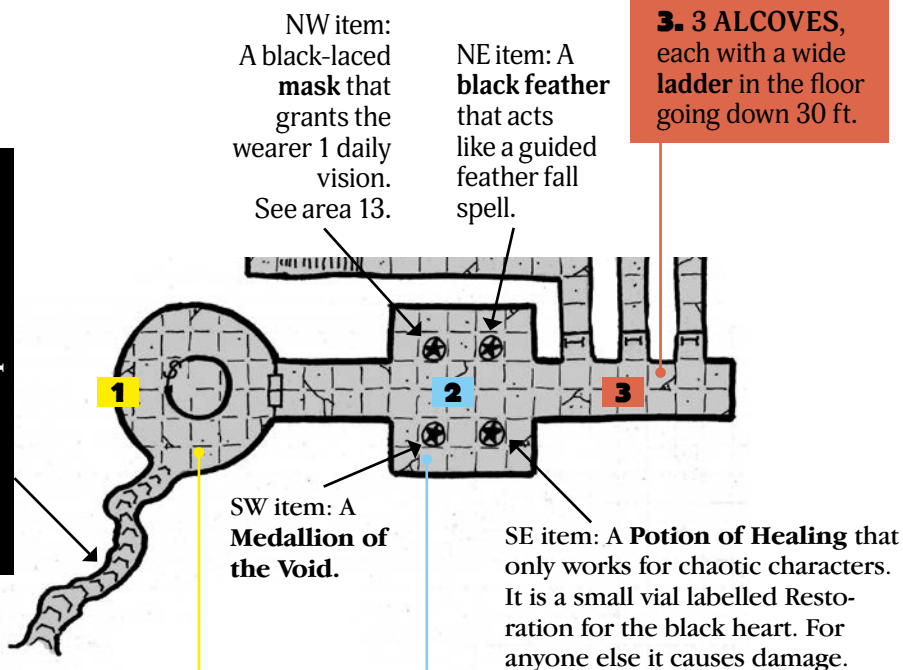Damage: 1d8,
AL: chaotic, XP: 15.

**Nothing but tragedy comes
from the Phaen Moors...**
Though not an actual member of the
fallen angel cult, the Phaen Witch
is a powerful ally and advisor in
the ways of black magic.
She has free access to the entire
dungeon.
Starting after the 2nd
encounter that involves
combat or a PC otherwise
getting injured, there is
a growing chance
that during the next
encounter the witch will
show up and make things
worse for the party.
Roll 1d6, she will either
(1-2) phase through a wall,
(3-4) teleport in,
(5-6) rise up out of
the ground.
She will arrive with 1d6+1
skeletons. The base chance
of her showing up is 15%,
which increases by 10% every
encounter thereafter.
An "encounter" includes traps
as well as fights.
**If she is reduced
to 10 hit points or less she
will teleport back to her secret
lair,** where she has access to
healing potions.
The chance to encounter
her again restarts at 15%.
Keep in mind that her
spells do not replenish
until the next day.

Dungeon Map

1 square = 10 feet

N

29
30
28
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8
1
3
7
2

NW item:
A black-laced **mask** that grants the wearer 1 daily vision. See area 13.

NE item: A **black feather** that acts like a guided feather fall spell.

300 feet back up to the surface.

SW item: A **Medallion of the Void.**

SE item: A **Potion of Healing** that only works for chaotic characters. It is a small vial labelled Restoration for the black heart. For anyone else it causes damage.

1. Both the inner and outer walls here are **A MOSAIC** depicting heavenly wars that ultimately focus on one angel and his demise. The very last image portrays a black-clad Fallen Angel poised on a pedestal surrounded by cultists with the phrase *"Praise the Fallen."* The **SMALL SECRET ROOM** contains 6 torches, 1 tinderbox, 2 black robes, and 2 daggers.

2. 4 STATUES OF ANGELS in various stages of anguish. Each statue has a kneeler before it. The **NE** angel is reaching back toward the heavens as he falls, his wings disintegrating. The **NW** angel has his hands over his face as if screaming. The **SE** angel is clutching a terrible wound as she falls. The **SW** angel has his eyes closed and is clutching a medallion around his neck. **If a PC of chaotic alignment kneels** at one of the statues and makes a save vs. magic, a compartment opens up to reveal an item (this will only work once for them, once they've kneeled and rolled that's it, going statue to statue will have no further outcome.) **If a lawful PC kneels** they will have to save vs. magic or start writhing in great pain, suffering 1d2 damage each round until they save (or are pulled away.) **If a neutral PC kneels**, the double doors to the west will lock shut and a painting appears on the doors showing a scene of human sacrifice. Anyone who studies this image enters a short trance-like state and if they make a save vs. magic they understand that the only way to open the doors is to sacrifice someone while saying *"Praise_____ (the Fallen)."*

4. Door locked. FALLEN-ANGEL STATUE, strikingly beautiful, with her hands out as if to clasp your hands in greeting. **Anyone who clasps her hands** begins a battle of wills. If you don't pass **3 consecutive saves**, poison, paralysis, then magic, she leans forward and vomits **acidic void-slop** in your face doing 1d4 damage and 1d4 permanent charisma loss. If you make the saves, a **Void-Blade** (or mace) appears in your hands and you gain 2 points of charisma, then the statue disappears for 1d6 days.
A Void Weapon is a +2 weapon that can cast darkness 3 times/day.
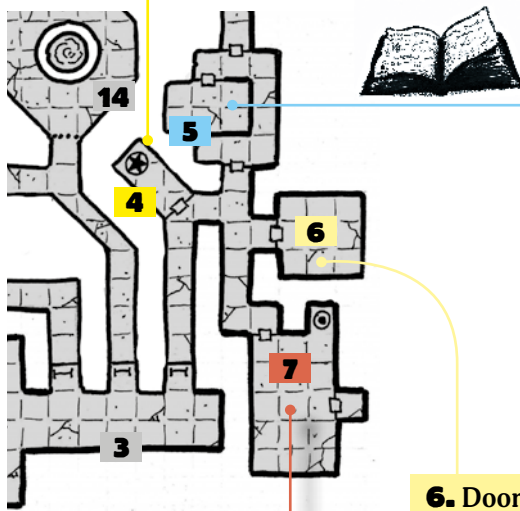
5. Door Locked, **LIBRARY**. Hardly any room to move as scrolls and books are crammed floor to ceiling. Allow every PC that searches (per hour), a 1 in 6 chance to find a **magic scroll**; wizards, elves, and clerics get a 2 in 6 chance. Roll 1d4 to determine the scroll level and 1d6 to determine whether it's a cleric (1-4), or a wizard (5-6) spell, then determine the spell randomly, it's always the chaotic version of the spell. Searchers also face a growing risk of discovering something that threatens their **sanity** starting at 15% on their first search and growing by 10% per hour. If they do discover some dark secret, they must **save vs. magic** or become catatonic for 3d4 hours.

6. Doors locked, dimly lit. **HIGH PRIESTS' QUARTERS**. 20% chance a high priest is here, another 25% chance **1d4 acolytes** will be here as well being lectured, punished, or enlightened. The room has **secret treasure** (treat as secret door) consisting of 2d6 x 100 GP and 1d4 random cleric scrolls.

7. Dimly lit. CULTIST LIVING AREA, sparse, with slabs carved out of the walls for beds, floor to ceiling. There is a well for fresh water and a toilet room. **2d6 cultists** are here at any time. A search of the room reveals coins worth 2d6 x 10 GP.
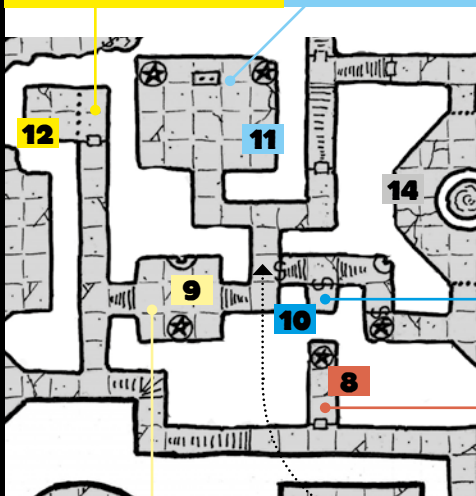
Acolytes & Cultists: AC: unarmored, **HD**: 1 (4 hp), **Attacks**: 1 dagger, +1 to hit, **Damage**: 1d4, **AL**: chaotic, **XP**: 20.

High Priest: AC: chain, **HD**: 6 (22 hp), **Attacks**: 1 mace, +4 to hit, **Damage**: 1d6+1, **Spells**: *cause light wounds* (2), *hold person* (2), *continual darkness* (1), **AL**: chaotic, **XP**: 300. **Wears a Void Medallion**.

12. **Door is locked. PRISON CELL** currently holds **2d4 prisoners** of the cult. Most of them are malnourished, confused, and weak, but a few plead for rescue as soon as they see the PCs.

11. **Dimly lit** by torches. **High Priest is giving a sermon to 20 cultists** preaching of the poison that is existence. They will soon **sacrifice** a young girl to the void. If he sees the PCs he yells, *"Infidels!"* and the whole lot of them pull out daggers and attack. If the alter is searched, **2d6 x 100 GP** is found in a compartment. The eyes in the two angel statues are **pearls** each worth 300 GP.

10. **SECRET SHRINE** to the powers of Law. A **bowl of water** sits on a pedestal that acts as a **Potion of Healing** for Lawful and Neutral people, but does nothing for Chaotics. **2 Swords of Light** (+1) stand in the corners beside the pedestal each inscribed with the phrase, *"The day is just and full of light."* These 2 swords do double damage vs. Nightdust and The Fallen. Whoever built this shrine is long dead.

8. **Heavy wooden door, locked. STATUE OF AN ANGEL KNEELING** and extending an arm straight forward, holding a dagger sideways, blade up. Anyone of **chaotic** alignment that gets within 10 ft. of the statue is compelled to sacrifice themselves to the void. If they fail 2 consecutive **saves vs. paralysis**, they will fall forward onto the blade neck first taking 2d6+6 points of damage. If they are wearing a **Void Medallion** they are immune to this effect. If they make the saves, a Void Medallion appears around their neck.

9. **Dimly lit by torches**. **4 Cultists** are prepping a girl for **SACRIFICE**. She appears drugged. The **FOUNTAIN** spews black liquid that dulls the wits of any who consume it (disadvantage on all rolls for 24 hours, no save.) **Fallen angel statue** is just a statue. If the cultists see the PCs, one of them immediately runs for help to the room just north of here. One cultist has a **key to the prison cell** NW of here. The eyes in the angel statue are **pearls** each worth 300 GP.

20% chance that **2 cultists** are in the hallway when the PCs come through the secret door. They will run for help.

Acolytes & Cultists: **AC:** unarmored, **HD**: 1 (4 hp), **Attacks**: 1 dagger, +1 to hit, **Damage**: 1d4, **AL**: chaotic, **XP**: 20. **Key to the prison cell** NW of here (room 12).

Prisoners: **AC:** unarmored, **HD**: 1 (3 hp), **Attacks**: 1, +0 to hit, **Damage**: 1, **AL**: neutral, **XP**: 5.

High Priest: **AC:** chain, **HD**: 6 (22 hp), **Attacks**: 1 mace, +4 to hit, **Damage**: 1d6+1, **Spells**: *cause light wounds* (2), *hold person* (2), *continual darkness* (1), **AL**: chaotic, **XP**: 300. **Wears a Void Medallion**.

16. **Dimly lit** by hanging braziers, a bed of furs in the NE corner. **SECRET LAIR OF THE PHAEN WITCH.** There is a 20% chance she is here or a 60% chance if the PCs recently encountered her and she retreated, in which case she is back to full health from her healing potions. If she is not here, 1d6+2 **skeletons** rise from the ground and attack the intruders. Searching the room revels 1d4 **healing potions**, 1d4 **random potions** , and 2 random **magic items**. Also, **gem/jewelry/coins** worth 2d8 x 200 GP.

Secret door

16

17

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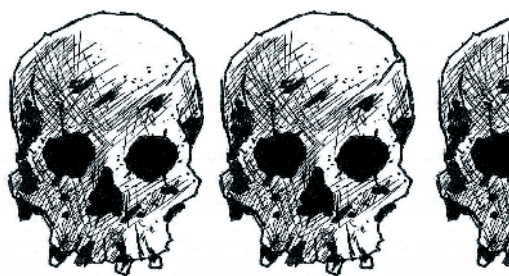
15. Empty **PEDESTAL** that slides to reveal a **secret passage** to the Void Pool room 19).

14. **Dimly lit by mysterious blue incandescence.** If the PCs enter here without any them possessing a Void Medallion, a **portcullis** slam down at both entrances. The opal encrusted **pool** in the center contains a nonreflective black liquid called a **VOID WEIRD** that will attack anyone not wearing a Void Medallion.
Any person can hold the Void Weird at bay by holding up the medallion to it, but this only works for 3 rounds, after which they must make a save vs. magic to keep the Weird from attacking.
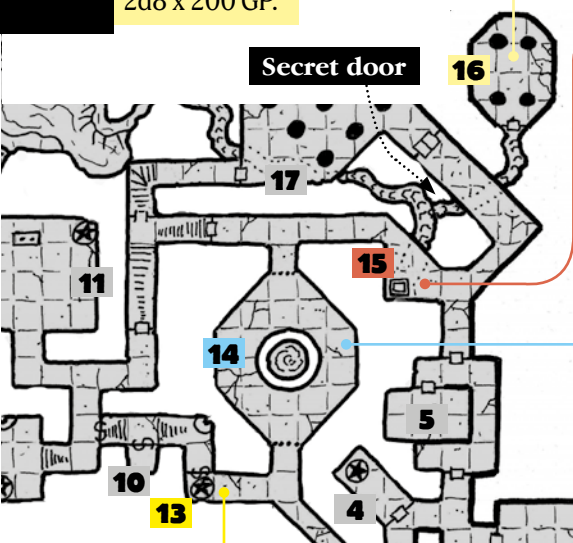
13. **STATUE OF A ANGEL** kneeling in despair. Close examination reveals the statue sits on a **pivot** and can be rotated 180 degrees. Turning the statue one complete turn to the right causes the **secret door** to open and the **fountain** in the hallway corner to turn on. Tuning it all the way around to the left also cause the secret door to open but the fountain will be dry. Drinking from the fountain of gray liquid grants you a **vision of the future.** Roll a d20, the result of this roll can be substituted for any one future d20 roll made by anyone. Each person only gets one vision no matter how many times they drink.

Void Weird: AC: as chain, can only be hurt by magic, **HD**: 6 (30 hp), **Attacks**: 1 slam +6 to hit (can reach entire room), **Damage:** 1d4 permanent hit points (your life force has been sucked out of existence and can only be restored by a wish spell), **AL:** chaotic, **XP:** 800. T**r**easure: 5d6 opals can be pried off the side of the pool, each one worth 100 GP.

Skeletons: AC: unarmored, **HD**: 1 (3 hp), **Attacks**: 1, +0 to hit, **Damage**: 1, **AL:** neutral, **XP:** 5.

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17. **Lit** by flickering torches. **PAINTINGS OF A SERPENT** laying waste to everything cover the walls and columns. Ancient writing repeats the phrase, *"The night is black and full of dust."* 1d4+4 angel-shaped **shadows** lurk here, they will target everyone except a person wearing a Void Medallion (even with a medallion, all bets are off if the PC attacks the shadows.)
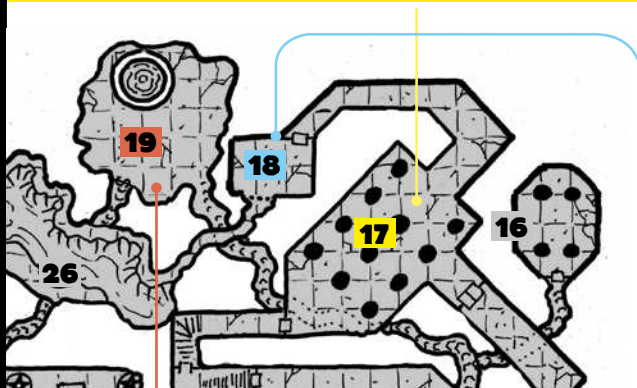
19. **Cave Dimly lit** by mysterious blue incandescence. The **VOID POOL.** Anything **dipped into** the pool disappears from existence. Anyone **gazing into** the pool without a Void Medallion must save vs. magic (-2) or become entranced. **Roll 1d8** to see what happens while entranced:

1-4. You are alone in this room, a shadow appears and you must destroy it or be destroyed. If you fail, your party members will simply see you fall over dead (50% you fall into the pool.) If you succeed, you gain the ability to become like a shadow 1/day for a number of rounds equal to your level.

5-7. If you're not chaotic, you are now. Your eyes turn black, you gain 2d4 hit points, and this special Attack: **Void breath** 2d6 damage + stunned for 1d4 rounds, (one target, save vs. breath for half damage and no stun) recharge on 6 (1d6), maximum daily uses equal to your level. The catch: you must make 3 consecutive saves vs. poison or your body melts away into a pool of nothing.

18. **Dimly lit** by torches. **2 ogres** stand guard in front of the **IRON GATE**, one wears a **key** around his neck. The ogres' eyes are solid black and their stare is blank; their skin is pale white. They will only open the gate for a priest of the cult and fight to the death guarding it. These ogres are infused with darkness.

8. Everything you've ever known slips from your mind. Whatever class you were, you are no longer. Roll 1d4 for your new class (1: Fighter, 2: Thief, 3: Cleric, 4: Wizard.) If you roll the same class, then re-roll all your abilities and spells.

Demi-Humans keep their race but take on a new class. Good news, there's no chance of death.

If you gaze into the pool while wearing a Void Medallion, it slips off your neck and falls into the pool but leaves you with some dark insights. Roll a d20 1d4 times, use these visions to replace future d20 rolls made by anyone.

22. 2d4 **undead dwarves** from the Bludigar Clan. Searching for new gold veins, they dug in the wrong area. The Void Cult killed most of them and cursed the remaining few with undeath. They are imprisoned in this cave. The **rubble** in the corner is a catastrophic collapse of their original route. The Bludigar are plotting revenge and have secretly begun digging a new tunnel. The Bludigar are demented in their undeath and proposition the PCs as follows: *"If your champion slays our champion in non-magical, hand-to-hand combat, we will march with you against the cult."* **1d6+2 x 100 GP** is hidden in the rubble.

21. 1d4 x 5 **giant rats** den here feeding off the scraps provided by the neighboring ghouls. **Scattered coins** worth 3d4 x 10 GP.

Iron bars cemented in place.
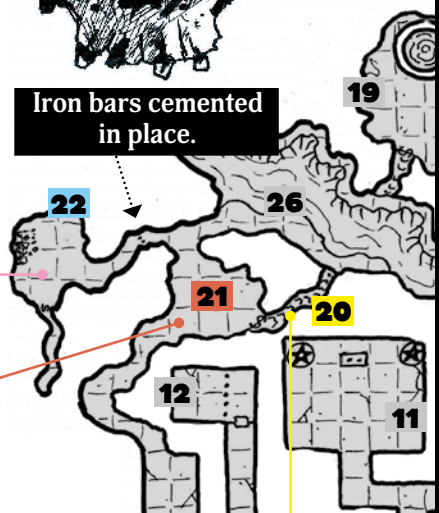
20. The **BODY** of an explorer, who recently died. His corpse is coated in **white dust** and he is reaching for his backpack which contains 3 **Potions of Healing**. His last encounter was of dust turning into a serpent. He wears leather and has a **Short-Sword of Speed** (grants the user 2 attacks, no additional attack bonus.)

Shadows: **AC:** as leather (can only be harmed by magic; can not be turned; immune to *sleep, charm*, and *hold*), **HD:** 3 (17 hp), **Attacks:** 1 shadow-blade, +3 to hit, **Damage:** 1d8+2 (anyone killed becomes an angel-shadow), **AL:** chaotic, **XP:** 150.

Void Ogres: **AC:** as chain; immune to *sleep, charm*, and *hold*, **HD:** 7 (36 hp), **Attacks:** 1 huge spiked mace, +10 to hit, **Damage:** 1d10+3, **Special Attack:** Void breath 2d6 damage + stunned for 1d4 rounds, (one target, save vs. breath for half damage and no stun) recharge 5 -6, **AL:** chaotic, **XP:** 600.

Giant Rats: **AC:** as leather –2, **HD:** 1/2 (4 hp), **Attacks:** 1 bite, +1 to hit, **Damage:** 1d6 + disease (save vs. poison or take 1d6 damage per day until save is made), **AL:** neutral, **XP:** 15 .

Undead Bludigar: **AC:** chain, **HD:** 2 (13 hp)**, Attacks:** battle-axe, +3 to hit (1d8+1), **AL:** neutral, **XP:** 50.

Undead Bludigar Champion: **AC**: as chain +1, immune to *sleep, charm*, and *hold* spells **HD:** 4 (24 hp), **Attacks:** battle-axe, +6 to hit (1d8+3), **AL**: neutral, **XP:** 100

23. **4d6 Ghouls** hang from chains upside down here, all former cultists who turned toward the light and were punished with eternal undeath. They attack anyone that tries to come through here. **Crawling** under them is possible, but the ghouls can still attack with disadvantage. **Turning** them causes them to cover their faces and stop attacking. The ground is littered with bones and scraps of victims. Hidden in the muck are **coins and gems** equaling 2d6 x 100 GP. These are regular ghouls unlike the one hanging above the grate.

25. **Magically locked gate**. Inside are **1d3 captured ogres**. They are pissed! They will temporarily align with anyone who frees them. Let the PCs control the ogres as **hirelings** until the ogres have had enough. There's a growing chance after every encounter that the ogres take off (starting at 35%, increases by 20%.)
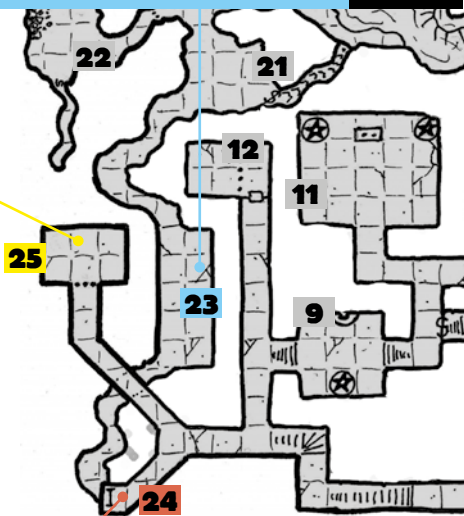
24. The **body** of a cultist hangs upside down with his throat slit, blood having long ago spilled into a floor grate below him. Written in blood on the walls is this: **"For those that step into the light will be denied the void."** The corpse is a **Greater ghoul** that can only be harmed by magic wielded or cast by a lawful person and will attack anyone attempting to climb down the grate. Turning the ghoul will cause it to cower. The ghoul howls maniacally while attacking which triggers an immediate **random encounter check**. Behind the ghoul, between the grate and the wall lies a silver **Ring of Protection +2** (you decide how visible you want this ring to be.) The grate opens up to a ladder climbing down 20 ft.

Regular Ghouls: AC: as chain -1, **HD**: 2 (10 hp), **Attacks**: 3 claws/bites, +3 to hit, **Damage**: 1d4 + paralysis for 2d4 turns, **AL**: chaotic, **XP**:100.

Greater Ghoul: AC: as chain -1, **HD**: 3 (16 hp), **Attacks**: 3 claws/bites, +3 to hit, **Damage**: 1d4 + paralysis for 2d4 turns, **AL**: chaotic, **XP**:250.

Ogres: AC: as chain, **HD**: 4+1 (18 hp), **Attacks:** 1, +7 to hit, **Damage:** 1d2 +3 or by weapon +3, **AL**: chaotic, **XP**: 125.

28. **Dimly lit** by torches, **north door is locked**. If the PCs have a key to the north door, they can pass through this room no problem. If they try pick the lock or break through the door, the **3 angel statues** come alive and attack. When destroyed, the angels crumble to dust. Their black eyes are **pearls** worth 300 GP each.

**27.** **Slim ledge** over a 70 ft. drop down into a **black pudding lake**, but too dark to see that far down. **Falling** only does 2d6 damage because of the soft landing in the pudding... but good luck with the pudding. When the PCs have made it half way across the ledge, the are attacked by **1d6+3 giant bats.** Every time someone takes damage they might lose their footing. Save vs. wands/ devices, if they fail, they have slipped and are hanging on for dear life and have dropped whatever they were holding (50% chance that the items falls safely on the ledge.) They must spend their next round trying to get up by making another save, if this save fails then they fall.

26. This **"lake"** is a **COLOSSAL BLACK PUDDING** that feeds off anyone that falls from the path above and the occasional rat or bat. When hungry enough, it will slither up the crevasse and **attack** people (15%).

Black Pudding: **AC:** as leather +1, **HD:** 15 (80 hp) only harmed by fire, **Attacks:** 1 slam +15 to hit, **Damage:** 4d8 + corrodes 1 point of metal armor, **AL:** neutral, **XP:** 3,000.

Giant Bats: **AC:** as leather +2, **HD:** 2 (10 hp), **Attacks:** 1 bite, +2 to hit, **Damage:** 1d4, **AL:** neutral, **XP:** 30.

Angel Statue: **AC:** as chain +1, **HD:** 4 (25 hp), **Attacks:** 1 sword, +4 to hit, **Damage:** 1d8+2, **AL:** chaotic, **XP:** 150.
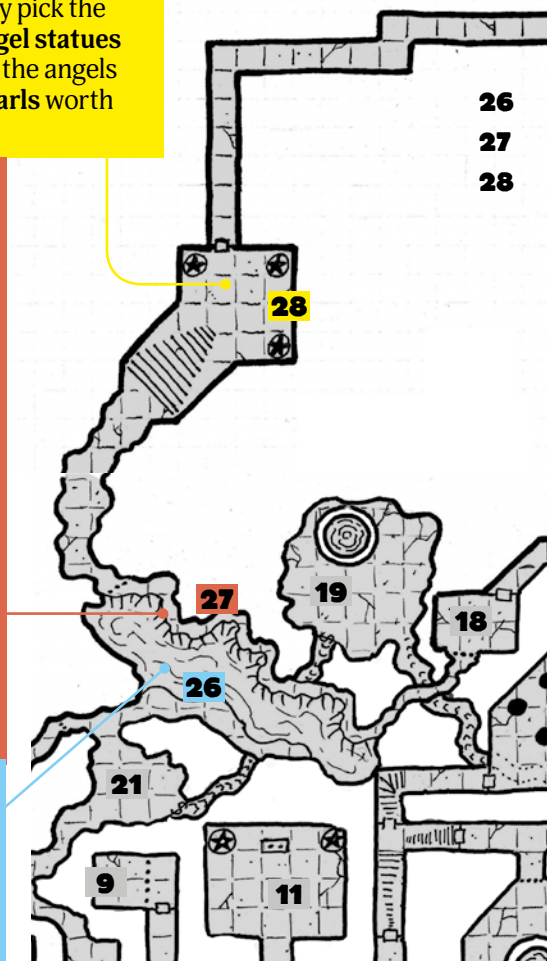
29. *"The night is black and full of dust,"* is carved above the entrance. A large serpent made of bone-dust arises from the deep dust filling this chamber. Only those with a Void Medallion may pass, but even they are not safe if they attack the serpent. Night Dust: Treasure: buried in the dust are gems equaling 2d8 x 1000 GP and 1d4+2 randomly determined magic items.

30. **Dimly lit** by torches mounted below, **very high ceiling**. Prompted by the knowledge of intruders, the cult has put its plan to action. **3 High Priests, 15 cultists, and the Phaen Witch** (if still alive) surround the **statue of the Fallen**. The statue sits on a pedestal 30 feet above the plateau; the Fallen stands about 7 feet tall. They have just completed a ceremony to awaken the Fallen from his slumber.

In 10 rounds the Fallen will awake unless everyone involved in the ceremony is killed. As the fight ensues, describe the Fallen starting to come alive, but this process seems to slow down when cultists are killed. Everyone present **fights to the death,** including the Phaen Witch. The plateau sits 20 feet above the rest of the room. Anyone falling off the side only takes 1d4 points of damage due to the slope. If the Fallen awakes, he joins the fray against the PCs. He doesn't mindlessly slaughter his faithful servants that awakened him, instead he will make them his future apostles.
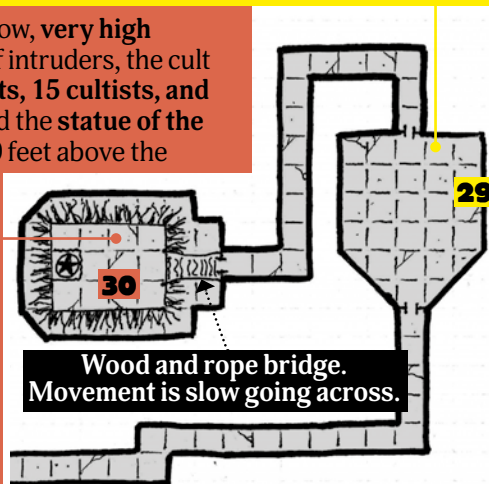
Wood and rope bridge. Movement is slow going across.

Acolytes: : **AC:** unarmored, **HD:** 1 (4 hp), **Attacks:** 1 dagger, +1 to hit, **Damage:** 1d4, **AL:** chaotic, **XP:** 20.

High Priest: **AC:** chain, **HD:** 6 (22 hp), **Attacks:** 1 mace, +4 to hit, **Damage:** 1d6+1, **Spells:** *cause light wounds* (2), *hold person* (2), *continual darkness* (1), **AL:** chaotic, **XP:** 300. Wears a Void Medallion.

Phaen Witch: **AC:** as chain+1, **HD:** 9 (45 hp), **Attacks:** 1 dagger+2, +5 to hit, **Damage:** 1d4+2, **Spells:** *sleep* (2), *charm person* (1), *continual darkness* (1), *invisibility* (1), *mirror image* (1), *hold person* (3), *confusion* (1), *polymorph other* (1), *cloudkill* (1), **AL:** chaotic, **XP:** 900.

The Fallen: **AC:** as plate +3 (can only be harmed by magic and immune to *sleep, charm*, and *hold* spells), **HD:** 12 (85 hp) , **Attacks:** 2 with an Unholy Spear+3, +15 to hit, **Damage:** 2d6+6, **Move:** flight at twice standard speed, **Spells** (at will): *cause serious wounds, hold person/monster, continual darkness, dispel magic, animate dead*, **AL:** chaotic, **XP:** 3,000.

Night Dust: AC: as plate +1 (can only be hurt by magic, immune to sleep, charm, and hold spells), **HD:** 10 (68 hp), **Attacks:** 1 bite, +12 to hit, **Damage:** 1d10+2, **Special Attack:** Breath Weapon - Poisonous bone dust, 20' x 30' cone, (save vs. poison for 1d6+2 damage, failed save equals 2d6 damage and stunned by a fit of coughing until a save is made, recharge 5-6), **AL:** chaotic, **XP:** 2000.

"...The night is black and full of dust..."

If the PCs prevent the Fallen from being resurrected, nothing changes, but they still need to make their way out. The "front doors" may be open or locked depending on the events in area 2. If the PCs have any living Dwarf allies with them, the Dwarves will escort them to the surface via their tunnels.

If the PCs manage to destroy the Fallen, then the entire place begins to collapse in on itself. The PCs (and any allies) however, in dramatic fashion, are engulfed in Holy Light that takes them safely to the surface and all ill-affects are healed. This light destroys any Void Medallions or Void Weapons the PCs might possess.

by **Chris Tamm** - Art after medieval woodcut

A LAIR FOR A RENEGADE WIZARD AND HIS NOTORIOUS GANG, MONSTER CREATIONS AND UNDEAD THRALLS!

THE WIZARD CAVE

THE WIZARD VALLEY

is feared by locals as anyone wandering close disappears and is used for the wizard's experiments. Strange creatures made by past wizards lurk here and serve the wizard. Occasionally he takes something he wants and adventurers are sent to investigate. The hills around are full of the cave lairs of surgical rejects and mutant things tainted with alchemical pollution. Some form gangs or are similar enough to function as a tribe. They fear the wizard who is their angry god. Someone could rally them into an angry mob. Anyone that tried got killed by the wizard or their followers.

THE CAVE

is a location not far from civilization, near a town bothered by the wizard. This lair has been used by wizards for generations as a base and school for pupils. It has a study and lab, and also room for apprentices and minions. There has always been a wizard here. People refer to them as «The Wizard», and are careful not to antagonise them, at least publicly. The wizard belongs to the cave, not the other way around. A wizard inheriting the lab and collection of books will usually just move in. Some say it is the curse of the cave. Centuries of failed lab experiments have created many monsters. Perhaps they will trade?

DUNGEON FEATURES

The great staircase goes to the oldest caves upstairs with some windows overwatching the entrance below. The windows are enchanted against normal missiles. They are 60 foot above the ground floor. The entrance is scorched and littered with charred bones and crumbling bodies - the remnants of centuries of fireballs.
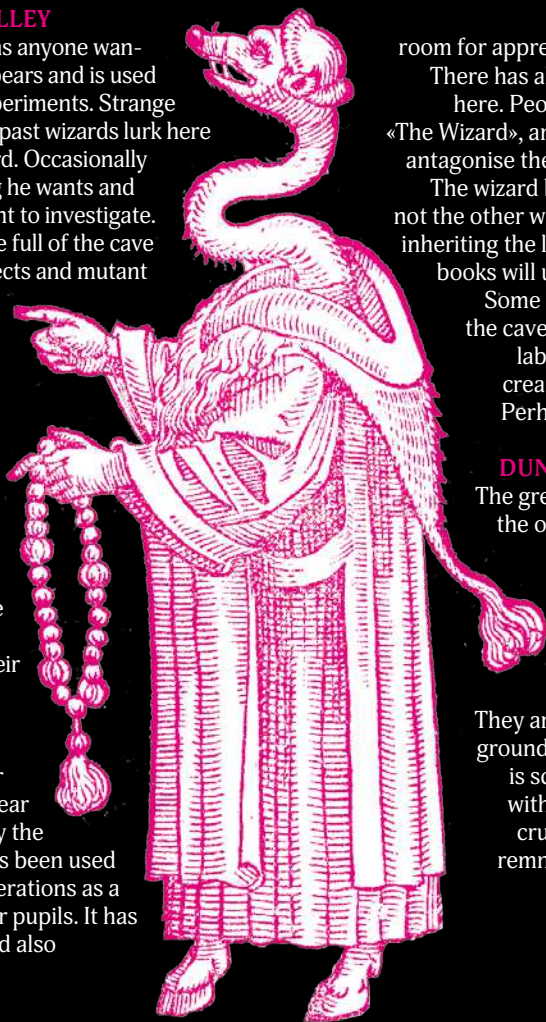
Visiting Beasts

FOLKMOLE MEN are worm eaters who also like mining. They burrow into gnome complexes to take them over. **RABBITMEN** hate humans and enjoy tormenting them and their dogs. They are fine with demihumans. **BADGER MEN** are savage warriors, their clans can be friend and foe alike. Gnomes and badgers may share burrows. **WEASELMEN** are cruel murderers and bandits who like to eat gnomes. They are nasty, mischievous liars and bullies.

d12 What is the Wizard up to?
1 Comuning with an imp from Hell
2 Performing surgery to make an experimental beastman servant
3 Creating orcs from mud in the lab
4 Making a zombie servant
5 Teaching apprentices
6 Testing new possible students
7 Making a magic item for a customer
8 Busy studying eldritch tomes
9 Having quiet time with lover
10 Spying on locals with magic
11 Having a meal, or a cup of tea and a smoke
12 Receiving guests

d12 Wizard Followers
1 Healer who also helps with lab work
2 Orc assassin, expert with dire wolves
3 Goatman with stitches, mostly obeys master
4 Evil druid with own reasons for helping
5 Former student, now a teacher and assistant
6 Ogre with hideous surgical scars and hump
7 Mongrel abhuman, a surgical failure
8 Owlbear handler and warrior hunter
9 Firenewt toad handler on riding strider
10 Petulant child apprentice, a big embarrassment
11 Former master, now scrounging for spells
12 Gangster from thieves guild

d12 Wizard's Guests
1 Orc chieftain, wants more independence
2 Visiting wizard come to swap magic
3 Beastman chief, fearful and wary
4 Crime lord dealing in magical matters for mob
5 Local wicked noble, wants a deal
6 Cult leader seeking to collaborate on plan
7 Family or school friends, very nosy
8 Blackmail and hostage negotiators
9 Merchant: trades magical stuff and slaves
11 Devil and minions, in illusory disguise
12 Dark elf come to trade evil lore

d12 Wizard Missions
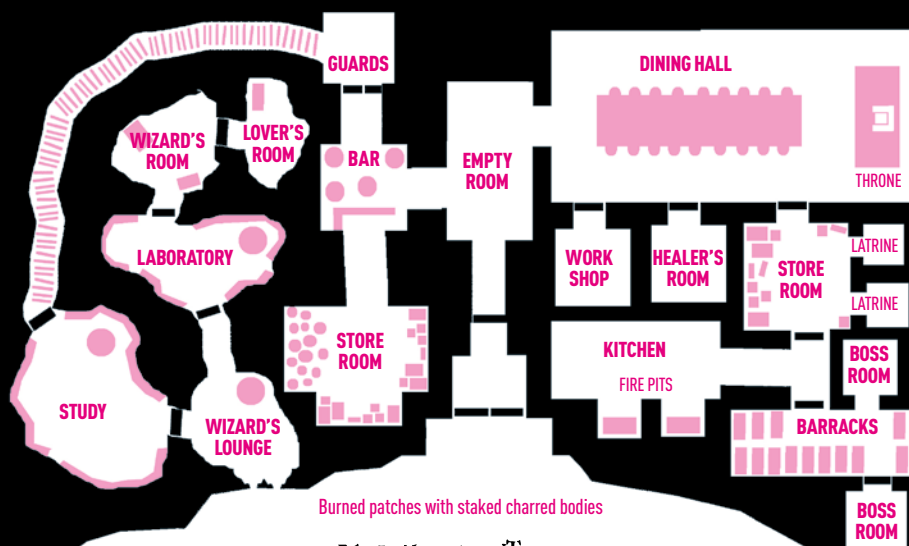1 Wants certain spell, convince owner to sell
2 Capture failed lab experiment that escaped
3 Kill some troublesome beastmen
4 Find rare ingredient guarded by monster
5 Bring back wizard's escaped lover
6 Test new monster wizard has made
7 Capture escaped apprentice who dared leave
8 Recover magical documents from a tomb
9 Capture an escaped creature and bring it back
11 Exterminate some lab rejects breeding in the wild
12 Find out what reject monsters are up to in the drains

Wizard Treasures For Trade

1. d4 magic potions **2.** magic arcane scroll **3.** +3 weapon: loses plus each hit **4.** wizard hat: stores 1st level wizard spell **5.** +3 armour: loses plus each hit **6.** +1 ring of protection -**7.** +1 magic dagger or staff **8.** Pistol with powder and 40 shots **9.** d6 *Continual light* lanterns **10.** baby monsters **11.** custom made beastmen **12.** newly made orcs

All sorts visit the wizard for trade but they also know people come to kill and rob the wizard. So the servants are wary and suspicious. They use all kinds of dirty tricks and magic to check out visitors. Spying on them and searching their goods is standard. They try and catch out visitors in conversation. The wizard is more confident but will use use magic to keep tabs on interesting visitors. Guests usualy camp in the entry hall.

MAP OF
THE WIZARD CAVE

GUARDS

DINING HALL

WIZARD'S ROOM

LOVER'S ROOM

BAR

EMPTY ROOM

THRONE

LABORATORY

WORK SHOP

HEALER'S ROOM

STORE ROOM

LATRINE

LATRINE

STUDY

STORE ROOM

WIZARD'S LOUNGE

KITCHEN

FIRE PITS

BOSS ROOM

BARRACKS

BOSS ROOM

Burned patches with staked charred bodies

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

| The Valley		The Cave
2d4 wild dogs	**1**	Apprentice wizard (1 cantrip)
2d4 giant grass rats	**2**	d4 orcs
2d4 kobold scouts	**3**	d4 zombie labourers
2d4 gang members	**4**	2d4 gang members
d4 beastmen hunting	**5**	Beastman hero
Fire lizard	**6**	Trained owlbear
2d4 giant ants	**7**	Hellhound guard
2d4 orc hunters	**8**	Fire toad guard
2d4 cannibal cavemen	**9**	Golem doll with dagger
d3 fire toads	**10**	Homunculus
2d4 evil adventurers	**11**	Imp, invisible or in animal form
Owlbear	**12**	Small familiar, spying on lair

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ROLLING BOULDER TRAP
triggers when doors are opened.

A suitable SAVING THROW allows a
character to avoid the boulder by
jumping into one of the alcoves.

Unencumbered characters at least
40 feet away from the doors
when the trap is triggered
are able to run
away.
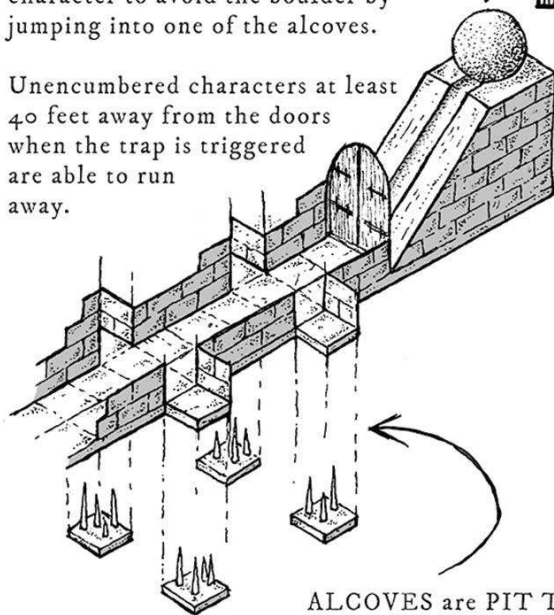
ALCOVES are PIT TRAPS that are triggered
when someone steps on them.

A suitable SAVING THROW is allowed to avoid
falling into a PIT TRAP. A succesful save
indicates the character managed to cling onto
something before falling.

BOULDER DASH

BY ERIC NIEUDAN - ART: TIM MOLLOY
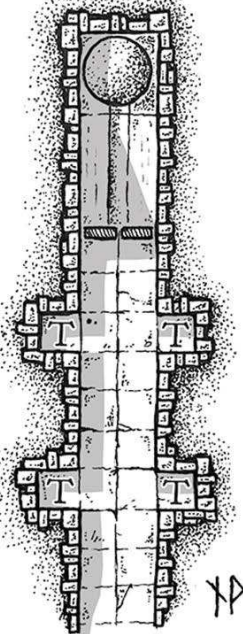
MEET THE D◉MON

DROP ALL THE D◉MON'S HIT DICE ON THIS COVER. USE AS MANY RESULTS AS YOU LIKE.

D8 USES FOR A HARVESTED EYE (2D4 USABLE)

1. EAT TO HEAL ANY DISEASE, REMOVE ANY CURSE.
2. INSERT INTO AN OPEN WOUND TO GAIN AN EXTRA EYE.
3. STICK TO A DOOR AND GAZE INTO IT TO SEE THE OTHER SIDE.
4. CUMULATIVE 10% CHANCE PER EYE STEWED AND EATEN OF +1 WISDOM.
5. SQUISH IN YOUR EYE SOCKET FOR 1D3 HOURS OF TRUE SIGHT.
6. FLOATS AHEAD AND ZIPS TOWARDS THE FIRST LIVING THING THEY SEE.
7. A WEAPON IT IS AFFIXED TO GAINS A RANDOM POWER.
8. TURNS YOUR FACE INTO A D◉MON'S (CUT OUT THE COVER OF THIS MAG AND MAKE A MASK). YOU GAIN A RANDOM D◉MON MAGICAL POWER.

D8 MAGICAL POWERS

1. HEAR THE WISHES OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS MIND.
2. TRAVEL THROUGH CONNECTED PEOPLE'S SHADOWS.
3. STICKY TONGUE: PROJECTS 30FT AND GRABS.
4. GROW AND ANIMATE PLANTS.
5. HIJACK AND WARP DREAMS.
6. LOUD TELEPATHY: SAVE TO HEAR ANYTHING THROUGH YOUR EARS.
7. TURN INTO A WEAPON. DISTRIBUTE NUMBER OF HD AMONG PLUSES TO HIT AND DAMAGE.
8. A RANDOM SPELL OF LEVEL 2D3.

D8 MOTIVATIONS

1. CREATE EXCESSIVE AND VIOLENT EMOTIONS AMONG MORTALS
2. ACQUIRE AN ITEM OF OCCULT POWER
3. POSSESS AND CORRUPT A RELIGIOUS OFFICIAL
4. DEVOUR THE LIVING FLESH OF SMALL PEOPLE
5. FIND THE PERFECT RECIPE FOR EVERLIVING CAKE
6. REWRITE TIME TO TAKE OVER THE UNIVERSE
7. FIND ITS THREE LOST OULMATES
8. CAUSE MAXIMUM CHAOS!

D8 GAZE ATTACKS

1. WASTING FEVER: SAVE DAILY OR LOSE 1D4 CON.
2. NEGA-RAY: SAVE OR BECOME A NEGATIVE IMAGE OF YOURSELF.
3. DROWN IN GORE: LUNGS FILL WITH BLOOD. SAVE OR DIE. THE REGURGITATED BLOOD ACTS AS A (DISGUSTING) POTION OF HEALING.
4. SCRAMBLE ALLEGIANCE: ROLL REACTION TO SET A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH EVERYONE YOU KNOW.
5. FREED FROM GRAVITY FOREVER: SAVE OR FLOAT LIKE A BALLOON.
6. MIND SWAP: SAVE OR EXCHANGE YOUR BODY WITH THE D◉MON'S.
7. SENSORIAL DEPRIVATION: SAVE OR LOSE ALL 5 SENSES BUT GAIN THE ABILITY TO FEEL MAGIC AND ELECTROMAGNETISM.
8. YOUR NEXT ACTION TURNS OUT TO BE OUTSIDE OF YOUR CAPABILITY FOR 1D20 HOURS. DURING THAT TIME, YOU CAN DO ONE SMALL BUT IMPOSSIBLE THING.

WHAT IS ITS TRUE NAME? ROLL 1D4 D20S AND CONSULT THE SPINE

1d4d20 COVER D 👁 MON TRUE NAMES 1. Aar - 2. Teil - 3. Globb - 4. Assa - 5. Ogb - 6. Leil - 7. Terr - 8. Fiez - 9. Kassa - 10. Dror - 11. Raas - 12. Trr - 13. Grrö - 14. Vassa - 15. Ÿh - 16. Shobb - 17. Mleil - 18. Ÿog - 19. Hënd - 20. Obb

Knock!